

Let Me Love You

Spring Towers Series: Book 2



Morgan Rayne

**Let
Me
Love
You**

By Morgan Rayne

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to everyone that has accepted me and my writing into their lives. Thanks to you, I am continuing on this amazing journey, and I couldn't be happier.

Chapter 1

The sun was shining brightly in the sky as a light breeze was floating through the trees; keeping the day tolerable in the summer heat.

“It looks like another good turn out this year.” Lindsay was looking around at all the people gathered for the annual firefighter’s ice cream social.

“Seems to be, but there will probably be even more people later. Go ask Jessie where she wants you to help out or what she needs you to do.” She gave Mitch a kiss on the cheek and headed off to find Jessie.

Kids were running around playing

tag and laughing together as their parents were talking amongst themselves. Fire crews from all over the county were setting up the waterball competition in the middle of the now blocked off streets, while wives and girlfriends were helping wherever they were needed and gossiping endlessly.

The annual ice cream social was the biggest fundraiser of the year for the fire department and also the most fun. There were games, food, face painting and so much more. She finally spotted Jessie near the dessert tables, and slowly made her way through the crowd in that direction.

“I didn’t think I would ever find you.” Jessie looked up and sighed.

“I’m so glad you’re here. I need someone to guard the desserts while I go inside to get more. Those hooligans have been trying to steal them all day.” Jessie waved her hand in the direction of the large group gathered in the town square.

“Who, the kids?” Lindsay asked while glancing around for the little rascals that were causing Jessie so much stress.

“No the guys, they are worse than the kids sometimes.”

“You know men never really grow up.”

“No kidding, but enough about them. You come around here and sit your pretty pregnant butt down. I don’t know why you came to sit in this ungodly heat?”

Between pale skin and pregnancy, I don't know which I should be more concerned about." Jessie rubbed a hand over Lindsay's barely showing belly.

"Jessie, I'm only three months along; I'll be fine. I'm wearing a sundress, I put on plenty of sunblock, and I promise to drink lots of water and stay in the shade as much as possible. Mitch wanted me to come and you know I wouldn't miss the ice cream social for the world." Jessie rolled her eyes and went inside the station to get more desserts.

Lindsay found a chair and pulled it under the shade of the awning by the table. Her pregnancy had been quite a shock, but Lindsay couldn't love the

little peanut growing inside her more than if she had planned for it. She grabbed a bottle of water and began sipping it as she watched the whole town join together for a day of fun.

Digging in her purse, Lindsay found her sunglasses and put them on in an attempt to hide the fact she was cat napping. She had been so tired the last month because of the morning sickness. Lindsay was just starting to nod off when Brad's familiar voice broke through her sleepy brain.

"You get more and more beautiful every day; pregnancy obviously agrees with you." Brad Williams was Mitch's old academy buddy and was the town flirt. Along with being very good

looking and one hell of a charmer, Brad was a genuinely nice guy.

“I’m not sure it agrees with me every morning, but thank you. What are you up to?”

“I was going to try and sweet talk Jessie into letting me have some cherry pie, but you may be easier to convince.” Brad gave her his megawatt smile that had all the ladies in town throw themselves at his feet, but it wouldn’t work on her.

“Think again buster. I was told to guard these with my life. No way am I going to suffer Jessie’s wrath for you.”

“Spoil sport.” His smile slipped as he stared somewhere over Lindsay’s head. She couldn’t figure out why until

he started speaking again. “Hey Mitch, good to see you”

“You too” Mitch’s words came out clipped and gruff as he moved to stand next to Lindsay’s chair. She sat there watching the two men interact, but didn’t dare say anything.

“I was trying to convince Lindsay here to let me have some cherry pie, but she’s a tough cookie to crack.”

Mitch laid his hand on her shoulder as he continued to regard Brad with disgust. “Were you now?”

“Yep, but I guess I’ll just have to wait like everyone else. See you in a little while.” Brad gave her an apologetic smile and made his exit without another word. He was a good

twenty feet away when Mitch gave Lindsay's shoulder a hard squeeze.

“We are leaving in ten minutes. Be ready when I get back.” He left as quickly as he had come, and began talking to his chief a moment later. Lindsay saw him gesture in her direction and she cringed. The chief nodded a few times before shaking Mitch's hand and waving to her.

Lindsay's pulse began to race as Mitch headed back in her direction. She could tell he was mad, but couldn't figure out what set him off so suddenly.

Jessie came back out of the fire house a few minutes later, carrying pies and brownies on each arm. Lindsay grabbed a few from her and set them in

their spots on the tables.

“I won’t be here to help after all; Mitch wants to go home.”

“What, why? You just got here.” Lindsay tried to ignore the knowing look Jessie gave her and shrugged.

“He’s just worried about me in the heat; it’s probably for the best. I’ll call you later and see how everything went.” Lindsay hated lying, but the truth was not something she wanted to admit. Jessie glanced up as Mitch was approaching and laid her hand on Lindsay’s arm.

“I don’t think you should leave, I really don’t. Please...” Jessie’s plea was cut off as Mitch grabbed her hand.

“Ready?” Before she could answer him, or say goodbye to her friend, Mitch

gave her arm a sharp tug and headed for the parking lot.

“Is something wrong?” He didn’t answer, but began walking faster towards the truck. When they reached the pickup, Mitch opened the door and waited for her to get in; still without a word. She situated herself on the warm seats before he slammed the door shut. This was not good. Lindsay would almost prefer his screaming and yelling rather than the silent treatment. At least when he was yelling she knew what she had done wrong, but right now... she was completely in the dark.

Their house was only a five minute drive from the town square, and each minute aged Lindsay five years.

Everything had been so great the last few months, but she was afraid that was all coming to an end today.

Mitch still hadn't said anything as he pulled the pickup into the driveway and exited the truck. Lindsay took a deep breath and tried to prepare herself for what may come next.

He yanked her door open and waited impatiently for Lindsay to climb down. She did so cautiously and when her feet touched the ground, Mitch grabbed her upper arm and shoved her towards the back door.

His keys were already in his other hands, so he slipped the key into the lock and pointed for her to go inside. As soon as she heard the back door click shut,

Lindsay was hit with so much force on the back of her skull she fell to the floor.

The pain from the blow distracted her enough that she wasn't prepared for the kick to her ribs and stomach that came next. She tried to curl up into a ball, but that only seem to anger Mitch more.

"Stop" Lindsay was trying to scream through the pain, but the kicks were coming too fast and she was having a hard time breathing.

"You think I don't know what's going on? You think I'm stupid?" Mitch kicked towards her stomach again, but she got her arms there just in time. She heard a crack and pain shot down her arm, but she held tight to protect the

baby best she could. Lindsay coughed twice and nearly passed out as the hurt took over from that small action.

“It’s his baby, isn’t it? I always knew you were a whore, but never thought you would be evil enough to flaunt it in public.”

“Who’s?” She sobbed. Talking made everything worse, but she had no idea who he was screaming about. The kicks stopped and Lindsay thought he was finally done, but he had other ideas. Mitch grabbed her by the hair and started dragging her through the kitchen, and into the living room.

“Don’t play dumb. You and Brad just couldn’t stay away from each other, could you? He threw her onto the couch

and was on top of her seconds later. He started tearing at her dress, and ripped it partially from her body.

“Stop, it’s not like that!” Lindsay was desperately trying to shove him off, but his much larger frame made it difficult. The back of his hand hit the right side of her face, and she could taste the blood coming from her now split open lip. She fought to get free, but he grabbed both of her hands and pinned them to the couch with one of his.

“I’m sure you never told Brad to stop. You two make me sick. Humiliating me in front of the entire town like that.”

Another hit connected to her left cheek this time and the room started

getting dark. Lindsay was sure she would pass out, but Mitch had other ideas. He jerked her off the couch and headed for the stairs. Lindsay's whole body was in agonizing pain and she could barely stand. "Get your ass moving now"

"Mitch, please. I'm sorry. Let's talk about this. I love you. There is no one else. I swear." His grip on her arm tightened as they went up the stairs. Once they reached the top, he finally let go. Lindsay had seen Mitch angry before, even been hit by him on more than one occasion, but she had never seen the pure evil that was in his eyes right now.

"You're a liar and a whore, and I

won't put up with either. You will learn to respect me and appreciate everything I do for you." He reached into his pocket and pulled out his large pocket knife.

Lindsay backed away from him, but was stopped by the wall. "Please. I'm sorry." She was barely squeezing the words out as a cold sweat broke out on her skin. The fear for her and her unborn child coursed through her veins as he closed the distance between them.

"Shut Up! Every word you speak is a lie." The blade was still folded in, but Mitch ran the handle along her cheek, and then further down until it rested on her stomach.

"No one can save you. No one can hear you scream. You are mine until I

say otherwise. Do you understand me?” Lindsay nodded her head and he put the knife back in his pocket. “Good. Now get moving to the bedroom.”

Mitch began to push her down the hall, and Lindsay knew she needed to get out of there; the crazy look in his eyes, as he had traced her body with the knife, told Lindsay that this time he would do it. He was going to kill her.

She walked as slow as possible down the hall, trying to come up with a plan to get out of there. Lindsay stopped at the door of the bedroom, but didn't go inside.

“Stopping won't save you, nothing will.” She still hadn't moved and Mitch was done waiting. He wrapped his arms

around her in an anaconda tight grip and lifted her off the ground.

Lindsay kicked and screamed, but with the whole town pretty much downtown, nobody would hear her. He grabbed her around the throat and with deadly calm whispered. “If you make one more peep, I will shut you up for good.”

Lindsay quickly shut up. Mitch got her to the bed and started pulling at the rags that used to be her dress. I will not die today. I will not die today. Lindsay repeated that over and over in her head as Mitch undid his pants.

When they were half way down his legs, Lindsay saw her opportunity to escape. With one hard kick to his chest,

Mitch stumbled back and fell to the floor.

The pain from moving so fast took a backseat as Lindsay bolted for the door. Mitch reached out his arm and tripped her, but luckily she didn't fall. She stumbled into the wall across from the bedroom door and that misstep gave him enough time to catch her at the top of the stairs.

Lindsay's body was spun around so fast, that she didn't have time to protect herself, as the shiny metal blade was thrust viciously toward her.

“Noooooooooo No No No”

“Lindsay! Lindsay! Wake up! Come on, wake up!” Lindsay's eyes flew open as she frantically looked around the

room. She realized someone was holding her around the shoulders and began swinging wildly.

“Fuck!” Her fist connected with something soft and warm and she heard a pained grunt. “It’s just me. It’s Stella.”

“Stella, get out of here. You have to leave. He’ll get you too.” Lindsay tried to get to her dresser and the gun hidden inside, but Stella clutched her from behind.

“It was a nightmare. Nobody is here. Calm down.” The room came into focus more and Lindsay exhaled. She was in her bedroom with Stella, and no one else. Shit!

“Sorry, did I hurt you?” Lindsay forgot about Stella spending the night so

they could get an early start on moving her stuff in the morning.

“I’ll live.” Stella said dryly.

“I didn’t mean to hit you.....or wake you up.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t wake the whole freaking neighborhood. I’ve never heard someone scream that loud because of a nightmare. Are you ok?” Stella was now rubbing her hands up and down Lindsay’s arms and the gesture was making Lindsay relax.

“I’m fine.” It was the same lie she had told for the last four years. After everything that bastard did to her, she would never be fine again. Stella released Lindsay and came around to stand in front of her.

Bright green eyes were zeroed in on Lindsay, and she felt like a bug under a microscope. She started to walk past Stella to get out of the room, when she was stopped in her tracks by one question.

“Lindsay...who’s Mitch?”

Chapter 2

How could she be so stupid? She never let anyone stay with her. Her nightmares had lessened over the years, but they still happened often enough that she should have known better.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You were screaming for this Mitch to stop. You were terrified and thought he was going to hurt me too. So what’s going on?” The concern in Stella’s voice was evident, but Lindsay couldn’t tell her; so she lied.

“You must have misheard. Really, it was just a bad dream. You should go

back to sleep. We have a big day today.” Lindsay knew she wouldn’t be sleeping anymore this morning, but there was no reason for Stella to stay up.

“I can’t go back to sleep. Your screams are going to haunt me for days. Are you sure it was nothing? I’m here if you ever need to talk, you know that, right?” Tears began to rise and Lindsay tried to keep them from falling.

“Thank you, but it’s really okay. I barely remember it.” Wanting this conversation to be over, Lindsay started walking again. “Do you want some coffee?”

“That would be great.” Stella still looked upset, but didn’t say anything more. The two of them drank coffee and

attempted to wake up in Lindsay's mostly packed kitchen. Even though it was only five in the morning, they got busy packing up the rest of her belongings.

“The boys are almost here. Do you think we'll be ready?” Stella was reading a text from her phone and looking around the boxed up apartment. They had been hard at work for two hours and Lindsay was more than ready to take all of the boxes to her new apartment. But Stella's first statement caught Lindsay's attention.

“Boys, I thought it was just Alex.” Stella gave her a mischievous smile and Lindsay's stomach tightened. There was only one person that could be coming.

“Kyle came over the other night and we were talking about it. He really wanted to help, so he switched schedules with someone at the fire station. Alex just picked him up. Is that a problem?”

Lindsay schooled her face into an indifferent expression. If she gave Stella one little glimpse of how Kyle affected her, she would never hear the end of it. “That’s fine. It will make things go faster. I just didn’t know he was coming.”

“Kyle baffles me. He is such a cad when it comes to everyone else, but when you’re around or even mentioned, he practically trips over himself. Is there something going on I don’t know about?”

Stella wiggled her eyebrows.

Lindsay shook her head so hard she made herself dizzy. “Absolutely not, why would you think that? You’re seeing things. Kyle could care less about me. Plus, do you really think I would be with someone who has slept with half of Chicago?”

“Half of Chicago is quite an exaggeration; maybe a forth.” Lindsay snapped her head around from the box she was packing and was now staring at the deep chocolate brown eyes of Kyle Brady. Damn!

“Uh...I didn’t hear the door open.” She wanted to smack her forehead. Like telling him that would make her words sting less.

Kyle and Alex came inside the rest of the way and shut the door. “I guess that means I won’t be getting a kiss for my services.” Kyle had a sexy smile playing on his lips and winked at her.

He really was a cocky bastard, but it was charming instead of obnoxious like most men. Kyle was a hard man to resist. Between his closely cropped black hair, dark brown eyes, oh-so-kissable lips, tanned skin and rippling muscles; muscles Lindsay wanted to run her hands over...

NO! Stop right there. Stop thinking about Kyle like he’s an entrée you want to devour. Haven’t you learned anything? She shook her head to clear it and quickly came up with a comeback to

his kissing crack.

“I’m sure Alex won’t mind taking care of that for you.” Stella laughed and Alex shuddered. Kyle’s sexy smirk never wavered.

“Alex wouldn’t hold a candle to you, Red.”

Damn it. It was like the man had a direct link to her hormones. Every time she was near him, her temperature rose a few degrees. And when he called her Red; mmmmm, it was like a caress from her head to her toes. Lindsay needed to put a stop to their flirty banter, right now.

“That would be a tempting offer... if you were female.” Lindsay was sure if Kyle’s jaw could hit the floor, it would

have. Happy she had the upper hand once again, she walked to her bedroom laughing.

Once she was by herself, Lindsay took a deep breath. She could mask her fears with jokes and sarcasm for a little while, but she was still shook up from this morning, not to mention the surprise of seeing Kyle, and just wanted to get this move over with.

“That may be the first time I’ve seen Kyle speechless.”

“I guess miracles do still happen then.” Stella had followed her to the bedroom. “Do you think he actually believed me?”

“He probably started planning a threesome in his head as soon as you

said that.” They shared another laugh before heading back to the living room carrying boxes. The front door was propped open and Alex and Kyle had disappeared, along with a couple items from the living room.

“The men must have got tired of waiting for us and got to work.” They sat their boxes down by the others and went to get more. When all the boxes were in the living room, Lindsay went back to check the closets to make sure they hadn’t missed anything.

The closets were empty, and the only thing left in the bedroom was her bed and dresser. Lindsay didn’t have much in her tiny one bedroom apartment; it made it easier to move quickly if she

ever needed to again.

“Can we move the furniture from in here now?” Lindsay nearly jumped out of her skin from Kyle’s deep voice.

“You scared the shit out of me.” When her heart started beating at a somewhat normal pace again, she turned. “Sorry. Yes, that’s fine. And Kyle, I apologize for what I said earlier. It was rude. Thank you for helping today.”

Just because Kyle was someone she couldn’t get involved with, didn’t make it right to put him down for being who he was. He had given up his time to help and she had been kind of a bitch.

“It’s alright. You didn’t offend me. It’s no secret I like women. You should know that feeling.”

Lindsay chuckled. “Oh, yes. What’s not to like?”

“It is cruel to lie to a man about such things as lesbianism.” Kyle was propped up against the door frame and his arms were crossed over his chest.

“Lesbianism huh, who said I was lying?” So much for no more flirty banter; she really should listen to herself more.

Kyle pushed away from the doorway and took a few steps toward her, but didn’t get too close. There was a spark in his eyes that should have scared Lindsay, but it didn’t, it intrigued her. When he spoke, it was in a low husky tone. “The blush that stains your cheeks every time I flirt with you tells me

you're lying.”

“Uh...” Lindsay was speechless. Kyle caught her completely off guard. He knew how he affected her, but had never said anything before now.

“Just so you know.” Kyle’s serious tone snapped her out of her own thoughts. “I’m not as shallow as you may think. You just don’t know me that well yet. I hope that changes.”

Kyle didn’t even give Lindsay a chance to respond to that blunt statement as he yelled for Alex to come help him with the bed.

His words exploded inside Lindsay’s head and Stella’s earlier comments came back just then as well. He did seem to act differently around her

than he did other women. Most of his bravado faded away and he seemed genuine and sweet.

No! No amount of sweetness could change his profession or the fact that she would never be with someone again; most of all someone like Kyle.

Alex came in and they started removing her mattress and box spring from the room. Her dresser was all that remained and she realized her gun was still in her top dresser drawer; where anyone could see it if the drawer slid open.

Lindsay went in search of her purse. It wasn't the safest place for a gun, but it would have to do for now. Luckily, Stella and the boys were down stairs

putting the bed in the truck. She found her purse in the living room and quickly ran back to the bedroom.

Opening her top dresser drawer, Lindsay moved the heavy piece of metal into her purse. Making sure the safety was on; no sense in taking chances and it accidentally goes off.

“I can’t promise I won’t sneak a peek through your underwear drawer.” Kyle was standing in the doorway again. She slung her purse over her shoulder and pretended to adjust the drawer as she closed it.

“That drawer gives me some trouble. I just wanted to make sure it was secure. I’ll get out of the way so you two can get it.” Kyle stepped to the side

so she could squeeze past him and Lindsay tried to ignore how good he smelled; or how much she wanted to brush up against him on her way out of the room.

Securing her purse strap in her hand, Lindsay held tight until she reached her car. She found her keys, and after putting them in her pocket, Lindsay placed her purse in the trunk. When everyone left later she would put the gun back in its proper place.

With that taken care of, Lindsay got back to helping Stella, Alex and Kyle load the truck.

“Who did you get to cover your shift?” Kyle had been staring out the

window, thinking about a feisty redhead that was seriously messing with his head, when Alex's question broke him out of his thoughts.

“Mills needed Monday night off, so he was more than happy to switch.” Kyle wasn't too thrilled about working a Monday night, but getting to spend time around Lindsay made it worth it.

Over the last few months, he had started to reevaluate his life. Sleeping with a different woman all the time didn't hold the same appeal it once had, and he found himself longing for the kind of relationship Alex had with Stella. And he wanted it with Lindsay.

Of course, Lindsay wanted nothing to do with him and he really couldn't

blame her. His past behavior wasn't exactly something you want a potential partner to see. But even if Kyle convinced her he was a changed man, he still had one huge obstacle to overcome.

Since the first time he met Lindsay, whenever they were in the same room, it seemed she couldn't get away from him fast enough. And God forbid if he touched her in any way; she jumped like a cat being put in water.

Kyle had a sickening feeling that Lindsay had been physically hurt by someone, and judging by some of the reactions he'd seen her have, he was pretty sure it was a man. He had been on enough domestic violence calls in his time on the fire department to know a

few of the warning signs.

But even if that was so, that didn't explain why she was skittish around him more than anyone else. She seemed completely at ease with Alex, even Frank from the studio, but not him. It made no sense.

“You have feelings for Lindsay, don't you?”

Kyle could joke his way around the question like he normally did with something he didn't want to talk about, but he needed Alex's help. Kyle leaned back in the seat more and sighed. “That obvious huh”

Alex laughed. “Oh yeah, I've never seen you act the way you do around her. And I can't imagine you working a

Monday night for just anyone.”

“A lot of good it did me to switch. You heard the same conversation I did this morning, right? Lindsay has no interest in me what so ever.”

“What I heard this morning was she doesn't want man-whore Kyle. If you would stop sleeping with every bimbo that throws herself at you, you might have a chance with a woman like Lindsay.”

“I'm trying. I haven't been with anyone since before your engagement party a month ago. I realized that night that I wanted what you and Stella have. I really like Lindsay and want to ask her out, but she already has her mind made up about me.”

Kyle thought about those light blue eyes, milky white skin and long red hair and no other woman compared. There was a long silence and it was then Kyle realized they had arrived at Spring Towers. He looked over at Alex who was just staring at him with his mouth hanging open.

“What?” Kyle was starting to feel like a freaky act in the circus.

“Did you just tell me you haven’t had sex in over a month?”

“Yes. Stop acting like I told you I saw Bigfoot.”

“Sorry, the shock hasn’t worn off yet. I think it may be more unbelievable than Bigfoot.”

“You really can be an ass when you

want to be.”

“I know. I’m just busting your balls. If you really want this, you know I’ll help however I can.” Kyle exhaled and felt a little better. If anyone could show him how to go from screw up to boyfriend, it was Alex.

“Thanks man. Please don’t tell Stella. I don’t want Lindsay to find out through some chick grapevine. I’d rather talk to her myself.”

“I won’t, but Kyle.” Alex paused and looked like he was thinking of something unpleasant. “I’ve always got the feeling Lindsay has a dark past. The way she used to be so jumpy and still is sometimes. She might not want or be available for a relationship.”

“I’ve thought the same thing. Has Stella ever brought it up?”

“She thinks the same, but told me that Lindsay’s never mentioned anything about her past. Even after almost three years, all Stella knows is what came up on her background check; which was practically nothing. It’s like she appeared out of thin air.”

Kyle was now almost certain Lindsay was running from something or someone in her past. He just hoped whatever it was wasn’t bad enough to ruin any shot he may have with her.

Alex had parked the truck, but they hadn’t got out and Lindsay and Stella were tapping their feet impatiently on the sidewalk.

“Well it looks like the girls are waiting for us. Like I said, let this be between us. Stella’s inquisition does not sound very appealing right now.”

“Not a problem, but you do know she is going to be all over you if you mess this up in anyway.” With a groan, Kyle got out of the truck. They went around to open the back door of the moving truck.

“It’s about time. What were you two talking about?” Stella had come over to snuggle into Alex’s side and Lindsay and Kyle stood awkwardly watching the happy couple.

“I asked Kyle to be my best man at the wedding and we were discussing bachelor party ideas.” Kyle didn’t think

anything could get his mind off his problems with Lindsay, but Alex completely took him by surprise.

Alex was an only child and didn't have a lot of close family other than his parents. Kyle thought him being the best man was a possibility, but now it was official and Kyle felt honored.

“Like anyone else could throw a bachelor party like I do.” Both women rolled their eyes and climbed into the back of the truck.

They started unloading and as they were heading up the stairs for the first time, Kyle had to force himself to stop staring at Lindsay's petite little waist and perfectly round ass. He lost his footing halfway up and heard Alex

chuckle.

Once they reached the landing, Kyle turned and gave a murderous glare to Alex. “Shut up, it’s not funny.” Lindsay and Stella had already gone inside, but he still whispered so they wouldn’t overhear.

Alex didn’t try to hide his amusement. “Stop staring at Lindsay’s ass and that wouldn’t be a problem.” Kyle wanted to slug Alex, but the box in his hand was making that difficult.

“Just remember who will be giving a speech at your wedding. And that same person knows all your dirty little secrets, with photos to match.” Alex blanched.

“You wouldn’t.” Kyle stared at

Alex, daring him to find out. Alex narrowed his eyes, but didn't say anything more.

An hour later, all of Lindsay's things were in her apartment and Kyle needed a beer or twelve. Somehow, he ended up behind Lindsay every time he went up the stairs and the tension in his body had nothing to do with lifting boxes or furniture.

Chapter 3

“Are you sure you don’t want to come to *Maxwell’s* with us? Victoria is going to be there and you know she is going to be upset if you aren’t there too.” Stella was giving her best pout, but Lindsay just shook her head.

“No, I’m going to start unpacking. I’m so tired I’ll probably just get my room set up and go to bed. Tell Victoria I’ll call her and we can all go out in a few days when I’m settled.” Lindsay would love to go out, but she needed to get started on installing all her reinforced window latches and add another lock to the door.

Luckily she was on the second floor with no trees outside her window, so the potential for anyone breaking in was diminished. She already felt ten times safer than at her last apartment.

“You guys go ahead and have fun. You deserve it. Here,” Lindsay went to her purse and carefully removed her wallet, “Take this and buy drinks; my thank you for helping.”

“We were happy to help, so put your money away.” Alex and Stella looked at her like she was nuts. She tried one more time, but they refused.

“Where did Kyle disappear to? Maybe he won’t be as stubborn as you two.” She hadn’t seen him in fifteen minutes or so and didn’t think he would

leave without saying goodbye.

“He’s in our apartment. Someone from the firehouse called and needed to talk to him. He’ll be done shortly, but I can guarantee he won’t take the money either.” Lindsay rolled her eyes and put the money back in her purse.

“You’re all stubborn.”

“So are you, so we’re even.” Stella gave her a hug and headed for the door. “I’ll check in with you when we get back if you’re not asleep.”

The front door closed and Lindsay went in search of the box of safety items. Since she found the box in her bedroom, she decided to start laying everything out on her bed. She was installing the first window lock when her mind began to

drift back to the reason all of these things were necessary.

“I’m sorry Mrs. Logan, but this is all we are able to charge him with at this time.” Lindsay felt like someone had stabbed her all over again. After spending a month in the hospital, she was finally strong enough to get to the district attorney’s office to go over her statement.

“So I spend a month in the hospital, almost die from what he did to me and you’re telling me aggravated assault is the best you can do? How about attempted murder and murder?” Lindsay still couldn’t believe her child was no longer living inside of her.

“We have no way of proving who introduced the knife into the equation. Mr. Rhodes insists that you grabbed the knife and tried to attack him. As for murder, fetuses aren’t considered living beings under the law until they are born.” Lindsay had heard enough. She still had pain when she moved, but stood up and placed her good hand on her hip.

“You’re going to believe him over me? It was his knife. I could understand if he was injured somehow there might be some speculation, but he didn’t have a scratch on him.” Justice really was blind; and deaf and dumb.

“I know it doesn’t seem fair, but it’s all I can do.”

“Is he at least in jail still?”

“Yes, for now. His bail was set at two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. If someone comes up with twenty five thousand dollars before his trial, he will be released. If his bail does get posted though, you will be notified before he gets out.” The hits just kept on coming.

“How long is he looking at once we go to trial?”

“The jail time ranges from two to twenty years. Being his first offense, the judge might take that into account.” This had to be some horrible practical joke. Where were the cameras?

“That’s ridiculous. So what am I supposed to do if he gets out?”

You have an order of protection right now, and if he breaks that, he will

go right back to jail and he would no longer be eligible for bail.” They expected a piece of paper to protect her; fat chance.

“I’ll be sure to throw the order at him when he’s trying to kill me. I’m sure that will stop him.” Her words dripped with sarcasm. At least he was in jail for now, and she could figure out what to do.

“I don’t like it anymore that you do, but legally my hands are tied.” The attorney handed her some pamphlets on domestic violence support groups and a few forms she would need to fill out. “I will be in contact with you if anything changes.”

Lindsay picked up the papers and

slowly made her way to the door. Her heart was racing and it was making the throbbing in her arm worse. The bandage wrapped around her ribs and stomach seemed to be squeezing tighter now and she just wanted a pain pill and to pass out for a while.

Jessie was waiting in the lobby to drive her back home. “How did it go?”

“They are only charging him with aggravated assault. The bastard could get out of jail if someone post his bail and if convicted could get as little as two years in prison. Basically, he’s getting a slap on the wrist after what he did to me.”

Jessie eased an arm around Lindsay’s waist as they walked to the

parking lot. “How the hell can that happen? That monster ruined your life and they are going easy on him.”

Lindsay didn't want to talk about it anymore. She had held the tears at bay so far, but it wouldn't take much to set them off. “So it seems. Mommy and daddy's money must have some pull. I just want to go home and not think about it.”

Lindsay was staying with Jessie until she could get back to work and find a new place to live. There was no way she was going back to the house of horrors ever again.

They rode in silence on the long ride back to Jessie's house. As they pulled into the driveway, Lindsay's cell

phone rang. She didn't recognize the number, but realizing it could be the attorney, she answered. "Hello?"

"Did you really think you could get away from me?" Mitch's deep menacing voice snarled over the phone. Lindsay sat frozen in her seat. How was he able to call her?

"I know your still there, I can hear you breathing. Don't think this is over. I told you the only way you leave me is in a body bag. When I get out of here, you are mine." The line went dead and Lindsay couldn't breathe.

"Lindsay, who was it?" The phone had fallen to the floor board of the car and her whole body was trembling.

"M-Mitch. It's not over, it will

never be over.” Lindsay began sobbing uncontrollably. A million ideas ran through her mind, but only one made sense. She had to disappear.

Lindsay was still holding the screw driver to the screw on the lock, but she was no longer turning it. Four years later and the fear still paralyzed her. Clearing her head of that awful day, she resumed her installation of the lock.

She had just tightened the last screw when she heard the front door open. Knowing her gun was still in her purse in the living room; Lindsay looked around for something she could use as a weapon.

“Lindsay? It’s Kyle.” What is he

doing here? He was supposed to be out with Stella and Alex. Footsteps in the hall were the only warning she got before Kyle was standing in the doorway to her bedroom.

“I knocked but you must not have heard me. I didn’t scare you did I?” He had no idea how much he scared her, but not in the he-will-physically-harm-me kind of way.

“I was just unpacking and got distracted. I thought you guys had already left. Did you need something?” Trying not to be obvious about it, Lindsay started making her way to the door. He was staring at the bed, but had yet to say anything about what he saw. When she got close enough, Kyle

stepped aside to let her pass by.

“Stella said you didn’t want to go out, but I thought I’d come see if I could change your mind.”

“I really just want to unpack a few things, take a long bath and get some sleep. Stella and I were up pretty early.” His eyes darted to the bed again before he followed her out of the bedroom.

“Do you want me to stay and help you? I don’t mind.” Definitely not; being alone with him this long made her pulse race and body respond in ways it shouldn’t be. Lindsay didn’t think she could handle much more. As polite as she could, while still getting her feelings across, Lindsay opened the front door.

“I appreciate it, but I won’t be

doing a lot. Go have fun with Stella, Alex and Vicki. You guys deserve it after all the heavy lifting you did.” Kyle strolled towards the open door, but paused in front of her. His hand lifted like he was going to touch her, but he dropped it back to his side.

“Get some rest, Red. I’ll see you soon.” And with that soft spoken statement, Kyle walked out of her apartment and disappeared down the stairs. Lindsay stood there for several seconds staring at the empty stairwell. She should be trembling from being alone with Kyle for so long. But instead all she felt was confused and slightly turned on. What was happening to her?

This time when she shut the door,

she locked it. Grabbing her purse on the way back to her room, Lindsay placed the gun back in its proper place.

She finished setting up all her security devices and went to draw herself a bath. The huge tub had been calling her name and her tired muscles could use a long soak.

Lindsay stripped away her sweaty clothes and made sure to avoid the giant mirror above the sink. It's not like she didn't know what her scars looked like. The warm water surrounded her as she sank further into the deep bathtub. Only her head was above the water as she began to nod off; visions of a sexy man with dark chocolate eyes and a smile that threatened all of Lindsay's defenses

dancing behind her eyelids.

“No! I just want to spend some time with my friends. I already told you that.” Kyle took a long pull from his beer bottle and turned his back on the leggy blonde that had been hitting on him all night.

They had been at *Maxwell's* for a few hours now and Kyle was ready to go home. He was sick of woman throwing themselves at him and had gone from gently letting them down to being a total asshole.

“Fine, your loss” She finally stomped off and Kyle looked up into three sets of very shocked eyes.

“What?”

“Uh...are you feeling ok?” Victoria placed her hand on his forehead like she was checking for a fever. “That’s like the tenth girl you’ve sent away. I think we need to get you to a hospital.”

“I’m just not in the mood to deal with any of them tonight. Is that so hard to believe?”

“Frankly, when it comes to you... yes” Kyle turned to Alex; to the one person who knew exactly what was going on. He sent Kyle a you-might-as-well-tell-them look and Kyle slumped back in his chair.

“If you must know, I have started thinking lately I want more from a relationship than a one night stand. And none of these woman fit what I’m

looking for. There, now you know. No need for trips to the ER.”

There was no reason to tell them who he wanted. Victoria and Stella would jump all over him if they thought for one second he had less than honorable intentions for their friend.

The two women sat stock still. You would have thought he told them he planned on killing someone tonight or something. Kyle clutched his hands together behind his neck and stared up at the ceiling. Why didn't he just keep his big mouth shut?

“If tall, blonde and sleazy isn't it, then what are you looking for?” Vicki's description of the women he normally slept with should have made him mad,

but she was right.

A picture of Lindsay wrapped in his arms popped into Kyle's mind and he smiled; it really was a nice image. But knowing it was so far out of reach made him groan. He should just pay his bill and go home to drown his sorrows, but then he remembered he rode with Alex and Stella.

“That groan tells me you know exactly who you want, but could it be that the great and powerful firefighter can't have someone?” Victoria was such a pain in the ass sometimes. “Now I'm even more intrigued.”

Kyle glared at Victoria, which made her laugh harder. When his eyes locked with Stella's he forgot all about Vicki.

Stella was staring at him with a tilt to her head, like the answers were written on his face. And apparently they were because she shoved back her chair and stood up.

“Are you kidding me!?!” Kyle winced, and a very surprised and angry Stella pointed to the side door. “If you two will excuse us, Kyle and I need to have a little talk.”

Alex tried to say something to Stella, but she was already walking to the door. Kyle blew out a breath and resigned himself to his fate. “We’ll be right back.”

The door hadn’t even closed all the way when she started her tirade.

“Really, of all the women in this

city, why her? You've done some messed up things before, but this may take the cake. She is not some piece of ass, Kyle. You won't be able to just sneak out in the morning when you've gotten what you wanted."

"Her name is Lindsay! Don't talk about her like she's some nameless bimbo I'm trying to sleep with. If you would have bothered to listen to what I said inside, you would realize I said I want more out of a relationship than a booty call. And if I just wanted a piece of ass, I could easily have that." He waved his hand toward the bar.

Kyle didn't like yelling at a woman, especially someone he considered a friend, but Stella had downright insulted

him. Stella didn't back down though.

“Why Lindsay, why now”

Kyle grabbed a chair and sat down and Stella did the same. He rubbed a hand down his face and tried to answer the best he could. “I can't explain why. It's just how I feel. I'll tell you what I told Alex. Since I decided I want to pursue something with Lindsay, I haven't been with another woman. That's how serious I am about her.”

“Kyle...I like you, you know that. But this is the first time you've even hinted that you want a serious relationship. What if you try it and you decide it's not for you? Where does that leave Lindsay? I don't want to see her hurt.”

“Hurt her? Do you really think so little of me? I would never hurt her. She’s already had enough of that in her life.”

“What do you mean?” Stella looked and sounded as pissed as Kyle felt when thinking about Lindsay’s unknown past.

“Nothing, I just have my suspicions and Alex told me you guys do too.” Leaning forward with his forearms resting on his knees, Kyle focused on the ground between his feet.

Stella sighed. “Yes, I do, but I’ve never wanted to bring it up to her. Lindsay went from this shy meek little thing to being full of life most of the time. I don’t want to force her to open up old wounds and her revert back to how

she was. I've told her I'm here for her to talk to, but left it at that.”

“I probably shouldn't tell you this, but it's been bugging me all night.” Kyle paused, but needed to tell someone so he continued. “When I went back to try and convince her to come out tonight, there was a bunch of security things laid out on her bed.”

“Did you ask her what they were?”

“No. She clearly didn't want me to see them because she couldn't get me out of there fast enough. Stella, she is terrified of somebody. It kills me to think of her going through that on her own. You or Vicki needs to get it out of her. It's driving me crazy thinking she's in danger.”

Kyle had never felt this way about someone before. Like if something happened to her, his world would forever be shadowed by a black cloud. “She’s never said anything to you about her past? Not even a slip somewhere along the way?”

Stella worried her bottom lip and looked like she was debating something in her head. “There have been looks and comments here and there. Then there are the times she freaks out at random things that she really shouldn’t.”

Kyle interrupted Stella. “Like at your apartment when she dropped the food?”

“Exactly, and when Alex and I had a disagreement and I said he hurt me, she

thought I meant physically.” Stella took a deep breath, “And early this morning, she had a nightmare. I’ve never heard someone scream so loud or sound so in pain from a bad dream.”

Kyle’s chest ached for what Lindsay could have possibly gone through in her life. “Did she say what it was about?”

Stella shook her head. “When I tried to wake her up, she was swinging her fists, and told me to get out before he got me too. She kept yelling for ‘Mitch’ to stop. I asked who he was or what the dream was about and she shut down; said she barely remembered the dream.”

“And you didn’t believe her?” Kyle was getting sicker to his stomach as Stella was reliving what had happened

this morning.

“No. She was petrified. She knew exactly what the nightmare was about.”

Kyle leaned back in his seat and thought about everything Stella had just told him. He didn't want Lindsay to get scared off by any of them, but he couldn't sit back and do nothing anymore.

“Lindsay is comfortable with women more so than men, so you and Vicki will have to be the ones to get it out of her. She seems especially jittery with me, and that kind of hinders me getting anywhere with her. My hope is once she tells someone what's going on, she will loosen up a little and I might have a shot.” At least he hoped.

Stella nodded in agreement. “She does seem more uncomfortable around you than anyone else. I even asked her about it, but she never really answers or changes the subject. I will talk to Vicki and see what we can come up with.”

Stella stood and Kyle followed her lead. She started towards the door and abruptly stopped. “If you are serious about changing, I will help,” Stella turned and glared a hole through him. “But if you so much as hurt her feelings once, I will hunt you down myself and do to you what I did to Kevin. Just remember that.”

Kyle’s hand moved to the front of his jeans and he winced. When he opened his eyes, Stella was already

back inside the bar. Feeling somewhat better, even after Stella's threat, Kyle opened the door and headed to the table. At least now they were all on the same page.

Chapter 4

Lindsay rolled to the middle of her bed, stretched her arms high above her head and yawned loudly. Damn that felt good. It had been a little over a week since she moved to Spring Towers, and Lindsay felt more relaxed than she had in four years.

As was her new routine in the morning, Lindsay took a long hot shower, got ready for work and went to the kitchen to get the coffee started. Stella would come over soon, and the two of them would talk as they drank the warm brew and ate breakfast.

A knock on the door, just as the

coffee maker signaled it was done, made Lindsay giggle. “Like clockwork.”

After quick check through the peephole, Lindsay unlocked the door. Stella came strolling in wearing her normal black t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes and her hair in a ponytail.

“Sorry I’m late. I, uh, got distracted.” Two mugs were already sitting on the kitchen counter, so Lindsay filled both and handed one to Stella.

“Every morning you say the same thing, and every morning I tell you it’s no big deal. So from now on, just come in, say hi, tell me Alex couldn’t keep his hands off you and drink your coffee.”

Stella’s cheeks took on a dark shade of red and she shied away sheepishly.

“Point taken, you think we’d be sick of each other by now. But our goodbye peck always turns into a lesson in foreplay.”

Lindsay put a finger in each ear and began babbling loudly. “Lalalalala, I don’t need the details.”

“Oh, details would be me telling you how he bent me over the ...”

“Stop right there. For those of us still using battery powered boyfriends, hearing about your sexcapades is not helpful. It’s just depressing. ” Stella just grinned as she took a sip of her beverage.

Lindsay smiled back and shook her head. She thought about how much her life had changed for the better since

meeting Stella.

When she called about the assistant job nearly three years ago, Lindsay had just moved for the third time. The fake ID her sponsor at the domestic violence group had set her up with had finally come through, and Lindsay wanted to try and start living a normal life; or normal enough at least.

While standing in line at a local deli, a bright flyer on the bulletin board caught her attention. Before Lindsay was kicked out of college, she had been taking art classes and thought being an assistant to a photographer would be a perfect way to start over.

During her interview, Stella's easy going personality and sense of humor

reminded Lindsay so much of Jessie. Stella hadn't even let Lindsay leave before offering her the job, and she almost dropped to her knees to thank her.

All this time later and Lindsay still couldn't believe it was real. She had a great job, a great apartment and fantastic friends. Stella, Vicki and Alex made her feel welcome in their small group immediately; like she had always been there.

Then there was Kyle. Sweet, caring, gentle, funny, confusing Kyle; he was the one person in Lindsay's current life that didn't fit in a specific category. While they were friends, she found it hard to be around him sometimes. There was always this underlying attraction

between them that brought out all of her insecurities and fears.

“I know of at least one person who would gladly help you out of your sexual drought.” Stella was grinning wickedly.

“Doubtful. But seeing as I have no desire to date, or have sex with a random person, we don’t need to discuss it further.”

“You’re no fun.” Stella crossed her arms over her chest and pretended to pout.

“I know, but you love me.” Lindsay picked up both their mugs and placed them in the sink before turning back to Stella. “Now come on boss lady. Let’s get to work so you can kick ass like always.”

“Alright, but are you okay with taking separate cars today? I need to make a few stops before I head to the studio.” Once Lindsay moved in, she and Stella started riding to work together. It seemed logical since they were going to and coming back from the same place.

“Sure. I have some errands to do on my lunch break today anyway. I’ll open up and get everything ready for your first shoot.”

“That’s why you are the best.” The two of them headed down to their cars and left in opposite directions.

Half an hour later, Stella came sauntering in carrying a small box in one hand, while a gift bag hung from the other. Stella thrust both in Lindsay’s

direction with a giant smile on her face.
“Happy Birthday”

“I can’t believe you remembered.” Her birthday wasn’t something Lindsay ever made a big deal out of, but the fact that Stella remembered warmed her heart.

“Of course I remembered. What kind of boss, or friend, would I be if I forgot one of my best friend’s birthday?”

“Still a great one, but thank you. This is awesome.” Stella waved the presents in front of her one more time and Lindsay took them from her. She lifted the lid on the small box first and moaned.

“Mmmm...it’s like a small slice of heaven.” In the box was an apple

turnover from the bakery around the corner. They were so delicious, it should be illegal.

“Open the other one.” Stella was bouncing in place, and Lindsay could tell she was really excited for her to open this gift. So she moved her attention to the gift bag.

Lindsay began taking piece after piece of tissue paper out of the bag. Her fingers grazed something metal, and Lindsay pulled a picture frame from the bag.

“Oh Stella...this is amazing. I don't even remember taking this.” In the frame was a picture of Stella, Vicki and herself hugging and laughing at Stella and Alex's engagement party; the words

‘Best Friends’ ran along the edge of the frame, and Lindsay couldn’t agree with that more.

“I knew I wanted you to have it as soon as the pictures came in. It was one of my favorites.”

“Thank you. I love it. I know the perfect spot to put it in my apartment. You’re the best.” With the picture frame still in her hand, Lindsay threw her arms around Stella.

“So are you.” Stella hugged her back. When they separated, Stella shook her finger at Lindsay. “And you better not have plans tonight. Victoria and I are taking you out to celebrate, and she told me to tell you don’t even try to argue.”

“No argument here. Just tell me

when and where.” A night out with her two best friends sounded like the perfect way to spend her birthday.

“The location is a surprise, but Vicki she said probably around eight for the time. Is that fine?”

“Sounds great” And it did. Now Lindsay would have two things to look forward to today.

Stella disappeared into her office a few minutes later and Lindsay sat down to sort through the schedule for today. She was just picking up the phone to call a client, when a delivery boy came through the front door carrying a bouquet of sterling silver roses.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m looking for a Lindsay Pierce.”

“I’m Lindsay.”

“Delivery, I just need you to sign here.” He placed the vase on her desk and pointed to a line on his clip board. She was sure he had to be mistaken; these beautiful flowers couldn’t possibly be for her. But sure enough, her name was printed next to the line for her signature.

She signed her name and gave the board back in a daze. The delivery boy accepted the board and handed her the vase.

“Enjoy!”

“I will. Thank you.” Having no idea who the flowers could be from, Lindsay sat the vase on her desk and searched for a card. She found one nestled in the

middle of the bouquet and she quickly opened it. The few words written on the card left her stunned.

Have a Happy Birthday, Red!

There was no signature, but then again she didn't need there to be. Only one person called her Red. But how did Kyle know it was her birthday and why would Kyle send her flowers?

All the possible, and very unlikely, reasons were running through Lindsay's head when Stella came out of her office.

"I heard the door open a minute ago. Did we have...?" Stella's words fell off as her gaze landed on the flowers.

"Damn! Those are gorgeous. Are they for you?"

"Yes." Lindsay didn't want to say

much more than that. Stella would have a million questions and they would be questions Lindsay couldn't answer herself.

“Who sent them?” She thought about lying, but knew Stella would probably find out eventually, so she played dumb instead.

“The card isn't signed.” Stella stuck out her hand and Lindsay reluctantly handed it over. Stella glanced quickly at the card, and started to give it back to Lindsay only to jerk it back, and hold it two inches from her face.

“It doesn't need to be signed. You know exactly who sent these.” Lindsay tried to shrug it off.

“I'm assuming they are from Kyle

because of the whole ‘Red’ thing. I don’t know how he knew it was my birthday though.” If there was one thing Stella was terrible at it was lying. So when she started shifting from foot to foot and not making eye contact, Lindsay became suspicious.

“Who knows?” Stella took a few steps toward her office. “I’ll be in my office if you need me.” Lindsay was not letting her get away that easily, so she grabbed Stella’s arm and stopped her attempt at retreat.

“Stella”

“Yes?” She pretended to examine her finger nails as Lindsay stared at her.

“How did Kyle know it was my birthday?”

“I don’t know.” Lindsay gave her her most stern look, and Stella sighed. “Okay, I may have told him a few days ago. He was over and saw your present and asked whose birthday it was, so I told him.”

Lindsay let go of Stella and tried to wrap her brain around the situation. Just because he knew it was her birthday didn’t explain why he sent the flowers.

“Do you know why he sent them?” Again Stella found her nails rather interesting, and Lindsay was losing her patience. Her annoyance must have been clear because Stella sighed and finally answered.

“I promised not to say.”

“Why would the reason he sent me

flowers on my birthday be a secret?” Stella pleaded with her eyes for Lindsay not to make her break her promise to Kyle. “Ugh, this is stupid. I can’t even enjoy them because now I want to know why.”

“It’s not every day someone sends you flowers. The why is not important right now, so stop analyzing it and just enjoy them.”

“Easy for you to say, you know the why. But I guess I have no other choice, so I’ll just sit here and be confused all day.” Lindsay moved the placed the flowers on the shelf behind her desk and harrumphed into her chair.

“That’s the attitude to have.” Stella said sarcastically.

Lindsay stuck her tongue out, and Stella walked back to her office laughing. Lindsay would text Kyle later and thank him, and hopefully be brave enough to ask him about the secret behind this whole situation.

The day had been relatively slow, and Lindsay had never been happier to see her lunch hour arrive. “I’m headed out for lunch. Do you need anything while I’m out?”

Stella glanced up from her laptop and waved her off. “No, I’m good. Take extra time if you need it. We don’t have anything until two.”

“It shouldn’t take that long, but I’ll call if I’m going to later than usual.”

Lindsay said goodbye, and could barely contain her excitement as she headed to her car. The lunch time traffic crowded the streets, as Lindsay navigated her way to the main post office on this side of town.

A short while later, Lindsay arrived at the large stone building and searched for a parking spot. She found one a few minutes later, and after putting change in the meter, Lindsay went inside.

She stepped into the air conditioned building and headed straight for the P.O. Boxes. Box 142 was located midway down a long hall, and as Lindsay walked toward it she searched her key ring for the key she needed.

Her head was down, and just as she

found the right key, Lindsay ran into the back of someone else. “Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry. I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going. Are you okay?”

It was then that Lindsay got a clear view of the person she bumped into. He turned around and the shiver that shot down her spine was not a good one. Something about this man that made all of Lindsay’s warning bells go off.

“It’s not a problem. I should have watched my back better.” The smile he gave her reminded Lindsay of how a snake would smile at you before attacking if it could.

She apologized again, and after stepping around the man, walked faster to her P.O. Box. Lindsay peered over

her shoulder and could no longer see the creepy man and felt relieved. The whole encounter left her with an uneasy feeling, so Lindsay quickly slipped the key into the slot and opened it; noticing a slight tremble of her hand as she reached inside.

A brightly colored envelope sat in the small box and Lindsay couldn't remove it fast enough. Checking the box for any other mail and seeing none, Lindsay closed it and started the short walk back to her car; looking over her shoulder as she went.

Once she was inside the car, Lindsay locked the door and ripped open the envelope. The front of the card read "*Happy Birthday* with a picture of a

silly monkey.” The picture made Lindsay laugh, but what she wanted to see was the letter she knew was waiting for her on the inside.

A folded up piece of white paper fell into Lindsay’s lap just as she was opening the card. She carefully unfolded it and began reading.

Happy Birthday, Lindsay! Nothing could make me happier than to celebrate your 28th birthday with you, but seeing as that can’t happen, I hope you go out and celebrate anyway. I miss you with each day that passes and can only look forward to hearing from you soon. As always, I have said nothing to anyone about your location or new life and will continue to keep

my big mouth shut. You know that's difficult for me ;) Life here is the same as always. Same people, same gossip. Sadly, there have been no sightings or updates on Mitch's location, but you know I will let you know the minute I hear anything. I hope you are living your life, Lindsay. Have fun and meet someone new. Life's too short to be alone. Now I know you're telling me to mind my own business in that pretty little head of yours, but please try. I love and miss you. Talk to you again next year.

Love, Jessie.

Lindsay sat there for several minutes squeezing the letter to her chest. She missed Jessie so much that at times

she thought about flying down to Texas to see her, but the reality of why she couldn't always find a way back in. There was no way she would jeopardize her new life. Not after she had worked so hard to get to this point.

The interior of the car started to get too warm, effectively breaking Lindsay from her melancholy. It was the beginning of May, but the temperatures were already in the eighties and had turned her car into an oven.

Reading the letter one more time, Lindsay slipped it back in the card and put both items in her purse. She started the car and cranked up the air conditioning. Lindsay looked both ways before merging with the now diminished

traffic flow.

Trying to bask in the joy of her annual letter from Jessie, without thinking about her strange encounter inside the post office, Lindsay headed to her favorite sandwich shop for some lunch.

Today was turning out to be a great birthday, and tonight it would be even better.

Chapter 5

“Are you going to tell me what we are doing tonight?”

“I told you, it’s a surprise.” Stella typed on her phone a few times and put it back in her pocket. “Vicki just texted me and said she’ll be here in an hour.”

Lindsay and Stella left the studio an hour ago, and after going to her own apartment to change, Stella came over to Lindsay’s.

“I can’t get dressed to go out if I don’t even know where we are going. At least tell me if it’s casual or dressy.”

Lindsay knew she was asking the wrong person, but she didn’t want to wear the

wrong thing.

“A cute top and jeans will work just fine. Now stop trying to trick me into telling you and go get ready.” Stella nudged Lindsay toward her bedroom and Lindsay began walking in that direction.

She didn't have much time, but Lindsay wanted to take a quick shower to wash the work day away. When she was finished, Lindsay went into her walk in closet to find an outfit. With the way the heat was today, she definitely wanted something lightweight and airy.

Lindsay found an emerald green halter top tucked away at the back of the closet and thought it would be perfect for tonight. Grabbing her favorite pair of jeans and knee high boots, Lindsay got

dressed and went back to the bathroom to dry her hair. She lightly applied make up and after a final mirror check, she was ready to go.

The small black purse she used for going out was hanging on the back of her bedroom door, so she grabbed it on the way out. Stella was sitting on the couch watching TV when Lindsay walked into the living room.

“You look gorgeous.”

“Thanks. Have you heard from Vicki yet?” Lindsay was transferring all the items she would need from her big purse to the smaller one as Stella answered.

“Yep, she’ll be here in two minutes. Do you need more time or are you

ready?

“Ready as I’ll ever be.” Stella’s phone chimed just as she stood up from the couch. She read something on the screen and slipped it back in her pocket again.

“Vicki’s downstairs. Let’s do this, Birthday Girl!” The two women locked their arms together and went down to meet Vicki in the parking lot. The passenger window on Victoria’s bright yellow Camaro rolled down as they approached.

“You both look great. Get in and let’s go have some fun.” They both laughed as Lindsay climbed in the back seat and Stella in the front. Lindsay was practically bouncing with excitement.

She had no idea what they were doing tonight, but she decided to take Jessie's advice and live a little.

Vicki pulled the Camaro into the small parking area behind *Maxwell's* twenty minutes later. "They are having a blue's band here tonight that is supposed to be amazing. We figured some food, pool and good music sounded like fun. How's that sound to you?"

"That sounds perfect. I was afraid you were going to take me to some male strip club or something." Lindsay laughed with relief, but Stella and Vicki got naughty twinkles in their eyes.

"You just gave me a great idea." Vicki pretended to reach for the keys,

but Lindsay was already opening the door and exiting the car as quickly as possible. The two women got out too, unable to stop giggling as all three of them headed for the door.

“I’ll be sure to book a flight to see Chippendale’s in Vegas for your birthday next year.” Lindsay wouldn’t put it past Vicki to do just that.

They made their way into *Maxwell’s* and found an open pool table at the back of the bar. It was nine o’clock on a Friday night and it was completely packed. They set their purses down on a small round table in the corner as a waitress approached carrying a serving tray.

“Hi, ladies, what would you like to

drink this evening?” Lindsay ordered a beer, and Stella and Vicki did the same.

“Do you want water too like usual?” They came to *Maxwell's* often enough that most of the waitress's knew them and their orders. Vicki told her yes as Lindsay went to the wall to grab a pool stick.

“What game do you want to play?” The reason they all loved coming to *Maxwell's* was to play pool and enjoy the laid back atmosphere it provided.

“It's your birthday. It's whatever you want, all night.”

“You guys are too much. It's just another day.” Lindsay had never liked being the center of attention. She would much rather someone else shine than

herself.

“It is not. We are here to celebrate you and all your wonderfulness. Now shut up and rack em.” Stella reached for a pool cue as well.

Lindsay grabbed the rack and arranged the balls for a game of nine-ball. Half way through the game, the waitress came back to take their dinner orders. The girls decided to share a large pizza and she said she would bring it out as soon as it was ready.

Getting back to the game, Lindsay leaned over to try a combo shot on the five and nine. She examined it from all angles before finally striking the cue ball gently. They all watched as the five struck the nine, and sent it rolling into

the side pocket.

“Woooo, I couldn’t do that again if I tried.” Stella and Vicki laughed as Lindsay started doing a little victory dance. Her attempt at the running man was almost as bad as the cabbage patch she was doing right now, but she was having so much fun she didn’t care.

“That may be the sexiest moves I’ve ever seen.” The deep huskiness with which those words were said made Lindsay stop mid arm row; she would know that voice anywhere. Lindsay pivoted slowly to the right and could now see where he was.

Kyle was standing with his shoulder propped against the pillar next to their table. His thumbs were loosely hung in

his pockets as he had his eyes trained on her and only her.

“W-what are you doing here?”
Damn it. Why did he always turn her into a stuttering moron? Lindsay cleared her throat and tried again. “Sorry, I mean, Hi. How are you?”

“I’m better now that I’ve seen you!”
He winked at her and she sure enough, she blushed. Kyle pushed away from the pillar and walked closer to where Lindsay was standing.

“Poor Alex was having withdrawals from Stella, and I didn’t feel like hearing him whine the rest of the night. I hope you don’t mind that we kind of crashed your girl’s night.” It was only then that she noticed Alex sitting in

the chair next to Vicki, with Stella now on his lap; although right now, Alex looked more outraged than love sick.

“What, I did no such...” Kyle raised an eyebrow at Alex, and Lindsay watched as Alex completely changed what he was saying. “Yeah, I couldn’t stand to be away from Stella any longer.”

“Puke, you two make me sick sometimes.” Stella and Alex ignored Vicki as they went back to snuggling in the chair.

Something weird was going on, but Lindsay couldn’t put her finger on it. She decided for tonight though, she didn’t care. She was having fun, and having the boys here wasn’t any different from any

other night.

“It seems you lost your opponent. Care if I take her place?” Kyle was already chalking up a pool cue before Lindsay could even answer.

“You sure you can handle me?” Shocking Kyle as much as herself, Lindsay slapped a hand over her mouth and sighed; she hadn’t meant for it to sound like a come on. She decided that not talking was probably safer than talking, so Lindsay silently walked around the table getting the balls out of the pockets.

When she reached the corner where he was leaning, Kyle made no attempt to move. Instead he just smiled as Lindsay carefully reached into the pocket behind

him to get the balls.

The table was all set for a new game and Lindsay could no longer stay silent. “Do you want to break?”

Kyle shook his head no, but didn't say anything. She found the cue ball off to the side and positioned it slightly off center to the left. Lining up her shot, Lindsay drew back only to have her arm brush against a hard jean covered leg.

She looked up and Kyle was now standing right next to her. The skin on her arm felt like it was on fire from where it had touched him, and Lindsay wanted to forfeit the game. But her reasons would be too obvious at this point.

So she gave his leg a tap with the

stick and he got the hint and stepped back a bit. Lindsay once again lined up her shot, but just as she drew back again, Kyle leaned down and whispered in her ear. “Yeah Red, I can handle you.”

The feel of Kyle’s warm breath against her ear jolted Lindsay forward. Her stick made contact with the cue ball, and it went sailing into the corner pocket.

“Damn it.” She thought she mumbled it under her breath, but Kyle’s muffled laughter told her otherwise. Lindsay stood up from her hunched over position and narrowed her eyes at him. He stared back with undisguised amusement and tried to play innocent.

“What? Does that mean I win?”

Lindsay growled and headed to the table to get a drink of her beer. As the now warm beer passed over Lindsay's tongue, she could hear Kyle call out behind her

“How about two out of three?”

Cocky bastard; he did that on purpose and now wanted her to play some more of this cat and mouse game they had going on. Lindsay was about to tell him where he could shove it, when Stella and Vicki joined the conversation.

“Come on, Lindsay. Kick his ass.”

Great, now she couldn't say no. Praying for all of her self-control, Lindsay picked up the pool stick and went back to the table.

“Fine, two out of three, but no

cheating this time.”

Kyle's eyes were alight with mock innocence. “I didn't cheat. You scratched all by yourself.” Rolling her eyes, Lindsay waited while Kyle racked the balls this time. When he was finished, Kyle grabbed the cue ball and prepared to break since he won the last game.

It was close, but Lindsay won the second game. Their friends all watched and were even making bets now before the third game started. “I've got twenty bucks on Lindsay.” Vicki was waving the money in Alex's face.

“You're on.” He responded back and placed another twenty on top of hers. The band for the evening had

started to play, and the raspy deep voice of the lead singer flowed around the room.

“Stakes are getting awfully high. How about we make a bet of our own?” She didn’t know what to say. Lindsay was confident in her pool skills, but Kyle was good too. Not knowing what he may want if he won, made her even more cautious.

“What are the stakes?”

“If I win, you have to dance with me during the next slow song the band plays.” She looked to the small dance floor and then back at him. Lindsay didn’t know if she would survive being in his arms for a whole song without begging him for more.

“And if I win?” Her brain was too foggy from thoughts of being in Kyle’s arms to come up with something of her own.

Kyle was thinking hard about her question, but Stella chimed in before he came up with something. “If you win, Kyle has to let Vicki wax his legs.”

Kyle’s eyes got impossibly wide, and just as he began to shake his head no, Lindsay said “agreed” and stuck out her hand. The cockiness from a minute ago was no replaced with uncertainty.

“Come on, man. You gonna let them scare you? You’ve got this.”

“Shut up. You aren’t the one that would have to wax your legs, now are you.” Kyle cursed under his breath, but

stuck his hand out and said “Agreed.”

Kyle took two or three long gulps of his beer. What the hell was he thinking? He glanced over to see Lindsay bent over the pool table and knew exactly what he was thinking. If he didn't feel Lindsay in his arms soon, he may not survive the night.

“You keep checking out Lindsay's ass, you'll never win.” Alex whispered next to him. He was enjoying Kyle's misery a little too much. He guessed he deserved it after all the shit he had given Alex about Stella.

“I know that. Damn it. Why did I agree to this?”

“Because you are too chicken shit to

ask Lindsay to dance like a normal person.” There was that. But why take the chance of being rejected when you could win what you want just as easily?

“I have to win. It’s the only way I’ll get Lindsay alone to talk without getting interrupted. Plus, I don’t feel like being the walking punch line around the firehouse if I have to wax my legs.” Kyle could already hear the other men’s harassment.

“You ready to lose, Brady.” Lindsay stood beside the table with her hands wrapped around her pool stick; a cocky grin on her face. With a final slap on the back and good luck from Alex, Kyle rolled his neck and loosened his shoulders.

“Dream on, Red. You’ll be slow dancing with me before you know it.”

“I think it’s more likely you’ll be sporting some smooth legs all summer. It will keep you cool at least.” They threw insults back and forth a few more times before Lindsay got into position to break. Right away she sank two balls, and Kyle felt a small sheen of sweat form on his forehead.

Lindsay made the two and three ball, but missed the four completely; which meant Kyle got ball in hand. Inhaling to calm himself, Kyle stepped up to the table. The remaining balls were arranged pretty openly and Kyle felt confident he could run the table.

He lined up his first shot and sank

the four into the side pocket. The cue ball stopped a little too far over, but he was still able to hit the five-ball in. Looking one more time around the table, Kyle easily made the seven and eight.

“Come on. One more and I’ll buy your beer the rest of the night with Vicki’s money.” Stella and Vicki both smacked Alex for his comment. Lindsay was watching intently from her spot by the pillar. She seemed almost frozen as he tried to figure out the best pocket to sink the nine.

“Right corner pocket.” Kyle pointed with his pool cue to the pocket he wanted. With one more calming intake of oxygen, he leaned over and gave a few practice strokes. One last stroke and

Kyle shot the stick forward.

The cue ball glided over the green felt and as if in slow motion, Kyle watched the ball crash into the white and yellow nine. He closed his eyes, not wanting to see if he had made it or missed. A collective gasp made him open his eyes. Kyle looked at the table and realized that the only ball left was the cue ball.

Kyle couldn't believe it. One look at Lindsay, and he knew she couldn't either. Alex jumped up and high-fived him. "Geez, when that ball started to drift, I thought it was going bounce off the side rail."

Stella and Vicki were talking trash to Alex as he went back to the table to

collect his winnings, but Kyle attention was drawn to Lindsay. She hadn't moved or said a word the entire time and he was starting to feel like maybe he had made a mistake with this bet.

Kyle didn't want her to feel like she was being forced to do this, so he laid his stick on the pool table and slowly approached her.

"Lindsay?" She must not have seen him approaching because he said her name it startled.

"What?"

"You don't have to dance if you don't want to. It was just a silly bet."

"You don't want to dance with me now?" Lindsay's confusion was clear and she no longer seemed to be in a

trance.

“I would love nothing more than to dance with you. You just didn’t seem thrilled about the idea right after I won.” Color returned to her cheeks and her lips turned up at the corners.

“I was just in shock. I didn’t expect you to win so easily.” Her admission made Kyle laugh and relax once again. She wasn’t thinking about their impending dance, it was just her wounded ego at being beaten. That was a relief.

“Sorry, Red. I couldn’t let you win just because it’s your birthday. I was too focused on wanting spinning you around the dance floor.”

“Well since it’s still a fast song, so

I guess my toes are safe for now.” The smile she gave him was so sweet; he damn near melted to the floor. He wanted to demand the band to play the longest slow song ever written right now. But he didn’t want Lindsay to see just how desperate he really was, so he just smiled back.

“I’ll be gentle. I promise.” Lindsay pushed away from the pillar and headed back to the small table where their friends were sitting. She sat down and received consoling hugs from her friends.

Alex handed Kyle a new beer and he sat down as well. They all sat around the table joking and laughing. Telling stories from their jobs and enjoying the

amazing music surrounding them.

The band announced they would be taking a short break after their next song and Kyle's heart sank. They still hadn't played a slow song since he won, and Kyle was starting to lose all hope that they ever would.

When the band began to play a soft blues melody, Kyle wanted to fall to his knees and thank each one of them. Lindsay was still sitting next to Vicki on the other side of the table, when Kyle stood and walked over to her.

"May I have this dance?" He extended his hand towards her. Kyle was relieved when Lindsay placed her small hand in his much larger one without hesitation. He could feel a slight

tremble in her hand as they walked the short distance to the dance floor.

A few other couples were on the floor, but there was plenty of room for them to move without bumping into anyone. Kyle turned a very surprised Lindsay in a circle once before placing both of his hands on the small of her back. They began to sway in time to the music and Kyle couldn't remember the last time something had felt this right.

Their height difference made it difficult for Lindsay to have a good place for her arms, so she ended up resting her hands on his upper arms. She was looking around at first, but then seemed to settle into the dance.

“Kyle?”

“Yes”

“Can I ask you a question?” They had been dancing in silence for a minute, and he was curious to find out what she wanted to ask him.

“Of course”

She seemed nervous about whatever she wanted to ask him, so he kept quiet and waited. Finally she asked. “Why did you send me roses?”

That was an easy one to answer.

“Because it’s your birthday, and when I saw those flowers, they reminded me of you.”

Lindsay gave him a confused look so he explained further. “Sterling silver roses are soft in color, beautiful and unique. Just like you.”

They had slowed down so much that Kyle didn't think it was consider dancing anymore. Lindsay frowned and he didn't know what he had said to upset her. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No. I'm just trying to figure you out."

Picking up their dancing pace again, Kyle smiled. "What's there to figure out?"

"You could have any woman you want, and they are normally of the tall, blonde and gorgeous variety. Why would your waste time on someone like me?" They continued to sway back and forth as he thought about the best way to respond.

"Did you like the flowers?"

“I loved them. They were very sweet, but I still don’t understand the why? Stella said she knew why, but wasn’t allowed to tell me. Why don’t you tell me?” Kyle glared in Stella’s direction; so much for keeping it a secret. Kyle sighed and decided to get it over with.

“I want a date. I want the chance to show you I’m not the womanizer you think I am. And I want to spend time with you, away from our friends, and get to know you better. You’re smart, funny, ambitious, and you put me in my place when I need it. Not to mention, you are one of the most beautiful women I know.”

Her lack of response made Kyle’s

palms start to sweat. She was still in his arms after the song ended, refused to look up at him. Instead, Lindsay was staring at the front of his shirt like it was the most fascinating piece of clothing she had ever seen.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea.” It was barely above a whisper, but her words pierced his heart like a dagger being plunged into his chest. Kyle should walk away right now, but he still wanted to know why she thought it wasn’t a good idea.

“Why not, are you dating someone else?” He was pretty sure the answer was no. Since Lindsay started working with Stella, none of them had seen her go on a date or even mention another man in

a romantic way.

Shaking her head as if the thought appalled her, Lindsay took a step back. “No, I’m not.”

“Then what is it? Are you not attracted to me?” If that was the problem, there was nothing he could do to fix it. But the few admiring looks he caught her giving him made Kyle think that wasn’t the problem either.

“I’m not dead or blind, so no, that’s not the problem. It’s just...” Lindsay stopped talking as Kyle watched all color drain from her face and her breathing became labored.

Kyle scanned the area around them to see what could have caused this kind of reaction, but saw nothing out of the

ordinary. When he turned back, Lindsay's terrified eyes were focused on the jukebox.

“What's wrong? What scared you?” He reached out to touch her arm, but she took off before he ever made contact. Kyle tried to catch up to her, but Lindsay had already grabbed her purse off the table and ran for the door.

“What the fuck did you do, Kyle?” He was so focused on going after Lindsay, he wasn't sure if it was Vicki or Stella that shouted the question at him.

“I didn't do anything.” He yelled back. “We were talking and then she turned white as a ghost. I tried asking her what scared her, but she ran before I could get an answer.” Stella picked up

her purse and headed for the door, with Vicki hot on her heels.

Alex came up beside Kyle as he stared at the door the three women disappeared through. “What were you talking about?”

“She asked me why I sent her flowers, and I said I wanted to take her on a date. She was starting to tell me why she didn’t think it was a good idea when all hell broke loose.” Alex gave him a sympathetic look and shrugged.

“Maybe her issues and fears are deeper than you thought. Are you sure you want to go through all of this?”

Kyle thought about Alex’s question. Could he deal with nights like tonight on a reoccurring basis? The moment he

thought about how Lindsay had felt against him while they were dancing, answered it for him.

“Yes, I am.” He had never been so sure of anything in his life.

“Then let’s go find out what’s going on.” Kyle and Alex threw enough money on the table to cover all of their bills and headed outside. There was no sign of any of the women, and Vicki’s car was gone.

“They probably went back to the apartment. Come on. We’ll head back to my place. I’ll text Stella and let her know we will be there soon.” Kyle was glad they brought Alex’s car to the bar. He didn’t think he could drive with all the unanswered questions bouncing

around in his head.

Chapter 6

“Ma’am, we’ve arrived at your destination.”

Lindsay was still lying across the back seat of the cab when she shoved some money at the cab driver. Not bothering to stick around and make sure it was enough, she peered out the window and decided to make a break for it; she ran up the stairs as fast as she could and unlocked her apartment.

After shutting and locking it behind her, Lindsay made it as far as the hall bathroom before she threw up. When there was nothing left to expel, she sat down and leaned against the wall.

Lindsay didn't know how much time had passed before the banging on her front door started.

“Open up Lindsay! We know you are in there, we saw you get out of the cab.” Sitting on the floor of the bathroom feeling drained and completely humiliated, she reached for a wash cloth to wipe her face. It had been a long time since a panic attack hit her that hard and fast.

Now her friends were going to want answers; answers she couldn't give them, not without putting herself at risk and telling them how she had been stupid enough to be with a man that almost killed her.

“It's just Vicki and I, let us in.”

Pushing herself to a standing position, Lindsay grabbed the sink for support; she forgot how much attacks zapped all of her energy and strength. Slowly, Lindsay made her way to the kitchen island and leaned on it.

“Go away; I just want to be alone right now. I’ll call you guys tomorrow.” She knew it was a weak attempt at best; Stella wasn’t going anywhere without an explanation.

“Hell no, we aren’t leaving until we see for ourselves that you’re fine. So open the door or I will wait for the guys to get here and have them break it down; your choice.” Lindsay didn’t want anyone seeing her like this, but especially not Kyle. Realizing her only

option was to let the two stubborn women in, she finally opened the door.

“See, I’m fine. Now you can both go home so I can get some sleep.” Stella rolled her eyes, and Vicki gave her a please look that said she weren’t buying it.

“We are not going anywhere. Sit down and point me in the direction of the alcohol; I have a feeling we are all going to need it.”

“I don’t have any.” Lindsay liked to stay alert so she never drank at home, and never more than a beer or two when they went out.

“I have some at my place. I’ll be back in two seconds.” Stella came back a minute later carrying vodka in one

hand and orange juice in the other.

“That’s better.”

Vicki went to the kitchen to help Stella make the drinks, while Lindsay sat on the couch trying to figure out what she was going to say to her two best friends. They both returned holding glasses, and Vicki handed one to her.

“Thanks.” Lindsay took a tentative sip of the citrus concoction and nearly choked. “Geez, Stella. Two sips of this and I’ll be blitzed out of my mind.”

“Good. Maybe when you’re drunk, you’ll explain what the hell happened at the bar tonight.” Deciding the overpowering drink was safer than spilling her guts, Lindsay took a bigger drink; the burn down her throat a welcomed

distraction from her current conversation.

Vicki took the seat next to Lindsay on the couch, but Stella was still standing in front of her waiting for an answer. She wanted to lie; wanted to tell them anything other than the horrible truth of it all, but the weight of this secret had been crushing Lindsay for too long.

Vicki placed a hand on Lindsay's knee and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "Please, you can tell us. I can tell that you want too so badly; let us help, we are here for you."

Lindsay closed her eyes and prepared to tell the story she hadn't told since the day she gave her deposition.

“You’re right, I do want to tell you guys, but it’s not something that’s easy to talk about.”

“Take as long as you need.” Stella finally sat down on the other side of Lindsay, and it was now or never. Knowing she couldn’t tell them every detail, Lindsay decided to start with the less difficult parts of the story.

“It all started when my parents were killed in a plane crash just outside of Dallas. They were flying up to see a concert with some friends, when the private plane they were on lost all power and crashed to the ground. I was in college at the time, so I didn’t even know they were dead until I got a phone call from a police officer the next day.”

Lindsay could hear Vicki and Stella sniffing next to her, but she was looking straight ahead; otherwise she would breakdown before she got it all out.

“After I found out, I went numb. I stopped going to class and subsequently was kicked out of school. My parents will took care of the house, so I at least had somewhere to go, but I was so depressed I could barely get out of bed each day. The small inheritance they left me was dwindling down, and if it hadn’t been for my best friend Jessie, my life would have hit rock bottom.”

Thinking about Jessie brought a sad smile to Lindsay’s face. “She came over one day to pick me up and took me to a grief counselor. The counselor forced

me to deal with my loss and about a year later, I started to feel normal again. Jessie and I were hanging out at a friend's house party one night, and that's where I met Mitch."

Just speaking his name made Lindsay need another long drink of her screw driver; this time she barely felt the burn. "We lived in a small town, so I knew who he was. Mitch was the town's golden boy. Star quarterback, good looking, mommy and daddy had money, and he was talking to me.

"He was home on leave from the fire academy, and we spent the whole night talking and laughing and getting to know each other; from that night on, whenever he was home, we were

together. We talked on the phone every day, we emailed, we instant messaged; he was everything that had been missing from my life since my parents death. I thought I had found the one person that would love me as much as my parents did; God how I was wrong.”

Stella and Vicki each grabbed one of her hands, but Lindsay was so lost in the story, the gesture barely registered in her mind.

“At first, the abuse was just mental. He would yell at me if I did something wrong or he didn’t like what I was wearing. He’d call me names and make me feel as small as possible. He didn’t like me hanging out with Jessie and our friendship started to get strained; things

got much worse when he finished at the academy.

The first time he hit me was a few days after he moved home. We had gone out to celebrate with some of his buddies and when we got back to my place, he shoved me into a wall and smacked me. I was so shocked I didn't know what to do. He immediately apologized and promised never to do it again; but of course that promise only lasted until the next time I did something he didn't like. He would smack me in the face, punch me in the stomach, kick me, and every time he would apologize. People around town started noticing my bruises, but I would lie and say I walked into a door or fell down.

“I knew I should leave, but by that point he had taken control over every aspect of my life. I had sold my parents’ house because he wanted us to get something together, and he insisted that I not work. At first I thought it was because he wanted to take care of me; quickly I realized it was so I couldn’t talk to a lot of people and he would know what I was doing at all times.”

No longer able to sit still, Lindsay removed her hands from Stella and Vicki’s and began pacing around the living room; knowing the hardest part was coming.

“A few days before my twenty-fourth birthday, I found out I was pregnant; it came as a complete surprise

and I didn't know what to do. Mitch and I had never discussed children, and I was terrified to tell him. When I did he was livid. He said I had planned it and it was just a way for me to get his money. He left the house and when he came back hours later, he was holding a teddy bear and gave me a hug and kiss. He apologized, said he was happy and we were going to be a family."

Small rivers were running down Lindsay's cheeks as a sob escaped her. Vicki stood up and pulled her into a gentle embrace. "Shh, it's okay. Do you want to stop?"

Wiping away a stray tear, Lindsay shook her head. "No, I need to get this out."

Vicki walked her back to the couch and Lindsay sat down. “For two months, everything was perfect. He stopped hitting me, didn’t raise his voice, he even held my hair when I had morning sickness; life was how it should have been all along and I thought it would stay that way.

“But, in the middle of July our town has an ice cream social to raise money for the fire department. When we arrived, I went to help out Jessie at the dessert table and Mitch disappeared to do whatever he was supposed to. Jessie had gone inside to get more desserts, when Mitch’s friend Brad came over and started talking to me.

“We joked back and forth about the

desserts, but it didn't last long; Mitch saw us talking and came over to interrupt. Brad walked away and Mitch told me we would be leaving immediately, and went to talk to his chief." Lindsay closed her eyes and could still remember every detail of that day.

"He said nothing all the way home and I knew he was pissed. As soon as I made it through the back door, the first hit came. He punched me in the back of the head, which sent me to the floor in the kitchen. Once I was down he began kicking me in the ribs and stomach. I couldn't breathe and I tried to protect the baby, but his kicks kept coming.

"He kicked the arm that was over

my stomach, and the bone broke immediately. He dragged me to our living room and threw me on the couch; where he hit me a couple more times and tried to rip off my clothes. I begged him to stop but that only fueled his rage. He was screaming about how I was sleeping with Brad and the baby wasn't his.

“I was in so much pain I couldn't walk and Mitch practically dragged me upstairs. He pulled out his pocket knife and ran it over my body; the silent threat was very clear to me. He got me to the bedroom and I knew I only had one more chance to get out; so I kicked as hard as I could, and he went flying off the bed. As I ran for the door, he reached out and tripped me. I made it to the top of the

stairs before he caught up to me.”

Picking up her glass, Lindsay downed the rest of her drink in two quick swallows. Her words were now slightly slurred, but she continued. “I didn’t have time to react as the knife came at me. He stabbed me with such force, that I fell backwards down the stairs and was knocked unconscious.”

“You really don’t have to say any more, we get the picture.” Stella started to stand up, but Lindsay reached out to stop her. Stella lowered herself back onto the cushion, and Lindsay went on with the story.

“Mitch placed the knife next to my hand before he left me lying unconscious at the bottom of the stairs; bleeding

heavily from the three inch wound he gave me. If it hadn't been for Jessie coming by a short time later to check on me, I would have died where he left me.”

Lindsay slumped back into the couch and rested her hands over her flat stomach; preparing to relive getting the worst news of her life.

“I woke up in the hospital three weeks later with a fractured skull, broken ribs, a broken arm, and they informed me that I had lost the b-baby when the knife lacerated my uterus.” The tears fell freely now. Lindsay still felt the guilt for failing to protect the life that had been growing inside of her.

The three of them sat in silence for a

short time, before Stella rested her hands on top of Lindsay's and spoke.

“Everything that you've been through proves you are a fighter, and a very strong woman.”

“How can you say that? I let that monster use me as a punching bag for years, and because I was stupid enough to stay with him my baby paid the price; an innocent life died because of me.”

Stella now looked as angry as Lindsay felt. “No! A life was taken by an evil person, and he very nearly took two. I can't sit here and say I know what you're going through because I don't, but you are a survivor and I won't let you believe otherwise.”

Vicki had been sitting quietly during

Lindsay and Stella's exchange, but her words brought both of them back to the story. "Stella's right, you survived and are in no way to blame." She wished she could believe that. "But what happened to Mitch, was he caught?"

Lindsay nodded her head. "The cops found him later that night hiding out at his parents. He was taken down to the police station and booked on aggravated assault charges."

"That's it, what the hell kind of justice is that?" The anger pulsing from Vicki was almost palpable.

"I was in the hospital for a month recovering and when I was finally strong enough to make it to the district attorney's office, they told me that's all

they could charge him with. Mitch said I had the knife and fell on it when I tumbled down the stairs, and they couldn't prove otherwise." Stella and Vicki sat in stunned silence.

"His bail was set pretty high, and he was in jail the whole month I was in the hospital. The harassing phone calls started as soon as I was released; Mitch said the only way I was leaving him was in a body bag and I believed him. So when I got the phone call telling me he was going to be let out on bail, I panicked. Jessie told me I would be safe at her place, but the first night he was out he tried to break in.

"Jessie dialed 911, and as soon as he heard the sirens, he ran. The police

searched all over town, but couldn't find him; knowing Mitch wouldn't stop until I was dead, I made the decision to pack up and move. I had a small chunk of money from my inheritance left and used it to try and start over.”

Stella looked as if she was trying to figure something out in her head. “You didn't move here until at least a year later. Where did you go?”

“I moved around a couple of times, but would pack up as soon as I started to feel uncomfortable. When I made my way to Chicago, I finally felt somewhat safe.” She didn't tell them about her fake ID; the risk was too high if they decided to do a little digging of their own.

“So I'm assuming Mitch has never

been caught?”

“No. The cops searched for a while, but it’s like he vanished without a trace. I don’t call home, but I do communicate with Jessie still in our own little way. She keeps me updated on any changes in the case, but so far there hasn’t been anything new.”

“Maybe he’s left the country?”

Lindsay thought back to every threat and glare Mitch had given her, and knew that wasn’t the case.

“He wouldn’t do that. I’m unfinished business in his mind and he won’t stop until I’m dead.” Needing something to do with her hands, Lindsay got up from the couch and headed to the kitchen to fix another drink.

Stella and Vicki followed her lead. “So what happened tonight to bring all of this on?” Lindsay thought back to the bar and a shiver ran through her body.

“Mitch called before he came to Jessie’s house that night. No one ever spoke, but the song ‘Every Breath You Take’ was playing through the phone. It started playing on the jukebox when the band took their break and for some reason I thought it meant he had found me; like he was there and toying with me.” Now that she could think more clearly, she knew it was ridiculous; but at the time, instinct took over and she ran.

“So what can we do to help?”

“There isn’t anything to do. As long

as he is still out there, I have to be aware of my surroundings and do what I can to protect myself; and hope I stay safe.”

“Well that explains the spy gadgets Kyle told me about.” Lindsay should have known he would tell Stella. She must have made an unhappy face because Stella began talking quickly.

“Don’t get mad at him for gossiping, he was worried about you just like the rest of us. We’ve all suspected something, but obviously not to this extreme; although, now I understand why you act so differently with Kyle. It can’t be easy being around a firefighter.” Stella had it partially right, but her unease around Kyle these days had more

to do with attraction than fear.

“I don’t try to act differently with him, but if I do it has nothing to do with his occupation.” Stella and Vicki were like dogs that heard a high pitched noise. Lindsay laughed and was happy for the chance to lighten the mood.

“Down girls, I think your tails are wagging.”

Vicki smiled devilishly. “So why do you act differently with him, hmmm?”

“I do not want to get into that with you two right now; between everything I just said and the vodka, I’m ready to pass out.” Lindsay had unloaded a lot of emotional baggage tonight and talking about Kyle would only drain her further.

“Do you want one of us to stay here

tonight?” It was a very sweet offer, but Lindsay shook her head.

“No, I’m fine. I actually feel better than I have in a long time. Thank you both for listening.”

“That’s what friends are for.” Stella gave her a hug and Vicki followed. “We will let you get to bed, but if you need anything call. I don’t care how late.”

After they left, Lindsay changed into her pajamas and snuggled under her comforter. Telling Stella and Vicki about her past had been easier than she thought, but now came the really hard part. She had absolutely no idea what she was going to say to Kyle the next time she saw him.

Chapter 7

“I hope you know what you are doing.”

“If this goes badly, I will take your warnings from last night and back off.” Kyle paced around Stella and Alex’s apartment last night for over an hour with no word from anyone. When the girls finally came back, they refused to tell him why she was upset. The only thing they said was all of their suspicions were true. Stella had even asked him if he was sure this is what he wanted.

Duh, if he hadn’t been sure he would have left after the bar. But he had

stuck around because he wanted to know that Lindsay was okay and wanted to show her she could count on him. Before he left the apartment last night, Kyle had discussed a plan with Stella and now he was putting it into action.

“Well I just left so she is all alone; good luck.”

“Thanks, I’m going to need it.” Kyle hung up the phone and threw it in the cup holder hanging from the dash; he had already stopped to pick up lunch and was getting closer to the studio. Stella was taking pictures at a wedding in Joliet this afternoon, so Lindsay was going to be alone the rest of the day.

Kyle pulled his truck into the small parking lot behind *Picture Perfect*

Studios a little after eleven. He took a moment to collect his thoughts, before reaching over to grab the bag of food he purchased a few minutes ago. Last night Stella informed him of Lindsay's favorite place to buy lunch, so he stopped on the way and ordered exactly what he was told to.

Kyle noticed that Lindsay's old Chevy Impala was the only car in the lot as he made his way towards the door. This was the part he was the most worried about. He didn't want her to feel uncomfortable being alone with him, but if they couldn't get past this big hurdle they were doomed. He took another deep lungful of air and opened the door.

“Welcome to *Picture Per...* what are you doing here?” Lindsay was sitting behind the reception desk with her face scrunched up in an adorably confused way.

Ignoring that less than peppy hello, Kyle held up the bag of food and simply replied “Lunch.” Lindsay was now looking around the empty studio like she was trying to figure out who he was having lunch with.

“Stella’s not here, she had a wedding to shoot in Joliet today.” Kyle couldn’t help himself as he let soft laughter slip past his lips. When Lindsay glared at him through narrowed eyes, he stopped.

“Sorry, you’re just too funny. I came

to have lunch with you. Stella told me last night she would be out around eleven, so I thought we could have lunch together.”

“Oh” Was Lindsay’s only reply. Kyle had been to the studio enough times to know where the break room was, so instead of giving Lindsay time to make an excuse to get him out of there, he started walking toward the back.

He walked at a leisurely pace, but on the inside he was a nervous wreck; that is until he could hear Lindsay’s heels clicking on the floor behind him. There was a small table in the break room, and he sat the bag down to start unloading the food.

“What did you bring?” She didn’t

sound frightened or pissed, but intrigued; thank God.

“I stopped at *Daisy's* and picked up pasta; pasta con broccoli without mushrooms, right?” Lindsay nodded and came to sit down at the table. Kyle handed her the pasta and she accepted it with a confused expression still on her pretty face. He pulled out garlic bread and sat it in the middle of the table, along with the salad. Kyle forgot drinks, so he went to the mini fridge and retrieved two bottles of water and passed one to Lindsay.

“Thank you”

“You're welcome.” They were both quiet after that as they started eating, but Kyle didn't mind. He had eaten about

half of his spaghetti when he looked up and noticed Lindsay glancing at him. When their eyes connected, Kyle could see all the questions running through her mind.

“Go ahead, ask me.”

“Ask you what?”

“Anything you want. You look like you have a million things on your mind right now.” Lindsay sat her fork down and leaned back in her chair studying him.

“How did you know what I like for lunch?”

“A little birdie told me.” She narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest when he gave his answer.

“Are you being obtuse on purpose?”

“Maybe” this time she actually tried to kick his shin. He was faster than she was and scooted out of kicking range.

“Grrr, why tell me to ask if you aren’t going to answer?” This is the Lindsay he knew; he loved seeing the feisty side in her come out.

“I did answer, but if you must know the birdie’s name was Stella.” Kyle tried to hide his amusement as she relaxed back into her seat but left her arms crossed.

“And you couldn’t ask me because...”

“Because that would have given you the opportunity to say no” Kyle knew manipulating the situation could backfire, but after last night he really

wanted to finish the conversation they started on the dance floor.

“So you thought tricking me into having lunch with you was a good idea?” She was so serious as she asked that Kyle started to question his judgment, but when Lindsay cracked a small smile he sighed loudly.

“That wasn’t very nice. Between you and Stella, I don’t know who’s trying to scare me more today.”

“Why did Stella scare you?” She was leaning back in her chair still, but Kyle could see the tension in her body.

“She was rambling on about last night and being careful; being same old overprotective Stella.” Lindsay’s face went from calm to angry faster than Kyle

could blink.

“So that’s what this is all about?” Lindsay stood up so fast her chair nearly flipped over. “Stella tells you about my horrible ex trying to kill me, and you decided to take pity on me. Well I have news for you Kyle Brady; I don’t want or need your pity.”

Lindsay tried to storm past him, but Kyle reached out and grabbed her arm. When she flinched and brought one hand to cover her face, Kyle immediately dropped her arm and stepped back. She was shaking like a leaf and Kyle wished he could kick his own ass at that moment.

“I’m so sorry, Lindsay. I didn’t mean to grab you like that. Damn it I

don't want to scare you, that's not the kind of person I am. I just wanted to finish talking to you, and didn't think before I acted. Please..." he tried speaking in a reassuring tone, "please look at me." She moved her hand away from blocking her face, and was now rubbing it on her arm where his hand had been.

"Did I hurt your arm?" Kyle had never felt so stupid in his entire life. Of all the ways he thought he could screw this up, hurting her wasn't one of them.

"No" She still wasn't making eye contact with him, but knowing that he hadn't hurt her was more than enough to make him feel less like the scum of the earth.

“I didn’t want you to walk away thinking Stella told me anything about your past, but I shouldn’t have tried to stop you like that. I really am sorry, I should have known better.” Lindsay pulled her chair back to the table and sat down once again. Kyle did the same, but moved his further back this time. She still seemed shaken up, so he explained more of what had happened.

“When she came back to her place last night, I asked her to tell me what was going on, but she refused. Both Stella and Vicki said it was your story to tell. The only thing they told me was that my suspicions were true.” She finally looked up and he could see the pain and sadness in her eyes.

“What suspicions?”

“That you were abused by someone in the past.” Lindsay looked a cross between ashamed and embarrassed as she stared at him.

“Well I guess it’s my turn to apologize, I shouldn’t have yelled at you before I knew the truth. When you said Stella talked about last night I just assumed she told you all the other stuff, and you were here because you felt sorry for me.”

“I feel a lot of things for you Lindsay, but sorry isn’t one of them.” The look of surprise on her face was almost comical, but this was not the time for laughing. “I like you very much and would love nothing more than to have a

date with you; a date that you weren't tricked into."

"So this is your idea of a date?" He had never been more relieved to see Lindsay smile.

"No sweetheart, but I wanted to test the waters first and see if you could be alone with me, and not want to run screaming. I don't know what happened last night, but none of that changes what I said to you while we were dancing."

Lindsay was worrying her bottom lip as she stared at the water bottle in her hand.

"I don't know... what happened last night could very easily happen again and that's not fair to you. You should be with someone that doesn't have all these issues."

“I suspected you had some issues before last night and it didn’t stop me from wanting you. All I’m asking for is a chance; a chance to make you happy. You don’t have to tell me more than you want about your past; although, saying your ex almost killed you makes a million questions run through my mind.”

Kyle wanted to find the bastard and make him pay for what he did to Lindsay; whatever that was. No longer able to stand the distance between them, Kyle stood up and moved his chair next to hers. He knew it was a bad idea, but he reached out and took one of her hands in his.

Her eyes fixed on their joined hands as she said “Okay.”

That one word bounced around inside his head before he finally understood. “Okay, as in okay you want to try this?”

Her lips twitched up into a half smile “Yes.”

Kyle jumped out of his chair and pulled Lindsay up with him. She was laughing at his excitement, until he wrapped his arms around her and squeezed her so tight she was gasping for air. He placed her back on her feet and apologized.

“I’m fine, you just shocked me and I lost my breath for a second when you hugged me.”

“I’ll work on not letting my emotions run wild, but I tend to lose my

head when I'm around you.” The cutest blush crept up her cheeks as he told her what she does to him. “So...when would you like to go out? I start a twenty-four hour shift today at three, but then I will be off for forty-eight after that.”

Lindsay started fiddling with her fingers and looking at the floor. “Ugh, I don't know, this was kind of a spur of the moment decision. Can I get back to you?”

All the joy Kyle had felt a minute ago fled his body. Not wanting Lindsay to see his distress, Kyle just shrugged. “Sure, you have my number; call or text me whenever you want to do something.” He glanced at his watch and then back to her, “I better get going so I

can pick up a few things before work.”

He started to head for the exit, when a touch on his arm stopped him in his tracks. Kyle looked down to see Lindsay's small hand resting on his forearm. When he moved his gaze to her face, those pale blue eyes seemed to be staring straight into his soul.

“Thank you again for lunch.”

Lindsay pushed up on her toes and kissed him on the cheek. For once, Lindsay was the one to surprise him. When she pulled away, he could still feel the imprint of her lips on his skin. As if on its own, his hand went to cover the spot; like he wanted to trap it there forever. Realizing he still hadn't said anything, Kyle broke out of his daze.

“You’re welcome. I’ll get out of your hair and let you get back to work.” They both said their goodbyes and Kyle left feeling a mixture of emotions. She had agreed to go on a date, but never said when.

His shift didn’t start for another two hours, but Kyle needed something to do to keep his mind occupied. He headed home and as he packed his bag for the station, Kyle dialed the one person that would give him perspective on the whole situation.

“Well since you’re calling me, I’m guessing it didn’t go all that great.”

“Don’t sound so amused, and for your information it went just fine.” Alex chuckled on the other end of the line.

“So why do you sound like someone kicked your dog right now?”

“She agreed to a date, but said she would let me know at a later time. I’ve been checking my phone every five minutes for a text or call; it’s about to drive me crazy.” Kyle was still regretting his moronic mistake when he grabbed her arm, and hoped she didn’t hold that against him.

“How long ago did you leave?”

“Like an hour or so.”

“You’re an idiot.” So much for Alex being helpful.

“Why exactly am I an idiot?”

“You asked out a girl that has been traumatized at some point in her life, hasn’t been on a date in years and you

expect her to call you an hour after you leave to set up a date.” Kyle started to reply, but Alex wasn’t finished. “Not to mention you kind of ambushed her today with an impromptu lunch.”

“Can I talk now?”

“If you must” Kyle was starting to regret making this phone call.

“First of all, I didn’t ambush her. She could have asked me to leave, but we actually had a nice lunch together. Second of all, I know she has some issues, but I thought her agreeing to go out with me would make things better. Instead I’m more of a wreck now thinking she is going to back out.”

Up to this point in his life Kyle had never been the forever kind of guy, but

every time he was around Lindsay all of that changed. She made him forget all of his reservations about a significant other, and what he could leave behind if he lost his life on the job like he had seen happen so many times.

“I’m going to remind you of this conversation the next time you accuse me of being a love sick puppy. Just go to work and stop being such a pussy, and let me get back to work too. Lindsay said she will get ahold of you and she will.”

“Nice pep talk douche bag. Get back to the world of geeks and nerds; I’ll talk to you later.” Both men knew the other one didn’t mean anything by their insults; it was what made their

friendship so great.

“Call me all the names you want, at least I know I have a woman coming home to warm my bed tonight.” Kyle could picture the satisfied smirk on Alex’s face as he said the jab.

“You’re a dick” He heard Alex laugh as he hung up on his friend. Kyle picked up his duffle bag from the bed and headed for his truck. He would get to the station early and watch some TV or something; anything to keep his mind off of Lindsay.

He knew it was pointless, but he checked his phone one more time before putting the truck in drive. There were no missed calls or messages, and he tossed the phone on the seat beside him. If he

kept torturing himself like this, it was going to be a very long shift.

Chapter 8

“From now on Frank is taking pictures for Catholic weddings. Honestly, how many times do people need to stand up and sit down; it’s exhausting just watching it.”

“It’s nice to see you too.” Lindsay moved aside to let Stella in. She had only been home for about an hour when Stella knocked on the door and started her usual ranting.

“Alex is in the middle of some huge website design fiasco so I can’t complain to him and Vicki isn’t answering. So you win the listen to Stella bitch lottery, congratulations.”

Walking to the refrigerator, Lindsay came back with two cans of soda and handed one to Stella.

“Thanks, so how was the rest of the day?” The smirk on her face told Lindsay she wanted details about lunch with Kyle. But seeing as Stella helped set her up, Lindsay was going to make her work for them.

“A few people came in wanting to make appointments, so I gave them packets and a business card. I told them to call when they were ready to set something up, but other than that it was pretty quiet.”

“I think you are forgetting one minor detail.” Lindsay nonchalantly sat down and grabbed the remote; mindlessly

flipping through the channels as if she didn't have a care in the world.

“No I think that covered it.” Stella picked up a pillow and threw it at her. She dodged the pillow, but still didn't tell her anything.

“I know for a fact you had lunch with a certain hunky firefighter today, so start spilling; I want to know everything.” Thinking back to this afternoon, Lindsay didn't know whether to smile or frown. She still wasn't sure what made her agree to a date with him so easily.

“Oh that. Well he brought me my favorite food from *Daisy's* and we ate lunch together; it was nice.”

“That's it?” The scene after they ate

ran through Lindsay's mind and she sighed.

“Not exactly, I may have bitten his head off for no reason.”

“And why would you do that?”

“We were joking around and he said you and I were both scaring him today. I asked him what he meant and when he said you talked to him about last night, somewhere in my neurotic brain I thought he was just being nice because you told him about Mitch.”

Stella interrupted. “I didn't tell him anything, I swear. He asked and I said I couldn't.” Holding up her hand to shutdown Stella's defense, Lindsay went on.

“He explained all that after I flipped

out on him. We talked a little bit more and he asked me to go on a date with him... I said yes.”

“That’s great news” The look on Lindsay’s face must have said something entirely different because Stella’s excitement deflated “Or not?”

“I said yes, but it was one of those heat of the moment things. Now that I’ve had time to think more about it, I don’t know. I told him I would let him know soon, but what if I have another panic attack while we’re out?” She would be even more mortified than she was last night.

“Then don’t go out, invite him over here to watch movies. That way you’re somewhere you feel safe, and Alex and I

will be home just in case something happens.” Lindsay leaned back into the couch further and thought about it. It would make her feel more at ease to be safely at home, but how would Kyle take that gesture?

“I guess that could work, but doesn’t that send him the wrong message if I ask him to come over here; like I want more to happen than just watching movies.” Stella seemed taken aback by that statement.

“I’m pretty sure Kyle knows you well enough to know that isn’t going to happen.” For some reason, not sleeping with Kyle was a very disappointing thought, “Unless you want it to.”

Lindsay snapped her head to the

side. “What?”

“You started pouting when I said you wouldn’t be having sex with Kyle.” She cursed under her breath; damn her and her expressive face. She couldn’t deny the attraction she felt for Kyle, but this was all already so overwhelming. Lindsay could barely control her emotions on a good day. She didn’t want to think about the reaction that could come when sex was brought into the equation.

“I’m not sure about a date, how can I be thinking about sex? And believe me, I think about it a lot when he’s around.”

“Because your human, Lindsay. It’s been what four years, and Kyle’s not exactly ugly. I’m happily engaged and

the man can still turn my head.”

“Can we stop talking about sex; it’s not helping my nerves at all.” The urge to run her hands over Kyle’s tight muscled body was stronger than ever and it had been a very long time. There was only so much a vibrator could take care of before it just wasn’t enough anymore. It couldn’t stimulate every part of your body at once, or use warm lips to caress the most intimate of places. Lindsay was lost in her daydream when Stella snapped her fingers in front of her face.

“Earth to Lindsay”

“Sorry what did you say?”

“I said I’ll stop if you call Kyle and set up a date.” Stella grabbed Lindsay’s

cell phone and tossed it in her lap. “Go on, put Kyle out of his misery”

“He’s at work; I don’t want to bother him. I’ll just do it tomorrow.” Lindsay didn’t want to call, sending a text would be so much easier. That way she wouldn’t run the risk of turning into a stuttering idiot, which normally happened when she was talking to him.

“If they aren’t on a call, he will answer. If he doesn’t, just leave a voicemail. So stop stalling and do it.”

“You really are a pain sometimes you know.” Stella grinned and nodded her head. Reluctantly, Lindsay picked up the phone and found Kyle’s number. She really hoped he was on a call or not around his phone.

After four rings Lindsay thought her prayers had been answered. She started to take the phone away from her ear when a gruff voice came through the ear piece. “Hello?”

Damn, so much for leaving a voicemail. “Uh... hi”

“Lindsay?” The sound of sheets rustling and his disoriented voice made her feel awful. Kyle had been sleeping and she woke him up. “Are you still there?”

“Yes, sorry I woke you up. Go back to bed; I can talk to you later.” She was starting to picture him with messy sleep tussled hair and half lidded eyes, and it was an intoxicating visual; one she wanted to see in her own bed one of

these mornings.

“Don’t worry about it; I was just taking a quick nap. We never know how many calls we will have a night, so we all try to nap when we can. What’s up?” She didn’t know what to say exactly, but with an encouraging nod from Stella, Lindsay decided to bite the bullet.

“I was wondering if you wanted to come over to watch a movie or two one night this week; maybe order some takeout.” His quick response made her chuckle inside.

“I would love to, how does Monday night sound?” Soon, that’s how it sounded. But she had already taken this leap and couldn’t back down now.

“That works for me.” A very loud

alarm screeched through the phone and Lindsay had to move it away a little.

“We are getting called out. I’ll call you tomorrow to get details, bye.” The line went dead and she threw the phone on the cushion beside her. She covered her face with both hands and groaned; she was going to have two days to obsess about this small, but crucial step in her life.

“Tell me again why I’m doing this.” Stella scooted closer and put an arm around Lindsay’s shoulders.

“You’re doing this because it’s time to get your life back. It is dinner, movies, and maybe a little making out if you’re lucky. It’s not like you agreed to marry the guy.”

She could do this. It was just a date with someone she's been around plenty of times. The word date bounced around in her head and suddenly Lindsay felt like the ugliest woman in the world. She began frantically searching for her phone behind Stella, but couldn't find it.

“What are you doing?”

“Trying to find my phone, I need to call Vicki.” Stella started wiggling her butt and making weird faces, and then stood up. She had been sitting on Lindsay's phone the whole time.

Snatching it from the cushion, Lindsay hit the speed dial she set for Vicki.

“Why do you need to call Vicki?”

She had just started to answer Stella's question when Victoria answered.

“Dad, I’m so glad you finally called me back. I’ve been so worried about you.” Dad, what the hell?

“What? It’s Lindsay, I need to talk to you.” Vicki whispered to someone on an emergency phone call, and then there was a few seconds of silence before she was back on the line.

“Hey girl, what’s up?” Vicki was making Lindsay’s head spin.

“Why are you pretending I’m your dad?”

“I was hired as a stylist, well more so as an image consultant, for a pain in the ass client and he’s driving me insane. Lying was the only way I was going to get away for a few minutes.”

“You have had difficult clients

before and not let them bother you. In fact I don't think I've ever heard you so annoyed. Is this one attractive in some way?" The disbelieving gasp and stuttering coming through the phone told Lindsay she hit the nail on the head.

"No! He just...I just..." Vicki sounded offended and outraged and even growled, "Never mind, I don't want to talk about him." If she didn't have problems of her own, Lindsay would have poked at Vicki some more.

"Fine, be that way. I actually needed to know if you are busy tomorrow?" She could always grill Vicki about her difficult client while she was at the salon.

"Not unless the superstar here

decides to be an even bigger douche bag. What do you need?”

“I need your services; I uh... have a date.” The scream that came over the phone almost blew out Lindsay’s ear drum. Once the ringing stopped, she realized Vicki was talking again.

“...he actually grew a pair. When did he ask you?”

“I only caught part of that because of the temporary hearing loss.” Vicki muttered an apology and then repeated the same question.

“He asked me today at work. We are going to have dinner and a movie at my place Monday night. I know it’s stupid, but I want to get my hair trimmed and my eyebrows waxed.” Lindsay knew

she was putting way too much pressure on this one date, but looking her best would at least make her feel somewhat better.

When she had been with Mitch, grooming was a requirement. If her skin wasn't smooth or perfect at all times, he would punish her or worse; humiliate her by doing it to his satisfaction. Since being on her own, Lindsay kept everything simple and easy. She rarely did more than shaping her eyebrows and keeping her hair looking healthy.

“It's not stupid. You're a woman, and we women need our pampering. What time do you want to meet?”

“Does one work for you?”

“Sounds perfect, I'll see you

tomorrow at one. I have to get back to his highness before he has a hissy fit again. See ya tomorrow.” With that taken care of, she only had one more thing to deal with.

Stella would hate her for it, but Lindsay looked at her and said “Let’s go.”

“Where are we going?” The cautious way Stella asked made her grin devilishly.

“Shopping!” An almost painful sound escaped Stella, and Lindsay laughed all the way to the car.

“It is not funny!” Stella was now slumped over trying to catch her breath as tears were streaming down her face.

“You’re right, it’s hilarious.” She said between fits of laughter. Lindsay grabbed a towel from the basket of clothes Alex was folding and threw it at her. She had just come back from Vicki’s salon and was not in a joking mood.

“Should I leave the room?” Poor Alex was caught between Lindsay and the current object of her anger.

“No honey, you’re fine.” She kissed him on the cheek and turned her attention back to Lindsay. “Not so funny when it happens to you, is it?”

She flopped down in the chair across from the couch and groaned. “No it’s not, but you don’t have to enjoy it quite so much.”

“I warned you she was evil.” Evil was an understatement. Lindsay had arrived at *Color Me Beautiful* three hours ago to get her dead ends trimmed and her eye brows cleaned up. That all went to hell when Victoria decided to give her the same treatment she had given Stella a few months ago. She appreciated the mani/pedi, and even the haircut she was still getting used to. What she wasn’t prepared for were the services of Vicki’s intern William. The thought of him alone made Lindsay shudder and her skin throb.

“Let me guess, you met William.” Lindsay narrowed her eyes at Stella, and then glanced at Alex who was now bright red.

“If you ladies will excuse me, I need a beer.” He stood up and went to the kitchen. Stella leaned back grinning from ear to ear.

“He knows who William is, if you were wondering why he left the room so quickly.” Great, now not only was she sitting here getting used to the newfound nakedness between her thighs, but Alex knew what she had been through. Ugh.

“I wish I would have runaway at the salon. Never again will I subject myself to that. It’s like I can feel my heartbeat” Lindsay glanced toward the kitchen to make sure Alex was still there before finishing, “everywhere.”

“I’m with you. The convenience was nice, but nothing is worth that pain.”

Alex came back to the living room and all conversation about waxing stopped and shifted to other things.

“On the plus side, I’m loving this new hairstyle. Victoria did an amazing job. I never thought you’d cut your hair so short, but it really works for you.” When she had sat down in the salon chair, Vicki suggested more than a trim. Lindsay’s first reaction was to say no, but as Vicki scrunched her hair in different ways she really liked one of the styles.

“I’ve never really had short hair before. I’m still getting used to how light it feels. Going from very long hair to a medium length bob is such a drastic change.”

“Well I think it looks great, and Kyle is going to absolutely die when he sees it.” Lindsay knew she didn’t need a man’s approval to be happy anymore, but she was anxious to see how Kyle would react tomorrow.

“It does look good on you Lindsay.” Alex was always so sweet.

“Thank you, and sorry for just barging in like that and interrupting you”

“I was just folding laundry, it wasn’t a big deal. We were going to make some dinner and watch TV, do you want to stay? There will be plenty.”

Alex asked and Stella insisted that she say yes, so Lindsay did just that.

“Alright, what do you want me to help with?”

“Not a thing. You girls pick something to watch and I’ll get dinner started.” He left the room and Stella’s eyes followed him. They had some rough spots in the beginning, but Lindsay could tell they were very happy now and hoped she could feel that with someone one day.

“So what are we going to watch?” Stella pried her eyes off Alex’s rear end long enough to look at Lindsay and then the coffee table.

“We won’t be watching anything if we can’t find the remote. I forgot I was searching for it when you showed up.” She stood up and started looking around where she was sitting.

“Where all did you check?”

“I had just started, so one couch cushion was as far as I got.”

“Let’s get to it.” And so began the quest for the missing remote. It was a fun distraction from everything she had been through earlier and her impending date with Kyle.

Chapter 9

“Brady! Get your ass in here.” The Chief yelled from his office as Kyle was packing his duffle bag at the end of his shift. Knowing he hadn’t done anything to fuck up lately, he finished getting his stuff together. When he was done, Kyle flung the bag over his shoulder and leisurely walked to the office.

“Did you need something?”

“Come in and shut the door.” Kyle did as he was told, and moved to one of the two empty seats in front of the large desk. He began drumming his fingers on the arm of the chair as he waited for whatever was on the Chiefs mind.

“I wanted to let you know that Lieutenant Powers is retiring at the end of the month.” Lieutenant Powers was only fifty-five and the best Lieutenant Kyle every worked for. Now he was probably going to be stuck with some asshole who thought his shit didn’t stink; great.

“What brought this on? I’ve never heard him mention retiring before.”

“I think it has a lot to do with his back. It hasn’t been the same since he injured it last year and he feels like he’s letting the squad down. But with him retiring, I’m going to have a Lieutenant position to fill; your name has come up as a possibility.”

Kyle was shocked. Being a

Lieutenant was something he wanted so badly, but never thought he would get the chance until at least his thirties or longer.

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Say yes when the time comes. It will go to the committee for a vote first, but you are the best candidate for the job. You’re the only full time firefighter at this station that has completed all the classes. As long as you keep up the hard work, and stay out of trouble, it should pass no problem.”

The Chief stood and extended his hand towards Kyle. Kyle stood too, but rounded the desk and clasped a big bear hug on the other man. “Thanks Dad!”

Knowing his dad didn’t like

showing affection, especially at the station, Kyle let go quickly. With a pat on the back he said “You earned it” in his deep voice.

When Kyle was growing up, all he wanted to do was be just like his dad. Leonard Brady was one of the hardest working men Kyle knew and his life was dedicated to the two things; his job and his family.

He was a man of few words and when he was at home, he didn't talk about work. The day Kyle enrolled in the fire academy, his dad asked if he was sure this was the path he wanted for his life. When he reassured his dad that it was, Leo shook his hand and said ‘welcome to hell.’

All these years later, Kyle understood why his dad said what he did. He had seen more than enough heartache and loss that he nearly quit after his first month on the job. Since then though, he learned to compartmentalize his worlds so he wouldn't bring the awful things he saw on a daily basis into his personal life.

But dealing with the hazards of the job hadn't been Kyle's only roadblock. Having your dad as your chief made others think you were handed everything on a silver platter, which was bullshit. If anything, Kyle had to work twice as hard to show his dad he belonged there. It had been a constant struggle for respect, but over the years he proved he was a hard

worker and could pull his own weight without Leonard Brady. This promotion, if he got it, would be because he earned it and nothing else.

“What are your plans for the next two days? Your mother would probably appreciate a visit.” Kyle scooped up his duffle bag and tossed it over his shoulder again.

“I’m going home to sleep for a little bit, but I’ll give mom a call and head over when I get up. I have a date tomorrow night, so I won’t be able to do it then.” His dad gave him a bored look.

“Can what you do be considered a date? Picking up random women, sleep with them once and never calling again.”

“Lindsay’s not like that.”

“I guess I should be happy you remember this one’s name.” Kyle hated that his dad knew about his playboy reputation, but he was working hard to straighten out that part of his life and make his dad proud.

“I’m trying to change; you of all people should see that. I’ve been like a regular boy scout lately and it hasn’t been easy.” Going from party animal to acting like a monk was one of the hardest things Kyle had ever done, but Lindsay was worth any sacrifices he had made over the last two months.

“I have noticed a lack of hangovers and crazy women trying to track you down here.” Kyle winced. He did seem to attract the crazy ones. “So am I going

to meet the woman that has finally tamed you?”

“Tomorrow night is our first date, I don’t think we are at the ‘meet the family’ stage; especially our family.” His father’s deep booming laughter echoed off the walls of the small office.

“Your mother would probably faint if you brought a nice girl home for once.” Kyle opened the door and prepared to leave.

“On that note, I’m heading out. Thanks again for telling me about the possible promotion; I won’t let you down.” His dad tipped his head in acknowledgement and started shuffling through some papers on his desk; their moment of bonding time was over.

Kyle threw his bag in the cab of his truck and climbed in. He wanted to go home and fall asleep for at least three or four hours, so on his way there, he called his mom and promised to come over around seven. Hearing how excited she was made Kyle feel guilty for not visiting more often.

He pulled into the driveway of his house just as he finished the conversation with his mom. Kyle knew he wouldn't get any decent sleep unless he made the one call he really wanted to. He began scrolling through his phone for the right number and hit send.

“Hello”

“Hey, it's Kyle.”

“No way, I didn't get that from the

name Kyle that popped up on my phone when it rang.”

“Ha Ha. I was calling to ask what movies you want me to pick up for tomorrow night, and to see what time you want me to come over.” When she didn’t answer right away, Kyle started to get a terrible feeling she was backing out and he hadn’t prepared for that.

“Um...” Lindsay sounded distracted and far from interested in talking to him right now.

“We can do it another time if you need to.” Kyle didn’t know how he would deal with it if she changed her mind, but he didn’t want to pressure Lindsay into something she wasn’t ready for.

“What? No, tomorrow is fine. Sorry, I’m at Stella and Alex’s and we are looking for the remote. I got distracted trying to help them find it. Now what were you saying?” Kyle let go of the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding.

“I asked what movies you want me to pick up and what time you want me there.”

“I’ll watch just about anything, except horror and sci-fi movies; pick whatever you want.” Kyle now felt pressure to pick the perfect movies. He didn’t want to watch a chick flick, but he didn’t think Lindsay would appreciate a bunch of action movies either.

“Alright, does seven work for you?”

“Yeah, I’ll borrow Stella’s take out menus and we can decide what to order when you get here; if that’s okay with you?” As long as Lindsay was there, anything was fine with him.

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll be at your place tomorrow at seven.”

“See you then, bye.” Lindsay hung up and Kyle couldn’t stop smiling. After setting the alarm on his phone for six-thirty, Kyle made it as far as his couch before he passed out from exhaustion.

“Ma, your baby boy’s home” Kyle shouted as he came through the front door of his childhood home. The familiar smells of his mother’s cooking never failed to make his mouth water.

“I’m in the kitchen.” Kyle toed off his shoes by the front door so he wouldn’t endure Sheila Brady’s wrath for wearing shoes in the house. He followed the hallway past the large family room and found his mom standing in front of the stove mixing something in a big pot. He walked over and slid his arm around her shoulders and placed a kiss to the top of her head.

“What did you make for me? I am a growing boy after all.”

“Kyle Mathew Brady, you haven’t been over here in weeks. I shouldn’t let you have any of my chicken and noodles.” Kyle gave his mom a one armed hug and tried to sneak his hand in the pot to grab a piece of chicken when

she whacked the back of his hand with the spoon.

“Ow! Damn it, Ma. I’m sorry I haven’t been by to see you, but there is no need to injure me.” His mom put down her big cooking spoon and placed a kiss to the spot she hit. From somewhere behind him, Kyle heard a man laugh.

“Mommy’s still kissing your boo boo’s I see.” Kyle would know that voice anywhere. He spun around and was now face to face with Cooper Wilde.

“What the hell are you doing here?” His smarting hand all but forgotten, Kyle clasped Cooper in a tight hug. This day just kept getting better and better.

“I’ve been back in Chicago for a few weeks, but tonight was the first free night I’ve had to visit my parents. I came to say hi to your mom and she said you’d be here soon, so I decided to stick around a little while longer.” Kyle couldn’t help it; he had to hug the man again.

“It’s so great to see you. It’s been what, five years? Are you back for good?” Cooper nodded.

“What happened to L.A.? I thought you loved it out there.” The expression on Coop’s face told Kyle there was definitely a reason he left, but clearly didn’t want to talk about it.

“Just time to come back home.” No matter what the reason, he was happy as

long as Coop was staying in Chicago for good. Cooper Wilde lived next door to Kyle's family for as long as he could remember and was more like a brother than a friend. He was Kyle's best friend before Alex, and it was going to be so great to have him back.

When he moved to L.A. eight years ago, it felt like a piece of Kyle left with him. They tried to stay in contact, but between both of their crazy schedules it had been difficult. They spoke on the phone occasionally, but that hadn't happened in at least a year.

“Well I'm glad your back. Are you still working in television?”

“Yep, I'm going to be the new commentator for the Chicago Crush.

That's why I haven't been able to get home to visit since I've been back.

Baseball is already underway, and they want me on air by the end of the month.”

“That's awesome. How many times did we say we wanted to work with the Crush growing up?” Granted they both thought it would be on the field, not in the commentary booth.

“I know, I just have one problem. The producers want me to completely change my image. In L.A I was this cocky jokester, their words not mine, and they don't think people in the Midwest will connect with me. So now they've hired an image consultant of sorts to teach me how they want me to act.”

“Are you serious? They hired you because of your work and then want you to change what made you popular. Have you already met with whoever it is?”

Coop grinned devilishly.

“Oh yeah, she absolutely hates me. Everything she tells me to do, I do the opposite. I’m hoping to piss her off enough that she quits and the producers get the hint.”

“You surprise me, Cooper. You’ve never been intentionally mean to someone before.” Kyle loved his mom. No matter how old they were, she still tried to give her lectures on good manners and such.

“I promise Mrs. Brady, no harm is being done. This woman’s shield of

armor is so thick I don't think King Kong could scare her. I've thrown every trick in the book at her, and she's still standing." His mom just rolled her eyes and went back to stirring the pot of noodles.

"I hate to rush off before we got a chance to catch up, but I have to get back to the hotel and go over some questions for an interview tomorrow." They had just started talking and Kyle was bummed he was leaving so soon, but since he was back they had all the time in the world.

"My number is still the same. Give me a call when you get a chance and me, you and Alex can go grab a beer or something." Coop extended his hand to

Kyle.

“Sounds good to me, how is Alex?”

“Good, he got engaged a couple months ago. You’d like Stella; she’s a huge sports fan.” He’d leave off the psycho Predators fan part for now.

“I’ll give you a call later this week. Bye Mrs. Brady, I’m sorry I’ll miss eating your delicious chicken and noodles.” His mom wiped her hands on her apron and patted Coop’s cheek.

“Don’t worry about it, honey. You come back anytime and I’ll make more. It’s not like my own son or husband appreciates it.” He kissed the back of her hand and after another hand shake and goodbye, Cooper made his exit.

“I really am sorry Ma. I’ll try to

come by more often. I know you get lonely here with dad working all the time.” He knew his parents’ marriage was strong, but sometimes he wondered how his mom dealt with his dad hours.

“It’s okay honey, you’re still my favorite son. So tell me, what’s been going on with you since I last saw you.”

“I’m your only son, hell I’m your only child, but thanks for letting me off the hook. Things are actually going pretty great. Today dad told me about a promotion I’m up for, Cooper is back in town, and a very beautiful woman agreed to go out with me finally. Life is good.”

Thinking about his upcoming date with Lindsay made him smile. He still

hadn't thought about movies to take, but maybe his mom would help with that.

“No offense honey, but the women you date are always beautiful. They just aren't that bright. I wish you could find a good woman like Alex did.” Here we go again. Only this time he would be able to shut down his mom's rant about the women he dated.

“As a matter of fact, she is a good woman and you've met her before.” The skeptical look his mother gave him made him laugh. “You remember Lindsay Pierce from Alex and Stella's engagement party?”

His mom was barely containing her excitement as he told her who it was. “That gorgeous redhead, oh she was an

absolute sweetheart. How the hell did you pull that off?”

Kyle was getting no love from either of his parents today, but it was his own fault for their poor opinion of his love life. “I bribed her.” He said dryly.

“Sorry, she’s not normally your type. Not that that’s a bad thing. You could stand to change the type of women you date.”

“Well I’m trying. Tomorrow night is our first date, but I’m hoping it won’t be our last. I really like her, but she’s been hurt before and is a little gun shy about relationships.”

“Hurt how?” Kyle knew it wasn’t his place to say anything, but his mom could keep a secret and he wanted

someone not close to the situation to confide in.

“Her ex abused her.” Her hand went to her mouth and tears were already pooling in her eyes. “It happened a few years ago, and I don’t know any of the details, but she hasn’t dated anyone since.”

“Oh that poor girl, how could a person hurt someone so precious?” Kyle wondered the same thing. Lindsay was one of those people that you just wanted to shower with affection, not abuse.

“I don’t know. All I know is I practically had to beg her to give me a chance and I’m not going to blow it. We are having dinner at her place tomorrow and watching some movies.”

“That’s a good idea. Taking things slow will probably make it easier on her. Does anyone know what happened?”

“Not until recently. She told Stella and Vicki the other night, but they wouldn’t tell me what she said.” Every time he thought about it, it drove him crazy. How could he protect her, or know the right things to do or say, without knowing what she went through.

“Let her tell you in her own time. The day she does, is the day you’ll know she trusts you. Just have patience.”

“Thanks mom. I know I don’t have to tell you this, but can we keep this between us. I don’t think she would want everyone to know.”

“Of course I won’t say anything, you have my word. I am curious as to why you’ve done such an about face on the whole relationship thing; not that I’m complaining.” This was his mom’s nice way of asking why he finally decided to grow up.

“Honestly, I don’t know. Seeing Alex happy is part of it, but the way I feel when I’m around Lindsay...I’ve never felt that way before. Like I would do anything to bring a smile to her face or make her laugh.” No other woman had ever made him forget his reasons for not getting too close to someone, just Lindsay.

“That’s as good a reason as any.” They each dipped a bowl of food and sat

back down to chat a while longer. By the time Kyle left it was after ten and his mom was ready for bed. On his way home, he thought about everything his mom told him. It might not be easy, but with a little patience he and Lindsay could make this work.

Chapter 10

Standing in the bathroom brushing her hair with one hand and holding the phone with the other, Lindsay was overwhelmed with worry. “This is going to be a disaster, I can feel it.”

“Well if you go into it with that attitude it will be. Now calm down and breathe. You’ve been around Kyle before, even been alone with him, you will be fine.” Vicki always did give it to a person straight and today was no different. Lindsay took a breath and tried to relax.

“I’ll try. He isn’t supposed to be here for another fifteen minutes, so why

don't you distract me and tell me how work is going. How's the Superstar behaving?"

"He still won't listen to a damn thing I say, but I'm handling it. I have no idea how I got roped into this new role, but the contract I could get from it is incentive enough to stay." All of Vicki's big talk did little to hide the attraction Lindsay knew was simmering below the surface.

"You sure he isn't the tiniest bit cute?" She heard a heavy sigh on the other end of the line and laughed.

"Alright, I'll leave you alone...for now."

"Thank you. So how are you liking your new hairdo? Gotten used to it yet?"

Lindsay ran her hand over the silky locks that were cupping her face and smiled.

“I love it. Yesterday was weird, but today it has grown on me.”

“Good, I’m glad.” Vicki started to say something else when there was a knock at the door and she started babbling into the phone.

“Oh my God, he’s here. What do I do? I’m not ready for this.”

“Lindsay! Snap out of it. You are going to answer the door, let Kyle in, eat dinner and watch a movie. It’s not that serious.” Another knock and it was time to say goodbye to Vicki.

“I’ll call you tomorrow, thanks for the pep talk. Bye.” Lindsay ended the call and set her phone on the dresser on

the way to answer the door. With a quick check through the peephole, she opened the door.

“Hi, come on in.” She moved to the side to let him in, but Kyle seemed to be frozen to the walkway. “Is something wrong?”

“You look fucking hot.” His unfiltered response made her laugh and forget some of her nervousness.

“Thank you, you’re looking pretty good yourself. Are we going to stand here all night or are you coming in?” She raised an eyebrow at him and he shook his head as if to clear it.

“Sorry about that, I was in shock for a minute over your hair.”

“I take it you like it then?” She

didn't need his approval, but his response did interest her.

“I liked how it was before, but I'll be damned if you don't look even more beautiful now. I didn't think it was possible.” She closed the door and locked it.

“It's just hair, but thank you.” She noticed the stack of DVD's in one of his hands and in the other was a white bakery box. Lindsay could already smell the delicious confection that was waiting inside. He must have seen her glance at the box because he handed it to her with a smile.

“I brought dessert.” Sure enough when she lifted the lid there were two apple turnovers. If she didn't close the

lid right then the pastry wouldn't last until after dinner, so she shut the box and sat it on the counter in the kitchen.

“You found my weakness. Those are the best.” Kyle was standing on the other side of the island watching her and she was beginning to think apple turnovers weren't her only weakness.

Tonight he wore a navy blue polo with all but one button undone and his sunglasses were hanging from the opening. The shirt hugged every well-defined muscle in his arms and chest so well that Lindsay thought a shirt was unnecessary at this point. His short black hair was gelled lightly and he was wearing the most intoxicating cologne. It was masculine and sexy; just like the

man who wore it.

“I’m glad I got what you like.”

Lindsay had been so lost in her perusal of Kyle that she forgot what they were talking about.

“Huh?”

“The turnovers” Oh yeah. Get it together, he wasn’t talking about himself. She walked over to where the menus were laid out to focus on something other than the sexy man in her apartment.

“Are you ready to order dinner, or do you want to wait?” He looked as hungry as she did, but it wasn’t for food. They stared at each other for what felt like hours when Kyle finally broke the spell.

“We can order now. You pick since

I chose the movies.”

“Anything you don’t like?”

“Not a huge fan of Mexican, but I’ll eat just about anything else.” Lindsay smiled. She didn’t like Mexican food either. This was off to a good start. Grabbing the menu for *Giovanni’s*, Lindsay held it up for Kyle to see.

“How about Italian? I know we ate pasta the other day, but they have the best lasagna and breadsticks.” Kyle agreed and took out his phone to dial the number. After placing their order, Kyle hung up and turned to Lindsay.

“Delivery time is thirty minutes.”

“That’s not bad; do you want something to drink while we wait? I have water, pop, juice and red wine.”

She had grabbed a bottle of Sweet Red on her way home from the salon last night on a whim.

“Wine sounds good. Point me in the direction of the corkscrew and I’ll open it up.” Lindsay opened the drawer next to the stove and pulled it out. Kyle already had the bottle from the fridge, so she handed him the corkscrew.

She found her wine glasses and set them on the counter as Kyle efficiently opened the wine and poured each of them a glass; he held his up in a toasting salute.

“To a sweet, sexy, beautiful woman. Thank you for making me a very happy man and giving me a chance.” Lindsay clinked her glass to Kyle’s.

“You’re welcome. I’m glad you convinced me to.” They each took a sip of their wine and headed to the living room. “So what movies did you bring?”

Kyle looked down at the movies in his hand almost sheepishly. “I brought four because I couldn’t decide. I have two comedies, a drama, and an action.”

Lindsay moved closer to him so she could see them and each title she read made her laugh. “Either we have the same taste in movies, or that same little birdie told you my favorites.”

“She’s a very talkative bird. I wanted to pick something you would like, but had no idea what that would be.” It was kind of funny to see smooth confident Kyle all flustered.

“Why didn’t you call me? It’s not like I wouldn’t have told you my favorite movie.”

“I thought it was a test when you told me to pick the movie; like you wanted to see if I would choose a bunch of guy ones.” Pink dotted both of his gorgeously sculpted cheeks and Lindsay was glad she wasn’t the only one nervous. Taking pity on him, she grabbed her favorite of all four and showed him.

“Anything with Jason Segel or Paul Rudd gets my vote. Now you won’t have to call Stella next time you have a movie question about me.” Kyle’s eyes brightened and all traces of nerves disappeared.

“So you’re saying there will be a next time?” Not wanting to answer a question like that until later in the night, Lindsay handed him the DVD and gave him a shove toward the TV.

“Shut up and go put the movie in.” Kyle was still laughing as he opened up the DVD player and put in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, and then came to sit on the couch.

“Do you want me to start it now?” Lindsay took a seat on the far end of the couch and folded one leg under her. “Why don’t we wait for the food? I hate stopping a movie in the middle.”

Kyle sat down at the other end of the couch, and mirrored her position. He was turned towards her with his elbow

propped up on the back of the couch, and his head resting on his hand. Neither one of them said anything for several moments and Lindsay couldn't take the silence anymore, so she went for something generic.

“How's work?” Kyle's sinfully gorgeous lips pulled up into a heart stopping smile.

“Good. I got some pretty great news yesterday, actually. I was told I was in line for a promotion. It just has to be voted on sometime this month.”

“That is great news. What would you be doing differently?” Lindsay liked the fact that Kyle actually talked. Most men only gave short one word answers or grunts.

“I would be a Lieutenant. Basically, I’d be the boss of my shift. I’d train new guys and have to deal with discipline issues; the Chief is the only one higher. But I don’t want to jinx it. There’s still a chance I could lose out on it. How about you? How’s work at the studio going?”

Lindsay loved her job. “It’s been good. I’m glad we brought Frank in. It’s made Stella slow down, and it gives me someone to talk to when she’s away on a shoot.”

“What is your favorite kind of photo shoot?” Lindsay thought about that for a few seconds. She already knew the answer, but her reasons were bittersweet and she hoped Kyle wouldn’t ask for a why.

“When parents bring in babies every so many months to get new pictures done; I love watching them progress from shoot to shoot.” She could leave off the part where it also made the ache inside her grow a little more with each one.

“That would be a great perk of the job. Does it make you think about having kids of your own one day?” Lindsay should have known better than to bring the subject of babies up. All it did was depress her.

Thankfully there was a knock on the door that saved her from having to answer. Kyle stood and walked toward the door, pulling his wallet out on the way. While he paid for the food, Lindsay

tried to pull herself back together as she went to the kitchen to get plates and silverware out.

Kyle came in and put the bag of food on the island, and started opening the foil containers. “This smells so good.”

“Have you ever had Giovanni’s?”

“It’s been a long time. They don’t deliver to my area, and Alex and I always seem to order pizza or Chinese food when I’m over.” Lindsay handed him a plate and a fork, as they worked around each other getting food.

Making their way to the living room, Lindsay grabbed a pillow and sat it on the floor in front of the coffee table, and Kyle did the same. He reached for

the remote and pushed play as they began eating and watching the movie in silence.

“I’m so full.” Kyle rubbed his hands over his stomach and moaned. “You weren’t kidding about the lasagna, it was really good.”

“I told you.” Lindsay stood and tried to pick up his plate but he moved it out of her reach, and then got up and took her plate. “Hey!”

“You said you don’t like being interrupted during a movie. I’ll take the plates in the kitchen and rinse them off while you sit back down and watch the movie.”

Lindsay made one more attempt to

snatch the plates back, but their height difference made it easy for him to hold them high above her. With a cute little scowl, Lindsay plopped down on the couch and resumed watching the movie.

While Kyle was in the kitchen, he thought about how the evening had gone so far. They both were nervous in the beginning, but that was to be expected. Now that they were done eating, Kyle wanted nothing more than to sit on the couch, with Lindsay curled up next to him, and watch the movie.

He went back to the living room and she was once again on the opposite end of the couch. He didn't want to make her uncomfortable in anyway, so Kyle sat where he was before and watched the

movie all by his lonesome.

When the credits started rolling, he hoped Lindsay would agree to watch another one. Kyle was trying to think of a clever way to ask her when Lindsay surprised him. “Do you want to watch one of the other ones?”

Pure happiness coursed through him. “I’d love to, which one?”

“How much would you hate me if I said *The Notebook*? I haven’t seen it in years.” Kyle groaned on the inside, but thought it was the perfect opportunity to bargain for what he wanted.

“Okay, but on one condition.”

Lindsay eyed him suspiciously.

“And what would that be?”

“You have to come snuggle with me

during the movie. I may need you to hold my hand so I don't cry." Lindsay didn't say a word. She stood staring at him, and then walked out of the room.

Shit, him and his big mouth. He should have just been happy she wanted to spend more time with him instead of pushing for more. Kyle put his head in his hands and leaned forward to rest his elbows on his knees. The sound of footsteps coming from the hallway made him tense up. Lindsay was probably coming back to throw him out.

"Are you okay?" There was clear confusion in her voice, and he slowly removed his face from behind his hands. Lindsay was standing in front of him holding a big blanket and relief made

him sag back into the couch.

“Is something wrong?” Lindsay’s eyebrows were drawn together and Kyle wanted to erase that expression from her face.

“I’m just an idiot. I thought I had scared you off with my request. I’m relieved you just went to get a blanket.”

Lindsay’s expression changed from a frown to downright pissed off. “Is this how it’s going to be all the time? You walking on egg shells and expecting me to fall to pieces at any moment; because if that’s the case, we don’t need to watch another movie.”

Kyle got to his feet and tried to control his own temper. “You’re pissed because I’m not sure how to act? Pardon

me for being a little gun shy. I don't want to say or do the wrong thing and have another repeat of the other night at the bar. It's like I'm walking through a mine field blindfolded, but since I don't know anything about your past it makes it a little difficult to know how to act.”

“If that's how you feel, then why are you here? Why not just find a normal girl to date, instead of one that is so clearly damaged.” A small sob escaped Lindsay and any anger Kyle felt vanished. He didn't think this time as he wrapped his arms around her.

She was still holding the blanket, so Kyle let go of her with one hand and threw the blanket on the floor beside them. Small hiccups and sniffles were

vibrating against his chest, and Kyle held on tighter.

“You’re not damaged Lindsay, and I’m sorry for being an ass. It’s just hard for me to know the right thing to say or do.” She had stopped crying, but still hadn’t said anything. Kyle pulled back a little and placed a finger under her chin to tilt her head back. He wiped a tear off her damp cheek and kissed the tip of her nose.

“I want to watch another movie with you, but only if you want me here.”

Lindsay inhaled deeply and blew it out. “I do want you here. Please stay.”

“I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.” Kyle started to lean down, but stopped inches from her lips. “I want to

kiss you so bad right now.”

Her eyes moved to his mouth and then back up to his eyes. Kyle waited for her response and felt like time stood still.

“Yes” The word came out as barely a whisper, but that’s all Kyle needed. He pressed a tender kiss to her lips and the connection sent a jolt of desire racing through his body. Not wanting to go to fast but unable to stop, Kyle slide his fingers into Lindsay’s hair and held her head in place as he tasted and savored every inch of her mouth.

A moan echoed through the room and Kyle didn’t know which one of them it came from. Lindsay’s arms were snaked around his waist and pulled him

against her even closer; it still wasn't enough. He walked back, taking Lindsay with him, until his legs hit the edge of the couch.

Running his hands down her body, Kyle placed both hands on Lindsay's hips as he started to lie back on the couch. When he tugged her down on top of his chest, she came willingly.

Their lips met once again, but this time all tenderness was gone. Neither one of them could get enough from the other, until Kyle broke the kiss to take a breath. "You don't know how long I've wanted to do that."

Lindsay was panting just as hard as he was. "Then why did you stop?"

With that one question, Kyle went

from semi-hard to fully erect. Lindsay was lying on top of him and he was sure she could feel how much he wanted her. “Because I’m a stupid, stupid man”

Placing his hand on the back of her head, Kyle brought their lips together once again. He ran his tongue along the seam of her mouth and she opened instantly. He gave first one stroke, then another, over Lindsay’s tongue and she was right there with him; giving as much as she was taking.

He thought nothing could make this moment any better; that was until Lindsay ran her hands down his sides and over the bulge in his pants. He broke the kiss once again and started raining kisses along Lindsay’s jaw line,

and then to her neck.

Since he was underneath her, it made getting to where he wanted more difficult, so Kyle quickly flipped their positions. When she was lain out beneath him, all he could do was stare. “You are stunning, Red. I could look at you all night.”

Lindsay reached for the bottom of his shirt and started tugging on it. “Too many clothes, I want to see you.” She didn’t have to tell him twice. Kyle shifted to his knees, straddling Lindsay, and ripped his shirt off over his head.

“Much better” Lindsay started trailing her fingertips from his collarbone, down his chest and over his abs; it was all too much. He had wanted

to feel her against his skin for so long that he was positive he would shoot in his jeans if she went further south again.

Not wanting to embarrass himself, Kyle wrapped his hands around her wrists and raised them towards her head. Holding her hands in place, Kyle started his trail of kisses all over again. He made it as far as her right cheek before he realized she was no longer responding like she had been.

Bringing his head up, Kyle could see the distress and terror in her eyes. Letting go of her hands, Kyle scrambled off the couch and knelt next to her. “Breathe it’s okay. Shit, I shouldn’t have attacked you like that.”

“No...it’s my fault...it’s just...”

Lindsay was still trying to get her breathing back and talk at the same time, and it wasn't working.

“You don't have to explain, I understand.” Lindsay closed her eyes and didn't try to talk again until she was back in control. When she was, she pushed herself into a sitting position and patted the seat next to her. Kyle moved from the floor and sat in the spot she indicated.

“Do you want me to get you a glass of water?” Shaking her head no, Lindsay leaned forward and grabbed her glass of wine. After downing what was left of it, she placed it back on the table.

“I needed that.” He knew touching her was risky, but he couldn't stand to

see the anguish in her eyes so he placed his hand on her knee. Kyle began moving his thumb in small circles, hoping to put her at ease. She covered his hand with hers, and turned to face him.

“I know you said I don’t have to explain, but I want to try.” He didn’t know if he could handle hearing what she might say, so Kyle turned his hand over and held hers and reassured her.

“Really, you don’t have to. All I care about is that you are okay.”

“But I want to. If I don’t talk about it I will never get past it, and I really want to try and get my life back.” He didn’t say anything as Lindsay pushed her shoulders back and took a deep breath.

“You know I had, I mean have an

abusive ex that almost killed me. I'll skip most of the gory details for now, but one of the things he did when he was hurting me was hold me down by my wrists.”

Kyle froze. He had reminded her of the monster she used to be involved with. He opened his mouth to apologize, but she stopped him.

“You had no way of knowing, but I couldn't stop the fear that started to take over and I panicked. I never know what will trigger a flashback or cause a panic attack, but talking about it more has helped me recover from them faster.”

The small distance between them felt like a mile and Kyle wanted to hold her, so he held his arms open and

Lindsay crawled onto his lap. He draped his arms loosely around her waist as she got comfortable.

“Thank you for telling me. I won’t do that again.” Lindsay laid her cheek on his chest and sighed.

“I can’t promise things like this won’t keep happening. This is the first time I’ve tried to date since it all happened. You deserve someone you can touch without hesitation, and won’t panic when you want to make out on the couch.” Kyle kissed the top of her head and smiled.

“I deserve you.” Lindsay didn’t respond, but snuggled in closer to his chest. “Why don’t I put the movie in, and we can cuddle together while we watch

it.”

“As long as you don’t steal all the covers” Kyle shifted her off his lap and went to switch the DVD’s. He picked up the blanket from the floor and spread it over Lindsay, who had already stretched out on the couch. Kyle crawled in behind her and pulled the blanket over his legs, before stuffing a pillow under his head.

“If I do I’ll keep you warm, don’t worry.” He pressed another kiss to the side of her head and pushed play. The movie started and Kyle moved his hand to rest on Lindsay’s hip. She reached down and intertwined their fingers and they stayed like that for the rest of the night.

“Aside from the minor panic attack

and little tantrum I threw, I've had a really great time tonight.”

“Me too, I hope we can do it again soon.” Lindsay only nodded. They didn't talk anymore, and at some point during the movie Kyle's eyes started to feel very heavy. The last thing he remembered was watching the two main characters dancing in the street to no music.

He fell asleep picturing him and Lindsay dancing around his living room, with nothing but the sound of their hearts beating to lead them.

Chapter 11

A small opening in Lindsay's curtains was allowing the early morning sunlight to stream in, and it was hitting her right in the face. "Ugh, stupid sun"

She started to get up to close it, but her legs were pinned by a much longer and heavier one. Panic threatened to overtake her, but last night quickly made its way through her mind. She and Kyle had lain down to watch the movie and must have fallen asleep.

The sound of him softly snoring behind her brought a smile to her face. Trying to move as slow as possible, so as not to wake him, Lindsay turned so

she was now face to face with this amazing and understanding man.

Even when Kyle was sleeping, he was ridiculously handsome. He hadn't put his shirt back on last night, and Lindsay had to suppress the urge to memorize every muscle of his chest and stomach with her hands. His black hair was sticking out in spots and a small line of drool ran down his cheek; seeing that made her giggle.

She must have laughed louder than she thought because Kyle blinked open his sleepy eyes, and that lopsided grin was playing on his lips. "What has you so happy this early in the morning, Red?"

"You're snoring and drooling, it's

very cute.” He brought his hand up to his right cheek and wiped away the evidence.

“That is not cute, it’s embarrassing.” Lindsay ran her fingers along his other cheek and he turned into the touch.

“I promise not to tell anyone you’re not perfect when you sleep.” She sarcastically crossed her heart with the hand that had been caressing his cheek.

“I see you have jokes today. Let’s see how funny you think this is.” Kyle dug his fingers into Lindsay’s side and tickled her mercilessly. She tried and tried to get away, but his leg was still thrown over hers and she had no way to escape.

She tried to say something, but Kyle doubled his efforts and she laughed harder. Lindsay gasped out an “I give” finally and he stopped, but not before giving her a smug little grin.

Small giggles still made their way out as she grabbed onto his hand. “You’re an evil, evil man.”

Kyle chuckled. “That will teach you to make fun of my snoring or drooling ever again.” He wrapped his arm around Lindsay and pulled her slightly toward him. She thought he was trying to bring her in for a kiss and lifted her lips to meet his.

Kyle wiggled his other arm out from under them just as her lips pressed into his. When she realized he was only

trying to free his arm, Lindsay was so embarrassed she tried to pull away but he wasn't having any part of that.

“Where do you think you're going?”

“I thought you were trying to...and you were just trying to...” Lindsay didn't want to voice her stupidity, so she just said. “Oh never mind.”

Kyle enveloped her with both arms this time and rolled so she was now lying on top of him. “That's better.”

He snuggled his body further into the cushions. “Now back to this little misunderstanding. I was trying to get my arm out from under me. I slept on it all night and it was numb.”

Lindsay fixed her stare on his chest and refused to make eye contact, but he

had other ideas. “Don’t for one second think I didn’t want that kiss. I always want to kiss you. But seeing as I was distracted during that last one, I say we try it again.”

The honesty and sweetness in his words made her lean forward and kiss him gently. It was a brief kiss, but the feelings it sparked inside her were very powerful. She smiled down at a now serene looking Kyle. “Good morning.”

“Good morning. I think I may need another taste of those sexy lips to fully wake up.” He wiggled his eyebrows and it was then that Lindsay felt how ‘awake’ parts of Kyle already were.

Feeling like this was the perfect chance to pay him back for tickling her,

Lindsay pretended to think about his statement. “I don’t think that’s necessary.”

“And why’s that.” She pushed herself up until she was straddling his lap. Feeling more confident than she had in years, Lindsay gave her hips a slight back and forth roll over the bulge beneath her.

“You feel fully awake to me.” She gave him what she hoped was a seductive smile. He lifted his hips a fraction, and then lowered them just as quickly.

“Are you trying to torture me?” His words came out low and husky.

“Consider this payback for the tickling.” She moved against him one

more time, and this time a moan escaped him.

“You’re playing with fire, Red.” Lowering herself back to his chest, Lindsay planned to show him how much she liked the way they were playing. But before she could stop it, some of her fears came out as she whispered.

“Just don’t burn me.” She hated that her vulnerability had picked this moment to emerge, but that’s what it all boiled down to; not wanting to put herself out there and be hurt again.

Kyle brushed his lips across hers and whispered back. “Never”

That one word shifted something inside Lindsay that she thought was gone forever. She tried to keep the tears from

falling, but one slid down her cheek and dripped onto Kyle's bare chest.

“Don't cry. You never have to worry about me hurting you. I just need you to trust me not to.” Lindsay was still looking into Kyle's eyes as he made his plea. She wanted to trust him more than anything, but didn't know if she was capable.

“I'll try” As if that was the only thing holding him back from ravishing her, Kyle clamped onto her mouth with his and effectively ended their conversation.

His hands slipped under the back of her shirt and were making a trek up her back, when someone knocked on Lindsay's door. “Who the hell is here

this early?”

Kyle looked just as annoyed as Lindsay felt, but when she glanced at the clock she knew exactly who it was.

“It’s not as early as you may think.” With a this-sucks-a-lot look, Lindsay removed herself from Kyle’s hold and stood up. “That is probably Stella coming over for our morning coffee and gossip. If I don’t get my ass moving, I’ll be late for work.”

Kyle groaned, but rolled off the sofa too. “Sorry if I made you late.”

Lindsay pushed up on her toes and kissed him one more time. “I’m not.”

With a wicked little wink, Lindsay rubbed her hip along the still prominent bulge in his pants as she walked by him

toward the door. He caught up with her a second later and pulled her back against him.

“What was that you were saying about *me* being evil? I will get you back for that later.”

“Promise” Lindsay didn’t know what had gotten into her, but Kyle made her feel light and happy and free to be herself for the first time in a so long. More knocking interrupted them yet again.

“You should answer the door before I make you really late for work, and give Stella more things to grill you about.” With that he disappeared into the bathroom, and Lindsay thought about ignoring Stella completely. She would

like nothing more than to follow Kyle and finish what they started on the couch.

A frustrated groan escaped her, as she went to open the door. Lindsay barely got the door open before Stella pushed her way in and started with the questions.

“What took you so long? Why aren’t you dressed and why don’t I smell coffee?”

“Hello to you too” Stella went straight to the kitchen; probably to start the missing coffee. Lindsay followed and was just about to start answering one of Stella’s many questions when Kyle exited the bathroom.

““Morning Stella” She turned towards him but didn’t seem to be able

to say anything back. He walked to where his shirt was lying on the floor and put it on. Lindsay thought it was a crime to cover such perfection with clothes as he made his way over to where she was standing.

“I’ll get out of here so you can get ready for work. My shift starts at three, but I’ll call you later if that’s okay.” Stella was still standing with her mouth hanging open, but all Lindsay could focus on was Kyle.

“Call as late as you want.” He bent down to give her a kiss and before she knew what was happening, Lindsay was tilted halfway to the floor. When he had thoroughly explored every part of her mouth, Kyle stood her back upright.

With another quick peck to the cheek, he said, “Have a good day at work” and walked out the door. All she could do was stare at the now closed door and sigh. That was one hell of a goodbye kiss.

“I may need to go home and get a quickie from Alex after witnessing that display. I think the temperature has risen a few degrees in here.” Lindsay completely forgot about Stella being there when Kyle was kissing her. Now she didn’t want to turn around and face the Stella Howe inquisition.

Knowing there was no way around it; Lindsay turned around and watched as Stella was dramatically fanning herself. She tried to make a break for her

bedroom, but Stella was right on her heels.

“Oh no, you don’t. You aren’t getting away from me that easily. I want details and I want them right now.”

“I need to change for work. You don’t want to be late, do you?” She hoped reminding Stella of how late they already were would buy her sometime; no such luck.

“I’m the boss. We don’t have any appointments until ten, so we have plenty of time.” Stella flopped onto Lindsay’s bed like a little kid.

Rolling her eyes, Lindsay went to her walk in closet and found a blue silk top and black dress pants to wear. When she exited the closet, Stella was sitting

with her back against the headboard and arms crossed over her chest.

“I’m waiting” A smirk lifting her lips.

“There’s not much to tell. We ate some food and watched a couple movies, end of story.” She did not want to talk about their other activities because this day was already going to be long enough; especially after that kiss.

“Nowhere did I hear why Kyle was still here this morning, or why his shirt was on the floor. And let’s not forget that kiss he planted on you before he left.”

Why had she let Stella in this morning? She should have known this was coming. “We fell asleep on the

couch watching the second movie, and neither of us woke up until a little before you got here.”

Stella narrowed her eyes like she was trying to figure out if Lindsay was telling the truth. “So nothing else happen?”

Instead of answering, Lindsay made a break for her bathroom and locked the door. She knew it was only a short reprieve, but Stella could wait. After all, she was the one that interrupted what was proving to be a very nice wake up call.

Five minutes later, dressed and ready to go, Lindsay came out of the bathroom to find Stella missing. The familiar scent of coffee drifted into the

room and she knew where to look.

She had just entered the kitchen when Stella held up a mug. “I needed caffeine.

“Sorry I didn’t have it ready, I got distracted.” Lindsay grinned and winked at Stella.

“Smartass” They both laughed. “So are you going to tell me the rest, or am I just going to assume you got down and dirty with Kyle?”

“Nope” Lindsay made the word pop. What her and Kyle did or didn’t do was between them. “I’ll only say that we had a nice time and I’m glad I agreed to the date.”

“Alright, I’ll let it go. But only because you are absolutely beaming

right now and I like seeing you this happy.”

“Thank you, I like feeling this happy; it’s a nice change.” As they finished their coffee and headed to work, snippets of last night and this morning played through Lindsay’s mind. She groaned as the ache between her legs worsened with each memory she replayed. This was going to be a long day.

“Can’t you make this thing go any faster?”

“I don’t know what’s up your ass tonight, but you need to shut the hell up and let me drive. We will get back to the station when we get there.” Kyle glared

across the cab of the fire truck at Rodriguez.

Tonight had been one of the busiest shifts he had ever worked, or at least it felt that way. This was already their fourth call since he came on at three and Kyle was taking his frustrations out on the rest of the crew. All he wanted to do was get back, take a shower and call Lindsay.

Fire station five came into view and he forced himself to stay inside the truck as it was slowly backed into the bay. Rodriguez barely got the gear shift into park before Kyle jumped out and started removing his gear. Making sure it was all in the right places for the next call, he raced to the shower; stripping as he ran.

Knowing they would have more calls tonight, Kyle cleaned himself just enough to feel human again and wrapped a towel around his waist. He walked to his bunk to get his phone and ignored the curious looks from the other men at his state of undress.

The clock on the wall read eleven-fifty, but Lindsay said to call whenever so he did just that. Three rings later, she picked up.

“You sure know how to keep a girl in suspense.”

“Sorry it’s so late, but we’ve had back to back calls all day. Is that your way of saying you’re glad I called?” A collective round of cat calls and smooching sounds floated around the

room, and Kyle flipped off his coworkers over his shoulder.

“Not at all” Her words would have hurt if Lindsay hadn’t sounded so amused after she said them.

“So you’re up at midnight for no reason?”

“Nope, I’m watching my favorite late night talk show. Craig and I have this date every weeknight.” Kyle knew it was stupid to be jealous of a television host, but he wanted to be the one there occupying Lindsay’s time.

“You sure know how to bruise a guy’s ego.” Lindsay just laughed.

“A nuclear bomb couldn’t bruise your ego. But if it makes you feel better, I am very glad called.” Kyle walked to

his locker to get his clothes as he listened to Lindsay. If they got a call while he was on the phone he needed to be ready.

“Good. So how did the rest of your morning go after I left; were you late?”

“Thanks to you and that kiss this morning, I had to deal with Stella and her barrage of questions as soon as the door closed; not to mention the effect it had on me.”

“Oops, I’m sorry.” Kyle said the word, but he really wasn’t sorry at all. That had been a great start to the day, and a way to make sure Lindsay thought about him all day. He pressed the phone between his cheek and shoulder as he pulled on his underwear and then his

jeans. He sat down to put on his socks as Lindsay replied.

“Liar”

“I know it, but I couldn’t help myself. You’re very tempting.”

Tempting, sexy, seductive and so fucking sweet Kyle didn’t know what he would do if she finally realized she was too good for him.

“You’re forgiven this time.”

“You’re very generous.” She scoffed over the line and he laughed.

“So what did you tell detective Stella.”

“That we had dinner and fell asleep watching movies. The rest is none of her business.” He knew Stella well enough to know that she probably badgered Lindsay for more details than that.

“I’m sure she wasn’t too thrilled with the shortened version.”

“She wasn’t, but she understood. She was the same way after her first night with Alex.”

“I promise I won’t be talking to Alex about it either. I agree it’s nobody else’s business.” Kyle thought he heard Lindsay sigh in relief, but he wasn’t sure. “Now comes the important question, when can I see you again?”

“I’m not sure.” It was like a ten pound weight sank in his stomach. Kyle was so used to women throwing themselves at him, that going slow was an entirely new concept.

“I don’t want you to take that the wrong way. I had a great time with you

last night. It's just that this is all so new to me and I don't want to rush things. I know my actions last night and this morning contradicts that, but...I'm not explaining this very well am I?"

"Lindsay, you don't have to explain. We are going at your pace with this. I will wait as long as you want to." Waiting may kill him, but if that's what it took to earn her trust, Kyle would do it.

"I can't give you a definite time frame for when I might be ready for well, you know, but hanging out and getting to know each other better wouldn't suck." Lindsay laughed softly, but he could tell she was nervous to hear his answer.

"Like I said, I'm not in a hurry. I

know my reputation isn't exactly great, but I'm trying to change. If all we do is go out and share a few kisses, I'm fine with that. There is still kissing involved right?"

This time when Lindsay laughed, it was full of joy. "Well...I may have to insist on that as a condition. It's the least I can do to repay you for all of your patience."

"You're very kind." They shared another snicker and Kyle was happy Lindsay had told him what she wanted. They talked a few more minutes, but got interrupted when the alarm sounded for a residential fire. He promised to call her tomorrow and hung up. Kyle threw his phone in his open locker, and hurried

into his shirt and boots.

He ran into the bay and put on his gear just in time to hop on the truck. Ten seconds later, the truck was on the road and the adrenaline was pumping through Kyle. No matter how many calls he went on Kyle always got the same feelings, excitement mixed with a little fear; today was no different.

Chapter 12

Almost two weeks had passed since Lindsay and Kyle's first date. They talked on the phone every day, but between his schedule and hers they hadn't seen each other; tonight that was finally going to change. He told her about a friend of his that just moved back to Chicago, and they were all going to meet him at *Maxwell's* later.

"Hurry up; we are going to be late."

"Hold your horses, we still have half an hour. You'll see Kyle soon, I promise." Stella yelled from her bedroom. Lindsay decided to ride with Stella and Alex to the bar just in case

she and Kyle decided to do something else after.

Alex came into the living room and sat in the chair across from the couch where she was sitting. “She didn’t used to take so long to get ready; you and Vicki created a monster.”

Lindsay slumped back onto the couch. “No she’s right, we have plenty of time. I guess I’m just anxious to get there.”

Alex gave her a knowing look. “So...I assume that means things are good between you and Kyle.”

She and Alex had talked before, but never about something like this; it was a little weird. “I guess. We’ve only had one date, but he calls every night or

during my lunch. We are taking things slow.”

“I’ve known Kyle a long time.” His voice took a very serious tone. “I love him like a brother and that’s why I can say what I’m about to.”

He paused for a brief moment. “I’ve seen Kyle do a lot of dumb shit. I’ve bailed him out more times than I care to count, and I’ve watched him go through women like they were disposable to him.” Lindsay opened her mouth to say something, but Alex lifted his hand to stop her.

“Let me finish. He’s not a bad guy, and most of the women he was with knew it wouldn’t go further than just one night. I know Kyle has his reasons for

the way he's lived his life up until this point, and they are valid. But no matter what his faults have been in the past, he has always been one of the most loyal people I've ever known. If it weren't for him, I would have lost Stella forever, and for that I will always be grateful.”

“Why are you telling me all of this?”

“Because since he told me about his feelings for you a few weeks ago, I've never seen him happier. The changes he's made astonish me and they were all for you. I didn't say this to freak you out, I guess I just felt like I needed to defend my buddy against his idiotic past and tell you he's not the same person he used to be.”

Before Lindsay could respond, Stella came into the room. “I’m ready, sorry it took so long.” She looked between the two of them. “Is everything okay?”

Alex gave her an unsure look and Lindsay smiled reassuringly at him. “Everything’s great, let’s go.” As they all headed toward the door, she reached out and touched his arm.

“Thank you for telling me all of that, and I promise I won’t say anything to Kyle about it.” He winked at her but didn’t say anything more; he didn’t need to. Alex had confirmed what she was already starting to realize; Kyle was one of the good ones.

The three of them piled into Alex’s

Camry and headed to the bar. Lindsay was curious about Kyle's friend, so she asked Alex more about him. "So who is this Cooper that's coming tonight?"

Alex laughed. "Cooper Wilde. He and Kyle have been friends their whole lives. Grew up next door to each other and were basically inseparable. Coop was always the life of the party and an all-around good guy. We all used to hang out together, until Cooper moved to L.A seven or eight years ago."

"Kyle mentioned something about him working for the Crush, but didn't say why he moved back to Chicago." Alex shrugged.

"I asked Kyle but he doesn't know. I guess he got the impression Coop didn't

want to talk about it. I haven't seen him since he moved away, but I'm glad he's back. He's one of those people that you can't help but smile around." It would be nice to talk to someone that knew Kyle in his younger days, and she was glad he would have a close friend back in his life.

When Alex pulled into the parking lot a little while later, Lindsay couldn't stop the grin that crept onto her face when she saw Kyle's truck. She didn't want to seem too desperate, but the wheels had just stopped turning when she opened the door and headed for the building.

Alex and Stella followed right behind, but at a much more leisurely

pace than hers. She could hear them chuckling, but Lindsay didn't care. It felt like two months since she saw Kyle last, instead of two weeks.

When she reached the door to *Maxwell's*, Lindsay took a deep breath and waited for them to catch up. Alex opened the door and she was the first to go inside; telling him thank you as she passed. The bar was dark, but Lindsay's eyes adjusted and zeroed in on Kyle immediately.

As if he could sense her as well, Kyle turned and their eyes locked; at that moment no one else existed. She weaved in and out of the tables as fast as she could without running, on her way to where Kyle was standing near the back.

He opened his arms as she neared, and Lindsay all but jumped into them. Not wasting anytime, she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled Kyle down to fuse their lips together. His surprise at her forwardness quickly turned to passion as he kissed her back with the same desperate desire.

Both of them nipped and teased the others mouth as they lost themselves in the kiss; forgetting all about where they were. When they finally broke apart, Kyle had to put his hand on the back of the chair next to him to get his balance. Lindsay rubbed a finger over her kiss swollen lips and gave him an innocent smile. “Hi”

He blinked his eyes like he was

trying to bring her into focus. “Hi.”

The one word came out like he had just run a marathon, and Lindsay liked that she could do that to him. “I missed you.”

Kyle still looked dazed, but this time when he spoke, a little of his normal cockiness was there.

“Apparently. If that’s what happens after two weeks, I should stay away longer next time.

Lindsay narrowed her eyes at him and tried to pull away, but Kyle held tightly to her. “I’m just kidding. I couldn’t stay away from you if I tried.”

She thought about making him suffer, but being in his arms felt too good. “Don’t try then.”

Kyle bent his head down to give her a much gentler kiss this time. “I’ve missed you too.”

Lindsay leaned into his chest and enjoyed the already familiar embrace, until she heard a disgusted groan from behind her. “Ugh, not you two too.”

Victoria’s surliness made Lindsay turn in Kyle’s arms, but she didn’t moving away. “I didn’t know you were here.”

“This place could have been on fire and you wouldn’t have noticed.”

“Good thing I would have had a fireman to save me.” Victoria rolled her eyes and everyone else laughed. “I thought you had to work tonight? Did the devil decide to let you out on time

today?”

“Apparently he had plans tonight, so I was released from the depths of hell early. I swear I wish I could just walk away.”

“Who is she talking about?” Kyle whispered in her ear. The feel of his breath on her skin sent a shiver through her body, and when he chuckled softly she knew he felt her bodies’ reaction to him. Trying to block it out, Lindsay smacked his hand and went on.

“Vicki’s new client that refuses to listen to her”

Vicki interrupted. “He knows I’m right, but he ignores me just to be an ass.”

“Why do you put up with it? Why

not just drop him as a client?” Kyle snuggled her closer to his chest, but still seemed genuinely interested in the conversation going on.

“I wish I could, but if word got around I dropped someone because they were difficult my reputation would take a hit; not to mention the huge account I could get after I’m finished.”

“Also she has a huge crush on him.” Lindsay couldn’t resist throwing that piece of information into the mix.

“For the last time, I do not have a crush on...” Alex, who had been at the bar, came back just then carrying two drinks. He started to give Stella hers, when Victoria snatched the drink and downed it.

“What the fuck? Why is there water in a glass like this?” Stella and Alex quickly looked at each other and then back at Vicki. Neither of them said a word, but Lindsay could tell something was going on by the way they were acting. Stella fidgeted with a napkin on the table and pieces of the past week crossed her mind.

Over the last few days at work, Stella had been more tired than usual and sitting down a lot. A couple of times she had rushed from the room, only to come back pale and sweaty minutes later. When Lindsay asked her about it, she just waved it off saying she was probably coming down with something.

Now as Lindsay stood there

watching the scene in front of her, she knew why Stella hadn't been feeling well and was drinking water instead of alcohol. It was the same way she felt four years ago. "Oh my God"

Two sets of eyes turned in Lindsay's direction and she had her answer. She could tell the couple didn't want to say anything yet, but when Stella smiled and nodded at Lindsay she couldn't contain her excitement.

She pushed out of Kyle's arms and went to hug Stella. Vicki was still standing there holding the now empty glass confused as could be. "What is going on? What are you getting all worked up about?"

Alex came over to help Stella out of

her chair and slid his arm around her waist. “You might as well tell her before she explodes.”

Vicki put her hands on her hips, and Lindsay tried to hide her grin. “Tell me what?”

“We were going to wait a couple more weeks to tell everyone, but seeing as I’m pretty sure Lindsay has figured it out we’ll do it now.” Stella and Alex shared a look that was filled with so much love she had tears in her eyes. “I’m pregnant.”

As if it had never been there, Victoria’s bad mood evaporated and was replaced by screams of joy. “Are you serious? I’m going to be an aunt? When did you find out? Why didn’t you

tell me?”

Victoria bolted for her sister, and engulfed her in a tight embrace that made Stella stumble back a bit. Thankfully Alex was holding onto her, or she might have fallen over. “I took the test at the beginning of the week. We were going to tell everyone after I saw the doctor next week and confirmed it.”

“I’m so happy for both of you.” Vicki let go of Stella and gave Alex a hug too. Kyle was the next to make his way into the mix; shaking Alex’s hand and hugging and kissing Stella on the cheek.

“Congrats! Tonight drinks are on me.” Stella pointed out she could only have water, and Kyle laughed. “Okay,

Alex's drinks are on me.”

“Nope, I told Stella I would only have one since she can't drink. While she's pregnant I won't be drinking.” The four of them talked animatedly as Lindsay looked on; the previous joy she had felt melting away fast.

She was very happy for Stella and Alex, but the sadness from her loss was creeping in and she didn't want to ruin this moment by falling apart in the middle of the bar.

Since everyone was preoccupied, Lindsay made her way to the side door that led to the patio area. She stepped into the warm night air just as the first tear fell.

Four years later, she still felt the

pain and regret like it was yesterday. Finding a patio chair, she sat down and let all the pain flow from her eyes. She heard the door opening behind her and quickly wiped at her eyes; she didn't want anyone to see her like this.

“Lindsay, what is it? What's wrong?” Kyle was now squatting in front of her, and started running his hands up and down her legs.

“Nothing”

“You're crying, that's not nothing” She could see the plea in his eyes for her to trust him, but this was not a conversation Lindsay wanted to have outside a bar; or anywhere really.

“I'm fine, I just needed some air. Go back in; I'll be there in a minute.”

“No way, I’m not going inside until you tell me what upset you.” The emotions she was trying hard to keep at bay were threatening to come out, but before they could the patio door opened again. The door clicked shut and then someone stood beside the chair a second later.

“Kyle, can you give us a minute?” Stella’s voice was laced with concern as she made the request. “Please”

Kyle looked at her and then back to Lindsay. The questions in his eyes were almost more than she could handle, so she stared at the concrete next to her chair. With a muttered curse he pushed himself to a standing position, and without another word walked inside.

The patio door slammed shut, and she knew he was pissed about her lack of trust in him. Not wanting to upset Stella, Lindsay continued to fix her gaze on the ground to the left of her chair.

“I’m sorry” The apology made Lindsay lift her head and stare at her friend.

“Why are you apologizing?” She should be the one saying sorry for ruining Stella and Alex’s announcement.

“I should have thought about your feelings before I just blurted that out.”

“Stella you didn’t blurt anything, I figured it out. And don’t for one second think that I’m not happy for you. I’m the one that’s sorry; yet again my past ruined a great moment.” Lindsay longed for the

day she could act like everyone else and just enjoy life's little moments.

“You didn't ruin anything. Kyle and I were the only ones that noticed your exit. When I saw him headed for the door, I thought you may need some support.” Her eyes wandered to the door he slammed shut, and she sighed.

“He's mad at me” Stella looked at the closed door too and then back to Lindsay.

“Why is he mad?”

“He wanted to know what upset me and I wouldn't tell him.” How do you tell someone you care about that you are the reason a baby died?

“I can see why he's mad then. He wants to be with you and you are

completely shutting him out.” Lindsay stood and put her hands on her hips in a very defensive way.

“He was the one that said he wouldn’t push me about my past. Now when something happens, I’m supposed to just spill everything. We’ve only been talking for two weeks, which hardly qualifies him to know all my secrets.” Stella stood too.

“I didn’t say that, but if you really do want things to move forward between the two of you, you are going to have to give him something. And don’t give me this two week crap; you’ve known him a lot longer than that.”

“I don’t know if I can. I don’t know how to do any of this.” The anger from a

minute ago was gone, and now Lindsay just felt defeated.

“I understand if you’re not ready, but things like this are going to keep coming up. He may be trying to be patient now, but eventually his patience will run out. Do you really want to risk losing him when all he wants to do is help?” The thought of not having Kyle in her life left a very unpleasant taste in her mouth.

“No, I don’t.” Lindsay sat back down and looked up at the night sky. “I told him I would try to trust him. I guess I’m failing miserably huh.”

“I think you are doing fine considering all that you’ve been through. You just need to let Kyle be there for

you when this kind of thing happens.”

“Let’s go back inside. Hopefully he’s not too pissed off to hear me out.”

“He’ll get over it.” As they walked back into the bar, Lindsay was feeling much better and was ready to explain things to Kyle. As they approached the table, she looked around but didn’t see him anywhere.

“Is Kyle in the bathroom?” Vicki shook her head.

“He came inside and the only thing he said was he had to go. After he threw some money on the table, he started talking to someone on his phone about meeting at his house.” Any calm she had started feeling vanished.

“So much for him getting over it”

She said to Stella.

“I forgot what a moody bastard he can be sometimes.” Lindsay wanted to be mad at him for just leaving like that, but she knew she only had herself to blame.

“Would you guys care if I take off? There’s something I need to do.” The sooner she left, the sooner she could make things right between them.

“We will take you home to get your car. There’s no sense in you taking a cab.”

“I don’t want you to cut your night short because of me.” All three of them scoffed at that.

“We can just as easily hang out at our place, so stop being stubborn.”

Knowing it was pointless to argue with her friends, Lindsay grabbed her purse and the four of them headed for the door.

Once outside, Vicki went to her car and Lindsay, Stella and Alex piled into his. The street lights passed by in a haze as she stared out the window on the way back to Spring Towers.

Tonight was going to be a test of her newfound strength. Trusting Kyle with her past was not something she planned to do so soon, but it had to be done. That is, if he would even let her explain.

Chapter 13

“Man that sucks.” Coop was standing in Kyle’s kitchen listening to him bitch about what happened at the bar.

“I don’t know what to do. I thought I could be with her and not ask question, but when something like this happens...” he hated this feeling of complete helplessness.

“It’s only been two weeks, why not just walk away?”

“It’s not that simple, I’ve liked her a hell of a lot longer than two weeks. Plus I’ll see her all the time; she’s one of Stella’s best friends.” This whole

situation was fucked up with no easy way out.

“I don’t know her so it’s hard for me to judge the situation, but from everything you’ve told me I’d say give her some time. If a guy is the one that hurt her, talking to another guy about it can’t be easy.” Cooper was making sense, but it still didn’t make Kyle feel any better.

“Can we talk about something else? Tell me how work is going.”

“It’s alright. They still have the consultant working with me, but I only have to deal with her when the Crush have home games; which thankfully isn’t that often right now.”

“I watched the Arizona game

Sunday. You and the other announcer seemed to work well together.” It was still weird seeing his friend on TV, but Coop was doing what he loved and Kyle couldn’t be happier for him.

“Bob’s cool. I like everything about the job except living in a hotel constantly. When we aren’t traveling with the team, I’m still in a hotel because I haven’t had time to search for an apartment here. And I definitely don’t want to live with mom and dad.”

“I know it’s not much, but you can move in here if you want. I have an extra bedroom you’re more than welcome to use. I’m hardly home to do more than sleep myself.” Kyle hadn’t ever thought about a roommate before, but having

Cooper move in would be like living with a brother.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure.” Kyle stuck out his hand and they did a half hand shake half hug. “I’ll show you the room and give you a tour of the rest of the house. Come on.” He took Cooper through the living room and down the short hallway. On one side of the hall was Kyle’s room, and on the other side were the spare room and the bathroom.

“So what do you think?”

“It’s perfect. I won’t be here a whole lot myself, so I shouldn’t get in your way too much.” They made their way back into the living room and sat down on the leather couch. Kyle turned

on the TV and started flipping through the channels.

“You won’t be in the way period.”

“Thanks for this. Staying in a hotel is one thing, but living in one sucks.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll give you a key later and you can move in whenever you want.” Kyle pressed the numbers for ESPN, and they started talking back and forth about how the baseball season was going so far this year. The reporter on the screen was recapping the day’s scores when there was a knock at the front door.

“Were you expecting someone?”

“No, it’s probably my neighbor. She’s ninety and always thinks she smells smoke, so she has me check it

out.” Cooper laughed.

Kyle opened the door expecting to see Mrs. York, but was surprised to find Lindsay standing there rocking from foot to foot. “What are you doing here?”

“I need to talk to you, can I come in?” He didn’t know if it was something good or bad she wanted to talk about, but he stepped aside and let her in.

She barely made it two feet inside the door, when Coop introduced himself. “You must be Lindsay; it’s nice to meet you. I’m Cooper Wilde.”

“Lindsay Pierce. It’s nice to meet you too. Sorry if I interrupted, I can come back another time if you two are busy.”

“I was just heading out actually.

Kyle, I'll call you tomorrow and bring my stuff over, if that's cool with you.”

He grabbed one of his spare keys from the hook by the door and handed it to Cooper. “No need to call. That key works on both doors. If I'm not here, just let yourself in.”

“Thanks. Have a good night.” Coop headed out the back, and as the door closed behind him Kyle reluctantly turned to face Lindsay.

“Do you want something to drink?” Lindsay shook her head as she looked around his living room. This was the first time she had been to his house and he knew it was a wreck.

“Don't mind the mess, I wasn't expecting company.” There was no

question that he needed to clean up. His place screamed bachelor pad. Her only response was a whispered ‘it’s fine’. For someone that needed to talk she wasn’t saying much, and Kyle couldn’t take the suspense any longer.

“So...what did you want to talk to me about?” At first he didn’t think she heard him, but when she moved to the couch and motioned for him to sit too he realized she had.

“We need to talk about why you left the bar earlier.”

“If you’re here to tell me what an ass I am, you can save it; I already know that.”

“I’m not mad. I understand why you did.”

“You do?” This was not the direction her saw this conversation going.

“Yes, I told you I would try to trust you and then I completely shut you out. I’m sorry.”

“I thought I could handle not knowing, but it turns out I was fooling myself. When I see you upset I want to help, but when you won’t let me in it makes it difficult.”

She raised her eyes and he was once again reminded just how beautiful she really was. “That’s why I’m here. Stella made me realize that if I want this to work that I need to trust you and open up.”

“So you’re not here to break up with

me?” She gave him a sad smile.

“I thought you leaving earlier meant you were done with me.” Now he felt like an even bigger ass. He never wanted Lindsay to have this look of sadness on her face, so he picked up her hand and kissed the tips of her fingers.

“Leaving was selfish of me, I’m sorry I made you feel like that.”

“You have nothing to apologize for.” Her free hand came up to caress his cheek. “I came over because I’m ready to tell you what you want to know.”

“I don’t want you to do this because you feel pressured.” Lindsay kept her hand where it was and looked him straight in the eye.

“I don’t. I’m doing this because I

want you to know.” The conviction behind her words was all the reassurance he needed.

“If you’re sure, then I’m ready to hear it.” Her hand slid from his face and he immediately missed the warmth. She removed her other hand from his and pushed off the couch to stand. “Where are you going?”

“I might as well stand now because once I start, I won’t be able to sit still.” This was her story to tell, so he sat back and shut his mouth; and waited for her to begin. He could tell she was nervous to start, but thankfully she did.

“Imagine this...a young twenty-one year old woman who has recently lost both of her parents, stopped going to

college, and completely withdrew from life. She finally starts to get her life back and meets the towns golden boy at a party.

“He calls all the time, visits as much as possible when he’s on leave from the fire academy, and says he loves her. This lost girl thinks she’s found her prince charming and someone to replace the love she lost.

“However, this prince turned out to be more of a dragon in disguise. He moved home and started controlling every part of her life. At first it was just name calling and put downs, but turned to hitting, punching and kicking not long after.”

Kyle listened as Lindsay told the

story as if it was someone else's life. Some messed up fairy tale that he knew didn't have a happy ending. He wanted her to stop, but she was so lost in the memories she probably wouldn't hear him.

“That went on for almost three years. By that time, she had become distant from her friends and everyone around town knew what was happening. A week before her twenty-fourth birthday, she found out she was pregnant.”

Lindsay paused and locked her eyes with Kyle; he could see the tears forming and wanted to wipe them away. The lack of child in her life now made Kyle force down the bile that was trying to rise in

his throat.

“Lindsay you don’t have to do this, I can fill in the blanks. You really don’t have to put yourself through this.”

She shook her head and continued. “Of course he blamed her and said she did it on purpose; that she just wanted his money. He didn’t hit that day, but instead left and came back a short time later with a teddy bear and said he was happy.

“For two months everything was great. Things were how a relationship should be. Until they went to the annual ice cream social and he saw her talking to another guy. He convinced himself that a simple conversation between friends meant they were sleeping

together.

A cold chill rocketed through Kyle's body. He could only imagine the kind of reaction a person like that would have to seeing his girlfriend talking to someone else.

“They left immediately. When they got home, he proceeded to beat her so severely she had a broken arm, broken ribs, fractured skull, and lost her baby when he stabbed her in the stomach and pushed her down the stairs.”

Kyle refused to stay sitting down any longer. He pulled Lindsay into his arms and never wanted to let her go. How could someone treat another person so horribly? Someone they supposedly loved and was the mother of their child.

Kyle felt something on his cheek and when he lifted a hand to see what it was, he realized he was crying. Lindsay leaned back and looked up at him.

“I don’t like this story” was the only thing he could think to say.

“I’m afraid it gets worse before it gets better.”

“Before you continue, can we sit down?” She gave him a kiss on the cheek and walked back toward the couch. He sat down first and pulled her onto his lap. “I want you with me.”

Lindsay didn’t try to get up, but did move so she was more comfortable. After finding a position that worked for them both, Lindsay picked up the story where she left off.

“He left me at the bottom of the stairs unconscious and bleeding, and after placing the knife next to my body he fled the scene. Luckily, my friend Jessie came by to check on me a short time later and found me. I was in a coma for almost a month.”

“Did you remember what happened when you woke up?” Kyle could feel the tension in her body.

“Yes, to this day I can still remember it in vivid detail.”

“What happened when you woke up?”

“They found him that night at his parents. He was questioned and arrested, but they only charged him with aggravated assault. He told them I had

the knife and they weren't able to prove otherwise. He was in jail the whole time I was in the hospital, but eventually got let out on bail and came after me again.

“I was at Jessie's when it happened. She called the cops, and when they showed up it scared him off before he could get to me. They searched the area, but never found him. That's when I decided to pack up and leave town.”

“Where did you go?”

“A couple different places; I would start feeling like someone was watching me and move on. When I reached Chicago a year and a half later, I finally felt safe enough to stay.” Kyle sat in awe of the remarkable woman that was on his lap.

“I’m glad you did.”

Lindsay smiled. “Me too. I hope you can understand now why you of all people freaked me out. I haven’t had the best experience with firemen before.”

The fury raging inside of Kyle was making it hard for him to think straight, but he got some words out. “We will disagree, we will argue, but don’t think for one second I will raise a hand to you.”

She laid her head on his shoulder. “I know that. I don’t know how, but I do.”

“Good.” Kyle placed a kiss to her forehead. “So you have all those gadgets I saw for safety?”

She nodded. “Heavy duty locks for the windows and doors, and a special

alarm. If he somehow finds me I don't want to be caught off guard.”

Thinking about the danger she could still be in made it hard for Kyle to catch his breath. “Am I squashing you?”

“What?”

“You're breathing really hard.”

Kyle took a second and got himself back in control before responding.

“No, you're not. I was just thinking about everything. Does anyone from your past know where you are?”

“My friend Jessie knows the city, but not an exact location. We communicate through a P.O. Box I rent. I check it once a week, waiting to hear if there are any updates; there aren't.”

“How can someone just disappear

like that?” Kyle had enough experience around crime to know you needed money, and lots of it to stay hidden.

“The police have no way to prove it, but they think his parents are getting him money somehow.”

“How could they do that after what he did to you?” Kyle wanted to go to wherever these people were and tie them to a chair until they told him where their son was.

“They have money and never liked me. When the police arrested Mitch, that’s his name by the way, his parents refused to believe he did it. They were the ones to bail him out and then when he tried to come after me, they said I was making the whole thing up.”

These people needed a reality check. “So you still think he’s after you?”

Lindsay sat up and the certainty in her eyes froze Kyle in place. “He swore I wouldn’t leave him unless it was in a body bag, and I believe him.”

“I won’t let that happen, I promise.” He kissed her softly on the lips to prove he meant it.

“You can’t make that kind of promise. No one can.”

“I couldn’t imagine my life without you in it, and I don’t even want to. When I promise something I mean it, so please trust me to do what I say.” Kyle didn’t know when it happened, but he had fallen fast and hard for Lindsay and he

would not give her up.

She didn't say anymore and Kyle was happy story time was over. The TV was still on ESPN, but neither one of them was watching it. A little while later a yawn escaped Lindsay, and Kyle laughed.

“Bored of me already?” Lindsay lowered her head shyly.

“I was up early this morning. I was so excited that I was going to see you tonight, I couldn't sleep; it's catching up to me now.”

“That may be the sweetest thing anyone's ever said to me.” She blushed and Kyle snuggled her closer to his chest. “Do you want me to drive you home so you can get some sleep?”

He would much rather take her to his bed, even if it was just to sleep, but after everything that had happened he didn't want it to seem like he was taking advantage of the situation.

So when Lindsay sat up and gave him a mischievous grin, he was surprised. "You don't want me to stay with you?"

"What? Of course I do, but I didn't think you would want..." He shut his mouth before he could talk her out of staying. Instead he stood up with Lindsay in his arms, and speed walked to his bedroom; Lindsay cracking up the whole way.

When they reached his bed, Kyle let go of Lindsay's legs. He still held onto

her upper body as she slid down his large frame. The movement brought to life parts of Kyle's body that had no business getting excited right now.

When her feet touched the floor, Lindsay didn't waste any time. She took her shoes and socks off and climbed into the bed. The sight of her lying in his bed did little to ease the hard on growing in his pants.

"Do you have an extra pair of sleep shorts I could wear? Sleeping in jeans doesn't sound very fun." She was trying to kill him. Just knowing her naked skin would be touching his clothes made him groan.

"Or not"

"Sorry, you are just making it very

difficult to do the right thing.” She had the nerve to smile.

“And what is the right thing?” Did she know that everything out of her mouth sounded seductive right now? Needing to do anything but look at her in bed, Kyle opened his bottom drawer and found his smallest pair of sleep shorts. After he found another pair for himself, Kyle tossed hers on the bed.

“I’ll go lock up the house and turn out the lights while you change.” Her hand reached for the button on her jeans, and Kyle made himself leave the room.

He double checked all the locks, and after a visit to the bathroom to change his clothes, Kyle went back to his room. Lindsay was already under the

covers when he came in.

“Do you need to get up for anything?” She shook her head no and he turned out the light. He climbed into bed, but stayed as close to the edge as possible. One touch of her body and he would be a goner.

“Kyle?” Lindsay’s voice was laced with amusement.

“Yeah”

“Relax” Easy for her to say.

“I’m trying, but I’ve never slept in the same bed with someone I really like just to sleep.” Kyle wanted to crawl into a hole and die. “I can’t believe I just told you that?”

Lindsay didn’t say anything, but her hand crept up his side and started to

move across his stomach. “That’s not going to help me relax.”

She continued the movement as if he hadn’t said a word; not stopping until she was cuddled up along his side; her arm now holding onto him like she couldn’t get close enough. Kyle rolled to his side and wrapped both of his arms around her.

“I’m glad I came over. Thank you for listening and not freaking out.”

“It wasn’t easy, but I’m glad you told me everything.” Another yawn escaped her, and Kyle’s body finally got the message and settled down. “Sleep now, sweetheart. I’ve got you!”

Kyle kissed the top of her head and stayed awake until Lindsay was fast

asleep. As his eyes drifted shut, Kyle knew he had never been this happy or scared in his whole life. But with Lindsay in his arms, he felt like he could defeat anything that was thrown their way.

Chapter 14

Her soft lush lips and wicked tongue were working their way across his chest. He let out a moan when she bite his nipple and then soothed the abused flesh with her tongue. Lindsay gave his other nipple the same treatment before moving lower to start her delicious torture of his stomach.

This was not the first erotic dream Kyle had had that involved Lindsay, but it was the most realistic of them all. The pressure in his balls was building fast and Kyle needed relief. He had just gripped his hard shaft, and gave it one long stroke, when his hand was smacked

and pulled away.

“I’m getting there.” That got his attention. He had never had a dream where he didn’t allow himself to be taken care of. Peeling one eye open, Kyle looked down towards his stomach and saw Lindsay peering up at him.

“Am I dreaming?” When she chuckled softly against his stomach, he felt the vibrations all the way through his over sensitized body; he had to be hallucinating.

“Depends?” The innocent sound of her words made both eyes open this time.

“On what?”

“Do you like it?”

“Hell yes, I like it!” Lindsay’s eyes

brightened even more than usual.

“Then you’re not dreaming.” And to prove her point, she moved further down his body. She was nestled between his spread thighs, and he was wondering when his shorts had been taken off. Kyle watched Lindsay place kisses on each hip and just below his navel, never touching or coming close to his aching cock.

One of her hands was rubbing slowly up his inner thigh, and just as it got close to where he needed it to be Lindsay would start moving it back down his leg.

Not wanting to do anything that may stop this incredible torture, but not being able to stand it any longer, Kyle

groaned. “You’re killing me here.”

“What do you want?”

“Is that a trick question?” Her laughter was infectious. He looked down again and she smiled, but didn’t answer.

Instead her hand finally wrapped around his shaft, and that one touch sent his hips jerking off the bed. As if that was the invitation she had been waiting for, Lindsay wrapped her mouth around the head and sucked.

“Ohhhhh...” Kyle had never been so close to the edge from such a simple action. She bobbed up and down, taking more and more of him on each downward stroke. When he felt the soft cushion of the back of her throat, Kyle thought he had died and gone to heaven.

Lindsay swallowed to take more of him and Kyle started reciting fire codes in his head to keep from coming.

“How do you do that?” The suction she applied before she pulled off was like nothing he had ever felt before.

“Is that your way of saying you like it?” The little vixen grinned and when he was about to answer, she wrapped both hands around his cock and moved them in opposite directions. Every nerve ending in his cock was alert, and his body didn't know what to do. Just as a moan slipped passed his lips, Lindsay lowered her mouth back over him.

Two flicks of her tongue later and he was a goner. “Lindsay...I'm gonna... too much...” The hand that was resting

on his thigh gave him a squeeze that he hoped meant she was okay with him coming in her mouth.

Before he could ask for sure, his cock was going further than before. Kyle threw his head back and thrust his hips up. He came with such force that he was sure he would be out of commission for at least a week.

Small twitches were all that remained as Lindsay licked around the head one more time; getting every last drop he had spilled. “I forgot how much I like doing that.”

He could have sworn his dick would be useless, but her words had it trying to come back to life. “You are going to be the death of me if you keep

saying things like that.”

She fluttered her eyelashes. “Why’s that?”

“Don’t play innocent. I just came harder than ever, and your little confession made my dick try to make another appearance.” Her eyes widened as she looked down at his now softened member.

“Seriously?” She sounded almost hopeful.

“Don’t get any ideas.” Lindsay crawled up the bed and laid out next to him. She was still wearing his shorts and her shirt from yesterday, but he could tell she had taken her bra off at some point.

As she was lying on her back, her

hard nipples were like beacons calling for his attention. He could finally move after his orgasm and wanted nothing more than to repay the favor.

Shifting from his back, Kyle propped himself up on his elbow. His other hand moved to her right knee and started to disappear up the leg of the shorts.

“What are you doing?” Lindsay didn’t sound upset, just curious.

“If you have to ask, I’ve clearly lost my touch.” He resumed the upward trek of his hand, and when his fingertips grazed a thin scrap of damp silk Kyle’s dick gave another twitch.

“You don’t have to. I did what I did because I wanted to, not to get something

out of it.” A full body blush had taken over her body as she tried to wiggle away, but he left his hand where it was.

“First of all, I didn’t think you did it because you expected something” He moved his fingers higher and swept one over her silk covered nub, and Lindsay rolled her hips up to meet his finger.

“Second of all, bringing you to orgasm is something I’ve dreamed about doing for years. Believe me, it’s not a hardship. Now lie back and let me.” She opened her mouth like she was going to say something, but closed it and did as he asked. With one more swipe of his finger over the silk, he removed his hand from the shorts.

“Lift up for me.” Her legs were stiff

as a board, and she made no move to lift her hips.

“Lindsay, will you look at me please?” A few seconds passed, but thankfully she did. “I need you to talk to me. What’s going through that pretty head of yours?”

“I...I don’t know. This is all so new to me. I’m not used to being, uh... satisfied. I don’t even know if it’s possible.” Of all the things she could have said, this wasn’t one he expected.

“Is that some sort of challenge?” Lindsay grabbed his pillow and threw it at him. It made contact with the top of his head and started tickling her sides.

“You forget I know your weakness.” She thrashed on the bed from side to

side as he tickled her until she was gasping for air. They were both sprawled out on the bed panting by the time he stopped.

“You play dirty.”

“Make sure you remember that.”

Kyle pushed his upper body up and watched Lindsay catch her breath. When he was sure she had it, he became more serious. “I really do want to know what you’re thinking. If you need me to back off, I will.”

She stared at him like she was trying to figure out what planet he came from. “Why would I want you to stop? I was just letting you know ahead of time so if I don’t, uh...”

“Come.” Lindsay narrowed her eyes

at him. Kyle couldn't help himself, she sounded so cute trying to say the word.

“Yes. You won't think it's your fault.” Now it really was a challenge that had been thrown down in his mind.

Kyle bent his head to capture her lips in a very aggressive kiss. She opened for him immediately and he didn't waste any time as he slipped his tongue inside.

With their mouths fused together, Kyle took the opportunity to let his hand slip into the front of her shorts and panties. He had yet to find out what made her tick, what would make her moan or better yet, scream his name.

As he thrust his tongue into her mouth again, Kyle grazed his finger over

her clit. Lindsay moaned deeply and he swallowed it down; feeling it in his body like he was the one being touched.

She tore her mouth from his when he applied more pressure this time.

“That’s...wow!”

No longer able to do both, Kyle gave her a quick peck and moved down her body. The bright morning sun was coming through his window and he wanted to see her petite body, in all its naked glory, bathed in sunlight.

His free hand traced the top of her waist band and he looked to her for permission. She nodded and he didn’t waste any more time; he pulled the shorts and her panties off in one fell swoop.

After tossing both items on the floor, Kyle's focus turned to the pink swollen lips in front of him. He could see her desire for him and sure enough his dick was hard again.

“Kyle...please.”

“Tell me you want this as much as I do.”

“Yes, I want you...now.”

“As you wish sweetheart” Kyle bent down between her spread thighs and settled her legs over his shoulders. She was perfectly spread open and he didn't wait any longer. The first lick of his tongue between her folds made them both moan.

“Ohhhh...do that again.” He barely held in his amusement. Lindsay was

bossy in bed, but he did as she asked and this time he pressed the flat of his tongue to her clit. He applied just enough pressure to drive her to the edge, but not go over. Not wanting it to be over just yet, Kyle started kissing his way up her body.

“What are you doing?” Lindsay sounded like she may cry if he didn’t let her come soon.

“Exploring, just relax. I haven’t got to feel your incredible body yet and it’s been driving me crazy.” She groaned, but didn’t put a stop to his explorations; that is until he tried to take her shirt off.

“Don’t.” That one word held so much pain that Kyle stopped immediately. He looked to her

questioningly, but she had closed her eyes. He knew they would have to talk about this at some point, but he didn't want it to be right now and continued up her still covered body; her shirt left untouched.

Lindsay's body relaxed once again as he neared her breasts. They may have been covered, but the hard peaks were begging to be touched. Kyle captured one nipple between his fingers and gave it a pinch, and Lindsay arched off the bed; so he did it again.

He lowered his mouth over the other one, and even through the cotton, Kyle could feel the bud get harder.

"Yes." The word came out as a gasp, and after a few more rolls and

sucks on her sensitive peaks, he couldn't take it anymore. Planting kisses along her neck, jaw and finally her mouth, Kyle rested his hand once again on her extremely wet pussy. This time he rested his thumb over her clit and slid his middle finger into her channel.

She didn't say anything, but thrust up to meet his finger. Her kiss swollen lips called to him and he couldn't resist. Kyle sucked her bottom lip into his mouth and gave it a bite.

Lindsay was still arching up into his finger and he was done playing with her. Resting on his left elbow, he started moving the thumb on her clit in small circles and moving his finger in and out of her pussy.

“Yes, yes, right there. Shit!”

“Let go Lindsay. Let me hear you.”

A cry came from her lips, and Kyle had never seen anything more erotic. Lindsay had her head thrown back, and was now riding the wave of a powerful orgasm. Her eyes were still closed, and her breathing labored, when he slipped his finger from her clenching channel. The smile that lifted her lips was one of contentment.

“That was amazing.” She opened her eyes and he knew he would never want anyone else, but telling her that would probably freak her out so he kept it to himself.

“How do you feel?”

“Like all of my energy was zapped

from my body, but in the best possible way.” Lindsay’s gaze was roaming over his naked body and when her eyes saw his erection, she raised an eyebrow at him.

“I just witnessed the sexiest woman in the world come. My dick couldn’t help itself.”

“Well, we will just have to do something about that, now won’t we?”

“I don’t think we should.” Lindsay tried to scoot away, but Kyle stopped her. He wished he hadn’t been the one to put the look of rejection on her face, but he wanted her to understand why.

“It’s not because I don’t want you. I would love nothing more than to sink deep inside you.” She was staring at him

now, and the confusion was clear. “But this was the first time you’ve done anything in a long time. I just don’t want to move too fast and have you regret it later.”

“But you...”

“Will be fine. It may take a cold shower, but I’m okay with that as long as I know you are okay.” She turned her head away and ran the back of her hand over first one eye and then the other. When she looked at him again, his heart stopped. The emotions he saw in her eyes mirrored his own.

“Thank you for thinking of me.”

“You’re welcome.” He placed a kiss on her cheek and got off the bed. Finding his shorts and putting them on,

Kyle said. "I'm going to take a shower, but when I'm done we could go get some breakfast. There's a great café down the street."

"That sounds perfect." He was just getting some clean clothes from his dresser when he heard his cell phone ringing. The phone was sitting on the bedside table, so Lindsay tossed it to him.

"Brady here"

"You don't sound like you were asleep for once." His dad's voice held surprise

"Hi dad, no I wasn't sleeping."

"I have some good news for you; the votes came in last night. Congratulations Lieutenant Brady!" Kyle had to sit down.

He knew it was a strong possibility, but hearing Lieutenant before his name made it all real.

“Are you serious? I’m speechless.”
His dad laughed.

“That’s a first.” The bed dipped behind him and Lindsay swung her legs over the side to sit next to him.

“Is everything okay?” she whispered. Kyle wrapped the arm not holding the phone around her shoulder and pulled her into him. After shaking his head yes, he went back to the conversation with his dad.

“So what now?”
“The department banquet is next Saturday. They will make the announcement then and swear you in.”

His dad paused. "I'm very proud of you, Kyle." He told himself he would not cry, but his dad saying he was proud of him almost had him doing just that.

"Thank you. Does mom know?"

"Yes, she cried like a baby. I would suspect you'll be getting a call from her shortly."

"Thanks for the heads up about mom, and for calling. Will you be at the station when I come in later?" His dad worked all the time, so it was kind of a dumb question.

"I'll be here and we can go over everything then. You get back to whoever I heard a minute ago and I'll see you then." Kyle chuckled as he glanced down to Lindsay at his side. She

cocked her head to the side and mouthed “what?”

“You’ll meet her Saturday. I’ll see you in a little while. Bye dad.” He hung up the phone and threw it back on the side table.

“Who am I meeting Saturday?”

“My parents” Lindsay flew off the bed and put her hands on her hips like she always did when she got mad.

“Did you even think to ask me first before just saying I would? What if I have plans, or I don’t want to meet your parents?” He really didn’t see what the big deal was, but if it made her feel better he would explain.

“That was my dad. I got the Lieutenant promotion. They are having a

banquet Saturday and I will be sworn in then. My parents will be there, and I was hoping you would be my date.” Lindsay jumped into his arms and it knocked them back onto the bed.

“Congratulations, I’m so happy for you. Of course I’ll go, that is if you still want me to after how I just acted.”

“I wouldn’t miss the chance to show you off. I will be the envy of the squad.” She gave him a playful slap and sat up.

“You’re just full of compliments today.” He sat up too and linked their hands together.

“They are well deserved.” He kissed her hand and stood. “Now, I am ready to celebrate with my beautiful girlfriend so let’s get dressed and get

some food.”

“Girlfriend?” Every cell in Kyle’s body froze.

“Oh, I guess I just assumed after last night and this morning...” Lindsay walked toward the door and winked at him over her shoulder.

“Kyle, I was kidding. I just wanted to make you sweat for a minute.” She took off running down the hall and he went after her. He caught her just as she tried to round the recliner.

“That was a cruel joke.”

“But it was funny; you should have seen the look on your face.” Kyle walked towards the wall and Lindsay wrapped her legs around his waist. When her back was resting against the

wall, he held her there and stared into her eyes.

“All kidding aside, I do want you with me next Saturday; and I want you there as my girlfriend. There hasn’t been anyone else in months, and I don’t want there to be anyone else; just you.”

She lifted her hand and traced it down his cheek. “I would be honored to go with you. There is no one else for me either, but I think you already know that.”

Kyle exhaled and pinned Lindsay against the wall with his body. “Good.”

No more was said as they lost themselves in the passion of the moment. Breakfast was forgotten, and they even missed lunch. When Kyle walked into

the fire house hours later he was hungry and tired, but happier than he had ever been in his life.

Chapter 15

“So what exactly are you looking for, a dress?” Lindsay scanned the area behind her again, but saw no one that stuck out or that had been there before. She realized Vicki had asked her something, so she turned back around.

“What?”

“Are you okay? You’ve been checking over your shoulder a lot.” She didn’t know how to explain it, she just felt like someone was watching her.

“It’s nothing; probably just my nerves about meeting Kyle’s parent’s tomorrow night making me paranoid.” Vicki didn’t look convinced.

“Are you sure? We can go home if you want, and I can have my assistant pick something up and bring it to you.”

“No, we are already down here. Really, I’m just not used to being in such a crowded place.” When she called Vicki to help her pick out something to wear, Vicki insisted they head downtown to Michigan Avenue. It was six o’clock on a Friday night, and the sidewalks were filled with people.

“Alright, but if you still feel like this in an hour we are leaving.” Lindsay agreed and started looking in the different windows.

“Let’s go into this shop over here. They have some cute cocktail dresses in the window.” Vicki wound her arm with

Lindsay's as they made their way through the crowd. They entered the small boutique and were greeted by a larger than life sales woman.

“Welcome to Sophie's! I'm Kiki, how can I help you?”

“I need a dress for tomorrow night; nothing too fancy.” Kyle told her it was a fundraising banquet that the department did every few years. He said it was kind of formal, but not over the top.

“We have everything from ball gowns to cocktail dresses. Look around and let me know when you find something you want to try, and we will start a dressing room for you.” She thanked Kiki and walked further into the shop. Lindsay was on her third rack of

dresses when Vicki held one up.

“This is the perfect dress for you.” In Vicki’s hand was a simple black dress; it had tiny straps and would probably hit Lindsay about two inches above the knee. The sash around the middle was tied into a bow in the back and Lindsay fell in love.

“That is gorgeous. Let’s find Kiki so I can try it on and make sure it’s not too short. Do they have shoes too?” Vicki pointed to a spot in the back, and she could see a small area with a variety of heels.

They found Kiki and were led to a room with three dressing areas, and a full length mirror off to the side. Kiki placed her dress in one of the rooms and

left them alone.

“While you change, I’m going to see what heels I can find for you.”

“The higher the better; Kyle is a foot taller than me, after all. I feel like we are a side show at the circus sometimes.”

“You guys are adorable together, but I promise to get the skyscraper kind of heels.” Lindsay laughed and headed into the dressing room. She removed her clothes and slipped into the soft satin dress. With her shorter hair, Lindsay was a lot more aware of her chest and shoulders.

Before she could hide herself with her long hair, but now there was no hiding. She turned from side to side, but

the small mirror in the dressing room wasn't giving her a good idea of how it looked.

“Do you have it on?” Vicki yelled from the other side of the door.

“Yes, did you find shoes?”

“Oh my God, yes. I'm glad we wear the same size because I will be borrowing these if you get them. If not, I'm buying them anyway.” Vicki's obsession with shoes was known by all. It was probably a good thing she made such a good living because her shoe budget had to be outrageous. Lindsay stepped out of the dressing room and headed to the large full length mirror.

“You look so cute, and these are going to make it all pop.” Vicki handed

her a pair of dark teal high heels that were at least four inches tall.

“I really like that color.” She put the shoes on the floor and put stepped into them. Standing in front of the mirror, Lindsay stared at her reflection. The dress and heels were simple, yet she had never felt more elegant. She turned in a circle, looking at herself from all angles.

“I don’t know why, but the bow in the back is my favorite.”

“It’s very you, and Kyle will probably like where it’s placed.” Vicki wiggled her eyebrows. The bow rested on the small of her back, just above her butt.

“Speaking of Kyle, how did your talk go the other night? Did you end up

telling him?” Lindsay looked around to make sure they couldn’t be overheard. When she was sure they were alone, she told Vicki about everything that had happened.

“Let me get this straight, the same person that used to sleep his way through half of Chicago turned down sex.”

Kyle’s past conquests were not something Lindsay wanted to think about right now.

“Don’t remind me. Don’t get me wrong everything we did was unbelievable, but I thought I would be the one to put the brakes on things; not the other way around.”

Vicki came up behind her and lifted her arms out to the side. “Well if you are

sure you're ready for more, this outfit should do the trick. And if he tries to be the hero, tie him to the bed and have your way with him.”

Lindsay dropped her arms and burst out laughing. “Only you would suggest something like that.”

“That’s what I’m here for.” Lindsay was shaking her head as she went back into dressing room to change. When she hung the dress back on the hanger, it was the first time she saw the price tag. Blinking a couple times to make sure she read it right, Lindsay wanted to stomp in frustration.

“Vicki.”

“What?”

“How much are the shoes?”

“I don’t know I forgot to check. Why?” Lindsay couldn’t afford the dress, so she didn’t know why she wanted to know how much the shoes were.

“The dress is eight hundred dollars, there’s no way I can buy it. So it looks like the shoes are yours because they are probably way outside my budget too.”

Vicki didn’t answer her, but she could hear her whispering to someone on the other side of the door. Lindsay finished changing and walked out holding the dress and shoes. She was going to put them back when Kiki came and took them both from her.

“Thank you, but I think we need to keep shopping.” Kiki shared a look with

Vicki and exited the room. “Where do you think we should go next?”

Vicki nodded toward the front of the store. “The check-out counter.”

“For what?”

“So I can buy your outfit.” Lindsay started to argue, but Vicki was Vicki and cut her off. “Don’t get all worked up, I want to do it and I can. You were practically glowing standing in front of that mirror and it will make me feel good to buy it.”

“I’m paying you back.”

“Have sex the night you wear it and that will be payment enough. Someone other than Stella should be having hot and steamy sex.” They got to the counter and Vicki handed her credit card to Kiki.

“You are stunning, Victoria. There are tons of guys that would be glad to take you out. Nowhere is it written that you have to be in a relationship to have sex.” Vicki scoffed like that was absurd.

“My last date checked out every woman that passed our table. Are you suggesting I should have slept with him?” Kiki slid a receipt in front of Victoria and she signed it. Lindsay picked up the bags, said thank you and they walked outside.

“No I’m not suggesting you sleep with someone like that. I’m saying if you meet someone that you’re attracted, but isn’t relationship material, just have a fling.” They were walking back to Vicki’s car, and that uneasy feeling was

creeping up Lindsay's spine again. She didn't want to alarm her friend, so she tried to shrug it off.

Lindsay opened the back door of the car and put her bags in, and then got in the passenger seat; Vicki started the car and pulled into traffic.

“Do you really think it's that simple?”

“What, a fling?” she nodded and Lindsay thought about it.

“As long as both people go into it knowing that that's all it will be, I don't see why not.” Vicki didn't say anything more on the ride back to Spring Towers, and Lindsay was too busy thinking about what she had felt while they were shopping to care.

After thanking Victoria once again and grabbing her bags, Lindsay went straight to her apartment and locked the door. She checked all of her windows and the alarm, but nothing was out of the ordinary.

Deciding it was all in her head; Lindsay thought a bath may help calm her frazzled nerves. She was getting ready to step into the tub when her cell phone rang. She thought about letting it go to voicemail, but seeing who it was made her answer.

“Do you have radar?”

“Um what radar?” Amusement and confusion was in Kyle’s tone.

“The ‘Lindsay is naked’ radar” He started choking on the other end of the

line.

“Damn, give a guy some warning next time. Why are you naked, and why did you have to tell me? Now I’m going to have to fight off a hard on while I’m working.”

“I was just getting in the tub when you called. You might not want to be hard working around a bunch of men, unless you really want to make a few of them wonder about you.” Lindsay walked back to the bath tub and sank into the warm water.

“Very funny. By the way, I can hear the water moving around. That’s cruel on so many levels.”

“It’s a big tub, want to come join me?” Kyle growled and whispered a

few choice words.

“And you say I play dirty? You may have me beat, torturing me like this when you know I can’t leave.”

“Guess we can try it out tomorrow night.” The possibilities were already running through Lindsay’s mind of all the things they could do in the shower and the bathtub.

“Are you drunk?” Lindsay threw her head back and laughed.

“No why?”

“I’ve never heard you so, I don’t know, seductive before.” She had never tried to be before, and Lindsay was glad it was working. Tomorrow night she wanted Kyle to stop treating her with kid gloves and take her like she wanted to

be taken.

“You just have that effect on me.”

“I’m glad.” Kyle cleared his throat. “How did shopping go? Did you find something to wear tomorrow?” Lindsay wanted to continue their sexy banter, but went with the change of subject.

“Yeah, I found a cute black dress and teal heels. Well, actually Vicki bought them because she’s a pain in the ass that wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

“That’s what you get for taking her with you.” Kyle knew how Vicki was with her friends and family. “Did you have fun at least?”

“We did, except...” Damn it, Lindsay smacked her forehead. She hadn’t planned on telling Kyle about the

feeling she got when they were out. She didn't want him to worry or jump to conclusions; maybe he didn't hear her?

“Except what?” Shit, might as well tell him now.

“It's probably nothing. We were walking downtown and I got the feeling that someone was following me. It was probably because it was so crowded where we were and I wasn't used to it.”

“Did you check all of your stuff at your apartment? Was anything moved or set off?” This is exactly why she didn't want to tell him. Kyle sounded panicked and worked up all over a feeling.

“Yes, I wouldn't be talking to you right now if anything was; calm down. I shouldn't have said anything, it was a

silly feeling.” She heard Kyle blow out a frustrated breath.

“I promised nothing would happen to you and I meant it. So when you tell me something like that, I can’t stay calm cool and collected.”

“I appreciate your concern, but you can’t do this to yourself all the time. Believe me, living like a paranoid mess isn’t fun.”

“I will dial it back, but you have to promise to tell me if this happens again. You could come stay with Cooper and me if it gets worse.” Lindsay wanted to scream.

“I am not moving in with you, Kyle.”

“I can come there if you feel more

comfortable staying at your place.” That was the last straw. Lindsay sat up in the tub so fast water splashed over the sides.

“Listen to me, Kyle Brady. I have been dealing with all of this by myself for four years. I am not a child that needs taken care of or someone that will be told what to do. So until you can stop this overreacting bullshit, don’t call me.”

Lindsay hit the end key so hard she almost dropped the phone in the water. She grabbed a towel and quickly dried off; so much for a relaxing bath.

Her phone started ringing again, but she didn’t answer. Kyle could wallow in his own stupidity for a while. She found

her robe on the back of her bedroom door and pulled it on.

A knock on her front door made Lindsay freeze. She wasn't expecting anyone, and after what happened earlier Lindsay wasn't taking any chances. She opened her top drawer and grabbed her gun. Another series of knocks and Lindsay took the safety off as she walked down the hallway.

“Lindsay, I know your home.” It was almost nine o'clock, what was Stella doing here? She engaged the safety once again, and went to open the door.

“I was in the bathroom, what's up?” Stella's eyes were instantly drawn to the gun still clutched in her hand.

“Sorry, let me go put this up. Come on in, I’ll be right back.” After placing the gun back in the drawer, Lindsay put on a pair of underwear under her robe. Stella was sitting in the chair when she got back to the living room.

“Why did you have a gun?” Lindsay sat down on the couch and shrugged.

“Protection”

“Do you do that every time someone knocks?”

“No...” Lindsay told Stella about earlier and even about her phone call with Kyle. “So you should probably be expecting a call too. He keeps trying to call back, but I haven’t answered.”

Stella leaned back in the chair. “I don’t plan on going home, so I won’t

have to worry about it.” Lindsay raised an eyebrow.

“I can’t take it anymore. Alex has been a complete basket case since we found out I was pregnant. I swear if he tries to help me up from a chair, or refuses to have sex because he doesn’t want the baby to see his penis one more time, this will be our only child because I will cut his balls off.”

“It can’t be that bad.” Alex had been overprotective, but Lindsay thought it was sweet.

“Not that bad?” Stella practically shrieked. “He refused to let me order *Chop Sticks* earlier because he thought it would harm the baby.” Lindsay winced. No one should ever come between Stella

and her favorite Chinese place; especially when she's pregnant.

“As long as you stay away from sushi, it won't affect the baby.”

“I told him that, but he went off on some crazy cross contamination rant. This is going to be the longest six and a half months of my life if he keeps this up.”

“He loves you, he's just worried; cut him some slack.” Stella gave her a narrowed glare.

“Like Kyle is just worried about you? I don't see you cutting him any slack.” Touché, Lindsay raised her hands in a surrendering pose.

“Point taken, so where is he now?”

“At home; I didn't want to drive to

my dad's or Vicki's. I was hoping you would let me hang out here for a while." Lindsay grabbed the blanket off the back of the couch and patted the seat next to her.

"Come on, we will eat ice cream and watch some bad late night TV." Stella sat down and Lindsay went to get the ice cream and two spoons. She heard her phone ring again, but wasn't ready to answer just yet.

"It's been way too long since I watched TV at night; anything good on?" Lindsay took her seat and handed Stella a spoon.

"Not really, but there is usually decent movies on channel thirty-eight." She turned to thirty-eight and a sappy

chick flick was on.

“Ugh, of course it’s some stupid love story.” Lindsay normally loved chick flicks, but not tonight.

“Turn it to Spike, they show action movies.” Sure enough, *Die Hard with a Vengeance* was on and Stella bounced up and down like she had won the lottery. But as quickly as she started bouncing, Stella stopped and ran to the bathroom; the familiar sound of vomiting coming from the open door.

Lindsay remembered how suddenly morning sickness could creep up. She went to the kitchen and wet down a rag and took it to Stella, who was now leaning back against the bathtub.

“Here ya go.”

“Thanks, I really hope this part goes away soon. I hate throwing up.”

“It will. Hang in there, it will get better.” Lindsay had never made it past the morning sickness phase, but from everything she had read it did go away.

“I’m gonna sit here a little longer, just in case.” A knock on the door made Stella groan. “It’s probably Alex. If he sees me like this, he’ll call the doctor again.”

“Why would he call the doctor, it’s just morning sickness.” Stella gave her the ‘duh’ look.

“I know that and you know that, but Mr. Overprotection doesn’t understand that it’s normal. I’m going to have to switch doctors if he doesn’t calm down

soon.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I’ll shut the door while you see who it is, but if it’s Alex I am not talking to him.” Lindsay peeked through the peephole and confirmed it was Alex. Opening the door, she didn’t even let him start talking.

“Yes, Stella is here. No, she doesn’t want to talk to you right now, and I can’t say I blame her. If half the stuff she said is true, you’ve really gone off the deep end.” Alex’s shoulders were hunched forward and he looked like someone stole his laptop.

“I know I’ve been acting like a lunatic lately, but I feel so helpless. She throws up all the time and gets so tired

that she looks like she may pass out at any minute.” Lindsay moved to the side so he could come in.

“It’s all part of pregnancy. If something is really wrong, Stella will know it. Do you really think she would take a chance with the baby’s health or hers?” Alex lean his hip against the counter.

“No” He ran his hands down his face. “So on a scale from one to ten, how pissed is she?” Lindsay grinned at him.

“Let’s just say that if you don’t ease up, you’re going to be missing an important part of yourself.” She didn’t even have to tell him which part. Alex knew Stella well enough that he covered

his crotch instantly.

“I love her; I want her and the baby to be safe and healthy.” Lindsay walked over and gave Alex the hug he seemed to need.

“They will be.” The bathroom door opened and Lindsay and Alex turned to see Stella watching them. Alex went towards her, but stopped short. “Hi.”

“Hi”

“I’m sorry I’ve been such a pain in the ass. I promise to stop hovering and freaking out all the time.” Stella glanced at Lindsay and then back to Alex.

“I’m pregnant, not an invalid. I can do things on my own. There may be a time when I do need your help, and I promise I will tell you when that time

comes. But until then you have to give me space.”

Alex grabbed her hand kissed the back of it. “Ok. Will you come home now?”

Stella nodded and Alex scooped her up. “Damn it, I can walk on my own.”

“But we will get to the bed faster if I carry you.” Stella zipped an imaginary zipper over her lips and laughed as Alex all but sprinted to the door; waving at Lindsay as they left.

Stella’s laughter faded and Lindsay went to lock the door. It had been an emotional night and she just wanted to get some sleep. The lock had just clicked into place when there was another knock on the door.

“Who the hell is it now?” Lindsay murmured to herself. She looked through the peephole and jumped back.

“I can hear you, Lindsay? Will you please let me in so we can talk?” Kyle was supposed to be working until tomorrow morning. Why is he here?

She wanted to tell him no, but was curious as to why he was there. Opening the door once again, she made a sweeping motion with her arm to invite him in. He came in but stopped right inside the entry.

“What do you want to talk about?”

“I was worried about you.” Not this again.

“I told you that I don’t need...” The rest of her words were swallowed by

Kyle when he latched his mouth onto hers. A battle of tongues, teeth and lips ensued, and Lindsay forgot for a minute why she was mad.

When he pulled back, they were both a little dizzy. “When you wouldn’t answer your phone, I started to worry. After what you told me, all sorts of crazy thoughts ran through my mind. I had to make sure you were okay.”

“I’m sorry you worried, but I’m still upset with you.” There was no heat behind her words and he caressed her cheek.

“I know.” Too exhausted to talk anymore, she took Kyle’s hand and tugged him to her bedroom. She picked up a night shirt and put it on with her

back to him. He hadn't started to undress, and Lindsay tried not to laugh.

“I don't have anything that will fit you, so you can sleep in your boxers” She shook her finger at him. “but no funny business. I'm too tired and sleep is the only thing I want to do right now.”

Kyle stripped so fast, Lindsay thought he was going to fall over when he took his pants off. He dove on the bed, and once he was under the covers held his arms open for Lindsay.

She rolled her eyes, but gladly went to him. She backed up to his front, and Kyle closed his arms around her.

“Goodnight.”

Kyle kissed below her ear and whispered. “Goodnight, Red.”

Sleep pulled her under almost immediately.

Chapter 16

Kyle had fallen asleep for a few short hours, but since he was on a different sleeping pattern he woke up around four in the morning wide awake.

Lindsay was still curled up on her side, and all he could do was stare at this amazing woman. He was so deeply in love with her and she had no clue. She made a few pained faces, but it was when she started crying out for Mitch to stop that Kyle couldn't take anymore.

“Lindsay, wake up sweetheart.” He rolled her to her back and shook her until she opened her eyes. She looked from side to side and then fixed her eyes

back on him. “I’m here, you’re safe.”

Kyle wasn’t prepared for the flood of emotions he felt when her arms came around his neck and held him in a vice grip. “It’s okay. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

She loosened her grip on his neck, but didn’t pull away. Instead she found his lips with hers. It was such a sweet coming together, but when her tongue licked for entrance into his mouth, and Kyle let all of his emotions come roaring out.

They fell back onto the bed and he got lost in the taste and feel of her. Lindsay pushing down his boxers a few minutes later brought Kyle into the present. “Whoa, Lindsay we need to...”

Her mouth covered his once again, effectively cutting off his attempt to slow things down.

Kyle balled his fists in the bedding in an effort to control his body's reactions to Lindsay writhing beneath him. She started to push his boxers again, and this time he pulled away and sat back on his heels.

“Why did you stop?” Lindsay reached out for him, but he didn't let her touch him.

“This is not how I want our first time to be. I don't want it to be because you had a nightmare and are scared. When we make love I want it to be because you are ready.”

“I'm ready right now. I'm so ready

all it would take is the tip sliding in for me to come.” Lindsay threw her arms over her eyes and tried to hide. “I can’t believe I just said that.” Kyle gently pulled her arms away from her eyes.

“I’m glad you’re as turned on by me as I am by you, but rushing this could hurt more than it helps.” She had been staring at the ceiling, but now brought her gaze back to him.

“Can you stop being perfect, just for a little bit?” Kyle laughed.

“I’m far from perfect. It’s killing me not to make love to you right now.” Lindsay harrumphed and crossed her arms over her chest.

“So what now?” Kyle readjusted his boxers and moved up the bed. He sat

down with his back against the headboard and patted the spot next to him; Lindsay sat up and scooted over.

“Now we talk.”

“I’d rather have sex.” She was pouting and Kyle gave her bottom lip a tug.

“Soon, I promise. Why don’t we start with what your nightmare was about” Lindsay sighed.

“Same thing it always is. I’m back in the house and Mitch is attacking me.”

“It never changes?” She gave him a sad smile.

“It didn’t used to...but lately it has varied.”

“How so?”

“A tall dark haired man saves me.”

The reality of that confession sent chills through Kyle, and he pulled her closer.

“I wish I could have.” He bent down and gave her a brief kiss.

“Me too” She leaned her head against his shoulder and blew out a breath. “Now that you know what it was about, can we talk about something else?”

“One more thing” Lindsay’s exasperation was clear, but she told him to go ahead. “Why won’t you let me see you? Last week when I tried to take your shirt off, you stopped me and I wanted to know why.” The arms that had been crossed over her chest were now clutching her stomach.

“No one has seen my scar other than

me and the doctor that took my bandages off. I don't want you to be disgusted by me." Kyle gripped her chin between his thumb and forefinger and made her face him.

"A scar does not take away from your beauty, it only enhances it. You are a strong resilient woman and I am in awe of you." She tried to turn away but he wouldn't let her. A single tear hung from her eyelash, but it had yet to fall.

"I'm not strong; I live with fear every day. That fear still allows him the power to affect my life."

"But you made the decision to take your life back. You've come so far the last couple of months, and I feel incredibly honored that you gave me this

chance.” She snuggled into his side and sighed.

“I don’t know what I did to deserve you.”

“Ditto” They lay in bed a little while longer until Kyle’s stomach growled. Lindsay sat up and laughed.

“Come on, I’ll feed you.” Kyle got up and put his jeans on, but left his shirt off.

“I haven’t eaten since lunch at the station. I guess I didn’t realize how hungry I was until my stomach let its anger be known.”

“How were you able to leave early?” Lindsay was still in her night shirt and underwear as she walked down the hall towards the kitchen. He almost

ran into the back of her when she stopped because he had been watching her ass play peek-a-boo with the bottom of the long shirt.

“Sorry, what did you say?”

“You may have an unhealthy obsession with my ass.” Kyle only shrugged. Lindsay pointed to the bar stool and told him to sit. “Before my ass distracted you, I asked who let you leave early.”

“I called my dad and told him what was going on?” At Lindsay’s raised eyebrow, he shook his head. “No, not in detail, just that I needed to make sure you were okay. Luckily one of the other guys volunteered to stay over.”

Lindsay was fluttering from cabinet

to cabinet grabbing different things.

“That was nice of him. I know you shouldn’t have done it, but I’m glad you came over last night.”

“Me too” Lindsay fixed scrambled eggs, sausage and toast for breakfast, and they made small talk as they ate and discussed the plan for tonight. Kyle left a short time later; one errand and one errand only on his mind.

At five forty-five, he arrived back at Lindsay’s place. Kyle hated wearing his Dress Uniform and pulled at the collar again to loosen it around his neck. After a pat to the box in his pocket, he knocked.

Several seconds later, she opened

the door and Kyle had to reach his hand out to steady himself. Standing before him was a thing of beauty.

Lindsay was wearing a little black dress that fit her body like a glove. She didn't have the biggest breasts in the world, but what she did have was displayed tastefully yet so enticing that Kyle wanted to say screw the banquet and undress her here and now.

“Wow, you are stunning.” Pink tinted her cheeks as she reached out and adjusted the front of his jacket.

“You clean up pretty nice yourself. Are you ready to go?” Kyle shook his head and took a step toward her. Lindsay raised her hand and grabbed a small black purse off the hall table.

“Oh no you don’t, I didn’t get all done up just to have you ruin my hair and make-up before we even get there.” He tried again, but she shoved him out the door. Kyle stood on the walkway pouting as she locked up. Lindsay put her arm in his as they walked down the stairs.

“Don’t pout; we have all the time in the world for that later.”

“That dress and those heels are doing very bad things to my body. I’m glad most of the night involves sitting down.” She smacked his chest playfully.

“Your parents will be there, I’m sure you can behave yourself.”

“I’m not making any promises.”
When they reached his truck, he helped

her inside and shut the door. Every step he took made the small box hit his leg, and Kyle felt like it was burning a hole in his pocket. He still wasn't sure when he was going to give it to her, but he wanted it on hand just in case.

The drive to the conference room where the event was being held took ten minutes, and Lindsay seemed to get more anxious the closer they got.

“It’s just a fundraiser, don’t get so worked up. You look amazing, there’s nothing to worry about.”

“I’m meeting your parents, that is a big deal.” She really was neurotic sometimes in the sweetest possible way.

“Newsflash, you’ve already met my mom. Remember, at Alex and Stella’s

engagement party. Now you'll get to meet my dad too; they are looking forward to it." He could feel her palm sweating on the hand he was holding.

"I wasn't your girlfriend then." Kyle chuckled.

"If it would have been up to me or my mom, you would have been. My mom adores you and my dad will too." He pulled into the conference center parking lot and turned off the engine. Lindsay was staring at the center, and then glanced back at him.

"Let's get this over with."

"That's the enthusiasm I was looking for." He said dryly.

She gave him an adorable scowl and he went around to open her door.

Making sure she didn't twist an ankle in her incredibly high heels, Kyle picked her up around the waist and lowered her to the ground.

“I can get out of the truck myself, you know?”

“My way was more fun. Those shoes are a danger to your health and mine.” They made her legs look a mile long and he wondered what Lindsay would look like in those and nothing else.

“You're too freaking tall. I had to make up some of the difference.” He laughed. The heels did very little to make up for their height difference, but he didn't think she would appreciate him pointing that out,

Taking her arm in his, they made their way to the banquet room. There were round tables strategically placed throughout the room and a ton of people were already milling around. A buffet was set up at the back of the room, and a long table was at the front with a podium in the middle.

“Let’s find our table before we mingle.” Lindsay was taking in everything around her, and Kyle had to tug on her arm to get her moving again.

“It’s so pretty. I wasn’t expecting something so formal and fancy.” Candles were in the middle of all the tables, and place settings were in front of each chair.

“They go all out when big donors

are going to be attending.” Kyle spotted his mom waving like a fool and led them through the crowd. “Hey Ma, where’s dad?” Kyle looked around but didn’t see him.

“He’s around here somewhere. The Superintendent snagged him right after we got here and I haven’t seen him since.” He leaned down to kiss his mom on the cheek and stepped back.

“Mom, you remember Lindsay Pierce?” His mom was practically glowing and engulfed Lindsay into a tight hug.

“Of course I do. Lindsay dear, you look lovely this evening.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Brady, so do you.” His mom patted her hair and

waved her hand dismissively.

“Your very kind, but I don’t hold a candle to you. And please, call me Sheila.” The three of them took their seats and waited for the festivities to start. Kyle had never seen his mother so excited to talk to someone before.

A strong hand squeezed Kyle’s shoulder a few minutes later, and he turned to see his dad standing behind him wearing his Dress Uniform as well.

“Hey dad” Kyle stood and shook his dad’s hand, and then turned to help Lindsay get up. “This is Lindsay Pierce. Lindsay, this is my dad, Leo.”

“It’s very nice to meet you, sir.”

“Lindsay it is a pleasure. I’ve heard a lot of wonderful things about you.” She

smiled her sweet smile at his dad and shook his hand. “I hate to steal him away, but they are swearing you in to start the night’s events.”

Kyle pecked a kiss to Lindsay’s cheek and turned to his mom. “Please don’t say anything to embarrass me.”

“Would I do that?” She faked innocence, and Kyle groaned. As he walked away with his dad, he could see his mom lean over to say something to Lindsay that made her giggle; nothing good could come of leaving them alone together.

The Superintendent gave a speech and introduced everyone to start the night. Kyle stood at the front of the room and repeated what he was supposed to,

and was given his new Lieutenant patch and everyone applauded. He walked back to his table, shaking hands as he went.

“God I’m glad that’s over.”

“You looked so handsome up there. I’m so proud of you.” His mom wiped away tears with a napkin and took a sip of her water.

“I am too; you are going to make a great Lieutenant.” He sat down next to Lindsay and put his arm around her shoulders. He was tracing the strap of her dress on her shoulder and felt her shiver. Good, at least he wouldn’t be the only one suffering tonight.

“Thank you both.” A few more awards were given, and then it was time

to eat. He and Lindsay filled their plates and returned to the table, where his dad had finally joined them along with a few other couples. They ate dinner while the same stories Kyle had heard his whole career were retold.

The waiters came around collecting the dirty dishes, and the band started playing soft music. Lindsay hadn't said much through dinner, and he wanted a chance to talk to her away from his parents.

“Would you like to dance?” She seemed surprised by his question, but placed her hand in his. They weaved through the tables to get to the dance floor and he pulled her close to him as they started to sway.

“So far this is my favorite part of the night.” She laid her head on his chest and exhaled.

“Mine too.” Kyle could see his parents watching them from the table, with smiles on their faces, and he smiled back; tonight was perfect.

“Are you having a good time?” Lindsay pulled her head away from his chest and he almost forgot how to breathe.

“Yes, it has been amazing. Your mom is very sweet, and I can tell she cares deeply about you.”

“What did she say? She didn’t harass you with questions did she?” Lindsay rested her head on him once again before answering.

“No, she just wanted to make sure I didn’t hold your playboy past against you. She told me her theory for why you were that way.” Kyle could only imagine the things his mom had come up with.

“And why is that, according to her?”

“She thinks you didn’t want anyone to get too close in case you didn’t come home from work one day.” They stopped swaying and Kyle just held onto Lindsay. He had never come right out and said those words, but his mom had obviously known.

“She’s a very smart woman. I’ve seen the sadness in her eyes when my dad is at work. Sometimes it’s because of the amount of hours he works, but I

know it's because she's worried too.” Lindsay removed her arms from around his neck and placed a hand over his heart.

“You can't let fear rule your life, I should know. It's no way to live.”

“Being with you has shown me that it's worth the risk. I can only hope you feel the same way.”

“You are going to be around for a very long time, but even if you died tomorrow I wouldn't regret a single second of us being together.” Lindsay's words warmed his heart, and Kyle had never wanted to make love to someone as desperately as he did at this very second.

The desire reflected in Lindsay's

eyes was Kyle's undoing. "Let's go."

Lindsay was practically running to keep up with him as they headed back to their table. He picked up her purse and handed it to her. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"Lindsay isn't feeling well; I'm going to take her home." He knew it was wrong to lie to his mom, but right now he didn't care.

"Oh, I hope it's nothing serious dear." Lindsay shook her head no, but thankfully didn't say anything more. "Kyle make sure you call me tomorrow so I know Lindsay here is okay."

A quick hug with his mom and hand shake to his dad, and Kyle was once again dragging Lindsay behind him

toward the door. When they made it to the lobby Kyle, being mindful of her short dress, scooped her up into his arms and sprinted to the truck.

“You are insane; I can’t believe you just lied to your parents like that. I didn’t know what to say. Give me some warning next time.”

“There was no time. We had to leave or I was going to throw you on the nearest table and have my way with you.” Lindsay stared at him in shock, and then the shock morphed into pure unadulterated lust.

“Hurry”

They finally got to his truck, and he didn’t even bother going to the passenger side. Opening the driver side door, he

climbed in still holding Lindsay. Maneuvering her around the steering wheel, Kyle kept her next to him as he started the truck and peeled out of the parking lot.

He didn't care how many traffic laws he broke on the way back to her place, he was going to make the ten minute drive in five.

Chapter 17

Lindsay held tight to the seat as Kyle drove like a maniac back to Spring Towers. The closer they got, the more the butterflies in her stomach took flight. He was finally going to give them what they both wanted, and she was more than ready.

Kyle whipped the truck into the parking lot so fast, Lindsay was surprised two of the wheels didn't come off the ground. He parked the truck almost sideways in a spot and threw it in park.

“Were you Evil Knievel in another life?” He didn't answer as he got out of

the truck. She had just gotten her legs over the side of the seat, when Kyle nudged them apart and stepped between them.

“I need to taste you.” She didn’t have time to respond, as he captured her mouth in what could only be described as a kiss of desperation. Lindsay melted into the embrace, and all the butterflies disappeared. They were quickly replaced by need; a need that couldn’t be taken care of in the parking lot in front of her apartment.

“Apartment” was the only word she got out, but that’s all Kyle needed, because he picked her up and once again took off running.

“How do you do that?”

“Do what?” His words were said between clenched teeth. They had reached the stairs and he was taking them two at a time.

“Run with me in your arms and not even break a sweat.” She brought her purse up to retrieve her keys and he turned so she could reach the lock. She had just clicked the lock over and pushed the door open when he answered.

“Thank the job. I carry heavier things than your tiny body up and down ladders all the time. Now” Kyle moved inside the apartment and kicked the door closed. “would you like to further discuss my stamina, or can I just strip you naked and show you how good it

is?”

His question made her mouth go dry, and another flood of arousal dampened her panties even more than they already were. Instead of answering, she started unbuttoning his jacket as Kyle walked them through the apartment to her bedroom.

“Are you sure?”

“What!?!” Lindsay grabbed each side of his face and pulled it to within an inch of hers. “I’m not a china doll, I will not break so stop being so God damn gentle and concerned. I want you and I want you now.”

“I love how bossy you are in bed.” He removed his face from her hands and tried to lay her on the bed, but Lindsay

was tired of waiting. She pulled at his jacket to bring him with her, but he only laughed and stood up beside the bed.

“I’m not going anywhere, sweetheart. I just want to take my jacket and pants off before you rip them off of me.” Lindsay wanted to argue, but knew she was close to doing just that. As quickly as he could, Kyle unbuttoned his jacket and shirt the rest of the way. His pants were next and Lindsay could only stare at the gorgeous specimen of nearly naked man in front of her.

“I think you’re even sexier than the last time I saw your amazing body.”

“You’re good for my ego.” Kyle stood between her legs and lifted one in front of him. He removed one heel and

then did the same with the other.

“Your ego is fine, along with the rest of you.” He placed a kiss to the inside of her knee and another above that one. When he reached the bottom of her dress, Lindsay knew what she was going to have to do.

“I’m in my boxers and you’re fully clothed, this seems unfair.” He gave her a sexy smirk and Lindsay rose up to lean on her elbows. If she was really serious about getting her life back, being naked in front of her boyfriend was going to have to be part of that.

“Switch me spots.” Kyle gave her a curious look, but did as she asked. He sat on the edge of the bed and helped her get down. Standing with her back to him,

Lindsay took the ends of the bow and slowly pulled it apart. When there was nothing more covering the zipper, she peered over her shoulder.

“Unzip me.” She felt his hands tremble as he did what she asked. She was still holding the front of the dress up as she faced him again. One look in his eyes and Lindsay found what she was looking for, and let go of the dress. It pooled around her feet and she was left in only her bra and panties.

“Wow.” Lindsay forced herself not to hide as he ran his eyes up and down her body.

“Better?” She tried to smile, but the butterflies were back. She could feel her scar pulse, and it felt like it had a huge

neon sign pointing to it saying ‘look at me.’

“Much.” Kyle ran his hand from the middle of her chest, under each breast and stopped to trace the length of her scar.

“Please don’t.” He didn’t back off though. Instead, Kyle leaned forward and kissed all three inches of the raised skin.

“Lindsay, I want you. And this” he ran his finger over the scar again “doesn’t make that want any less.” She could see the truth in his eyes and let all the insecurities go.

“I’ll shut up now.” He encircled her hips with his arms and lifted her off the floor. Lindsay giggled as he flipped her

onto her back and moved over her.

“My legs are going to forget how to work around you.” He was holding his body away from hers and staring down at her nearly naked body.

“Good, we can spend all our time lying down then.”

“I like the sound of that.” Lindsay grabbed one side of his boxers and snapped it against his hip. “These are a problem.” As gracefully as he could, Kyle shimmied out of his underwear and kicked them to the floor.

Feeling bolder than ever, Lindsay palmed the thick cock between his legs, and gave it a few strokes. He hissed and closed his eyes. “That’s so good.”

Taking that as permission to keep

going, Lindsay stroked up one more time and swiped her finger over the head. A drop of pre cum had beaded around the slit and she brought her finger to her lips to lick it clean.

“Hold that thought.” Kyle lunged off the bed and was frantically searching his pants; Lindsay was amused as she watched him.

“What are you looking for?” After a few more frantic shakes and he seemed to find whatever it was he was looking for.

“Ah ha” Kyle held up a condom and Lindsay blushed. She hadn’t even been thinking about protection. All she had been thinking about was getting Kyle inside of her. The sound of the foil

packet opening made Lindsay remove her bra and panties as she watched him roll on the condom.

He came back to the bed and moved her to the center, before he positioned the head of his cock at her entrance.

“You tasting me on your fingers almost sent me over the edge. We’ve already waited too long; I need to be inside you.”

“Make love to me Kyle.” His arms were quivering as he nudged her entrance once, twice and then finally sank into her body. He paused halfway for her adjust to his size, and Lindsay had never felt so full. A whimper slipped past her lips and Kyle’s concern was clear.

“Am I hurting you?” She hated that that one question caused her to get choked up, but she pushed past the clog in her throat and shook her head.

“No it’s just been a while, but it’s getting better. Please don’t stop. Take me like I know you want to.” Kyle thrust until he was buried to the hilt.

“I don’t want to this to be over too soon, but you feel too good around me.” Lindsay rolled her pelvis up to meet his next thrust and he brushed over her clit. Two more thrusts and Lindsay’s body trembled.

“I’m right there with you. Let go, give us both what we want.” Kyle growled in her ear and began moving his hips uncontrollably. Her climax hit her

so fast that she couldn't hold in her scream of pleasure.

Kyle roared and stilled above her a few moments later, and the pulsing of his cock made another orgasm overtake her body. He collapsed onto the bed beside her, and Lindsay was pretty sure she was paralyzed. The bed dipped and she watched Kyle take care of the condom and toss it on the floor.

“I'll get that in a minute when I can get my body moving again.”

“That was unbelievable.” Kyle slid his hand into hers and intertwined their fingers.

“You were incredible. The look on your face when you come is every man's fantasy come to life.”

“I’ve never had two orgasms during sex; it kind of frightened me for a second.” Kyle’s booming laughter made her smile.

“I’ll be sure to make that happen again soon, but right now I would like nothing more than to take a shower with you.”

“The shower is really far away.” Kyle rolled off the bed and extended his hand down to her, but she still couldn’t move.

“I could always carry you.” He winked and she rolled her eyes.

“No I think I can manage, thank you.” Getting her feet on the ground, she was surprised when they only shook a little bit. Once inside the shower, Kyle

soaped up his hands and cleaned every inch of her body.

“All my showers will be boring after this one.” Lindsay teased and he kissed behind her ear and bit down on her earlobe.

“If I didn’t think you were sore from what we just did, I would bend you over and show you exactly how fun showers can be.” Lindsay rubbed enticingly against Kyle’s hardening member and wiggled her eyebrows at him.

“What if I want you to?” His muttered ‘fuck’ made her laugh.

“You are going to be the death of me.” He turned the water off and stepped out. She was disappointed, but knew he was probably right. They both dried off

and went back to her room.

Kyle had slipped his underwear back on and climbed into bed, and Lindsay put on a pair of panties and nothing else. Just because he was right, didn't mean she wouldn't make him suffer for turning her down. There was a Cheshire cat grin across her face as she crawled into bed.

"I know what you're doing." Kyle wrapped her in his arms, and Lindsay snuggled closer.

"Whatever do you mean?" Lindsay yawned and Kyle laughed.

"See, you're too tired for another round anyway. Go to sleep, we have all the time in the world." She wanted to argue, but what was the point. She was

tired, and he obviously wasn't going to give in.

Lindsay lay there, being lulled to sleep by the steady rise and fall of Kyle's chest. "Thank you for tonight."

"It was my pleasure, Red." The words were on the tip of her tongue, the ones that would make all of this real, but fear made Lindsay hold them back.

"Sweet dreams, Kyle."

"Goodnight baby"

The next morning, the smell of something sweet cooking woke Lindsay from her already delicious dreams. Wondering what Kyle could possibly be making, she got out of bed to grab her robe. Trying to put her robe on and walk

at the same time, Lindsay missed the small object lying in the middle of the floor and her foot landed on top of it.

“Ow, what the hell?” The pain in her foot subsiding, she looked around the floor to see what she could have possibly stepped on. A small brown box was the only thing on the floor, and her palms started sweating as she picked it up. Cautiously, Lindsay opened the box and sank the rest of the way to the floor. Sparkling back at her was a ring, but not just any ring. This ring had a diamond in the middle and was circled by much smaller ones.

Why was there an engagement ring in her bedroom? She closed the box and tried to think quickly. This was all too

fast. They had only been seeing each other a short time, and she was just starting to adjust to all of the newness. Why would he put this kind of pressure on her?

Lindsay heard footsteps in the hallway and wanted those questions answered right now. Kyle came into the room and saw her on the floor.

“I thought I heard you in here. What are you doing on the floor?” She held out the box on an unsteady hand and all color drained from Kyle’s face.

“W-Where did you find that?” His hand patted his pants pocket and he muttered “Shit” under his breath. Lindsay peeled herself off the floor and tossed the box to him. She tried to storm

past him, but Kyle stepped in front of her.

“Lindsay wait, don’t be mad. I didn’t mean for you to see it. It must have fallen out of my pocket last night when I was looking for the condom.”

“You didn’t mean for me to see it? So you weren’t planning on asking me to marry you?” She gave him a look that dared him to lie.

“No, I mean yes, but I hadn’t decided when I was going to ask you. Damn it, why are you so mad? This is supposed to be a good thing.”

“Why? Because for all your talk about going slow and not pushing me too fast, that ring says differently.”

“Just because I propose doesn’t

mean we have to get married tomorrow.” Kyle came toward her, but she took a step back.

“Lindsay, I love you.” He had never said that to her before and Lindsay shook her head no. How could he love her when she was still such a wreck?

“Yes, I do. I know this is fast and you are scared, but I love you more than I’ve ever loved anyone. There is no one else I want to be with and that is why I bought the ring.” There was a catch in his voice and it all became too much for her.

“I can’t deal with this right now. We need to take a step back and get some space.” She wished she could have missed the crushed expression that now

clouded Kyle's normally gorgeous face.

"I can't and won't keep chasing you; it hurts too damn much. If after everything we've been through you still can't trust me, then you can have all the space you want. I'm done trying to show you that I will never hurt you. The fact that you can't even accept that I love you tells me everything I need to know. Goodbye Lindsay." He slipped the ring into his pocket and picked up his shirt from the floor.

Lindsay's heart was breaking into a million pieces as he put his clothes and shoes on. She wanted to take back everything she had said, but Kyle left the room and she heard the front door slam shut seconds later.

Tears fell one after another as Lindsay slumped into the chair by her vanity. What had she done? Kyle had been nothing but good to her and she let her fears run him off. She let him walk away without even trying to stop him. All rational thought escaped her as she frantically opened her drawers to put some clothes on. She was not going to let him go without a fight.

Lindsay had just pulled her jeans on when she heard the front door open again. Thank God, he came back. She was already pleading with him when she came into the hallway.

“Kyle, I’m so sorry. Please forgiv...” But it wasn’t Kyle. Standing ten feet away from her, wearing an evil

smile, was Mitch. “NO! NO! Get out!”

She ran back into her room screaming and tried to close the door, but Mitch was too strong and forced the door open. He pushed it so hard that Lindsay fell to the ground. One hard kick and all the air left her body along with a silent scream. The worst case of déjà vu hit Lindsay just as he landed another kick to her back.

“Hi honey, miss me?” The endearment made Lindsay’s stomach roll and she tried to scream for help, but he was ready for it. A gloved hand covered her mouth and nose making it harder to breathe than it already was. Forcing her to stand up, Mitch pulled her back against his chest. Her robe had started to

come undone and she could now feel something cold and hard moving across her bare stomach.

“Now this reminds me of something.” He tapped the blade against her skin a few times. “I can’t seem to put my finger on it, but I feel like we’ve been here before. Do you remember?” His hand was still covering her mouth so she couldn’t answer, but the shiver that ran down her spine made Mitch chuckle menacingly.

“I see you do. Only this time, I won’t be so careless. I’ll make sure you can’t run to the police and tell them what I’ve done. No, this time I will get what I want and then you will die; like you should have last time.”

The knife cut into Lindsay's skin just above her navel and she screamed out in pain. His hand and the glove muffled the sound, and the pain was almost too much.

“No one can hear you scream. Not your boyfriend or your friend's next door, just me.” Focusing on his words instead of the excruciating pain in her midsection, Lindsay's eyes widened. How the hell did he know about any of them?

“Oh you didn't think I would come unprepared did you? It may have taken me a long time to find you, but I wasn't taking any chances once I did. You know it's amazing what money can buy. Find the right shady private investigator and

all will be revealed.” Lindsay could feel blood running down her stomach and onto her legs. She struggled against his hold, but he was too strong.

“You and that dumb bitch Jessie thought you were so smart, but I was smarter. I knew she would know where you were. Pretty stupid to have her send you something around your birthday, don’t you think?” Lindsay tried to hold back the tears. She had given him enough of her tears over the years, but her own stupidity led him here.

“Since the card was sent to a P.O. Box, my guy waited for you to pick it up. After he was sure it was you and followed you for a few weeks, I knew it was time to pay you a visit.” A picture

of the creepy guy from the post office flashed in her eyes, and she knew without a doubt who Mitch was talking about.

“Now I’m going to take my hand off your mouth. If you make one sound, I will not hesitate to slit that milky white throat of yours. Understand.” Lindsay nodded and he let go of her mouth. His hand was replaced by a gag of some sort, and he tied it securely around her head. Knowing she was running out of time, Lindsay had to think fast.

Mitch had dropped the knife when he reached for her hands to try and tie them together, so she gave one hard kick backwards and thankfully hit her target. He fell to the ground gasping for air, and

Lindsay didn't hesitate. Instead of running for the door, she ran for her gun; screaming the whole way.

She pulled so hard on the drawer it came flying out of the dresser, and landed on the ground. As her fingers grazed the metal, something hit her so hard over the head that she only had seconds before unconsciousness took over.

“You stupid bitch, now I will make sure you die a slow and painful death.” Lindsay grabbed the gun as she was collapsing to the floor, and when Mitch rolled her to her back she pointed the gun at his chest. The last thing she remembered seeing the large knife in his hand, and the sound of the gun going off.

She thought she could hear Kyle screaming her name, but then it all went black.

Chapter 18

“You don’t understand I have to get back there, she needs me. Why won’t you let me see her?” Kyle was shouting at the nurse sitting behind the counter.

“I’m sorry sir, its family only. A doctor will be out to see you as soon as they have news on her condition.”

“She doesn’t have any family; we are all she’s got.” Alex gripped his arm and tried to pull him away from the nurses’ station.

“Calm down before security throws you out. Come back to the waiting room. You’re not going to be any good to her from outside the hospital.” Kyle

struggled against Alex, but one look from the security guard and he reluctantly went back to the waiting room.

Stella and Vicki both jump to their feet. “Any news?”

“No, they won’t let me back to see her either.” Kyle punched the wall beside the door and didn’t even feel the pain. “This is all my fault. I need to tell her how sorry I am. What if something bad happens and I can’t tell her?”

Alex pushed Kyle down into a chair and shoved his finger into Kyle’s chest. “None of this is your fault. Her crazy ex is the one that put her in here, not you. So stop beating yourself up. She is going to pull through and you will make this

right. Now sit there and don't get up until they say we can see her.”

Alex went to console Stella, but kept one eye on Kyle. No matter what Alex said, this was Kyle's fault. He rested his elbows on his knees and hid his face behind his hands; thinking back to just a few hours before.

The door slammed, and he held onto the knob for a couple seconds. No, he would not go back in there. She made it very clear when she didn't say anything that this was over. With one final glance at her apartment, Kyle stomped down the stairs.

Glad his keys hadn't fallen out of his pants pocket last night too, he got

into the truck and put the key in the ignition. He tried to turn it over, but nothing happened. “Just fucking great”

He tried one more time, but not even the lights would come on. Kyle looked at the switch for his headlights and groaned. He had been in such a hurry to get Lindsay upstairs last night that he hadn't turned off his lights, and now his battery was dead.

Alex's car was in its spot, so Kyle pulled out his phone to call his buddy to come down and jumpstart his truck. One ring later and he was met by a very pissed off Alex.

“What!”

“What's got your panties in a wad this morning?”

“You!”

“What the fuck did I do?” Kyle was not in the mood for this bullshit.

“Fighting with Lindsay ring a bell?” Of course she would run to Stella. Oh well, she was the one in the wrong, not him.

“I don’t want to talk about that right now. I just need you to come down and jumpstart my truck.”

“Wait, what?” Alex had lost all of his anger and now sounded worried.

“Where are you?” Kyle was losing his patience.

“I’m down in your parking lot. I left my lights on last night and my batteries dead.”

“Then who the fuck is arguing with

Lindsay?” Kyle was out of his truck and sprinting to the stairs; his truck forgotten.

“Call the cops, NOW.” Was the last thing he said to Alex before he threw his phone on the ground, and bolted up the stairs. He twisted and turned the door knob, but it didn’t budge. Kyle began beating on the door.

“Lindsay! Lindsay hold on, I will get to you.” He could hear her scream, but the door wasn’t budging. Alex and Stella came out jingling keys.

“Here, we have a set of her keys. Move” Alex quickly turned each lock and Kyle raced into the apartment screaming her name. The sound of a gun shot came from Lindsay’s bedroom and he ran faster.

Nothing could have prepared him for what he saw when he made it to her room. Lying on the floor covered in blood, and surrounded by pieces of broken wood, was Lindsay and a man he had never seen before. Alex and Stella came into the room and Stella screamed.

“NOOOO, Lindsay.” Alex held her back while Kyle made his way to Lindsay’s side. He checked for a pulse and almost fainted when he felt one.

“She’s alive! Where the fuck are the cops? She needs to get to a hospital now.” The strange man’s body was partially on her, and Kyle quickly moved him to the side. He checked for a pulse and couldn’t help but feel relieved not to find one.

“Is he...?” Kyle nodded, but didn’t take his eyes off Lindsay’s motionless body. His training took over and he started assessing her injuries. There was so much blood that it made it difficult to tell where it all was coming from. The only thing he could see for sure was a long cut on her stomach.

“Alex grab some towels from the hall closet. I need to cover this wound while we wait for the paramedics.” He was barely holding it together, but falling apart wouldn’t do her any good right now. So he continued his evaluation and found another wound bleeding on the back of her head.

“Here” Alex thrust a handful of towels at him.

“I need you to take some of these and carefully apply pressure to the cut on her stomach.” Alex knelt beside him and did as he asked. Kyle moved to her head and tried to stop the bleeding, but he didn’t want to move her neck too much.

Now that he was on the floor, he could tell the pieces of wood were from a chair. The bastard probably hit her over the head with it during the struggle. Thankfully, just then men yelling police came running into the apartment.

“We are back here, hurry.” Stella was frantically screaming and four officers were in the room within seconds.

“Where are the paramedics? She’s

got a pulse, but it's weak." One of the officers tried to get Kyle out of the way, but he refused to leave her.

"Kyle let us do our jobs. The paramedics need room to get in here. We will take care of her, I promise." He hadn't even realized he knew the officers that responded, until Chad said his name.

"I can't leave her. I left and look what happened." He couldn't hold back the tears as he looked down at Lindsay's blood stained face.

"We need to get her to the hospital. You can ride in the ambulance, but right now you are hurting more than you are helping." With one final caress to her cheek, Kyle walked to where Alex and

Stella were standing.

“She is strong, and she will pull through this.” He knew Stella’s words were true, but if she didn’t he would never forgive himself. The paramedics came in and the rest was a flurry of activity as they got Lindsay on a backboard and loaded in the ambulance.

Now he was sitting in the ER waiting room, feeling like the lowest form of life; praying that Lindsay would wake up so he could apologize for being the biggest jackass on the planet.

“Where were you? Obviously you were at the apartments, so why weren’t you with her?” Vicki’s venomous question had him jerking his head from

behind his hands and glaring a hole through her.

“Vicki stop” Stella was glaring at her sister now too.

“No, I want to know how her psycho ex got to her without you knowing.” All the anger inside Kyle boiled over. His anger toward her ex, his anger toward himself, his anger at the nurses and doctors that wouldn’t tell him anything; he took it all out on Victoria.

“You want to know where I was? I was in the fucking parking lot trying to leave because we had a fight. I left because Lindsay found the engagement ring I bought for her and was completely freaked out. But because I’m such a self-centered asshole I let my temper blind

me, and walked out on the best thing that's ever happened to me.

“And the reason her fucking ex was able to get in the apartment was because when I stormed out, I didn't lock the fucking door.” Kyle turned to Alex and let him have some of his rage too.

“So don't tell me this isn't my fault. The whole fucking thing is my fault.” He finished his tirade and almost collapsed with grief. Alex and Vicki both caught him and helped him back into a chair.

“I shouldn't have said that. I'm just worried about her and I took it out on you. I know you love her, Kyle. You had no reason to believe this would happen.”

“Yes I did. She told me she felt like someone was watching her, and I still

left her in harm's way." Kyle put his head between his knees in an attempt not to hyperventilate.

"You may have made a rash decision, but the only person to blame for all of this is now lying in the morgue." They all sat in silence after that. All of their eyes fixed on the door, waiting for the doctor to come in and give them good news hopefully.

Twenty minutes later, a tall middle aged man came into the room.

"Are you the family for Lindsay Pierce?"

"Yes" They all said in unison as they stood.

"Ms. Pierce is still unconscious, but we've ran tests and I think she should

come out of it sooner rather than later. She has some bruised ribs and a pretty significant injury to her head that required stitches, but the CT scan showed no swelling of the brain. The cut on her stomach wasn't deep, but we did have to put some butterfly bandages over it so it wouldn't get infected.”

“When can we see her?” Kyle hadn't heard much after the doctor said she would pull through.

“They are moving her to a room now. Give them about thirty minutes and you will be able to visit with her, but only for a short time; she needs her rest.” He shook the doctors' hand and thanked him. Alex slapped him on the back and gave him a one armed hug.

“See, she is going to be just fine. Let’s go get some food in the cafeteria while we wait, and then you can go see her.” He wasn’t in the mood for food, but he could sit there with his friends while he waited.

When they got to the cafeteria, it turned out he wasn’t the only one that had lost his appetite. They all bought drinks, but couldn’t seem to eat.

“So did you really buy her an engagement ring?” Stella swirled her water in the bottle and waiting for him to answer. Kyle took the box out of his pocket and set it on the table without a word. She looked at him as if asking for permission to open it, and he nodded. Three sets of eyes widened when Stella

popped open the lid.

“You’ll get the chance to ask her again, just give her some time.”

“You know last night I told her to go to sleep because and I quote ‘we have all the time in the world to be together’. How wrong was I?” Vicki took his hand in hers.

“You still do. She’s not dead, and after some major groveling on your part, Lindsay will forgive you.” Kyle stared at the swinging cafeteria doors and sighed.

“How am I ever going to forgive myself?” Sitting here was getting them nowhere, and he couldn’t take it anymore. “I’m going up. They’ve had plenty of time to get her settled.”

Alex, Stella and Vicki stood too and made their way to the elevators. The doors opened and Kyle pushed the button for the fifth floor repeatedly until the doors closed.

The whole ride up felt like it was set in slow motion, and when the doors finally dinged open he was the first one off. He went to the nurse's station prepared for another argument about how he wasn't family, when a sweet older lady greeted them.

“Can I help you?”

“We are here to see Lindsay Pierce. She was just brought up from the emergency room.” Kyle watched her tap a few buttons, and then point to one of four hallways.

“Of course, Ms. Pierce is in room 502; second door on the right down this hall.”

“Thank you.” He headed in the direction she pointed and paused outside Lindsay’s room.

“Do you guys mind if I go in by myself first?” Vicki tipped her head toward a sign across the hall that said ‘Waiting room.’

“We will be in here when you are ready for us.”

“Thanks.” Kyle inhaled deeply in an attempt prepare himself for what he was about to see. Feeling as ready as he’d ever be, he went inside.

Lindsay was lying in the bed, tubes and wires coming from what seemed

like every part of her body. Seeing her hooked up to all those machines made Kyle's heart plummet to his feet.

“Oh baby” He sat in the chair by the bed and picked up her hand. All of his emotions came flooding out at once.

“I'm so sorry, Red. I didn't mean what I said this morning. I would chase you anywhere. Please wake up. You have to. You have to yell at me for being an idiot. You have to put your hands on your hips in that adorable way you do, and tell me what an asshole I am.

“Then I will agree and hold you in my arms and promise to never do it again. You will forgive me and we will be together, happily unengaged for as long as you want, but we can't do that if

you don't wake up. So please, please get that stubborn brain of yours to work, and let me love you.”

The monitors beeped and Kyle could hear people in the hallway outside, but nothing else happened. He sat there holding and kissing her hand; willing her to open her eyes.

A nurse came in to check her vitals, and he must have looked as miserable as he felt because she didn't say anything; just left as quietly as she came in.

Lindsay's normally pale skin was even paler, and Kyle could see spots of dried blood still on her face.

Letting go of her hand long enough to wet down a washcloth, he came back and started to wash away the horrible

reminder of what she had been through. As if her lying in a hospital bed, in a blue gown, hooked up to IV's and heart monitors wasn't reminder enough. When he finished, there was a knock on the door.

“I know you wanted time with her, but the girls are about to go crazy.” Kyle nodded, and Alex motioned into the hall for the girls to come in.

“Sorry, I hadn't realized how long I'd been in here.”

“Don't worry about it. Has she been awake at all?” He was still holding her hand and rubbing his thumb over her knuckles.

“No. The nurse came in to check on her, but nothing has changed.”

“She’ll come out of it when she’s ready.” Kyle hoped it was sooner rather than later, because every minute she was unconscious he died a little more inside.

Alex convinced the girls to go home and get some sleep later that night, but when he tried to get Kyle to leave, he refused.

“I want to be here when she wakes up. I’m not leaving this room until that happens.”

“I understand, I’ll let the nurses know. Do you want me to swing by your house and get some of your stuff? I can bring it up tomorrow.”

“That would be great; you know where the key is.” Alex said goodbye and Kyle settled into the chair he would

be sleeping in for the night. Reminding himself that Lindsay had serious injuries, was the only thing that kept him from crawling into bed with her.

He pushed the chair as close to her bed as possible and put down the rail. Laying his head as close to hers as he could get, while still sitting in his chair, Kyle kissed her forehead and whispered.

“Goodnight Red, I love you.” What he wouldn’t give to hear her sweet voice say the same back to him.

Chapter 19

“There is no magic pill I can give her to bring her out of the coma. She has to do that on her own.” Lindsay heard voices around her, but wasn’t sure who’s they were. Her whole body ached, and the pounding in her head was almost deafening. A tingling sensation on her hand made her aware that someone was touching her.

“It’s been three days. If her brain wasn’t damaged, why hasn’t she woken up yet?” Kyle sounded so upset and frustrated. Lindsay tried to open her eyes, but they wouldn’t cooperate.

“Kyle they are doing everything they

can for her. Why don't you come with your mom and me and get some fresh air and something to eat? They will call you if she wakes up.”

“No, I'm not leaving her. I'm never leaving her again.” His voice shook, and she wanted to wrap her arms around him and tell him it would all be okay. But before she could, her mind started to fade into the blackness again.

The next time she came to, Lindsay could hear Kyle talking to Alex. “When will she be here?”

“Stella said tomorrow morning. I guess it was the first available flight from Houston to Chicago. We are going to pick her up at the airport.”

There was that tingle again and this

time Lindsay felt rough lips on the back of her hand. “You hear that sweetheart? We need you to wake up. All your friends want to see those pale blue eyes and know you’re okay.”

Yes. Yes, I want to see you too. Lindsay was screaming on the inside, but her body had other ideas, and sleep overtook her once again.

“I can’t believe how delusional they can be. They seriously want her charged with murder?” Who was murdered? What was going on? Lindsay’s body didn’t ache when she woke this time, but she still had a slight headache.

“The cops all but laughed in their faces. They just need Lindsay’s statement when she wakes up, and the

case will be closed. His parents will have to come to terms with the fact that their son was an unstable lunatic. The best part is they are being charged as accessories.” Lindsay would know that voice anywhere.

She tried to move her arm, but it felt heavy. “What the...”

“What?”

“Her hand just moved. It hasn’t done that the whole time she’s been here. Lindsay, can you hear me?” The fog cleared a little more when Kyle said her name. “Hit the nurse button, I think she’s trying to wake up.”

“Stop shouting” He was going to make her headache come back if he kept yelling like that, but her complaint came

out as barely a squeak.

“I’m here. Open your eyes, sweetheart. What were you trying to say?” Slowly one eye lid slid up, and she quickly shut it; damn that’s bright. Blinking twice, she was finally able to open both eyes without pain.

Kyle was leaning over the bed and planting kisses all over her face. Her joy at seeing him was overshadowed by the person standing on the other side of the bed. Jessie’s eyes were covered in a sheen of tears, and so were Lindsay’s.

There was so much she wanted to know. How did Jessie know she was here? Why was she here? Lindsay started to ask, but her throat was too dry to say anything. She mouthed “water”,

and Jessie picked up a cup with a green sponge on a stick off the table.

She put the sponge in Lindsay's mouth, and the tiny amount of liquid was like ice cream on a hot summer day; refreshing. A few more swallows and Lindsay was able to talk, although it was scratchy.

"What's going on?" Kyle wiped at his eyes as he started to explain.

"You're in the hospital. You've been unconscious for four days." Four days? What the hell? A nurse came in and moved to the side of the bed next to Jessie.

"Welcome back Ms. Pierce. I'm Jody, and I'll be your nurse until six. How are you feeling?" What a question.

Lindsay was feeling a million things. Confused, pissed, excited. All she wanted to do was talk to Kyle and Jessie.

The nurse was waiting for her answer, so Lindsay went with “Fine. My head hurts, but nothing unbearable.”

“I would imagine it does. You took quite a blow to the head, but luckily your skull wasn’t fractured. You have some stitches, but they will be coming out next week. I’ll call the doctor and have some pain meds ordered.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll be back with your medicine in a bit and to check your vitals. If you need anything before then, just hit the call button. You can have

small sips of water if you're thirsty, but don't overdo it." Jody left the room, and Lindsay tried to push herself up on the bed. Shooting pain radiated through her abdomen and she winced.

"Don't do that, you have bruised ribs. Let the nurse come back and help you." Kyle was reaching for the button, and she caught his hand.

"No. She will poke and prod on me, and I will never get to talk to you guys." Lindsay let go of his hand. "You can help me."

"I don't think..." Lindsay scowled, and Kyle shut up. He did as she asked, and she was only sort of uncomfortable as he raised the head of the bed so she could sit up.

“There, much better.” Jessie hadn’t moved from her position at the side of the bed and Lindsay just wanted to shake her out of it. “What’s wrong?”

A dam broke and Jessie pulled her into an embrace that said everything. “I missed you too, Jessie.”

She blocked out the pain in her ribs, and clung to her oldest friend. “I’m so glad you’re finally safe.”

Bits and pieces of the conversations she heard when she was asleep ran through her mind, along with the last thing she could remember from that horrible morning. Her whole body went rigid and Jessie loosened her hold.

“What’s wrong? Your whole body is tighter than a drum right now.”

“I’m safe? Did I...?” She was looking at Kyle as she asked the question. For some reason, him telling her would make it true.

“Yes sweetheart, you did. He can’t hurt you ever again.” Lindsay had cried so many tears over the years for so many things, but now with the knowledge that she had taken a man’s life no tears fell; she almost couldn’t believe it.

“You are finally free. No more running, no more hiding, no more fear.”

I killed someone. I killed someone. That was the only thing Lindsay could think about. How could she do that and not feel one ounce of regret. Kyle was studying her from his spot on the bed and began shaking his head.

“No, no way. Don’t you dare feel guilty. That bastard tried to kill you more than once. If you hadn’t done what you did, you wouldn’t be here.”

“Actually, I was trying to figure out what kind of horrible person I am for not feeling guilty. I mean, who shoots someone and doesn’t even feel bad.” He grasped her hand so tight, she thought it might break.

“The kind that had no other choice” When he brought her hand to his lips, Lindsay finally got a good long look at Kyle. All of his emotions were playing out on his now tired and scruffy looking face. Dark circles encased his chocolate brown eyes and she could see the hell he had been through in them.

The last time her and Kyle had talked, things had ended badly. Now Lindsay wanted nothing more than to make that right. It had been four years since she had seen Jessie, but now that she was safe they had all the time in the world to catch up.

“Jessie, I hate to ask, but...”

“Say no more. I’ll go out in the hall and tell everyone you’re awake. You have quite the fan club assembled in the waiting room.” This is why Jessie had always been her best friend. She knew what Lindsay needed without her having to ask.

“Thanks, I’ll try to make it quick.”

“Take your time.” Jessie winked and left the room.

Knowing it was probably a bad idea but not caring one bit, Lindsay gingerly moved closer to Kyle until she was curled up on his lap. She was expecting an argument from him, but what she got instead was a waterfall of tears as Kyle sobbed into the crook of her neck.

“Shh, please don’t cry. Everything is going to be better now.” He wept harder when she tried to calm him. “Kyle why are you so upset; talk to me.”

He had brought his emotions down to a few sniffles and then sighed. “How can you want to sit on my lap after what I did?”

What he did? Lindsay tipped his head up to look at her like he always did

to her. “What did you do? If you mean the fight we had, that was not your fault; it was mine.”

“If I hadn’t bought you that ring we wouldn’t have fought, and I wouldn’t have said those horrible things. I would have been in the apartment instead of storming out and leaving the door unlocked. I’m the reason that asshole was able to get to you.”

Fresh tears were falling from his eyes and she understood why he looked the way he did; no way was she going to let him blame himself. Lindsay grabbed the edge of the sheet, and tried to clear the tears from his eyes.

“Listen to me and listen good.” Her tone must have been harsh because he

looked up in surprise. “You did not stalk me for weeks. You did not sneak into my apartment. You did not knock me on the ground and kick me. You did not cut me with a knife, and then hit me over the head with a...”

“A chair” Kyle supplied. He had hit her from behind, so Lindsay had no idea what it was.

“a chair, thank you. You didn’t do any of that, Mitch Rhodes did.”

“But...”

“Don’t interrupt me.” Lindsay placed her hand over his mouth to silence him. “What you did do, Kyle Brady, was make me laugh and smile and trust and feel safe and loved again, and you taught me how to love in

return.” His eyes widened after her last point.

“Yes, I love you. I love you for everything you did and didn’t do. I was an idiot the morning I found the ring. I didn’t want to believe that my life could be normal, that a man as wonderful as you could love me. I let the fear take over, but never again. Never again will I hold back my feelings for you.”

And to prove her point, Lindsay pressed her lips to his and waited for him to respond. It didn’t take long for his long fingers to cup her face and give her the passionate kiss she craved. When his fingers tried to bury in her hair, she gasped in pain.

“Fuck, I’m so sorry. Shit, how could

I forget?”

“It’s okay. I was as lost in that kiss as you were.” Kyle slowly lifted her off his lap, and sat her back where she was before.

“Hey.” He took a few steps back from the bed.

“I don’t want to hurt you, and after everything you just said, I don’t trust myself to touch you.” Even with stitches in her head and bandages wrapped around her midsection, Lindsay desired this man; and he seemed to want her just as bad. Knowing this wasn’t the last time she would be with him, Lindsay laid back and smiled.

“I like you touching me.” Kyle narrowed his eyes.

“You are not going to distract me from what I want to say. No matter how sexy you look in that blue gown.” Finally his sense of humor returned.

“I’ll make sure I can take it home with us.”

“With us?”

“Well since we are getting married, I figured that involved living together.” Lindsay said the statement dryly, but on the inside she was cracking up.

“D-Did you just say married?” Kyle was staring at her in disbelief. She went on as if they had already discussed all of this.

“I think the sooner the better, don’t you? Stella will be showing soon, and I don’t want her to get too tired standing

for the ceremony.” Lindsay had never seen a bigger grin on someone’s face. Kyle moved back toward the bed, but didn’t sit down. Instead, he sank to the ground and was now kneeling on one knee.

“Did you just agree to be my wife, Red?” Cocky Kyle was back, and Lindsay couldn’t have been happier.

“I sure did. What are you going to do about it?”

“What I should have done weeks ago?” Kyle reached into his pocket and retrieved the small brown box. Opening it, he removed the ring from its cushion.

“I love you Lindsay Logan.” Lindsay raised an eyebrow at him, and he laughed. “Jessie filled in some of the

blanks while you were unconscious; your name being one of them.”

“I like Lindsay Brady better.”

“So do I” He picked up her left hand and paused with the ring hovering over her finger. “Now, so my mother doesn’t beat me for not doing this properly, I want to ask you a question.”

Lindsay sat up more, pushed her shoulders back and pretended to fix her hair. “I’m all ears.”

“Smart ass” Kyle grumbled, but then he straightened and cleared his throat. He was once again ‘serious’ Kyle. “These last few days have been the worst days of my life. I thought we had all the time in the world, but when I saw you lying on the floor...”

Kyle closed his eyes and the pain on his face made Lindsay tear up.

“I’ve died a thousand deaths since that day. It’s shown me that life is precious, and that I don’t want to waste any more time that we already have.” He slid the ring onto her finger and looked deep into her eyes; all the way to her soul.

“Will you marry me?”

“Yes.” He gave her a quivering smile as he rose from the floor. Being as gentle as possible, Kyle kissed her with all the love both of them felt.

“Can we come in; I’m dying out here.” Vicki’s voice echoed through the room, followed by a bunch of other ones telling her to “shut up and be patient.”

Lindsay and Kyle shared one more brief peck, before they gave in. “You can come in.”

A never ending stream of people filed into Lindsay’s hospital room, and she had never felt so loved in her life. They received congratulations from Kyle’s parents, Stella and Alex, Jessie, and Vicki. The nurse came in a few minutes later and kicked everyone out so she could check over her patient.

Everyone said their goodbyes, and promised to come back tomorrow. Nurse Jody said she was doing very well and even let her order dinner, but the only thing she was hungry for was some more alone time with her future husband.

“Do you want me to go get you

something to eat? Hospital food isn't all that great." She moved over on the bed and patted the spot next to her. Kyle walked over and sat down where she wanted him.

"Aren't you hungry?" Lindsay snuggled into his side and nodded.

"I am, but I wanted to do this first." Being mindful of her ribs, he pulled her in closer to his body.

"I love you, Red. You are everything I never knew I wanted." Lindsay looked up into those chocolate brown eyes, and knew he meant every word. There wasn't anything left to say, so Lindsay simply replied.

"Ditto"

Epilogue

“Where are the rest of the streamers?” Stella yelled from the kitchen.

“In the car” Vicki, Stella and Jessie had all arrived at Kyle’s house an hour ago to start setting up for Lindsay’s welcome home party. She had been in the hospital a little over a week, and today was finally the day she was coming home.

Jessie decided to stay in Chicago for a few extra weeks to catch up with Lindsay, and had offered to help set up and even make some of the food. Vicki and Stella adored Jessie, and would be

just as sad as Lindsay when she went back home.

“What is left to do?” Jessie asked as Vicki wiped down the entertainment stand.

“I think that’s it. Once Stella grabs the streamers and we hang them up, we should be done.”

“Cool. Who all is supposed to be here?” Vicki through the paper towel she was holding in the trash and tried to think.

“Pretty much everyone you’ve met at the hospital. I don’t know of anyone else that would be coming.” Stella walked back into the house holding two rolls of streamers.

“Don’t forget Kyle’s friend Coop.”

“Who’s that?” Jessie asked.

“I’ve never met him, but he’s an old friend of Kyle’s. He actually lives here too, but probably not for long since Lindsay’s moving in.” Vicki had yet to meet this mysterious Coop, or learn anything about him.

“So why wasn’t he at the hospital?” Vicki wondered the same thing, but obviously Stella knew because she chimed in.

“The team he works for had a bunch of away games, but they are finally back in town for a stretch of home games.” Everything in Vicki’s world stopped at that very moment. This could not possibly be happening to her.

“Stella...what team does he work

for?”

“The Crush, why?” That still didn’t mean it was him, so Vicki tried to control her voice as she asked another question.

“What is Coop’s full name?” Her sister gave her a confused look and scrunched up her nose like she was trying to think of it. If there was any mercy in this world, Stella would not say the name of the one person Vicki despised the most.

“Cooper Wilde I believe.” All the air left her body like someone had punched her in the gut.

“Are you okay, you don’t look so good?” Vicki didn’t feel so good right now. Of all the people that it could have

been, why did it have to be him? Not only was it him, but now that Lindsay was moving in here Vicki would have to see him away from work too. The walls felt like they were closing in, and she needed some air. Ignoring the concerned looks from both Jessie and Stella, she went out the front door and leaned over the railing of the porch.

“Victoria, what the hell is going on? Why did you turn white as a ghost when I told you his name?”

“It’s him” was all she could say.

“Him who?” Stella’s exasperation was clear, so Vicki finally turned around to explain.

“You know the new client I’ve been having so many problems with, the one

that has me so mad I can't see straight sometimes, the one that drives me absolutely crazy.”

“Yeah...” Stella drew the one word out like she couldn't figure out why Vicki was telling her about this client.

“Well Kyle's longtime friend and my client are one and the same. Cooper Wilde is my client from hell.” Jessie and Stella glanced at each other and then back to Vicki. They were trying so hard to hide their amusement, but there was nothing funny about this.

“Don't you dare laugh.” Her warning was their undoing, as Stella and Jessie laughed so hard tears were streaming down their faces. Vicki stood there glaring at both women until a car

pulling up in front of the house caught all three of their attentions.

Vicki turned around to see a sleek black Mustang with tinted windows now parked behind her car. The windows may have been dark, but she knew exactly who would be stepping out.

They didn't have to wait long, as the door opened and out he came. With the same annoying smirk he always had, he started walking towards them. When he reached the bottom step, he slowly removed his Aviator's and looked only at her.

"I didn't know image consultants made house calls." Vicki wanted nothing more than to wipe that cocky expression off his face, but she would not let him

see her sweat.

“You didn’t know a lot of things. Like your roommate’s fiancé is one of my best friends.” All the color drained from his face and he was now looking from Stella to Jessie and then back to her.

“You’re that Vicki.” What the hell does that mean? She’s that Vicki? The man had some nerve, but instead of arguing with him like always, she just shrugged.

“It would appear so.” They stood staring at each other for what felt like an eternity, until finally Stella came forward and stuck out her hand.

“Hi, I’m Stella and this is Jessie. It’s nice to finally meet you.” He seemed as caught off guard as she did, but he

smiled and exchanged handshakes with both women. As they all stood there getting acquainted, Vicki slipped back into the house.

She wanted nothing more than to hop in her car and leave, but Lindsay was her friend and that would just be selfish. The sound of Cooper's deep booming laughter turned her attention back to the still open door, and Vicki groaned.

Over the last two months, this man had been the cause of all her stress. Between the constant worry over how he was acting and the heightened state of arousal he left her body in on a regular basis, Vicki didn't know how she was surviving.

Determined to push him out of her mind, Vicki picked up the roll of streamers and started hanging them up. She was trying to reach a spot high on the wall, when a strong hand closed over hers and lifted it the rest of the way.

Her pulse was racing and her heart was beating so fast she was sure he could hear it, as he bent down and whispered in her ear.

“Need a hand, mine tend to work wonders.” Vicki tried to stop the shiver that ran down her spine, but failed miserably. Shaking off the unwelcomed sensation, she turned around and handed him the roll of streamers.

“Knock yourself out” And with that she walked to the kitchen to help the

girls with the food.

The rest of the evening went by in a blur. Lindsay loved her surprise welcome home party, and was even more surprised when she noticed all of her things had been moved into Kyle's house already.

“We didn't think you would want to go back to the apartment, so we took care of it. I hope you don't mind.”

“Not at all, and you're right I wasn't looking forward to going back in there.” Vicki hugged Lindsay gently.

“I'm so glad you're safe and happy now. You deserve it.”

“Thank you, I never thought this day would come.” Lindsay had been through hell and was finally getting her happily

ever after. Looking around the room and seeing all of her friends and family so happily paired off, she started to wonder if maybe it just wasn't meant to be for her. Maybe her career was the only love she would ever have.

She didn't want to ruin the party with her depressing thoughts, so Vicki excused herself and went out back. The stars were shining brightly in the night sky, and she made a wish on the brightest one. Now she would just have to wait and see if wishes really do come true.

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About the author:

Morgan Rayne discovered her love of romance novels at an early age. Escaping into the world of happily ever after's and true loves was a great outlet when life wasn't so great. Writing a romance novel had always been a dream, but one she never thought possible to achieve. Being a stay at home mom has allowed her the opportunity to now follow that dream. When she's not playing with her kids, cooking dinner or writing, Morgan loves to listen to any and all kinds of music, dance around the house and read on her iPad for hours on end.

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