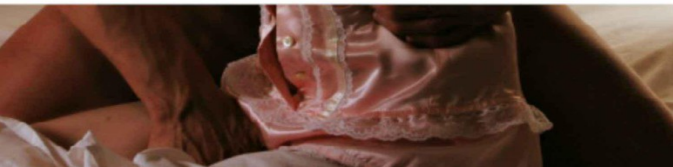




THE BOY WHO
KNEW ME WHEN
J. L. BOSTICK



The Boy
Who Knew Me
When

J.L. BOSTICK

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DEDICATION

To Rio, in between and back again
you have always been my muse.

Prologue

June 17, 2010

Dear Diary,

Life is a pretty damn scary when you think about it, you can just be sitting around having a cup of coffee, reading the Sunday comics and two minutes later you are gone. Heart attack, car accident, brain tumor....murder. That's just how it is, no matter how much you fight it there is no way of getting around the inevitable.

It is kind of like in the movie

Labyrinth when Sarah has to chose which path to take, one of her options is the road to sudden death. The truth is that the only choice we have is how we choose to walk the path after we cross that threshold because both doors lead to sudden death. Even if we have cancer and have been sick for months, we don't plan on dying., not really. We keep hoping, praying that death will pass us by like miracles are a reality. So dumb! Everyone is just so freakin clueless. We are all on the road to sudden death, that is the road we chose to take the day we were born. I know, total bummer.

I remember a time when all I wanted

to do was dance in the sun. I wore these stupid purple fairy wings that I got for my seventh birthday and twirled around our back yard on a mountain of dreams with a heart full of unconditional love for everyone. I never wanted to grow up, all I wanted to do was twirl around like an idiot. I can't actually remember the day that carefree little girl abandoned me but sometimes, I yearn for her.

I also yearn for Julian. The boy who was always by my side even though he is five years older than I am and didn't have to be. What's up with that anyway?

I hate "him", you know who "he" is,

for taking them from me. I hate Nicolai for being a selfish ass. I hate my parents for abandoning me when I needed them the most and I hate Julian for never coming back.

No, I take that back, I don't hate him at all. Truth is that I miss all of them and I am tired of missing them.

I want to live. I want to start highschool telling everything and everyone who haunts me to 'fuck off'. I am tiring of hurting, I just want to be happy, is that so much to ask? But none of the morons in this crap hole town will let me forget. They just keep shoving it in my face and I can't take it anymore! I just want to scream at them;

*“SHUT THE FUCK UP AND
LEAVE ME ALONE!”*

*Brea says I should just smile, say
“thank you” then walk away. She says
that they are all just trying to be
sympathetic but how sympathetic is it
to keep rubbing it all in my face? Why
is it so hard to believe that all I want to
do is forget everything?*

*Dear diary, I am done with all of this.
Tired of sitting around waiting for
Julian to come back because the fact is
that he is never coming back. he left me
to suffer the madness all by myself. I
know it must have been difficult for him
at the time, maybe more so than it was*

for me, but I needed him. I needed his smile, his hugs, his spirit, all of him to take the pain away because my mom and dad were useless. I miss him so much it hurts. I know I am being selfish but I loved him.

Please take it all away? I have to forget!

Here it goes, the magic spell that will make it all vanish from my mind. I will just say it and it will be so.

I Jemma Hale vow to forget about Julian Ackles and everything that we suffered through from this day forward. No more journal entries, no more cutesy little drawings, nothing. I command you to leave my head forever

*Julian, Nicolai, mom, dad.... 'him',
adios, arrivederci, goodbye.*

*I will no longer let the past destroy my
tomorrow. I want to learn to dance
again.*

-Jemma

Chapter ONE

There was no other way to look at it: I..am..a..loser! Not one college acceptance other than Austin Community College, which I did not particularly need to get “*accepted*” into because well, it *is* a community college. A college for people with big fat LOSER stamped on their forehead, for people who slacked off in high school and hold very little hope of a future. And for those

blessed individuals with no family to give a damn about them; in other words, for people like me. It was my own fault really because for the majority of my high school experience I had very little ‘give a fuck’ and a whole lot of ‘*fuck it.*’

Brea, my best friend since fifth grade did not even bother to apply to college. She did not see the point of paying thousands upon thousands of dollars to what she called an “elitist organization” when she could get the same education for next to nothing locally. But that was Brea. To be honest Brea could scoop

shit for the rest of her life and still be perfectly happy.

When you are five foot seven with legs that go on forever, have Marilyn Monroe cleavage, skin like ivory, thick voluptuous naturally red lips and hair as dark as midnight you kind of don't need to have a care for what the future holds. Everything in the world is just kind of handed to you. At least, that is what it seemed like from my point of view. That was Brea, drop dead gorgeous Brea, every man's fantasy, every boy's wet dream. Not that Brea didn't have any

plans. She had plenty of them but she didn't have to go about it like the rest of us did. She just woke up and the seas parted. Therefore, Brea and her decision to go to community did not make her a loser, it made her a rebel and as far as I was concerned it made her even more perfect.

Don't get me wrong, I am no dog. I am aware that I have certain attributes that would prevent me from having to leave the house with a bag over my head. But I also know that I am different in a way that not even I can explain. For one, my

face is “off”. Brea says I am nuts but I can see it, I am not blind. My eyes are round, not the large yet sexy bedroom round eyes you would find on let’s say Amanda Siegfried, they are half the size and sunk into my head so that I look like a puffer fish. The only saving grace preventing them from making me look like a total perv is the glassy blue color that says “Fuck with me and I will turn you to stone”.

Not to mention, my nose is too long, my neck is longer than my head, my auburn hair is a stringy, lifeless mess

and my lips are so full it always looks like I am pouting or blowing kissy faces further elevating my fish status, especially when I am pissed, which is why I try my best NOT to be pissed. And my body, GAWD, don't get me started. Besides my slightly saggy 36 D's, my legs are too long and my butt is too big. Thank goodness I am not brain dead because I would be completely hopeless.

As far as guys, well, according to my friend Brandon who just so happens to be my first boyfriend, "Jem, you have

your head too far up your ass to give a damn about anyone other than yourself, no matter how much they care about you.”

Of course he said that 20 minutes after I dumped him, right before Senior Prom and he *has* apologized more times than I care to count, but he said it none the less. Maybe he is right; my head is a little bit up my ass. Hence, why I am stuck at ACC instead of going off to someplace amazing like New York or Los Angeles for higher education like most of my senior class, himself included.

I met Brandon freshman year, he was new to Taylor, Texas, a small nothing little town about an hour outside of Austin. Thanks to our high school principal, Mrs. Hale (who just so happens to be my aunt), I was nominated for welcoming committee. I had fought tooth and nail to avoid being noticed and here I was being forced to put on a smile and show some stranger the ways of high school. Something I myself knew NOTHING about.

My dilemma quickly resolved itself, turning into a new dilemma once our

eyes locked on one another. I had never had a boyfriend, not that I had any interest in them. There was way too much shit going on in my life to bother noticing the opposite sex. Not to mention that I was only 15, one year older than most of my friends thanks to failing seventh grade.

But here was this boy, who I very much noticed, taking my breath away. Here, standing outside of second period with my aunt in tow, stood this nearly six-foot-tall, fourteen-year-old Adonis, blonde messy hair, ripped to the nines,

lips that would have made any girl want to taste them, naturally tanned skin, angelic hazel-colored eyes and amazing hands. Oh my gawd, his hands were beautiful! I found myself at only fifteen years old wishing they were all over me, an image that turned my body pretty much to mush. Then he smiled, he smiled and I fell flat on my ass sending my books flying down the hall and leaving my cheeks crimson from embarrassment.

From that day on we spent every day together, things escalated quickly and before we knew it we were a couple.

Our only problem was that I only loved and lusted for him, but I was never “in love” with him. I gave him everything that I could possibly give but in the end my failure as a human being, my failure to give myself fully to anyone, failed us both.

About a week before homecoming, I gave him my body and from that moment I knew things had to end. Please, do not misunderstand me: the sex was perfect, he made my toes curl, my breasts peak and my body throb and pulsate in ways that made me feel completely weak from

head to toe in the most amazing way. Feeling him inside of me was one of the best things that ever happened in my 18 years of existence.

I have no doubts that he was the one everything was meant to happen with. He was kind, gentle, giving and mad about me. But there was nothing else there for *me*; suddenly I realized he was nothing more to me than a friend. Afterward I felt a sense of doom, I felt dead inside and I ended up spending all of the next day in my room crying for reasons I did not yet know.

Around midnight I stumbled into the bathroom and caught a glimpse of my red puffy face and realized just how much I hated myself. It was then that I also realized I had not been crying because I was sad about giving Brandon my virginity, no, I was crying because when all was said and done he told me he loved me.

He said that he loved me so much he was planning on skipping out on Columbia University to stick it out with me at a frickin' community college. My inability to commit to life was about to

take him down as well and it terrified me. I cared too much about him to destroy him. I am simply not worth that kind of love and commitment. Brandon, sweet, delectable, perfectly drool-worthy Brandon was and is too good for me. That is when I decided to end things. He was angry at first, said a bunch of things he didn't mean and just got up and walked away.

To be honest the entire time that I was breaking his heart all I wanted to do was rip off his clothes and ride him until the cows came home. But for his own sake I

had to keep my distance and not allow myself to give him another inch of me.

Once graduation was over Brandon apologized saying he didn't want to lose me as a friend; I on the other hand never did apologize. Not because I was not sorry but because I couldn't let him know that I was ripped to shreds over pushing him away. He had become such a huge part of my life and though I was not in love with him, how could I be, I still cared about him deeply.

I could not for the life of me imagine going our separate ways, never again

having him there to keep me safe, something he never failed to do. But as my mother always said “If you love something, set it free, if it loves you in return, it will come home again.” so I set him free. Only I hoped he would never come back again because I was nothing and he deserved someone that was not only something but someone who could and would give him everything.

“You know...Brandon’s plane leaves in a few hours.”

Brea never failed to point out the obvious. She had come over to help me pack the rest of my things so that we could move into our new apartment in Austin which we had found a few weeks before.

“Yeah I know, what do you want me to do about it?” I asked defensively.

I couldn't think about Brandon, it had been months since I ended things and I could barely stand to look at him without my eyes welling up with tears. Brea kept telling me how much she knew I was hurting.

“Jemma, look, I know you love Brandon, even if you don’t want to admit it to yourself. You cannot keep shutting him out. Four years,” she sighed, “you are throwing away four fucking years! If you did that to me I would want to ring your neck! Instead Brandon just wants to be your friend and you are tearing his heart out by ignoring him!”

I slammed my dresser drawer and tossed a handful of socks into my Hello Kitty travel-all.

“Fuck Brea! Don’t you think I know I am hurting him? Do you think I WANT

to hurt him? Stop fucking throwing this shit in my face. He was going to give up a perfectly good opportunity, one I would KILL to have but fucked up to the point of no return. I don't deserve him. Better I break his heart knowing he can take it than take his life knowing he won't recover."

I watched Brea's face turn from angry to flabbergasted in a matter of seconds.

"You know Jem, I love you, you know I do, but you are fucking stupid as fuck. And you got one thing right in that stupid bullshit pity filled rant you just gave:

you *don't* deserve him!”

Brea, huffed out a pissed off sigh and stormed toward the door to my room. She briefly stopped to face me before leaving.

“I am heading over to wish him luck.” She paused. “Did you know, I liked him, I mean like liked him?”

I raised my eye brows at her and shook my head not really understanding or knowing what to say.

“Well, I did, in fact I have had a crush on him since the moment I laid eyes on him, which was before you I might add. I

never told you because when you ran up to me the day you two met with that smile on your face and those perfectly pinked cheeks I decided not to say anything. I had waited so long to see you happy like that; you actually had a gleam in your eyes. If he was the one to give you your color back then I wanted you to have him.”

Tears began to well up in my eyes as she turned her head to the floor.

“Had I known, you were going to treat him like you did, that you were just going to throw him away, I would have

moved Heaven and Earth to see to it you never got to him. Anyway, I thought you should know that. I am so disappointed in you Jem.”

And with that she was gone. Even though she was trying her damndest to fight them I could see the tears in her eyes. I could also see the pain that I caused my best friend, the person who had gotten me through the most trying times in my life. I could also see something I had never seen in her before. I could see that unlike me, Brea was in love Brandon. She loved me enough to

sacrifice her own happiness just to see me smile. How could I have missed it?

Were there any signs that she had feelings for him? I couldn't remember a time she had shown those kind of emotions toward anyone. She always gave the two of us our space; she encouraged our relationship, sometimes to the point of ridiculousness.

Was that it? Proof that she had been harboring unrequited feelings for the love of my high school life? Perhaps to fight off her own emotions she *had* to see to it that we worked. All I know is

that in failing Brandon, I seem to have failed her as well.

After cursing myself for being so stupid, I finished packing the last few items in the room I had called my own since I was eleven. The lavender walls seemed so bare; remnants of the photos that had hung on them hours ago were seared into the paint. I felt a sense of nostalgia realizing that once I walked out the front door I would be nothing but a memory to this life and starting over would be my only option. There was no coming back.

After the heated conversation I had with Brea only hours before I wasn't quite sure what kind of beginning was in store for me. We have never had an argument before, much less a conversation with such shocking confessions. We were soul sisters, we spoke, we shared, we joked, we hugged, we teased, we comforted but we never fought. I did not know how to get her to forgive me for being such a horrible friend.

I had told her for years that I was not worthy of such an awesome friendship

but she would blow me off and dismiss me as being '*ridiculously self-conscious and clueless*'. If it were not for Brea I am not sure I would have ever made it through middle school, little alone all of the madness of high school. I have horrible self esteem and am insanely hard on myself, I know that. Because of her I started believing that I had a few redeeming qualities making me worthy of existing in a world full of chaos.

Brea and I met in fifth grade, the year that my life drastically changed. My dad

was going through a lot of health issues so he and my mother decided to move closer to Austin so that he could get the best help possible. My aunt, my father's sister, who at that time was on the City council pulled some strings with a friend and found us a little house in the country.

We had all hoped country living would help my father in his venture to become of stable mind again but it failed miserably. After months of therapy and anti-psychotic medication my father's mental abilities took a turn for the worse

and my mother had him temporarily committed to the state hospital for treatment of schizophrenia with sociopathic tendencies, an illness he had been diagnosed with two years earlier.

My dad had been pretty normal up until the few months preceding my eight birthday. He was like most other dads, he worked hard, came home tired but still managed to fit in time for me and my brother Nicolai. The thing I loved the most about my dad was that he loved to sing and had a voice that could easily rival any operatic voice of today. He

sang when he mowed the lawn, at church, in the shower and pretty much any other chance he had. The best part was when he sang us to sleep at night, always the same tune, *Pie Jesu*'. I was convinced that his voice was the fire that lit up every star in the night sky, it was truly magical. But that all changed the night Nicolai was taken from us.

Nicolai was twelve when he died; he had gone out of town for the weekend with his friend Julian and Julian's parents. It was supposed to be a fun trip, Six Flags, water parks and sight-seeing.

Howard and Victoria, Julian's dad and mom, had taken the boys to Cowboy Billy's for dinner, when the world came crashing down around them.

A crazed man walked into the brightly-lit restaurant, started screaming at his ex-wife, then pulled a semi-automatic gun out of a bag and started shooting anyone and everyone in sight. In the end, none of them made it back. Nicolai took a bullet to the right side of his face and stomach, he was declared dead in the ambulance. Julian's parents were both killed on scene and from what

I remember, Julian had only a superficial gunshot to the leg.

We never saw him again; he was sent to Puerto Rico to live with his grandmother. The gunman, Ignacio Juan Hernandez took the coward's way out of this world by putting a bullet in his own head.

When my parents were notified, my father took it the hardest. My mother, though heartbroken tried to be strong but even she had her moments of weakness. I was too young to understand much more than a very evil man had stolen my

brother from me and he was never coming back.

It took two months for my father to completely lose himself. We started seeing it a few days after the murder; he had locked himself in the attic for a full 24 hours. When he finally emerged he was barely recognizable. We would catch him talking to himself, which we later found was him talking to my dead brother. My dad eventually told us Nicolai would come to him, face bloodied, a giant hole in his stomach telling him how much he missed being

with us. It was so terrifying that on occasion I could swear that I saw him too, just as plain as day.

Dad would often burst into flying rages, screaming at the top of his lungs, clearing counter tops, shelves and throwing anything and everything he could get his hands on. Even his speech changed, he cursed all the time and often sounded drunk and lethargic, even when perfectly sober. Eventually my mother had to send him away for treatment which was when the doctor, with the permission of my father, explained to us

that my father was schizophrenic. They said it had probably been lying dormant inside of him his entire life. My brother's murder had awoken it and without proper treatment it would destroy him.

We had hoped his 6 month stint away would make him better and in the beginning it did. He was regularly taking his medications and he no longer lashed out. He wasn't the same as he had been before Nicolai was taken from us. For one thing, I never heard my father sing again. He had locked up his beautiful

voice deep down inside of him. Anytime I asked for a song he would ignore me and pretend I wasn't even in the room.

He stopped working, citing he couldn't handle the responsibility, so my mother went back to teaching, something she had given up years before. They had mutually decided it would be more beneficial for her to stay home and be a full time mother than a mother to a room full of strangers. But she no longer had that choice; she had to take care of what was left of her family.

After a few months, it was decided

that we would move away. Not a single one of us could ever be happy living in a town where the incident was being shoved down our faces. We couldn't go grocery shopping without someone walking up to us with an "I'm so sorry for your loss" or some other generic term of endearment.

Not to mention my brother's room was still a constant reminder of his horrific end, every inch of the house rubbed his absence in our faces. My father had forbidden us from entering his bedroom; he told us we were not to ever

even open the door. But one day I had wandered in wanting to feel some sort of connection with the boy I loved and lost. That was when I saw his A&M cap hanging on the footboard of his bed; he had loved that hat, so I took it. I had only wanted something he loved, something close to him that made me feel like he was still there. The hat smelled like him and I needed it, I didn't know why. But once dad saw me wearing it, giving me a look of what I can only describe as pure hatred, he ripped it off of my head taking a handful of my hair with him. The next

day the door was padlocked with the hat safely inside.

Nobody had really considered my feelings in everything and who was I to say anything, I was only eight. Plus, I was too busy watching everyone else fall apart. I didn't want to make things worse for fear I would lose my mother and father as well. So I stayed quiet and when not in school I spent most of the day in my room to stay out of the way.

When I was not listening to sobbing from one or the other of my parents through locked doors the house was so

quiet that I found myself feeling completely and utterly lost and alone. So naturally, I was shocked when my mother came into my room and told me we were moving closer to Aunt Tilly.

“Jemma, daddy’s not feeling well and we can get him the best help in Austin. They have some amazing doctors that can make him better. Plus we can wipe the slate clean and find a whole new life. A better one, what do you say?”

What could I say, my mother sat on my bed with my hand in hers smiling ear to ear. I had not seen her smile in almost

a year and I would have bent over backwards to keep that smile right where it was. I nodded, threw my arms around her and said the only thing my soon-to-be nine year-old self could say: “Sounds perfect Mama!”

Chapter Two

“Hey Jemma Lee, you all packed, sweetie?”

Aunt Tilly stood in my doorway holding out a glass of iced tea. I sat up from my bed, grabbed it from her hands and guzzled down half the glass. Aunt Tilly could not make toast without burning it but she made some damned good sweet tea.

“I think so, if I forgot anything I am sure I can figure out where you live.” I said in return with a crooked smile on my face.

Aunt Tilly rubbed my back and pulled me in for a hug so tight that I nearly dropped my glass spilling half of what was left onto the floor.

“I know I haven’t been much of a parent to you sweetheart, I have just never been good at that kind of stuff, emotions and all. But I do love you, and you are welcome here anytime, day or night. I hope you know that.”

It was true, Tilly was not good at showing she cared but I had never doubted that she did. She was a strange bird, I could tell that somewhere and some point someone had ripped her a new one but she never spoke about her past, heck she barely ever spoke about the present. Not with me anyway. But she made sure I had plenty of food to eat, clean good quality clothes and my own room. She would sporadically give me hugs here and there to remind me that she was still a part of my life and not going any place. Something I always found

kind of funny because sometimes I actually forgot.

I pulled away from her and looked up into her big blue eyes “I love you Aunt Tilly!” then threw my arms around her.

She stroked my hair a few times, edged me away and took a few paces backward. “Now that’s settled, Brandon is down stairs. He wanted to see you before he left.”

A sudden wave of panic surged through me and I opened my mouth to tell her to send him away.

“Nope, don’t even think about it young

lady!” For a woman so unfamiliar with her emotions she sure could read them well.

“You spent years driving me crazy with Brandon this, Brandon that and while I know you broke up, I also know that boy loves you and you love him. So you take your pretty little butt downstairs and talk to him before it is too late and you spend the rest of your life regretting it. You hear me?”

Half way through her speech the tears were starting to come down so much that I could only nod my head. One thing I

loved the most about Aunt Tilly is that she is nothing if not honest and straight to the point.

I shoved my way passed her without saying a word, wiped the tears from my eyes and went downstairs where I found Brandon waiting in front of the door. The very sight of him took my breath away. There will always be a part of me that loves him and knows that he will forever hold a place in my heart. After the last few months I have come to terms with the fact that I just may have cared about Brandon more than I allowed

myself to acknowledge but there was no going back. I simply couldn't break Brandon's heart any more than I already had. But seeing him standing there, with his head to the ground looking like a lost puppy I knew that I could not stand the thought of losing him forever.

As soon as I hit the last stair he looked up and met my gaze letting out nothing but "Hey".

"Hey back at yah." I smiled back and winked flirtatiously.

A tiny flash of a smile played on his lips for a brief moment before he moved

his gaze back to the floor, however brief, it was nice to see.

“I miss you Jem,” he uttered under his breath as he looked up to meet my eyes again. “I know I shouldn’t be here, that you don’t want me here, but I miss you and couldn’t bear to leave without seeing you one last time.”

There it was, the last time. Never again would this beautiful man before me kiss me and tell me I was beautiful and perfect. He would never again tell me he loved me or look at me like I was the only girl he had ever noticed in his

entire life. Brandon was no longer mine; I had no claim to him. He stood before me, damaged by a girl who didn't know the first thing about loving anyone because love scared the shit out of her.

But 'this girl' could not bear the words "last time". I yearned for one more touch, one more moment with the boy whose love I so desperately wanted to return, so I did all that I could think of doing without actually thinking. I threw my arms around him and let out the tears I had been forcing back since the mention of his name moments before. I

cried for him, for my brother, my parents, my best friend and for the part me that was so lost I could barely find myself in the fog that constantly surrounded me. With tears pouring from my eyes I buried my face into the warmth of his chest surrounded by the comfort of his arms sheltered by an embrace that I had in no way earned.

“Don’t leave me Jemma” he whispered, begging into my ear. “We don’t have to be a couple but please don’t leave me,. I love you, no matter what, I love you and always will.”

Still wrapped in his arms I looked up into the eyes that had sealed my fate with him freshman year, begging him to see the thoughts warring in my head. Brandon reached up to my face, after drying my tears he pressed his lips to mine and I let him. Our lips stayed locked in the sweetest kiss he had ever given me for what felt like a lifetime, when we finally pulled away our foreheads stayed together as if glued in place.

“I won’t leave you Brandon.” I whispered.

Our lips met all over again, only this time things were different, there was nothing sweet about this kiss, this kiss was hard and full of passion, this kiss was goodbye. Goodbye to the children we were, goodbye to young love and goodbye to us as Brandon and Jemma, forever.

Forgetting Aunt Tilly was home we somehow found ourselves on my bed in my wasteland of a bedroom. I didn't ever feel myself walk up the stairs, there was no thinking in this moment, it was pure animal passion. Brandon wildly

pulled my shirt over my head as I did the same for him, he tugged my pants and underwear down letting out a grunt that only fueled the fire between my legs once he laid eyes on my bare and utterly willing body.

When his pants were gone he climbed in between my legs, teasing me with the tip of his erection. First he claimed my lips and made his way down to my breasts, suckling them to make them harder then rolling his tongue over the peaks sending a flaming heat shooting through me head to toe. Keeping his

hands on my hardened nipples, he kissed his way between my legs. The moment his lips touched my throbbing nub embarrassment overcame my senses and I grabbed his head to pull him away.

“Brandon, please!” I begged, desperate for him to climb inside of me.

He looked up at me with an even more desperate fire burning in his eyes and whispered, “Jem, give me this please, let me know how you taste. I want to leave here knowing that I experienced every last inch of you.”

Hearing the need in his voice I bit my

lip and nodded. “OK” was all I could manage to get out. I was ready for him; I wanted him so bad I could feel it before it ever started. His lips kissed the bare flesh between my legs as I felt his fingers gently open my folds. His mouth slightly parted, allowing me to feel his hot breath on my clit, and then his tongue began singing its tune.

It began as a light tease, delicately circling my my swollen nub with tender care. But once the first gasp escaped my lips his tongue began more frantic movements. The ferocious dance of his

tongue caused me to quiver and shake beneath him.

“You taste like Heaven baby.” he slowly pushed a finger into me and his tongue went back to work, circling more and more flicking back and forth then circling again until I couldn’t take it anymore. I let myself go calling his name as I exploded on his talented tongue. He continued kissing me, once his mouth met mine I tasted myself on his lips and the throbbing between my legs became more intense.

“I love you so much Jemma, you taste

like honey, I can't get enough.”

He kissed me again as he moved two fingers back into me.

“Tell me you love me Jem, I know you do, say it please, just once baby.”

His fingers dance inside me and just before I climaxed again I whispered into his ear “I love you Brandon, I need you inside me, please, PLEASE!” I begged.

On the final please his hands moved and his cock jammed itself inside of me with one hard thrust. Never moving his lips from mine he continued to move along my walls, sometimes slowing,

sometimes pounding me so hard it nearly hurt. I could tell he needed this for closure, we both did.

“Jemma” he roared. “I’m about to come, come with me baby.”

I reached for his lips and began clenching myself harder around him, moving my hips in unison, anticipating his every move. Then with one final hard thrust I screamed his name once again, finishing along with him as he coated the walls of my hot moist core with everything that he had.

He stayed inside of me for several

minutes savoring every second before he pulled out and we began our inevitable goodbye. Leaving me alone so that he could get a wet cloth to clean us up, the tears found their way back as I realized just what I had given up. This was love. I loved Brandon. I don't know if it is the mind-blowing, forever-lasting, soul-mate kind of love but I know I am in love with him and it hurts.

Watching as Brandon pulled on his pants I found myself with tears softly flowing down my cheeks wishing that he could have stayed inside of me forever.

Just the two of us locked in this room, never having to face the reality of life again. We could just spend our lives making love, coming together then doing it all over again. But this was the real world and in the real world things are not that easy.

Once Brandon was dressed he climbed into bed next to me and propped himself up on his side.

“I know that doesn’t change anything Jem, if that is why you are crying.”

I shook my head back and forth trying

to force the tears back into my eyes but it didn't work.

“I love you Brandon, I really do and I am so sorry I am hurting you!”

He put his hand to my cheek and leaned over me kissing the tears from my eyes.

“Shh, it's OK baby, it's time to grow up, time to move on. I get it, you can't give me everything. I have always known , deep down I knew I didn't have all of you. No matter how many times I tried to convince myself otherwise I knew. But I also knew you *loved* me,

somewhere deep down it was there.”

He wiped the rest of the tears from my face and we stared at each other briefly before he got up off the bed and held his hand out to me helping me up.

“Get dressed and walk me out?”

I walked Brandon out to his car without saying a word. Not because I didn’t have a million things that I wanted to say but because I knew it would hurt both of us too much to say them. He opened the passenger side and pulled out a small manila envelope.

“Don’t open this until I am gone. It’s a

little cheesy but I wanted to give you something to remember me by.” He handed me the package.

“Don’t forget about me Jem. I am not going to be an idiot and say I am going to wait for you because I know you will never come to me. But I am hoping we can be friends, which is such a strange thing to say after everything that just happened. But I don’t want you to forget that I will always be there when you need me.”

He placed his hands on my chin, pulled my face to his and kissed me for

what was surely to be the last time.

“I won’t forget you Brandon, I promise. And so you know, I don’t regret a thing. You should know that, every second we were together, I regret none of it.” I cried.

His arms wrapped themselves around me once again and I felt his soft lips kiss me quick and soft on the top of my head, “Thank you, baby.”

Then he turned around, got in the car and drove away leaving me standing on my front lawn holding onto the envelope for dear life.

If it were not for Brea catching me off guard I am not sure I would have ever moved.

“Earth to Jemma!” she called out jabbing me in the ribs with her bony finger causing me to jump.

“Ow!” I yelped. “Did you come to make up or do you still hate me?”

She thought for a moment.

“That depends, was that Brandon? He said he might stop by.”

All I could do was nod. I seem to be at a loss of words most of the time these days.

“Well, what happened? Did you get everything sorted out?” she pressed.

“I think so, it was hard but I think we both know where we stand and are going to try to make friendship work. Though I am not so sure how to do that with him almost two thousand miles away.”

Then I turned and walked back in the house taking the stairs up to my room as Brea followed behind.

“Well, in that case, I forgive you. Sorry I freaked and bailed on you. As far as your future with Brandon, it’s friendship,

not romance. It's a lot easier to make a long distance friendship work than it is to make a sexual relationship work."

I nodded in agreement as she stepped through the bedroom door stopping as she reached the bed. She made a gesture that looked a lot like sniffing the air and before I knew it she punched me in the shoulder.

"You bitch! Did you and Brandon have sex?"

I felt my eyes widen then quickly turned away from her knowing all too well that Brea was one of the few

people who could read me like a book. I pulled my suitcase up and began dragging it to the door.

“YOU DID!” she shouted. “What the hell Jemma? What were you thinking? Are you two back together? Was it hot? Say something for crying out loud!”

But the truth is that I didn't know what to say or where to even begin. I was not even so sure I wanted her to know anything at all. So I just said,

“Not sure about Hell, never been there. I wasn't thinking, no, YES and I don't want to talk about it anymore. We have

closure, we are staying friends, enough said. Don't push it, OK?"

She let out an exasperated sigh and surprisingly gave up without protest. "OK."

She paused, both of us taking in the inevitable moment of 'moving on' that we were now faced with.

"Then I guess it's time to get this shit loaded and get the hell out of this crap hole of a town?"

I let out a much needed laugh at her question and simply said, "Let's do it!"

Chapter Three

I remember a very brief time in my life where everything was perfect. I don't remember a lot of depth-ridden details but I remember that I was truly happy. I loved frilly dresses, having my hair pulled into two little braids and parading around the yard disguised as a fairy. I was a child, innocent to the world around her and completely

oblivious that life can take a toll on your soul to the point that fight becomes near impossible. It's been two months since I left Taylor and the world that broke me in two behind me. Brea and I are settled into the life Austin has provided us and for the first time since dancing in fairy wings I feel full and it feels amazing.

It took me a week after moving in to finally open the envelope Brandon placed into my hands the day we said our goodbyes. Not that "goodbye" ever actually left either of our lips. If anything it was not a goodbye at all, our final

moments together were more like a hello to new beginnings than a true goodbye. Our relationship has changed, we are not a couple anymore, we are something so much more: we are friends, great friends.

We email, text and talk on the phone several times a week. At first I wasn't quite sure how we would move forward, we had promised each other that we would always be a part of each others lives but my love for him honestly scared the hell out of me. It wasn't until I opened the envelope that I knew for

certain I could handle the feelings that had been stirring inside of me since that steam filled afternoon in my bedroom at Aunt Tilly's.

“Brea?” I asked out interrupting her from an episode of *Maury Povich*. Yet another rousing episode of “Who’s the baby daddy?”

“Yeah babe?” she asks putting the TV on mute.

I cross the room from my bedroom, my arms wrapped around the envelope as if was the most sensitive package in the world and sat down next to her on

the couch.

“I think I am ready to open it. Do you mind sitting here with me?” Brea’s eyes opened wide, she shook her head no and mumbled “uh-uh”.

Slowly opening the small yellow package I pulled out a piece of white notebook paper and a small red box. Taking a deep breath I unfolded the letter and read:

Jem,

The day you broke up with me my world completely shattered. You broke me Jem, ripped out my heart and

stomped all over it. Looking back I can't say that it surprised me and maybe that is what caused it to hurt so much. Who wants to know that the person they have wanted most of their life didn't want them back in the same way?

I remember every second of our time together, from the moment I first saw you standing in the hall freshman year to the moment you broke my heart and every second of the last few months I spent trying to pull myself back together. Thank God Brea was here to

hold me up because without her I probably wouldn't be able to write this. I am glad you are going to have her.

I am not writing this letter to rehash the past, I am writing this because I know that for the rest of my life I will love everything about you. I will love that innocent young girl with a broken heart who let me have my shot at piecing it back together. I will love the girl that punched Jason Anderson in the nose for throwing the ball too hard during my first football practice, knocking me on my ass. The girl who I

shared my first dance with, my first kiss and the girl I gave myself to, body , heart and soul, a first for us both.

You have always floored me Jem. Every time I ever laid eyes on you after not seeing you for a few hours you floored me. Seeing you lit up my day and no matter what shit was happening at the moment all it took was one word from your lips to make it meaningless. It never mattered what the word was because it was the mere sound of your voice. It tortures me to know that I will never have you in my life again. I can't

bear the thought and I am determined to have that not be the case.

I wish you could see yourself. I wish you could see the girl that we all see, that you were not so blinded by your past that you can't see how amazing you really are. And that is the reason for this letter. No matter what happens between us I want you to know that about yourself. You are wonderful Jem! Every inch of you is the picture of perfection. You are the most beautiful girl I have ever laid my eyes on; you have no idea how many times I had to

fight off the guys on the team. Most of them made it perfectly clear they thought you were hot and would have given a limb for a chance at you. I threatened most of them on a daily basis, not just them but most of the male population at Taylor high school.

Everything you see wrong with yourself, those drop dead bedroom eyes , your perfectly kissable lips, breasts that could feed a man's dreams for a lifetime, legs that go on for miles, legs I love having wrapped around me and an ass, good lord that ass. J-Lo has

nothing on that perfectly sculpted ass of yours. It is as if God took his image of perfection and gave you every single fucking inch of it. Right down to what is inside of you.

You are smart, even if you blew off school; you are still so fucking smart. Remember our sophomore year when Becky Hamilton ran as student council president and she went on a tirade about the unhealthy food served in the kiosk, demanding it be closed down right along with the vending machines? You shot her idea down in half a second

after you side slapped her with statistics about the independence of youth and how something as simple as a food kiosk helped mold teens into productive citizens by providing choices and the opportunity to learn money management skills. You had the school staff eating out of your hands, it was hilarious, and I thought Becky was going to piss herself.

Intelligence is so much more than a grade on a piece of paper Jem. You have no idea how frustrated I would get sometimes with you, always putting

yourself down. You never listened to any of us even though we practically beat our admiration into you.

Anyway, I know this letter is long and I am totally rambling but I want you to know how special and amazing you are, not just to me but to everyone around you. And though I can't have you, I want you to know that you deserve love and I hope you find it. I know you fear the pain that can come along with it, Lord knows I know what that pain feels like right about now, but the joy that comes with loving someone outweighs

any pain it can cause.

I would not change one second of loving you Jemma. Well...except maybe the part where you ground my heart into sand. Haha! Seriously though, you have to let love in babe. You have to let someone love you and let yourself love someone. Your heart is still beating in your chest; you aren't dead, stop living life like you are. It is OK to love, not everyone is like your father, not everyone breaks in the end and not everyone will leave you. I love you and no matter what you decide. I'm not

going anywhere and will be here for you, no matter the distance whether you want me or not.

Yours always,

Brandon

I looked up from the letter in my hands to Brea with tears in my eyes.

“Well?” she asked.

Instead of answering I pushed the note into her hands and reached down to open the small box in my lap. Inside was the most beautiful heart locket I have ever seen in my life. It was about the size of a

quarter and covered in Celtic symbols. I pulled the delicate chain from the box and held the heart in my hand, rubbing my thumb over the intricate design and then flipped it open. As my eyes took sight of the photographs inside my heart sped up and a small breathless gasp made its way out of my mouth from the pit of my stomach. One side of the locket was a photo of my brother Nicolai and on the other was a photo of my mother. Engraved on the back of the locket were the words, “Let love in.”

Brea and I both sat in silence for what

felt like forever before she broke said silence in a way only Brea could.

“Fuck me gently with a chainsaw, that was fucking hot, it’s kind of annoying how much he loves you. Damn it Jem. So what now?” Brea had seen the movie *Heathers* way too many times.

That was the question wasn’t it? What now? What do I do with Brandon’s words, how do you process such blatant honesty?

“Well, I can tell you what you should do. You should mosey your out of this world ass over to the phone and call

Brandon before he comes to his senses. THAT is what you should do.” Brea huffed. I stared down at the locket in my hands, and then lifted my head back to her stare.

“I agree, can you put this on me before I call him?” I held up the locket and Brea nodded her head taking the heartwarming piece of jewelry into her hands and placing it around my neck.

“It’s beautiful Jem; it’s amazing how much Brandon has grown up since freshman year, huh? Not that he was ever a normal teenage boy. But man, the

letter, the necklace. I hate to say it but I feel bad for any girl who comes along after you. He's completely and totally ruined."

I cringed at the thought and said "He is going to find someone amazing, he doesn't need me anymore. And no, he is not the boy we met ninth grade."

Brea let out an almost hysterical laugh. "THAT is the understatement of a lifetime, definitely not a boy, Brandon is all man. Every hot succulent inch of him. Damn, I know he is pretty much hands-off material, but just thinking about it

makes me feel like I am 14 all over again.”

I laughed at her honesty then decided it was time for a little honesty of my own.

“I wish you had told me about Brandon. I want you to know that as far as you are concerned he is not hands-off. If you want him, I won’t hate you for trying to get him. He loves you too, you know.”

Brea took my hand in hers and offered up a sweet smile assuring me that she had no intention of playing second fiddle

to the love of his life. But I didn't want to think of myself as the love of his life. I had to know that Brandon would one day open himself up to someone else and move on. Deep down I knew he already had, the fact that he never really fought for me spoke for itself.

When he left me standing on the side of the street in front of my house holding onto the last significant piece of our relationship I knew he was saying goodbye to everything we were. I knew he was moving on and I would rather him end up with Brea than anyone else.

No other woman could ever be as good for him as she could be. After all, they had both managed to put up with me all of these years.

They had bonded when I wasn't around, when I was too caught up in my own bullshit to be a good friend and girlfriend and in turn they too became friends. It felt good knowing that she was there for him at a time that I could not be. When I was the last person in the world he would want comforting him because I was the reason why he needed comfort in the first place. He really was

a great boy, a boy who had grown into an even more amazing man.

I finally ended up calling Brandon and we spoke for hours about our past, our future, life, being on our own. And by the end of the conversation we officially realized that we would never be able to say goodbye. The reason the words never left our lips was because we would forever be intertwined. He and I both vowed that no matter what happened or who came into our lives we would never shut each other out. We vowed to put the past behind us while

still allowing it to shape us into better people and focus on a future as friends.

So here we were, months later and I couldn't be happier. Brea had gotten a job at the Old Navy store up the way from our small two bedroom apartment and I was on the last of my savings still clinging onto the hope that something would come my way before classes started next week. I had put in application after application but considering I had no work history and the competition was fierce I couldn't manage to find one person willing to

throw me a bone. I hated the idea of calling Aunt Tilly for financial help but I had approximately 300 bucks left in my savings account and rent was due in two weeks.

“Hey babe, Angela was wondering if you wanted to hit up the Omega party at UT tonight,” Brea yelled from across the room.

We met Angela two days after moving into our apartment. The walk-in gate to the building had gotten stuck and we got locked outside. Thank goodness Angela came along. Giving the gate a big kick

and tug the door sprang open allowing us entry. She was a second year student at St. Edwards and filled us in on all of the quirks the 50 year old building had to offer.

Angela is a bubbly, dark-skinned Cuban sex kitten. Short, with a pixie cut hairstyle and boobs so large that I was shocked didn't knock her abnormally small frame over with each step she took. She was very sweet and the three of us hit it off well. Meeting her had done wonders for our social life. She introduced us to pretty much every

human being in the building and dragged us to parties from UT to St. Edwards to ACC. She was lively and knew everybody; you had to be a real jerk not to like her.

“Yeah sure, whatever!” I yelled back.

Brea shut her bedroom door and went back to the conversation she was having with Angela on her cell and I went back to reading my book. Truth be told I wasn't in the mood to go to a party. We had spent virtually every weekend out and about, a quiet evening at home with my face buried in CD Reiss's *Beg* was

all I was interested in doing at the moment. I would have argued my case but dealing with Angela and Brea as a duo was not on my list of favorite things to deal with. I would waste my breath and end up going so what was the point? I always ended up happy that I chose to go anyway.

“How’s the book?” I jumped at the sound of Brea’s voice.

“Hot, almost a little too hot. It kind of makes me wish I had a Jonathan in my life.”

Brea laughed “Yeah, I think I changed

batteries in Big John at least ten times during that entire series of books.”

Brea grabbed her sweater from the back of the couch and shrugged it on.

“I swear girl, \$15.99 on Amazon, the best money you will ever spend!” I rolled my eyes.

Brea spent more time in her room with her dildo than she did with real men. About once a week she would sneak in Cole, a big husky Lacrosse player with more grunt than brains but when I questioned the relationship Brea always said “His dick makes up for

when his brains fail him.” and she left it at that.

I guess it was true because every time he came over I would end up spending the night elsewhere, it sounded like the two of them were going to bust through my adjoining bedroom wall at any second. Every time I heard the screams, grunting and pounding of what I can only imagine were body parts I was left wishing I had spent that \$15.99 on Amazon.

“I’m heading over to Coles, I left my

diamond-back leggings over at his place and I want to wear them tonight.” Yeah right, leggings my ass.

“Leggings? You expect me to believe you are running clear across town to pick up a pair of pants from your over endowed brainless boyfriend?” I asked.

“HA HA, as a matter of fact I do. He isn’t even home, he left them with Greg. But just so you know, I rather enjoy the fact he is brainless, that leaves him to focus on making sure his 10 inch cock fills me up and wears me out me out good.”

I put my finger to my open mouth pointing to my throat making the gesture that I am gagging.

“Oh please, trust me; you would want it if you had it. I orgasmed three times in 15 minutes last night. I’m convinced every ounce of his brains went into making his dick and I am one happy girl when I get to partake of it. If you had any sense you would find one of your own. I hear you at night, I know you need a little bit of boom chika just like the rest of us and don’t pretend it isn’t true.”

Shocked I put my hands to my mouth.

What does she mean she hears me? Sure I masturbate, I am a perfectly normal when it comes to needing sexual attention but I try my best to be *discreet* about it.

“Please tell me Cole hasn’t ever heard me?” Brea bites her bottom lip and does not make a sound. “OH MY GAWD, he has? How embarrassing!”

Brea laughs at me and shrugs her shoulders. “See yah later chica, be ready in an hour K? Angela says Omega parties are off the charts and the guys are absolutely edible. Maybe you’ll get

lucky.” Brea winks at me and disappears out the front door closing it behind her.

Once I get over the initial shock of learning her boyfriend has heard me pleasuring myself I decide to start getting ready for this evenings event. I shower then put on my thigh length black leather fitted skirt, a low cut brown ribbed t-shirt that accentuates my breasts, a pair of calf length biker boots and pull my long hair back into a smooth low pony tail. Finishing the look off with mascara and some ruby red gloss I glance at myself in the mirror and I have

to admit to myself that I actually look good.

It took me years to come to terms with the fact that I was attractive and while I still have moments where I think I could break glass with my face I am finally in a place where I am comfortable with my body. Not necessarily who I am on the inside but with my body and that is certainly a long way from where I was before. It helps that I often feel like I have to fight the guys at these college parties off with a stick, even if I do turn down every one of them.

After shoveling down chicken burritos from Chipotle we managed to make it to the party which was already in full swing. The frat house was a little bit off the beaten path just outside of campus. And old white, stereotypical two story southern home with a double wraparound porch and every inch of the two porches were filled with people guzzling down drinks in red plastic cups. By the time we made it inside the three of us had been groped and howled at by half the male population at The University of Texas.

Things were no better off on the inside of the house which was so cramped with people that by the time we made it to the keg in the kitchen I was a half second from having a panic attack. Needless to say, I do not do well with crowds.

“You need a drink, chica?” Angela exclaimed handing me one of the familiar red cups. I took it from her hands and chugged it, paying no attention to the cheers coming from the group of guys handling the keg and serving the drinks. All I needed to get through the

night was a slight buzz to take the edge off and I was working my way there as quickly as possible.

One of the guys manning the keg refilled my beer two seconds before I was yanked away by a pair of unfamiliar hands that sent half of the golden liquid flying into the air.

“Dance with me, gorgeous!” He exclaimed.

I flipped around to find myself being dragged into the living room where everyone was bumping and grinding to Lady Gaga’s “Do What You Want.” I

tried to pull away from him in protest but he would not let go of my arm. Just as I was opening my mouth to scream for him to get the fuck off of me, a large masculine body stepped in front of the insistent frat boy. “Let her go Raz, the lady obviously has no intentions of dancing with you tonight.”

There was no threat or warning in the deep voice cascading out of the mouth of the most beautiful man I have ever laid my eyes on. He simply stated a fact and with that statement my arm fell to my side and Raz let go.

“Sorry Ford, she was just too damn sexy not to have a turn with.” Raz turned to me and winked.

“Next time you ask a lady to dance, you don’t just grab her. Show some respect or you’re out on your ass, you hear me? Now apologize to the lady, Raz.”

Raz, looked to the floor and in a panicked voice he quickly uttered “Yes, Sir” and turned to me.

“Sorry for not showing you respect ma’am. Would you like to dance?”

Raz did a complete about-face, going from an over-enthused eighteen year old

to a southern gentleman in a matter of a second. But I was still a little shaken up about being ripped away from my friends and a bit flustered at the sight of the tall hunk of man that I could not take my eyes off of.

“No thank you Raz, maybe later?” Raz smiled from ear to ear mouthing

“It’s a date!” then he ran off disappearing into the mess of bodies on the dance floor leaving me alone with Ford.

“Sorry about that, new pledge and as it seems a total lightweight. Sometimes the

newbies get a little over excited when they see a beautiful girl.” His lips turn up into a smile so genuine and unbelievably hot that I find myself with a warm tingling between my legs.

Beautiful, he thinks I am beautiful. A feeling of excitement bubbles up in the pit of my stomach and I sense my mouth turn up in return making me feel like a child who just had her first taste of candy.

“I’m Ford.” he says, extending his hand out for me to take, only I hesitate still lost in his perfection.

Ford towers over me, with messy dark hair, tanned skin, dressed in a skin tight black t-shirt, equally tight jeans and a pair of old rugged brown cowboy boots. His clothing is simple and understated while showing off every detail of his panty dropping physique. Ford is clearly a man who knows the effect he has on women. I find myself gawking at him, moving from his perfectly auburn colored eyes to lips that I can only imagine could destroy a woman with the slightest caress.

“And you are?” he says clearing his

throat.

I manage to pull myself together enough to realize that he must think I am a total whack job.

“Oh sorry, I ...um, zoned out for a second. I do that sometimes.”

I somehow muster up the courage to take his hand.

“Jemma, Jemma Hale, my friends call me Jem.”

At the mention of my name his face turns cold and he carefully asks “Hale? Where are you from Jemma?”

I pause for a moment dumbfounded by

his change in demeanor “Montgomery, Texas, just outside of Houston. But I have been living with my aunt in Taylor since I was eleven. My friend Brea and I just moved here.”

He let out a uninterested “huh” and the next thing I know he is scowling and staring at me in such a way that makes the hairs on my neck stand on end. After a brief look he turns around and walks away without a single word, leaving me completely lost and confused.

“Who the heck was that cowboy? You need to go get some of him before

someone else snags him up and I mean now girl.” Brea steps into my view and tries to push me towards Ford who was making the disappearing act right before my eyes. What is his problem?

I shrug my shoulder, “His name is Ford. I thought he might be interested, but the second I told him my name he just blew me off and left. It was weird!”

Brea took my hand “His loss then hot stuff, let’s dance, there are plenty of pickings here tonight. I am determined to get you laid before the night is over. If not I’ll do you myself and trust me when

I say that I will be the best you will ever have.”

I slapped my forehead and just shook my head back and forth; even I could be shocked by some of the stuff that came out of Brea’s mouth on occasion. I knew she was joking, Brea loved dick almost as much as she love chocolate, the statement was just her crude way of getting her point across.

“You are fucking nuts Brea, I love you but you are nuts.”

She laughed “Girl I am a lot of things, but nuts is not one of them, being willing

to go down on the hottest bitch in this house is genius. If I ever do decide to play for the other team my friend, your pussy will be the first pussy I chow down on. That's a promise!"

OH MY GAWD!

I asked Brea if she was already drunk and she admitted that she may have had a few shots with Greg at Coles before we left for dinner. I could feel how blood red my face must be at her ridiculous admission of bullshit and I suddenly needed to excuse myself. Chugging what was left of my beer I headed off in

search of the ladies room to splash my face with cold water.

After finding the downstairs bathroom had a line into the next room I headed upstairs only to find the same thing, so I decided to just wait. Shortly after I took my place in line I felt a breath whisper into my neck.

“I have a private bathroom in my suite if you want to use it.”

I turned around to find myself face to face with a crouching Ford.

“You do huh?” Ford nodded his head at me.

Who did this man think he was? He blows me off and then offers me his private bathroom. Nothing about him made any sense, nothing about the fact that I said “Okay” made much sense either. A part of me wanted to slap him silly for igniting the heat between my legs with his uninvited closeness and tell him to fuck off but my body would not allow me to say what my mouth and head wanted.

Mindlessly, I took the hand he extended out to me and let him lead the way to a set of double doors at the end

of the hall. He unlocked one with a key that he fished out of his front pocket and walked me inside not once letting go of the hand that strangely seemed to mold itself with his as if they were made to fit together. A not-so-obvious fact that did not go unnoticed by either one of us.

“I’m sorry about earlier” he said. “Something you said caught me off guard and I needed a moment. The restroom is through that door, maybe we can talk when you are done?”

I nodded at his request and followed his long finger in the direction of the

bathroom feeling a sense of familiar longing as he released me. When I came out I found him sitting on the side of his bed fiddling with a photo frame. Staring at the photo inside his face turned sad, he seemed so lost that I wanted to wrap my arms around him and tell him that whatever was bothering him would be OK.

I moved to his side and sat down beside him. As I did he put the frame down face first on the bed beside him and turned to me. His eyes pierced mine in a way that felt like he was trying to

convey information without actually speaking.

Without thinking I lifted my hand to his face.

“What’s wrong, do I make you that miserable? Do you hate me that much already?”

His mouth whispered the word “What?” as he moved his head from side to side.

“No, I don’t hate you Jemma, I don’t hate you at all.”

He grabbed my hand from his face and thoughtfully moved it into his lap,

lacing his fingers with mine.

“Then what is it? Because I have to tell you that you are sending out some serious mixed signals and it is confusing as hell.”

Ford let out a deep breath. “I honestly don’t know where to begin so I will just say it. When I saw you downstairs with Raz I thought that you looked so damned familiar but when you told me your name I realized it was because you were familiar. I really am sorry that I walked away like I did. It is just that when I understood the connection everything

came rushing back so fast that it damn near knocked me off my feet. I had to take a step back.” he paused and I shook my head not really understanding where he was going with this.

“Jemma, my name isn’t Ford, I mean, it is Ford but Ford is actually my middle name.”

Then he reached for the photo on his nightstand and turned it over to show me what lie inside. In the simple black frame was a photo of a little boy and his parents, faces I had spent many days with as a child. The faces of two people

who were long dead and gone, Howard and Victoria Ackles, the two people who were murdered along with my brother, and my brother's best friend Julian who I had not seen since I was a little girl. And then it registered in my head, Ford, Julian Ford Ackles.

It had been so long since I laid eyes on the man before me, a time long before the stubble on his face set in and his voice changed into something forceful and domineering. I looked up at him from the picture with tears falling down my cheeks.

“Julian” I whispered as he reached his hand to my face brushing my tears away with his thumb.

“People don’t call me that anymore sweetheart. When I went to live with my gran in San Juan I asked her to tell everyone my name was Ford. I couldn’t live with everything that had happened and I needed closure. So it’s Ford now if you don’t mind?”

Never taking his eyes off of mine I nodded with reassurance that I would keep his past in the past just where I wanted my past to remain.

Ford stood up off the bed and ran his fingers through his hair. “Wow, well....”

I stared up at him from his bed and cutting him off I took his hand and pulled him back down beside me. I don't understand what came over me, maybe it was nostalgia. Julian was my first puppy crush; after he left, I was heartbroken and spent years longing to see him again. All I know is that I was overcome with a sudden maddening desire to kiss him. He must have felt it too because as soon as our eyes found each other again his breathing became heavy, my heart began

to pound as if trying to push its way out of my chest and our lips made the connection.

Magically, it was as if the entire population of the world vanished before our eyes and he and I were the only two people left to inhabit it. My feet became light and my stomach started fluttering around like butterflies in lost in space.

Ford pulled away from my lips long enough to utter “You are not the same little girl I used to know.”

Then with a force I was unaware that I possessed I pressed my lips back to

his, deepening the connection that was stirring inside of the two of us. Before we both knew it we were laying side by side with our hands and legs tangled up, our lips frantically moving together as if each of our lives depended on the other in order to breathe. Eventually it got to the point that a kiss was not enough. Not since the second night with Brandon had I felt so animalistic, only this time it was different. I was not closing a door, I was reopening one and this time the passion invaded the very depths of my soul on a level that could not be explained with

mere words.

Giving into the desire I shoved Ford onto his back and climbed on top of him, grinding my body into his. He pulled my shirt over my head then sat up so I could help him out of his. I kissed him down his chest stopping just long enough to unbutton his jeans.

Once they were unzipped I climbed down and with his help yanked them from his body along with his boxers freeing his erection. I immediately noticed how long and thick he was, the sight of him seemed to bring my body to

life in a way it had never been before.

He sat up on the bed and licked his lips.

“Stand up and take your clothes off sweetheart. I want to see every inch of you..”

I pulled off my boots and socks then unbuttoned my skirt and let it drop to the floor.

“Oh Jesus help me, you are beautiful!” he exclaimed biting his lip, letting out a deep breath. “Take off your bra and panties.”

He sounded as if it took every bit of

air in his lungs to make the request but I did as he wanted. The throbbing of the warm heat between my legs was intense and I knew that if Ford did not take me soon every part of me was going to explode. For reasons I could not explain, I *needed* to have him inside of me. I stepped toward him but was stopped short by the dominating sound of his voice “Condom sweetheart, top drawer of the dresser”

I have no idea how he managed the thought, because there was no other thought in my head other than what I

wanted him to do to me, but I am glad he did. I handed him the condom and watched as he unrolled it onto his massive shaft. Once in place he pulled me to him and into his lap, I followed his guidance, opening my legs and wrapping them around him. It didn't take much for him to find his way inside of me; he was as hard as steel and I had been wet and ready since the moment we reunited.

He was so well endowed that it hurt at first but as he moved I moistened even more allowing our bodies to mold

together like a perfectly fitted glove. I moved him inside out and of my quaking heat with the help of my hips while he worked his mouth over my lips, along my neck and down to my nipples where he flicked and played with them until my core began to tremble.

“Julian, I’m going to come.” I screamed barely able to force the thought but there was some alien part of me that had to communicate my need.

And come I did, harder than I ever had before. After my lips stopped pulsating around his unrelenting staff he

flipped me over onto my back pulling my legs and feet over his head deepening his decent into my body.

“Oh fuck! You feel so fucking good sweet heart. Tell me you want me baby.”

My eyes widened as his thrust slowed down to tease me. I whispered “Fuck me Julian!”

“Who do you want to fuck you sweetheart?”

I gasped as he shoved himself inside of me with force and I screamed. I suddenly realized that I had been calling him the name of a boy he longed to

forget but I so desperately wanted to know.

“Ford!” I screamed. “I want you to fuck me Ford.” He slammed into me again, over and over again and again and left me screaming his name as I my sex tightened, releasing my wetness around his shaft for the second time. A few seconds later I felt his hardness peak, he grew hot and with a loud grunt his body collapsed on top of me. I could feel the pulsating of his desire as he found his release inside of me.

Ford pulled his lips to mine without

moving his still hard shaft from the inside of my body.

“You are so beautiful Jemma Hale. It feels so fucking good being inside of you.”

And with that I felt him get even harder. There was no way the two of us were done. We were getting to know each other again and the introductions were not even close to being over.

“More,” I whispered into his mouth. His body began to move again with perfect rhythm. We shut out every noise of the party happening on the other side

of his door and ended up giving ourselves to each other two more times before passing out in each other's arms until we were awakened by a loud knock at the door.

“FORD, there is a girl out here looking for her friend. She says she was with a big black haired ape and as I am a stud and the rest of the guys are monkeys, that leaves you. Open up man!” The voice on the other side of the door pleaded.

Ford looked over to me and smiled. “Is that friend yours?” I nodded my head “Probably”. I was too tired, give out and

perfectly satisfied to even dream of moving.

“Want me to get rid of her? I can take you home in the morning. We can have breakfast.” He leaned down and pressed a kiss to my lips.

“Perfect” I managed sleepily.

Pulling a towel off of his desk and wrapping it around his lower half he glided to the door. Ford muttered a few words then shut the door and locked it behind him. He climbed back into bed and after a few minutes of kissing me we were ready for round four.

Chapter Four

Ford and I woke up around eight and after fooling around for a few minutes we showered together and made our way to IHOP for breakfast.

“What yah having? Whatever you want, it’s yours” He asked.

We both ended up agreeing to the chocolate chip pancakes and coffee. We sat in silence not really knowing what to

say after the extremely unexpected events of the night before. “It was good seeing you again Juli...I mean...Ford...Sorry; it’s hard not to call you Julian.”

A wicked smile flashed across his face, completely ignoring my slip up. “Good? I would not exactly say it was *good* to see you again Jemma.”

I frowned at his admission but he took my hand reassuringly.

“I wasn’t done sweetheart. There was nothing good about last night, last night was great, off the charts, out of this

world, amazing, mind-blowing but nothing as simple as good.” I giggled like a twelve year old again and agreed with him.

“So what now?” I asked. “I mean, we really don’t know each other. Yeah, the sex was amazing but we don’t know anything about each other. I have never done anything like that before. Who are you Ford?”

I could tell my questioning made him uncomfortable. His smile faded and he looked away from me, I feared he was running away to hide again.

“Look, Jemma, last night, I have never felt that type of connection with anyone before. I don’t know what it was but I know I am not ready for it.”

I suddenly felt all of the color drain from my face; he seemed to sense the life draining out of me so he grabbed my hand and tightly took hold.

“Don’t get upset OK, I’m not saying I don’t want to see you again. I just need to figure out what is going on in my head. You are so close to everything that I have spent half my life running from, I don’t know what to do with that.”

What exactly was he saying, was he blowing me off, letting me down easy? I was not just some stranger that he met on the street. He knew me, it had been a long time since we have seen each other but there was a time that we were as good as family. I did not expect him to want to spend his life with me after one night but I also did not expect to be *let down easily*.

“So you’re blowing me off? You spend the night fucking your best friends little sister and then you fuck off, is that it? Do you want me to tell you to fuck off

Ford?”

His face reddens, his teeth begin to grind against one another and I watch his hands started frantically moving through his hair like he was trying to rub every inch of it off of his head.

“No, no, don’t say that! And don’t talk about him or yourself like that, I can’t bear to talk about him at all, haven’t been for a very long time. But it’s not that. I enjoyed every second of last night, all I could think about all night long was how much I wanted to drown myself in you but the next day it just feels like too

much too fast. You of all people should understand.”

And with that he had me. I did understand. I understood everything. I understood that when something horrible happens to you all you want to do is push everything good in your life away for fear that you will have to watch it deteriorate before your eyes. I have a feeling that is how Ford has been living his life, pushing and hiding. He did not expect me to come along and remind him of a time when he was full of life. A time when he danced around with his

own pair of wings just like I did.

“I do understand Ford, I understand all of it, every last word.” Then I began to cry.

It seemed like all I have been doing lately was wiping tears out of my eyes. Just when they stopped and I began to feel whole again, Ford came along. Only for the first time in my life I did not fight the tears from falling. I allowed them to fall willingly, for Ford, the boy who had nearly died with my brother. He had to watch his own parents and best friend get brutally taken from this world and I

could only imagine how helpless and broken that made him. Probably more broken and helpless than I ever was. I didn't know if I could help him fight his demons but after the connection we found ourselves with I was desperate to try. For the first time I truly understood where Brandon was coming from loving me, how all he had wanted to do was make me better. I just prayed Ford and I did not share the same fate.

“I want to get to know you Ford. Can we start there? No strings, just two people who used to know each other

coming together again. Can we do that?”

Ford nodded his acceptance to the idea of friendship.

“That sounds perfect, Jemma,” was all he managed before the waitress placed our breakfast down in front of us. I smiled at the whipped cream smiley face on both of our pancakes.

“We usually only do that for the kiddos but y’all looked like y’all were in need of some smiles this mornin’,” the gray haired waitress gave Ford a wink and walked off letting us know to “Just holler if you need anything”.

Putting the serious conversation aside we gobbled down our pancakes sharing stories from our very different high school experiences and Ford filled me in about his frat brothers. I learned that at one point he had wanted to join the Army but in the end decided to go to college. His mom and dad had met on Austin's University of Texas campus and it was always a dream of his dad that he would follow in the footsteps of old white and orange. He said that he felt it was a way to keep their memory alive.

“I try so hard to forget that day and

focus on the good stuff, you know? So I figured, I would come here, get my degree and eventually I might join the police department or something. I haven't completely made that decision yet. I'm not quite sure I could handle ever walking into a scene like the one in Dallas.”

I watched him in awe as he played with a stray chocolate chip. He seemed so strong but I could see the broken boy that was hiding behind that strength.

“So,” he said, putting his fork down and meeting my eyes. “How are your

parents holding up?”

Choking I dropped my fork and knocked my half full cup of coffee all over my lap.

“Oh shit, I’m so sorry!” I panicked feeling the vomit rising into my mouth and I was overcome with the need to run.

I had not spoken about my parents to anyone but Brea and Brandon since I had decided to quit therapy. Brea was there when it all happened and it took me two years with Brandon to open up about the incident surrounding my parents’

upheaval from my life. A part of me wanted so badly to share everything with this boy who knew me when but I couldn't bear to bring that world into this one.

Shakily I jumped up from the table, "I have to go, I have an appointment that completely slipped my mind. I'm so sorry Ford."

Ford tried to run after me but the chair from the person sitting next to us was blocking his side of the booth so I was able to make a quick exit. Once outside I ran and didn't stop until I slammed the

door of my apartment behind me.

“Jesus, are you fucking OK?” Brea shouted as she came running out of the bathroom wearing nothing but a towel and a mouth covered in toothpaste.

Not being able to say a single word, I bobbed my head up and down before bending over in an effort to catch my breath. I was seriously out of shape; my next stop definitely had to be the apartment gym.

“Oh girl, hold on a sec.” Brea ran back into the bathroom and came back wrapped in her hot pink robe with a

freshly clean mouth.

“Do I need to kick someone’s ass?” She put her hand on my back and walked me over to the couch grabbing a bottle of water from the kitchen counter as we walked by.

We both sat, she popped the lid and told me to drink. “Was it that guy from last night? What did he do to you Jem?” I took a big gulp from the water bottle and shook my head back and forth at her still trying to catch my breath.

“Nothing, he was great...” I huffed. “It was all me Brea, you are not going to

believe what happened. I don't know what to make of it myself. But last night, was hands down the greatest night of my life."

Brea excused herself insisting that we would talk once her bare crotch wasn't rubbing into the terry cloth of her robe. I have to give it to her, Brea was definitely the poster child for too much information.

Fifteen minutes later, after I composed myself and she was dressed I filled her in on everything that happened the night before. Omitting only the

raunchy stuff like how his dick turned purple for a split second while the wetness pumped out of him and how his tongue felt rubbing along my walls and over my sensitive heat. Some things were better left to the imagination. Of course it didn't mean that my mind didn't silently fill in those details.

“When he asked about my parents I broke Brea, I couldn't bear it. What am I going to do? I have to see him again. I have to!” She rubbed her hand up and down my arms like I was freezing and she was trying to warm me up.

“It’s OK, Jem, just show up at the house and tell him what happened. It’s been so long since you told anyone about it. If anyone could understand it would be him.”

I truly wanted to tell him but how do you tell someone your dad put a bullet in your moms head and was rotting away in the nut house? My mother and father were two people that he loved as well and I was scared the revelation would be like losing his own parents all over again.

Suddenly there was an urgent knock

on the door and Brea jumped up to answer it. Looking out the peep hole she turned my way and without peeling her eyes from my face she opened the door. Standing on the other side was Ford who caught sight of me the moment the door opened. He stepped inside walking over to where I was now standing, barely paying mind to the fact Brea was glaring at him.

“Why did you run off like that and don’t give me that appointment bullshit, I knew you were lying the moment you opened your mouth,” he reached for my

hand but I pulled away.

At my rejection I watched a wave of sadness wash over him, instantly feeling guilty I moved in closer until we were toe to toe.

“My dad...” I paused letting a breath escape, “...murdered my mother.”

I didn't really mean for it to come out like it did, I was still deciding how I was going to tell him, still deciding if I ever was going to tell him. But I could not stand to see the heartbroken image that I had caused play on his face. I had so much to learn about him and was

terrified of losing the chance to learn about the man that I so desperately wanted to know again.

I could tell that the announcement caught him off guard. His mouth opened but he couldn't manage to get any words out. I watched as Brea slipped out the front door holding her fingers up to her ear gesturing for me to call her and grabbing her purse from the dining table on the way out.

“I’m sorry; I didn’t mean it to just come out like that. I...”

He grabbed my hand again only this

time I did not pull away. Instead he pulled me to him, kissing my forehead before resting his chin atop my head.

“I’m so sorry.” he whispered. “Tell me what happened?” He gently pulled me down onto the couch and into his lap, keeping his chin to my head.

“I honestly do not know if I can Julian”

His hands reached down and urged my chin up to meet his face. Gripping me tighter he moved his lips to my cheeks one at a time planting tiny kisses on each one. Then his lips moved to mine, kissing them softly before whispering

into my mouth

“You can tell me anything. I loved them too, please, I have to know.”

I let out the breath I was not aware I was holding straight into his mouth. As the air between us collided I felt his tongue slip into my mouth. It guided along my teeth, moved out to my lips and back into my mouth where our tongues met up and danced with each other. After a few moments he gently guided my head back to his chest and moved his cheek back to the top of it.

Once again I let a long breath escape

my mouth, pulled it back in and closed my eyes.

“I was asleep when it happened. I had just turned eleven; my dad had spent almost a year in and out of the hospital trying to get better. He literally went crazy after Nicolai...after...after he died.”

I paused for a brief moment to catch myself from breaking down and Ford softly kissed my forehead again reassuring me he was listening.

“He started hearing and seeing things. For a long time all he ever saw was

Nicolai covered in blood telling him that he missed him and needed to be with his family. And then he started seeing him, the guy from the restaurant.”

“Ignacio Hernandez,” Ford interrupted. I cringed at the sound of his name. I tried for so long to forget it, making it a point to never allow it to fall from my lips.

I looked up, “How can you bear to say his name?”

“People like him, they deserve to be remembered for being the monsters that they are. I make it a point to remember

his name, it serves as a healthy reminder that everything that happened on the day my family died was out of anyone's control. A single person cannot fight that kind of evil. It is an evil that won't ever die; there is no point in trying to bury him." He looked into my eyes as if he were trying to heal the invisible wound that had just appeared on my heart. "Continue, sweetheart."

Reclaiming the blind position on his chest I continued. "Dad didn't tell us about him at first but his doctors urged him to be honest with his family. His

doctor thought that because some of his behaviors were frightening to us it might help us to understand what was going on with him. Nobody ever actually told me personally, I was just a child, but they never noticed that I was always there in the background listening.”

“We had thought he was getting better, we never imagined that he was hiding the truth from us, we didn’t even know something like that could even be hid. But one day the truth came crashing down around him.”

“I was asleep when I heard her scream.

She was begging him to stop, pleading with him to put the gun away. But he wasn't himself anymore, he kept rambling that Nicolai needed us *'That son of a bitch is going to take him from us again! He is all alone, we have to help him!'* and the next thing I knew I was listening to the sound of gunfire. Immediately I pulled my hand to my mouth to stifle the screams trying to escape from it and ran into the upstairs bathroom. I heard his footsteps in the hall and he began calling my name telling me that everything was going to

be OK.”

“Over and over “It’s time to come out princess, come to daddy baby” he would say. I was terrified so I opened the window and stepped out onto the roof. I forgot to close the window behind me and after listening to dad break through the door he followed me out.

“It’s OK princess, everything is going to be OK.”

“I still don’t remember much after I escaped the bathroom, I must have stepped on a tree branch or something but I fell. The last thing I knew I was in

the hospital with two broken arms, scratches from head to toe and a concussion. The doctors said I was lucky to be alive, that I was saved by a holly bush.”

We sat in silence for a very long time before Ford got up the courage to ask where my dad was. I filled him in that my dad had been declared mentally incompetent to stand trial and was sent to serve a long sentence in the Texas state hospital.

“But my aunt pulled some strings and was able to get him into a private

facility on the coast.”

It was already starting to get dark outside when Ford scooped me into his arms and lifted me off of the couch.

“Which room is yours?” he asked.

I pointed him in the right direction and he carried me inside gently laying me on the bed. I was an emotional wreck and in need of his closeness, it surprised me when, as if reading my thoughts, he laid down next to me pulling my head onto his chest wrapping his arms around me. He stroked my hair until he fell asleep, something I barely noticed as I drifted

off into dreamland as well. I woke up at midnight to find him no longer lying next to me. Instead was a note that read:

“I have an early plane to catch at 5 am so I had to cut out. I’m heading home for the weekend to take care of some family issues. Don’t hate me for not waking you but I decided it best to let beauty sleep. Call me, don’t text, I need to hear your voice. Number is in your phone.”

Truly Yours,

Julian “Ford”

I was hurt that he left without saying

goodbye, not angry at him but hurt because I awakened desperate to feel his arms around me. But the sight of the name I used to know, written in his handwriting, warmed my heart and took me back to a time when life was joyful and full of hope.

Chapter Five

Julian and Nicolai, or Nick as Julian had called him, met in kindergarten. Their friendship was hardly at first sight. Nicolai tried to “borrow” Julian’s Transformers eraser and in the end Nicolai ended up with his first shiner, Julian walking away with a bloody nose. I was just a baby at the time so this story

is purely secondhand but from what I remember the fight was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. It's funny how boys find that sort of thing a bonding experience.

Both of our parents ended up bonding as well, becoming great friends. We spent summers together, holidays, had many backyard BBQ's, our dads went on fishing trips and I was basically on the road to growing up before their eyes. I don't remember a time as a child where Mr. and Mrs. Ackles and their son Julian were not a part of our lives. Even when

we were not all together as a family Julian was over to play or my mom and Mrs. Ackles were getting smashed on Pinot Grigio sharing mommy war stories and recipes in the kitchen.

Julian and Nicolai had many more moments of not getting along, they were more like brothers than they were friends, just as brothers and sister fought, so did they. Once they hit Jr. High however the arguments and fights slowed because they became more interested in girls and football.

I loved Julian even then; he was a lot

nicer to me than Nicolai who seemed to get a kick out of tearing the heads off of my Barbie dolls. He would talk to me like I was a normal person and not just some annoying little kid. When Nicolai would get called away by mom to set the table or take out the trash he would sit down and play with me. Most of the time we would color but on occasion we had tea parties and played with my Barbie dolls. You would think he would want to be Ken but that wasn't the case, nope, Julian preferred Skipper.

“I want to be the awesome one, how

could anyone not be awesome with a name like Skipper? Skipper just bleeds happy.” But then Nicolai would come in, make fun of Julian for playing with babies and dolls, pull Skipper’s head off and tell me to scram. It did not even matter if I was in my own room, I scrambled.

Don’t get me wrong, besides his annoying faults Nicolai was an awesome brother, he just suffered from what I like to call “big boy syndrome”. Meaning when a friend was over he insisted on becoming alpha male and asserting

dominance over the weaker party. It didn't matter if that weaker party was his baby sister as long as he got to show off in front of his friends.

But if any of his friends made fun of me or followed suit in ripping the heads off of my dolls they ended up never coming back: Nicolai would ball his fist up tight and punch them dead in the jaw every time. He would still hang out with these boys at the play ground, parties and school but they were never asked to come over again. When my mom would ask about these so-called friends Nicolai

would inform her that he did not want them in his house because only he got to pick on his baby sister “It’ll make her strong mom! One day she’ll need to be strong because boys are dumb. It’s my job as her big brother to show her how dumb...” he would argue. His words about how dumb boys could be stuck with me to this very day.

Sometimes I wonder if things would have ended up the same way had Julian stayed with his cousins in Montgomery instead of going back to Puerto Rico. My dad loved Julian like his own son and

when he never came back I know he felt as if he had lost two children that day. Not only that but he lost one of his closest friends when Howard was killed. My dad had nobody but my mother to hold him together and she had her own pain to contend with, her loss was equal to his, both of them losing close friends and a son in a single day.

My mother was the more interesting of the two, always smiling as if nothing happened. But no matter how many fake smiles she plastered on her face I knew she was dying inside. I felt it with each

middle of the night hug, and every second that my own pain went unnoticed. I never got to mourn Nicolai's passing and I never got to miss Julian. My heart was completely broken, the world as I knew it was gone and nobody seemed to care about anyone but themselves. Thus began my never ending struggle with putting my head up my own ass because it seemed for a long time I was the only one I could lean on. After a while I had no idea how to put faith in anyone, Brea being the only person I would let in.

When my father murdered my mother,

Brea became my rock, my sunlight on a cloudy day. My aunt did her best to comfort me but she was never exactly the motherly type. Brea was honestly the best thing that ever happened to me. When she came along I finally had someone I could call my own and even though we were only children she listened and comforted me in ways nobody had before.

“Do you have brother or sister?” she asked on the school playground the first day we met.

“My brother is dead,” I said

innocently.

Brea looked up from the fort where she had been twirling the fake stirring wheel, and matter of factually blurted out “That sucks!”

After a second she thoughtfully put her arm around my shoulder and said “Well, you got a sister now K, cause I ain’t got no brother or sister either, and everybody needs a brother or a sister don’t ya think?.”

And from that moment on she was the best sister a girl could have. She offered me a shoulder to cry on, she cheered me

up when I was sad and she made me chocolate chip cookies on Nicolai's birthday and the anniversary of his death every year.

“I tried to tell my mama chocolate chip cookies had magic healing powers but she wouldn't listen me none. I think once you get to be all big and stuff you can't see magic no more. When I get big I am always gunna see magic cause I'm never gunna grow up. Growing up is stupid!”

When my mother passed away she did nothing to commemorate either day. Not because she didn't want to, she wanted

to do anything that included chocolate chip cookies, but because she knew it would simply be too much for me to handle.

To this day she still lived by the motto that chocolate chip cookies were magic and baked them at least once a week but she loved being a grown up. Ever since she met Mark Jones a few months into our second semester of ninth grade she discovered the beauty of kissing which was a good enough reason to no longer be seen as a little kid.

“That boy has lips like strawberries; I

like strawberries...A LOT!”

I myself had tasted Brandon’s strawberries for months so I knew all too well how awesome it could be wearing big girl panties.

I had tried to call Ford early that morning without realizing the time and when he didn’t answer I determined that he was most likely still in the air so I tried to call him again after lunch and got his voice mail. I left a message letting him know how cold my bed had been without him in it and that I could not

wait until I saw him again.

I know I probably sounded pathetic, everything seemed to be moving so fast and unreal but from the moment we met, even before I realized who he was there was a connection between us. I was never one to believe in love at first sight and I am not saying that is what these feelings are but if ever there was a time to believe it was now.

For the first time in my life I truly wanted something other than my brother to have never been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Everyone in my life who

had known me when I still had joy in my heart was gone, it felt good to know there was someone out there who remembered that there was a time I was lively and carefree.

Not Brea, Brandon or even Aunt Tilly ever knew me as anything other than a fragile piece of glass. Between the three of them I often felt as if they were handling me with such care because they feared me so delicate that I might shatter into a million tiny pieces. There was a time that this might have been true, but not anymore, they simply did not

understand. Ford knew my pain, he knew how much I could handle and not handle because he had been through most everything I had and understood what it takes to make a person the way they are. To make *us* like *we* were, though he seems to have handled things much better than I had.

A few minutes after I left the message on his voice mail he called me back. “I miss you sweetheart. Sorry I just left you like that. I regretted it the second I climbed into my truck.” I beamed, happy to hear his voice, even more happy to

hear the regret which showed me how much he cared.

“Well, don’t let it happen again, mister!” I teased and he laughed.

“Seriously, I woke up wanting you like I have never wanted anything in my entire life. It royally sucked to find a note in your place. Are you in San Juan with your grandmother?”

“Yeah, she’s not been feeling too well and ended up in the hospital for a few days. I had to come out and help find someone to take care of her when I’m not around. I had a friend that was

supposed to do it for me but that didn't work out as planned.”

It was nice to hear that he was still the same Julian that I remembered. Loving and caring, always considering the well-being of the people he cared about. I was hoping to spend the rest of the weekend before classes started getting to know him better.

“When are you supposed to be back?” Suddenly I felt like a needy, nosy girlfriend. Considering the fact that I was not his girlfriend made me feel like an idiot and I immediately wanted to

retract the question.

“Sunday evening but I am going to be pretty tired when I get back. I was hoping we could meet up Monday after classes were over. Do you have your schedule yet?” I nodded even though he couldn’t exactly see me.

“I think my last class ends at three on Monday,” I said. “Want to have dinner?” Please say yes, I hoped.

“Sounds like a plan sweetheart. I’ll be thinking about you the whole time I am gone, that is a promise.”

I beamed as we both agreed to

meeting at six for dinner giving us both enough time for what was sure to be a much needed nap and a shower after a long first day of classes.

When I finally managed to leave my bedroom that Saturday afternoon I found Brea on the couch crying sitting in the middle of half a box of used Kleenex.

“Brea, what is wrong sweetie?”

She sniffled a few times before breaking out into a hysterical tear filled rant.

“He broke up with me, that stupid big

long arm son of a bitch actually broke up with *ME*. Nobody has ever broken up with me.” she paused to bury her nose into a tissue.

“Um, I’m so sorry Brea. I didn’t know you cared about him so much.”

She wailed out a cry, blubbering she continued “I didn’t think I did, I mean, I don’t Jem, I just...he was...he was nice to me. Or so I thought he was. Turns out he was screwing Rebecca Warner, remember her?” I could not say I had a clue who she was talking about.

“You know, Jemma!” she shouted

hysterically. “That fugly, flat-chested cow that works at Coffee Bean, the one that always forgets the fucking whipped cream. Who the fuck forgets the whipped cream on a gawd damn iced blended mocha? That’s the best fucking part!”

I could tell by her overabundance of the word “fuck,” that (typical Brea) she was quickly turning from upset to royally pissed off. I opened my mouth to try and calm her down and also reassure her that I knew who Rebecca was. Unfortunately I couldn’t get a word in before she jumped up off the couch knocking the

used tissues that had been blanketing her lap into the floor.

“FUUUUCK!” she screamed. “Gawd damn fucking boys! I am so sick of fucking boys. I came to college hoping to find a *MAN* and instead I end up with a prepubescent moron who just so happens to have a big dick.” she paused and then sat back down on the couch where I joined her.

“Damn it, Jem, he really knew how to use that thing.” she calmly exclaimed blowing a stray hair off of her nose. Thank goodness she was starting to calm

down. I had never seen Brea lose it over a guy before.

“So, what exactly are you pissed about if you didn’t actually like him?” I asked curiously watching as her eyes doubled in size looking at me as if I were a moron.

“Are you even listening to me? Besides the fact that I have to find myself a new toy he had the nerve to cheat on me with the likes of Rebecca. REBECCA, she is a step completely in the wrong fucking direction. She’s the girl that gets cheated on, not me!”

Wow, I knew Brea could be shallow but I have never actually heard her say anything so deplorable and self-centered out loud.

“So, it would have been fine if he cheated on you with Miranda Kerr? Were you guys even exclusive?”

For a second I honestly thought Brea was going to hit me. She gave me a glare so heated that I had to peel my eyes from her to the ground for fear I would spontaneously combust.

“UGH! YES!” She screamed again. “Because at least then it would make a

little bit of fucking sense. You just don't dump a nine for a three! And to top that off, I am not even a stupid nine so that makes it even worse. It is not as if he can argue that he got sick of me because I was some ditsy moron with big tits."

Sadly, now I got it.

"I'm sorry you're upset but really Brea, are you listening to yourself right now? Firstly, how exactly do you gather this girl is a skank from the fact that she forgets your whipped cream? It isn't like you to judge people on a basis of absolutely nothing; she seems nice

enough albeit a bit flighty. Maybe she doesn't even know about you? And second, you said it, you are a nine, well, actually I would say you are more like a ten. Unlike Rebecca you can snap your fingers and take your pick of men. Throw her the idiot bone, get over it and snap because I know you and I know you don't really give a shit."

Brea stared at me but I could not quite peg what her expression was. In a matter of seconds I read anger, frustration, indifference and awe. Nothing surprised me more than seeing the crooked smile

that flashed across her lips. Suddenly she crossed the room and threw her arms around me.

“Did you just say I was a ten?” she bounced up and down excitedly like a ten year-old. “I knew there was a reason why we were best friends. I love you Jem. And you are right, time to snap. James shot me a text before that moron dumped me and invited me out to the Omega house for some kind of meet the pledge party. Let’s go, you can hang out with what’s his name, Ford, Julian, whatever, it’s perfect.”

James was the guy who had beaten down Ford's door in an effort to find me after an insane night of first, second and third orgasmic encounters of the most delicious kind. I did not even know Brea had spoken to the man again, but then, I have kind of been caught up on my own little world the last few days.

“He isn't going to be there, he went out of town for the weekend. Went to visit his grandmother in Puerto Rico”

“Really?” she asked confusedly. I nodded and she continued. “Strange, you would think the president of the

fraternity would kind of have to be there.”

President? That was news to me. It seemed I really did need to get to know Ford because I had no idea that he was the president of the Omega Delta Phi fraternity. I guess that explains his larger than normal bedroom complete with private bath. Two rooms that I had gotten to know very well in only a few hours.

“Oh well, we can go anyway, it will be fun!” she decided.

The party didn't start until later on in the evening so we decided to hit the mall, do some shopping and have a little fun. I was still broke needing most of the money Aunt Tilly forwarded into my checking account from my trust for bills. There was just enough left that I could hit the clearance rack at forever 21 and The Gap. I needed this little shopping excursion to keep my mind off of something that I could not have. Or shall I say *someone* I could not have, not at the moment anyway.

By the time we were done shopping

Brea had racked up a few hundred dollars in shoes and I had managed a couple cute outfits, including a little black dress that I planned on wearing to dinner with Ford on Monday. It was strange calling him Ford knowing that he was Julian, no matter how many times I said it, I still saw him as my brother's best friend. Several times I had to correct myself which is funny since I had not seen him since I was seven years old.

I could not tell you how many nights I fell asleep wondering how he was. I

very much wanted him to be happy. I prayed every night for years, to a God that I was no longer sure existed, that he was safe and not hurting as much as I was. Deep down, no matter how much I prayed for him I knew there was no way he was any better off than me. Eventually it became easy to forget about him because I wanted to forget everything that preyed on the positive life I was trying to live, something I suddenly felt guilty about.

After my dad took my mom from this world I began to distance myself from anything and everything related to Nicolai. I was angry at the world but mostly my dad and Nicolai. I knew the things that happened were out of anyone's control but I hated my father for being weak and I hated my brother for being a victim. As far as I was concerned my dad could have chosen to stay in the hospital which would have been best for everyone involved and my brother should have wanted to spend more time at with his real family.

My dad had wanted to go fishing with Nicolai that weekend. My mom on the other hand thought it would be a good experience for Nicolai to see the big Dallas museums and the place where John F. Kennedy was shot, which is pretty ironic all things considered.

After unsuccessfully trying to call Ford I pulled on my favorite pair of vintage Calvin Klein boot cut jeans and a red sequined tank that I bought at forever 21 a few hours before. After deciding to let my hair fall freely and pulling on my biker boots Brea and I

made our way to the frat house. The party turned out to be more of a backyard barbecue with a few friends; it was nowhere near the size of the party a few nights before. I would say in total there were only about forty or so people including the frat boys and their pledges.

Several minutes after arriving Raz, the over enthusiastic pledge from the night before last with whom was the catalyst that reunited me with Julian, AKA Ford, handed Brea and I each a bottle of Corona.

“Don’t worry I didn’t drug ‘em or

nothin', we aren't allowed to open the bottles, house rules." I stared at him with my mouth gaped open. Should I have been worried?

"Ah crap, that was kind of a freaky thing to say huh?" He said taking notice of my stunned reaction.

"No, I can't say it was the best way to start off a conversation. Though, I guess it's good to know." Brea laughed behind me; I am sure finding both of us amusing.

"Drugged or not, thanks for the booze, Raz!" Brea beamed enthusiastically.

"Of course! It's my job though. I hand

out the drinks, I have two minutes to arm newcomers with a drink and two minutes refill anyone else who needs it. Timothy behind me has to video tape everything for proof. Jacob...” He pauses and lifts his finger pointing at a boy I can only assume is Jacob who is hovering about 10 feet away his eyes scanning the crowd. “...over there is doing his job which is to make sure I am doing mine. If either of us screws up we each have to lose a piece of clothing. If we end up naked we end up having to cup each other’s balls in front of all these lovely

ladies.”

And that is when I notice that besides the members and pledges every one of the people here are women. Not just any women but gorgeous women of all shapes and sizes.

“Anyway, I need to scan the crowd; I have no intention of letting these losers grab my dick. You still owe me a dance Jemma and I plan on collecting!” he said walking away collecting empty bottles and replacing them with full ones.

“I see James, mind if I split and go say

hello?” Brea asked. I shook my head no and told her to have a good time. I am a big girl; I can most definitely manage without her.

“Jem!” a perky voice cried out from behind me. I turned around and saw Angela walking up to me, wearing a six inch pair of rainbow wedges and a bright red strapless rainbow belted dress that showed off every inch of her tiny curvaceous figure.

“Angela!” We hugged and kissed each other on the cheek. “You are very colorful this evening.”

“I know right? I woke up in such a great mood this afternoon, I felt like a million bucks, only I was sad when I realized that I don’t have a million bucks and needed to find a pot of gold. Therefore....” She held the bottom of her dress out and spun around. “...I am a rainbow hoping she will find her pot of gold. “

We both giggled, stopping at the sound of my name in the back ground.

“Well got damn, I said GOT DAMN, is that Jemma Lee Hale I see?” I turned back to the party and lo and behold was

Brandon's best friend Axel.

“Axel, is that you?” He ran up to me, threw his arms around my waist, yee-hawed and lifted me up off the ground spinning me around. I laughed as he sat me back down on the ground.

“Well hell yeah it's me. Brandon said I might see you around these parts. Rumor is around the house that you hooked up with our pres. Say it ain't so Jemma?” He said clinging to his heart. “Tell me that after all this time I spent waiting in the wings you didn't hook up with that jerk?”

“Jemma! You didn’t tell me you hooked up with Ford. Is it true?” Angela questioned.

“Well, sort of, I mean we kind of know each other from when we were kids. He’s a nice guy. And besides what the fuck business is it of yours who I hook up with?” I defended myself. It wasn’t anyone’s business what I or who did with my life.

“Now Jem, don’t get all pissy on me. I ain’t saying nothin’! I’m just tuggin’ your chain sweet pea. Ford’s a good guy.” Axel pleaded.

“Heck well I’m sure as hell saying something!” Angela grabbed me by the shoulders and spun me to face her. “Ford Ackles is a total man whore. I don’t think I have been to a single party in the last two years that he didn’t hook up with someone. The most pathetic part of it all is that he has a fiancée back home, the son of a bitch could care less.”

Fiancée? I expect college guys to have a little fun but a fiancée? Not that I have any kind of claim on him but he never mentioned so much as a girlfriend, little alone a fiancée.

“In fact...” Angela continued. “She is supposed to be starting at St. Edward’s this year. Isn’t that right Ax?” She looked to Axel for confirmation.

“Like I said, I ain’t saying nothing. I ain’t risking my legacy status talking shit about other people’s business. Sorry Jemma, Ford’s a good guy. You might want to talk to him about it instead of listening to a bunch of hearsay anyway.”

I couldn’t quite wrap my head around anything the two of them were going on about. I felt so numb that I could not manage a single coherent thought until I

registered the next few words out of Axel's mouth.

“He should be along any minute now, I am sure he can explain his own life.”

“What do you mean any minute? Don't you mean Sunday night?” OK, now I was pissed.

“No, he should be back from the airport with Heather any minute now. He went down to San Juan to take care of his grandmama and to bring Heather back.”

I could feel the blood starting to boil in my body and I felt my face turning the

color of crimson.

“WHAT THE FUCK?! ” I screamed catching the entire party by surprise but I didn’t care. “Who the hell is Heather? You better talk Axel Eugene Mosby or so help me God I am going to tell everyone about that time Jennifer Flowers left you with blue balls and you decided it would be a good idea to.....”

Axel backed away from me a few feet and put his hands up in front of me as if trying to prevent me from kneeing him in the balls. Which I have to admit might make me feel a hell of a lot better.

“WHOA, WHOA WHOA” he loudly cautioned. “OK, don’t say another word. The last thing I need is for the guys to have that kind of ammunition to fire at me. Heather is Ford’s girl, from what I hear they have been going steady since junior year of high school, he proposed to her last Valentine’s day. All the guys participated in it, flowers, balloons, candles the whole shebang.”

I heard Angela utter an “Mm hmm” behind me. I could no longer control the tears I had been so desperately holding back.

“Oh shit” exclaimed Axel. I turned to follow in the direction his eyes were now pointing to find Ford hand in hand with a gorgeous raven haired beauty who I quickly figured out was Heather.

Almost as fast as I took notice of the couple Ford himself took notice of me. Our eyes locked and no matter how much I tried I could not look away from him. Each second we stared at one another caused my knees to grow weaker until finally they buckled and gave out. Luckily Axel was there to catch me, as soon as his arms pulled me back up

again Ford was in front of me, leaving Heather standing alone in the doorway.

“Jemma” He reached out for my hand but I stepped away tripping over Axels size thirteen steel toed boot. Ford grabbed hold of both my arms and pulled me closer to him yanking me out of Axel’s grasp.

“That’ll be all, Axel.” He ordered.

“You gunna be alright Jemma?” Axel glared at me with a torn expression on his face. I knew he didn’t want to leave me alone with Ford but at the same time I knew he had no choice if he wanted to

secure his spot for the next 4 years as a brother of one of the most prestigious fraternity's on campus.

“I’m fine Axel; go do what you need to do.” I said never taking my eyes away from Ford. I felt Fords grip tighten around my arms, when I cried out in pain he let me go.

“Jemma I...”

“DON’T Ford!” I firmly barked. “Don’t say anything, you don’t need to. I get it, OK? It wasn’t as if we were dating, you are not my man or anything by any stretch of the word. We fucked, it

was good, enough said, good luck on your engagement.” I said.

As I turned to walk away Ford grabbed both of my arms, pulled me around to face him then shoved his lips into mine. I gathered enough strength to push him off of me and slapped him with a force so hard he stumbled backward reaching his hand to rub the tender spot that was now reddened with my handprint.

My body started to shake and tremble, and then tiny noises I barely recognized as mine began to pour out of my mouth.

The noises that started off as nothing but small whistles quickly turned into hysterical laughter. Before I knew it Axel and Brea were by my side. I heard Angela mumble something behind me that sounded kind of like “You son of a bitch!” as the two of them escorted me out of the party.

Axel drove Brea and me home, we had taken a Taxi just in case we had a few too many and since he was the designated driver for the evening he was able to excuse himself without incident. By the time we arrived back at the

apartment the laughter had stopped and I had turned into more of a zombie than anything. My entire body had gone numb and there was pretty much not a single thought running through my head. It didn't make any sense but I suddenly felt as if I had lost my entire family, Julian included, all over again. This must have been how Julian felt the night he saved me from Raz, after he realized who I was. It felt like I was drowning in all of the stagnant emotions of my past.

Brea and Axel both helped carry me up the stairs to my apartment. They had

to talk my legs into moving because I couldn't manage that on my own, they didn't feel like a pair of limbs used to carry a human being, instead they felt like hot cheesy mashed potatoes.

Chapter Six

We made it to my room where I heard Brea ask Axel if he could please sit with me for about half an hour while she baked some cookies. Axel didn't question her strange request; we had all known each other since grade school which made him privy to all of the oddities of our group, including Brea's bizarre idea of magical cookies and the

fact that I might be slightly insane.

Axel crouched in front of me taking both of my hands into his then placing them into my lap.

“You need anything sweet pea? A drink of water maybe?”

Axel was a nice guy though I never understood his ridiculous nick name. All through high school Axel was known as the jokester, he made fun of everybody but it was always in good fun and never to the point of being mean. To see him so caring and attentive, even in the state I was in brought comforting warmth to my

heart.

Axel bent down and removed the boots from my feet. “There now, is that better?” he asked staring up at me proudly.

Without a single thought going through my head I moved my face to Axels and kissed him. He immediately pushed me away and jumped up. He looked at me as if he had just stepped in horse shit.

“Whoa, sweet pea. I don’t think so!”

But I knew that he wanted me, he always had. I never told anyone but this wasn’t the first time I had felt Axel’s

lips on mine. During the summer of my freshman year when Brandon had gone off to Europe with his mom Axel and I went to see a movie. We were just friends and it was strictly plutonic but by the time the movie was over Axel had not only kissed me but put his hands up my shirt. It taken him all of two seconds and even though, for reasons I could never comprehend, I allowed it. We both agreed it was a mistake and decided to never speak of the incident again, not to anyone.

I forced myself onto my feet finding

myself face to face with a much panicked Axel. I have no idea what was happening but I needed something to take my mind off the nothingness sweeping over me. I was so numb I could barely see straight and kissing him had briefly brought heat back into my flesh, I had to feel more.

“Don’t say no Ax, I know you don’t want to say no, please, please kiss me?” I begged.

I leaned in capturing his lips again, this time he reciprocated. Deepening the kiss I moved my hands down to his

crotch. When he didn't fight me I unbuttoned his jeans and moved my hands inside, taking hold of his hardening cock. It wasn't as perfect as Ford's or as long as Brandon's but it was thicker than both, much thicker. My clit began to throb and I knew that I needed this to ease the ache that was taking over my body. I pulled away from him for a brief moment to lock my bedroom door.

When I returned to him his arms shot up once again. "I don't know about this sweet pea. You're not right; I just don't

feel too good about this.”

But I could not allow him to stop this from happening, instead I took charge. I knew he was just like every other man and could never say no when all of the cards were laid out in front of him. I knew what kind of cards I had to play and I was going to use every last one of them.

I pulled my shirt over my head taking my bra off with it and walked my breast straight into the palms face up in front of me.

“Jesus H Christ!” he sighed in defeat as

he squeezed my full hardened breasts in his big hands. I moved closer to him taking his mouth into mine again and whispered in his ear.

“Please, Axel. I feel so numb, I want to feel *you*. I want you to touch every single last inch of me and then I want you to fuck me...hard. It can be just like it was in high school, nobody needs to know.”

He pulled away from my words and I allowed him to see the desperation in my eyes. At this moment I did not care about anyone. Not Brandon, not Brea, not

Ford, not even Axel. All I wanted was to have my needs taken care of; I wanted to feel something besides numbness and heartache.

Axel, giving into my demands pulled the shirt off of his back and stripped down while I took off the rest of my clothes.

“Not in the bed...” I said. I didn’t feel right about having him in my bed. Beds were for lovers, this was nothing but sex. Not even sex... this was fucking.

“..right here in the floor”

Axel nodded and laid me down on top

of the shaggy green carpet at the foot of my bed.

“You sure about this, sweet pea?” I reached down and squeezed his erect cock giving him all the answer he needed. He kissed me a few more times before moving his mouth to my breasts.

“Bite them,” I ordered. Not quite knowing why I wanted him to put his teeth on me but as instructed he bit down. I cried out and he bit my nipples again this time causing the fire between my legs to burn even hotter.

“Taste me Axel!” I continued to beg as

his mouth traced its way between my legs. Opening my folds with his fingers I felt his thick tongue lick its way over my swollen nub.

“Good Jesus, you are seriously making me hard, sweet pea!”

I shushed him “Bite it!” I screamed.

His tongue swirled around my clit a few more times before taking the swollen nub between his teeth gently biting down and licking the pain away. I softly screamed for him to do it again. The moment he bit down my body began to pulsate and with the pain I found the

release I so desperately needed.

Moving a finger inside of me he made his way back to my lips rubbing my wetness onto my mouth. Uninterested in foreplay I flipped him over and climbed on top of him sliding my wet walls onto the thickest cock I had ever seen in my life. He mumbled something that I could not make out, not that I cared what it was. I needed this and only this; I needed to feel the hurt that came from slamming myself onto him over and over again. I rode him as hard as I could, taking pleasure from his grunts and cries

of pleasure.

“Sweet pea I’m gunna come, you have to stop!” He begged.

But there was no stopping me, I was too close to finding my own release to care about his. Before I knew it I was being thrown onto my back and he had taken over, pounding me hard, once, twice and just as the explosion inside of me released itself he pulled out, emptying himself onto my stomach. Seeing his salty liquid spread all over my body brought me back to reality, I cried out and immediately jumped up

and ran to the bathroom.

What had I done? I had not only just thrown myself at my ex-boyfriends best friend, a pledge in my brother's best friend's fraternity but despite the fact he tried his damned to avoid it, I fucked him with no protection and almost let him unload himself inside of me. Was I really this fucking selfish, this stupid, this fucked up or all of the above?

I turned on the shower right before the shouting match began on the other side of the door, as quickly as it started it all ended with the sound of a sickening hard

slap. Just as I began to step into the steaming hot water Brea banged on the door.

“JEMMA, OPEN UP! Goddamn it Jem, open the fucking door!”

But I refused to bow down to her orders, not when all that I wanted to do was burn everything about the experience I just had with Axel from my body.

“Go the fuck away!” I yelled back.

“Just tell me you are OK, and I will leave you alone. Please Jemma?” I could hear the pain and fear in her voice.

I knew Brea loved me, I loved her as well but something was happening to me that I could not for the life of me explain. I told her that I was fine, that I just needed to shower. And then I stepped inside. Pulling the curtain closed behind me I began to scrub my entire body for dear life as if it was covered in disease.

I had hoped to just climb into bed and waste the rest of the day withering away but I should have known better. Brea was sitting in my desk chair, having turned it to face the bathroom door so that she could see me the moment I

stepped out. She looked at me as if contemplating something and then staring me dead in the eye asked the question I was hoping she would never have to.

“How long have you been off your meds?”

Bi-Polar Disorder

Definition - a mental illness in which a person experiences periods of strong excitement and happiness followed by periods of sadness and depression — called also *manic-depressive illness*.

I was diagnosed with Bi-Polar disorder the summer that I turned thirteen. My aunt had taken me to doctor after doctor all of which continued to diagnose me with PTSD, otherwise known as post traumatic stress disorder,

given my history of unfortunate violent trauma. My emotions were a regular roller coaster ride. There were moments I was fine, sometimes more than fine. And other moments where I couldn't tell whether I was coming or going.

My aunt started to realize it had to be something else when I began to fly off the handle. The smallest things would make me angry, sometimes I could not control myself at all. And during fits of rage, I would throw things, hit the wall, kick things over and sometimes even hurt myself. Once I had calmed down it felt

like the world had shifted on it's axis and remorse set in. I would often stay locked in my room for days listening to Joni Mitchell albums and doodling. Brea would come by to visit, I would let her in but we would end up just sitting on my bed staring up at the ceiling.

When I started eighth grade and Tilly started allowing me to go out on dates, as long as she drove me, I found more effective ways of dealing with the numbness that often led to my uncontrollable emotions. I had never gone all the way with anyone, not until

that evening with Brandon our senior year but I had done pretty much everything else.

I would allow most of my date's hands go just about anywhere they wanted to go as long as it ignited the pain and throbbing that made me feel alive. I was not selfish about it; I always gave back whatever I received. The fact that I would eventually regret every second of the time I spent letting uncaring boys violate my body had no effect on the choices that I made. Soon I found that I had gained a reputation so I

moved on to boys outside of middle school seeking the comfort of older guys in highschool. Preferably those getting ready to leave for college.

During this time Brea and I started arguing nonstop which was nothing at all like us. It hurt her to see the road I was choosing and I could not get her to understand that the choices being made were not something I would choose for myself had I any ability to think straight. I tried to explain to her how suffocating the numbness was, but her life had

always been perfect and she simply lacked all understanding. When my reputation resulted in her gaining the same reputation by association she stopped wanting to be seen with me in school. Later, when she gained her own reputation without any help from me she would laugh at the irony. Missing Brea was the only reason I decided to open up to my therapist and allow her to help me.

A week after my confession I was referred to a psychiatrist and eventually diagnosed with Bi-Polar disorder or manic depression as it is sometimes

called. Apparently some people with the disorder turn to violence, other to shopping, some to drinking and others like me, to sex. I truly did feel as if I *needed* the closeness that certain sexual acts afforded me. The feeling of being wanted and the variety of excitement temporarily fueled my lack of feeling breathing life back into me.

I was also informed that Bi-Polar disorder is often an inherited condition and sometimes linked to schizophrenia. It was after being diagnosed that my aunt shared with me our family's long torrid

experience with mental illness. She confided that the mental health of immediate family was one of the main reasons she refused to get romantically involved with a man, or woman, in all of her 48 years. She said that she refused to burden anyone should she develop any abnormal psychological issues. No she was not a 48 year old virgin; she simply chose to go the route of having relationships with men who had a mutual desire to satisfy her physical needs without strings. I never questioned her, she seemed happy and that was all that

mattered.

“How did you know?” I asked Brea who had not moved an inch in the five minutes I stood in the bathroom doorway trying to figure out how she deciphered that I was no longer taking the lithium; I’d only missed two weeks.

I had completely forgotten about the screams coming from my bedroom as I stepped into the shower. The shouting most likely meant that Brea caught Axel with his pants down. Sometimes I forgot that she was skilled at picking locks. A

talent she felt the need to become skilled in the first time I locked myself in my room and refused to open to the door to anyone and everyone, including her.

“How did I know?” She asked in a manner that suggested I was a complete moron. “Don’t tell me you have already gone that far into the deep, because I watched you take it a few weeks ago.”

I took a step forward but failed to manage another before I sat down right where I stood pulling my knees up, resting my chin atop them and throwing my hands over my head. I felt the floor

bounce as Brea marched over to me and bent down resting her head on top of my forearm.

“Oh babe, please do not put yourself through this again. Axel told me you threw yourself at him. Locked him in the room and practically raped him.”

I jerked my head up almost head-butting her in the chin at the accusation of raping Axel, who had barely put up a fight.

“Chill out,” she said practically. “I am not so stupid as to think he ever actually fought you off his pecker. But I know you

and I know that seeing Ford there with that woman sent you over the edge. I also know how you choose to self medicate when the pain comes. You know Brandon is going to kick his teeth in right?”

My eyes widened at the thought of Brandon finding out that I had seduced his best friend. In all of the years I was with him I never once needed anyone else. When I was hurting he always soothed the ache, most of the time without ever touching me because just being around him made me feel alive. Of

course I was also seeing a shrink and heavily medicated, rarely missing a dose the entire four years we were together.

Brea jumped up from the floor like her pants had caught on fire.

“Fucking Axel! He of all people should know better! I tell you what, that son of a bitch’s face is going to be black and blue for the next month because I kicked his fucking ass and to tell you the Goddamn truth I should kick yours too!”

I lowered my head wiping the tears from my eyes.

“I’m so sorry Brea. I stopped taking

them a week and a half ago. I just wanted to be able to start off college with all of my fucking head in one place. You know what the meds do to me. It takes everything I have in me just to have to even remotely feel normal on that shit. I felt ready to be without them, ready to finally feel normal on my own. I just never anticipated anything like Julian coming back into the picture. I fucked up, I know I did!" I buried my face back to my knees and started uncontrollably sobbing. I whispered into my knees behind the tears, "Please, Brandon

cannot know what I have done. It will break his heart, Brea.” I could not stop the tears from falling.

“Sorry babe, too late. I called him while you were in the shower. I had no clue what to do. You scared the flying fuck out of me!”

The news revealing that Brandon knew everything caused the sobbing to turn into all-out hysterical wailing. How could she go to him without asking me? I don't give a damn how helpless she felt.

“Come on babe.” I felt Brea's arm loop under my right side as she helped me to

my feet.

I woke up what felt like only a few minutes later in my bed, dressed in a nightgown with a massive headache. There were voices coming from the other side of the bedroom door but they were practically whispering, other than Brea I was not exactly sure who the other voice was coming from until the door to my room opened and Brandon appeared in the doorway. He stood there for a few minutes looking like total shit, just staring at me.

If I did not know better I would say he had been crying. His eyes were bloodshot and puffy and his cheeks were red. Moving his hands to his lips Brandon let out a sigh. I could tell he was at war with himself over how to deal with me but in the end his love for the girl I could have been won him over. He walked over to the side of the bed, shrugged off his shoes and climbed in under the covers next to me.

“Roll over baby.” Brandon whispered into my ear lightly nudging my body to the side, facing the opposite direction of

him. I did as he asked, selfishly needing to be rescued by the man whose heart I had broken far too many times. He put his arms around my waist and kissed the top of my head resting his on the spot where he kissed.

“I love you so much Jemma, please don’t fall apart on me. You promised not to leave me.” I cried into his arms.

I was so far from deserving anybody as good as Brandon that it was ridiculous. He was too perfect for even the most perfect person, and I was far from being perfect. Yet here he was,

holding me, taking in my pain and making it his own.

Wait....he is here, WHY is he here? HOW is he here? *He isn't here* I silently told myself, *you are finally going completely and totally insane.* I snuggled deeper into the arms of my delusion and drifted off to sleep. Unfortunately I woke up hours later face to face with the same delusion.

How could I forgotten how breathtaking he was? It had only been a few months since we were last together but I swear he had grown even further

away from the boy I had fallen head over heels for so long ago. His jaw line had become more defined, his eyes were slightly larger, his hair silkier and his hands, one of which was resting on my cheek even though he was sound asleep, were even more beautiful than I had remembered. He was so astonishingly gorgeous and unreal that I had little doubt as to whether or not he was here, so I leaned in and placed a soft kiss upon his lips. Still lost in sleep his lips began to move with mine, possessing every inch they were willing to give to

him. When his eyes opened up and locked with mine he pulled away sending my heart into a panic. Why was my delusion not playing along?

“No baby, we can’t, I won’t.”

A tear fell from his face as if rejecting me was tearing him apart and then I realized the man lying next to me was even more real than last I saw him.

“You’re really here?” I asked placing my hand below his eye wiping the stray tear away.

“As real as you are baby. Please don’t kiss me again, I couldn’t handle it.”

His expression was pained and serious. How is it even remotely possible for someone as amazing as Brandon not be a figment of my imagination?

“What are you doing here, Brandon?” I asked.

“Brea called. She told me you stopped taking the lithium. I have a few days before classes start and since I had the time I thought I would come see you. Though, I would have come regardless.”

I was such a horrible person. Had only I continued on my meds everything

would not be such a mess right now and Brandon would never have picked up and ran to his falling apart ex girlfriend. This is exactly what happened to my father. He thought he could deal so he stopped taking his medication and bam, he lost it.

“I wish you hadn’t come, but I am glad you are here. I missed you.” He smiled at me and moved a stray hair back behind my ear. “What did she tell you? Brea, what did she tell you?”

He pulled a deep breath into his chest and slowly exhaled. “Are you asking me

if she told me about that Julian Ford guy or if she told me you let my best friend climb inside of you without even a moments thought?"

I closed my eyes and cringed as a shiver made its way up my spine. He had taken my breath away and I had no idea how to respond, I was sure he hated me. How could he not when even I hated me?

"I don't hate you if that's what you are thinking. I could never hate you Jem. Sand, remember? Yet I just keep coming back for more." He joked placing his

hand over his heart.

I laughed at his morbid sense of humor jabbing him in the arm. “JERK!” I laughed.

“Ow! You have to be careful with me baby, I’m sensitive, as delicate as a yellow rose.” He paused softly smiling, “What time do you normally take your pill?” he asked.

I knew it was too good to be true. Even after he assured me he was real I still tried to convince myself he was a delusion for fear reality would come back and clobber me in the face just like

Brea had done to Axel.

I leaned over Brandon's shoulder to get a glance of the clock on the night stand behind him. "Usually around seven, or shall I say about twenty minutes ago." I said lying my head back down on my pillow.

"Well, what do yah say we mosey on out of this room? You take your pill and I will scrounge up some breakfast. Brea said she baked cookies and that I was to get them into you STAT."

Regardless of the fact that all I wanted to do was lay in my bed with

Brandon for the rest of my life, never having to face the reality that my shell had cracked, I got up with him. I took my pill like a good little girl and ate a stack of chocolate chip cookies soothing the ache in my heart that had returned when reality set in.

“So, tell me about him?” I looked up at Brandon with half a cookie in my mouth.

“Axel? I am pretty sure you don’t want the sordid details of that disaster.” Brandon’s lips puckered up as if he had bit into a lemon and he closed his eyes.

“Not Axel, Jem, *him*, your brother’s

friend, the guy Brea seems to think you are in love with.”

I put down the cookie that was in my hand. Was I in love with Julian, Ford, after only knowing him a little while? Because at this very moment I was sure I loved Brandon. True, my heart was throbbing at the thought of sharing Ford with Brandon. It was also throbbing for the fact that Ford felt just as dead to me now as Nicolai and my mother, but was I in love with him?

I could not bear the thought of watching Brandon leave again. Watching

him go the first time made me wish I would just die so that I didn't have to fight this cruel fucking world without him. He was always my knight in shining armor, the prince in all of the fairy tales I read as a child. The first time I fooled around with Axel I was just a confused young girl. I had a hard time understanding why I turned to him when Brandon was not there. If I loved Brandon so much why couldn't I manage to be without him for more than a few hours and still be faithful?

During my weekly therapy session,

Dr. Schneider, who had been my diagnosing psychiatrist, asked me if I could see myself functioning without Brandon. I contemplated the question for a long time, trying to will the answer to change based on the different scenarios he was offering me, but it always remained the same, there was no way that I could. He later asked me if I thought my feelings were love or if I had just grown to need him because he allowed himself to be there, if perhaps he could have been anyone. I refused to answer. I knew that I loved him, I wasn't

sure the depth of that love but I was positive that there was love in my heart for him.

By the end of the session Dr. Schneider had explained that he felt as if I had allowed myself to grow mentally attached to Brandon because he was so willing, basically because he was an easy target. He said that he thought Brandon had become my crutch, an appendage that wasn't really necessary but I insisted on having around for fear of falling. When my crutch left my side I fell to the ground, thus explaining my

behavior with his best friend, it was me latching on to the closest thing. He explained that until I learned to let go of him I would never truly understand the depth of my feelings, I might not actually love him at all. That was the last time I visited the great Dr. Schneider.

I never shared the doctors thoughts with anyone for fear that saying them out loud might actually make them true. Would he tell me the same thing about Ford? I didn't want to know. Of course it no longer mattered because Ford was no longer available to me. I am not so

sure he never was.

Chapter Seven

Julian

She was gone. One minute she was standing right in front of me looking sexy as hell and the next minute she had left me standing alone unable to explain myself. I told Heather coming here would be a bad idea but she insisted on it, promising that she would be

completely hands off. I should have known she was full of shit. She usually was.

We broke up two months ago after I went home for a few weeks and found out she was slutting around with Benicio the guy who mowed her dad's lawn once a week. I don't put up with that kind of shit. Once a girl decides to be with me I expect them to be with me and only me.

My gran had practically begged me to fly with Heather back to Austin where she'd decided to transfer after years of studying at home. I knew she was only

moving here to be near me but she was a grown woman and there was nothing I could do about it. The only reason I agreed was because gran feared for her safety.

“A pretty girl should never fly alone Ford, there are all kinds of deviants out there just waiting to get their hands on someone like her.” she argued.

I never told her what happened between me and Heather, I knew that it would break her heart, she truly loved the girl.

When Heather decided she wanted to

leave San Juan early, I was not going to argue with her. I had filled out all of the required paperwork at home health and they had someone coming out to help gran starting Monday morning so I was free to head back. The plan was to drop Heather off at her sisters and head straight over to Jemma's apartment. She had been all I could think about for the last 24 hours and all I wanted was to crawl back to her and figure out what this thing was between us. But after hearing about the Omega Pledge BBQ, Heather asked that I drop her off there,

which later turned into “Walk me in.” The only reason I caved was because as President I figured it might be best if I at least made an appearance. Boy was I wrong.

I never thought it was possible that Jemma and I would ever cross paths again. Over the years I had wanted to visit her family more times than I could count. I’d even been back once or twice while gran and I sold off the old house but guilt plagued me and I never gathered the courage to visit the Hales.

There were days that I wished I

would have just let Nick have the fucking eraser he tried to steal from me in Kindergarten. Perhaps we would have never become friends and at the very least Mr. And Mrs. Hale would not have lost a son. I could only imagine how horribly they had suffered the loss. I can only imagine that losing a child is one of the worse things that could ever happen to a person. Kids were destined to eventually lose a parent but a parent should never have to mourn their child. How could they not blame me for the pain inflicted on them? I was the boy

who lived and I hated myself for it.

I remember the events of that horrific day as if they happened yesterday. We were sitting in a middle booth, laughing and carrying on about the fact that Nick was too scared to take a photo with Bugs Bunny during our trip to Six Flags. He downright refused to go anywhere near the seven foot rabbit. "Rabbits should never grow that big! He will probably try to eat me for killing his cousins." he joked, however I knew that he was completely serious. As buff and tough as

Nick pretended to be I knew he was still just a kid.

His dad had taught him how to shoot the day he turned five and several times a year they would both go hunting for some kind of animal or bird. I had always wanted to trail along but my dad had a “No guns around kids” rule that he stuck by at all costs. Even so, he never turned down the side of deer meat Mr. Hale gave up because between the hogs, quail, deer and rabbit they never had room for more than half of their kill in the deep freeze. Since my dad was Mr.

Hale's closest friend we also got the freezer overflow which usually included a little bit of everything else.

I loved Mr. Hale, where my dad was smart and level headed, Mr. Hale was resourceful and wise. I turned to him all things related to sports and outdoors because he always had the best answers. My dad would usually just shrug his shoulders and say "Ask your mom, kid." As if my mother would know anything about jock straps.

No more than two minutes after we all calmed down from poking fun at Nick,

who laughed right along with us, a man bolted through the front door screaming “Where is that bitch! Janet fucking Cardenas. Where is she?” He wasn’t shouting to anyone in particular, I guess he was just shouting to be shouting. I remember thinking about how funny the man looked. His legs were spread apart in an odd gape, he was bald and he was abnormally short. The long black trench coat he was wearing no doubt made him look shorter than he actually was. He reminded me a little bit of The Penguin from Batman.

He turned into the restaurant and found his intended target sitting about three tables over to our right. He ran to her , jerking her up out of the seat by the hair of her head and began shouting at her in Spanish while she begged and pleaded for mercy. After slapping her a few times he pulled out a small revolver and shot the man who had been sitting beside her in the booth before turning the gun on her. The man in the booth had never moved an inch from his seat.

I remember everything else in slow motion. He started shooting wildly,

emptying the rest of the bullets from the revolver into ordinary unsuspecting patrons before getting to our booth. My mother had her hand out in front of me trying to shield me; my dad was shielding Nick with his entire body. They were both pleading with him, "Please, not the children." my dad begged and my mom over run with tears was crying to him "Don't hurt my babies! Do anything you want to me but please don't hurt my babies!" Every word out of their mouths seems to fuel the demon lurking inside of him more

and more. He dropped the empty gun and pulled a larger one out of his coat. He shot my dad first, once, twice through the head, then my mom. I was too caught up watching my dad fall over halfway onto the floor to notice where those bullets went. I later found out he shot her dead, straight between her eyes.

Then he moved the gun on me. I remember opening up my mouth to ask him not to hurt me but when I saw death in his eyes I knew there was no point in giving him the satisfaction of listening to me beg, so I just closed my eyes and

waited. Before I ever realized what was happening, Nick had turned my direction and threw himself on top of me. The bullet hit his face first, caught him mid air. It went straight through him, piercing me in the right arm. And the second bullet, fired consecutively, hit him directly in the middle of his stomach. That bullet also went straight through and hit me in the leg. Both of us lay on the seat of the booth bleeding to death.

My best friend had just sacrificed his own life to save me. I lay as still as I could underneath him because I refused

to allow that sacrifice to be in vain. A second before he could put another bullet in me, ending my life along with everyone else's, a man came from behind the counter with a knife in his hand and threw it straight into the gun mans leg. He shot the man, knocking him to the ground before the restaurant filled with the deafening sound of sirens. A few moments later, realizing his reign of terror had come to an end, the man shot his self in the mouth sending a bullet through his skull. He fell dead no more than a few inches from where my dad lay

slumped over the side of the booth.

I wanted to scream but I remained silent, refusing to move until I felt Nick's lifeless body being lifted off of me. They say he was still alive when they put him on the gurney and was dead before they ever pulled out of the parking lot, my mother and father were carried out of the restaurant in body bags. I was the lucky one, I spent a week in the hospital recovering from only superficial wounds thanks to the only real friend I have ever considered myself having.

And now here I was after spending my entire life trying to keep from inflicting any more pain on his family by staying away, only to find that I broke his baby sister's heart because I am a total moron. I don't know what I can do to make it up to her but I want to try. Unfortunately I cannot get her to answer her cell phone, judging by the fact that it goes straight to voice mail I don't even think she has it turned on.

A few minutes after my final attempt I see Axel stumble through the door

looking like someone beat his face in with a two by four. Scared something might have happened while driving Jemma and Brea back to the apartment I approach him and ask what the hell happened. He started mumbling some shit about how he fucked up, I could not make out a single word he was saying so I slapped him in an effort to get him to relax enough to make even a little bit of sense.

Apparently it worked because after the blow he apologized and explained to me that Jemma had seduced him. He tried to

convince me that he had not meant to sleep with her but she was standing in front of him “all needy and shit;” afterwards he started shouting.

“I always had a thing for her in high school but she was Brandon’s girl so she was off limits but when she walked her tits right into my hands, fuck man what could I do? A guy can only take so much.”

I tried to comprehend everything that he was saying but my head was nothing but a jumbled mess. Jemma and I had never made any type of commitment to one

another, she was not my girlfriend by any stretch of the word but I couldn't help the fact that I was pissed. Commitment or not, Jemma was mine, to hell be damned anyone who tried to take her from me.

“After we both got off she freaked out man, I don't think she even knew she was coming on to me, it was like she was someone else. She is fucking nuts!”

And with that statement what little sense I had left abandoned me, my eyes saw nothing but darkness. Before I knew it, James and Jonathan, the Omega's Co-

President and treasurer were pulling me off a nearly unconscious Axel begging me not to kill him. I looked down at my throbbing knuckles, finding them split open and covered in my and Axel's blood. It was then that I decided to head upstairs. I would worry about the consequences of my actions later. I took two steps before turning to James.

“Get his sorry ass out of here. Don't let him back in or he won't live long enough to see his next sunrise.”

Legacy or not, he took what was mine.

I tried to sleep after taking a hot shower to wash the blood off of my hands and burn away the knowledge that Jemma had spent the night in the arms of another man in what sounded like a total breakdown. I could not bear the thought of another man's hands on the body of the girl who had me so tied up in knots that I did not even recognize who I was anymore.

But every ounce of it was my fault, had I been up front with her about my trip she would not have felt so betrayed. I

was supposed to protect her just like Nick had protected me but I didn't know how, I fucked up everything I had ever touched.

I sat up in bed and put my hands through my hair. Something I had a tendency to do when I was out of sorts with the world.

“Nick, dude, please help me. I pretty damn sure that I am fucking in love with your sister and it is killing me right now.” I pleaded into the air praying to my dead friend for some kind answer to a question I never even asked.

So many times in my life I had seen Nicks face. For once I was actually hoping I would see him and he would guide me in the right direction. I didn't want to lose Jemma again. I was not sure exactly what we had, I didn't know how she felt or, considering what had happened with Axel, if what we had was even real but I had to do something. She was Nick's sister. Nick, who had done everything to insure that I would live to see another day. I still had no plans to let his sacrifice be in vain and though I might die trying I was going to fix this, I

was going to fix her and God willing if there ever was an us, I was going to fix that as well.

I got up early, eager to get over to the apartment to try and talk to her and let her know how sorry I was. It was almost nine in the morning when I knocked on the door, a little early by most people's standards but I had no more wait left in me. Brea flung the door open telling me that Jemma wasn't home but I paid no mind to her and walked inside hoping to find that she had been lying.

“Where is she? Did she leave for class already?” I turned to Brea who was shutting the door behind me.

“ I told you, she is not here Ford. She went to the admissions office to discuss postponing until next semester, and then she has a doctor ’ s appointment, ” she stated calmly. I wondered why she was not angry with me.

“Is she sick? What’s wrong with her? Is there anything I can do to help?”

I felt myself start pacing back and forth before Brea ever asked me sit down.

“ The first thing you should do is sit the

fuck down because your pacing is driving me bat shit. ”

She held her hand out to an overstuffed flowery arm chair sitting beside a small couch and I took a seat in the chair resting my elbows on my knees. Brea sat down across from me on the couch.

“ Second, you need to calm the fuck down. Third, she is not sick, not in the sense you are asking anyway. She has an appointment with her Psychiatrist. ”

Psychiatrist? Were things still so hard on her that she needed that kind of help? Suddenly I felt the need to set the record

straight.

“Brea, she isn’t my fiancée. Heather and I broke up months ago after I found her in bed with another guy; she just cannot seem to understand that I am no way in hell interested in her anymore.”

She rested her hand briefly on my fisted hand.

“ I know! I was up waiting for Brandon when I saw her sneaking into the building about three o'clock this morning. It seems her sister lives on the second floor. You could have told us that, you know. ”

I could have told them much more. I should have.

“ After exchanging a few unpleasant words she told me what happened. And just so you know, I told Jem everything before she and Brandon took off. ”

I stilled at the mention of Brandon's name clenching my fists so hard that my fingernails began to dig into my palms. From what I remembered he was supposed to be two thousand miles away at some fancy college in New York. Suddenly jealousy took hold and would not let go.

“What the hell is he doing here?” I barked giving spark to Brea's ferocious laughter. I am glad one of us is amused.

“Honey...” She paused. “There is no mountain Brandon Coy Hicks would not climb and no sea he would not swim to get to her if she needed him. Let me tell you right now, he loves her to death and she loves him just as much. So if you are thinking you are going to come sweep her off her feet and he will just go away you have another thing coming. If that is the case you'd best go now. Jemma doesn't work like that, once she lets you

in, it is for life.”

She cleared her throat waiting for my response. When I didn't move she continued.

“Look, I am not sure when they will be back. But I will ask her to call you when they get home. OK?”

No, not OK, I was not going anywhere because I had to know what was wrong with my girl. It hurt enough knowing that I was not someone she could turn to when life got to be too much but I knew that was something we would have to work up to.

“I cannot leave without knowing what is wrong with her Brea. I won’t be able to think straight if I do.”

“I can’t share that with you. I will just say that sometimes, when she doesn’t take care of herself she loses control and before she knows it she feels completely worthless and helpless. And she is sensitive to things most of us aren’t so she ends up misreading everything and everybody. Did you know that for years she thought she was hideous? You can thank Brandon for finally bringing her to her senses. I would give anything to have

just one man look at me like he looks at her and here she has two! I love her to death but she can be a little clueless sometimes.”

I shook my head back and forth and buried my face into my hands completely ignoring the tension in Brea’s statement.

“I’ve lost her haven’t I?” I whispered then raised my head to Brea who was shaking her head.

“Did she just sleep with me because she has issues? Is that why she fucked Axel?”

Brea looked at me with what I can only

describe as the eyes of a demon. I was almost certain that she was going to open up her rabid jaws and take a chunk out of me. I could not say I would blame her considering the way the words came out of my mouth. I had not intended on wording things quite so ‘eloquently’.

“I am going to ignore that asshole statement you just made and chalk it up to you being hurt. As far as her reasoning for Axel, yeah, she was just trying to fill a void or something. I cannot and will not speak for her, besides, I don’t even get it, and she does things for various

reasons Ford. She says she goes numb, her entire body, she feels dead all over and there are certain things she can do to make herself feel less like a zombie and more like a human being. Shit, I don't know why I am telling you any of this, it isn't my place to tell you any of it but I can see you care about her.”

I silently pleaded with Brea to keep talking. I wanted to know *why me?* I needed Brea, as Jemma's best friend, to tell me that our connection was not born out of some sick desire to feel something. I do not want to know that in

the end I mean nothing to her.

“No, I can tell you right now that she didn’t sleep with you for that reason. As far as I know this time with Axel was the first time she had ever completely given into the urge. The first time she actually had sex with penetration so to speak. It probably has something to do with the fact that she knows him so well but even with him she lost it. Not only did she not freak out with you but she spent the night with you. When she suffers an episode with some random guy she never mentions him past the initial meltdown,

though she ends up a total mess for weeks after. I know for a fact that you and Brandon are the only men she has ever been with in any way that mattered.”

Me and Brandon. There his name was again. Was I going to have to fight for this girl? I had never been willing to fight for a woman before. Not a single person had ever been worth fighting for but Jemma was not just some girl. She was my fairy princess, the keeper of souls, an artist, a healer of headless Barbie dolls, she was a Skipper and

Skippers were always happy. If I was in for a fight at least I was armed with ammunition not a single soul other than me could fire off.

“For what it’s worth Ford, I see something different in her when she talks about you. I have seen it even more the few times I have seen her look at you. It’s a strange comfortable familiarity, a natural calm that I never saw in her the entire time she was with Brandon. He was always the person she would lean on when she couldn’t stand, still is and I’m not so sure that’s a good thing. But

that look in her eyes, the one she gets when it is all about you, she has never even had that with me. I don't want that gleam to go away. Do what you can to get it back and keep it there."

I will, I will do that and more. Anything and everything I have to do, including jumping in front of a speeding bullet, I will save her. She won't have to lean on me because I will see to it that she can stand on her own two feet. Brandon might care for her and I am thankful he was there to keep her afloat when she needed a life raft. But as far as

I am concerned he was nothing but filler during a time I could not be there for her.

Brandon was her then, but I was her when, her now and as sure as I am living, I will be her tomorrow.

Chapter Eight

Jemma

It was hard coming back to see Dr. Schneider. After I cut off all ties with him I started getting my medication thanks to short visits with therapists at MHMR. I didn't want someone who was going to take a nose dive into my head and tell me things that I did not want to

hear. But I made a promise to Brandon that since he could not be here for me I would try to seek professional help. Since Dr. Schneider was already familiar with my past Dr. Schneider it was. Luckily he had a cancellation and was able to fit me in for a same day appointment.

Brandon held my hand in the small dark waiting area while I tried to wrap my head around the events of the night before. From the moment I came to my senses I started to doubt everything I had been feeling since the moment I stopped

taking that little pink pill. I doubted the reality of everything around me. From the color of the plants in the waiting room to my feelings for Brandon and Ford to my ability to cope with the menial tasks of daily life. The fact that Brandon was sitting next to me rubbing the palm of my hand after I destroyed his friendship with someone he knew half of his life caused the biggest doubt of all. It made me doubt if there was anything inside of me worth salvaging.

“Hale?” A short pixie like woman in a pink cardigan called out from the door

behind the check in window. I looked over to Brandon who had sat straight up never releasing my hand. I don't know why it felt as if I needed his permission to leave but I couldn't stand up without finding the confidence his voice always offered me. "Go baby, I will be right here waiting. You can do this." I took a deep breath, stood up and hesitantly gave his hand back to him.

I followed the woman back to Dr. Schneider's all too familiar office. Short of the new ivy sitting next to the blacked out window everything had remained the

same. A large dark cherry wood desk took up half of the far side of the room. In front of it stood two mahogany parlor chairs. Along the wall nearest to the door sat a plain Grey couch and next to that on the side wall sat a matching chair. The room was pretty standard as far as mental health offices go. I had been to see plenty of them in my short life. I took a seat on the couch knowing that was where we would end up anyway and waited for Dr. Schneider to make an appearance.

A few moments later after a few

customary knocks on the door he slid into the room with his eyes glued to a clip board. I never understood why it was doctors knocked, especially psychiatrists, it was not like I would be sitting in the office naked or anything. But then again, given the fact that he dealt with crazy nut jobs like me I guess it was not entirely unheard of. I certainly had no intentions of getting naked anytime in the immediate future.

He was a little bit different than I remember, seemingly shorter, thinner and his hair had begun to gray with age.

“Miss. Hale!” He exclaimed looking up at me from the hand full of papers. “It has been a while. What brings you in this morning?”

He walked around the coffee table in front of me and took his customary seat in the uninteresting gray chair after clicking play on the recording device he sat down on the side table. This was customary, I spoke, he listened, recorded and on rare occasions gave advice.

I paused for a moment, where do I begin?

“I guess, well, I moved out of my

aunt's house a few months ago. Remember Brea?" he nodded. "We moved in together, here in Austin actually..."

I continued; filling him in on all of the details leading up to my confrontation with Brea about my medication and then stopped remembering the last words he ever said to me in this very office. "*Brandon is your crutch, try to let him go.*" I didn't want to tell him about Brandon unfortunately what I wanted did not matter.

"I see you and Mr. Hicks are still

acquainted?”

I shook my head. Was he always this perceptive or had he just been spying on me in the waiting room?

As if reading my mind he replied, “I saw the young man heading into the mens room on my way in here.”

I nodded “Oh.” was all I said.

“He tells me he has moved to New York. He is pretty worried about you. What do you think about that?”

What did I think about that? I thought it was a crummy but necessary step to keep

him safe before I dragged him down with me because I am complete and total whack job, but I didn't say that.

“I don't deserve Brandon. It hurts to lose him, but I am glad he has a life away from me. We are no longer a couple. I ended things senior year after I...after...” I cleared my throat, he waited for me to finish.

“After what Jemma?” He pushed.

“After I gave him my virginity and he told me he was in love with me so much he wanted to give up everything to be with me.” I said quickly, ashamed of

myself. I could not bear to look at him for fear of seeing judgment in his eyes so I turned away.

He inquired, “You gave yourself to him, he told you he loved you and then you ended things after all of that time? Why would you do that? Tell me how you felt about it.”

I bent over and put my head between my legs.

“I felt unworthy of it all. I felt afraid.” I sat back up forcing myself eye to eye with the doctor who was nodding his head up and down.

“I could not stop thinking about what you said the last time I was here, about Brandon being a crutch and suddenly it felt so true. I just did not want him to give up his life for someone who might have only cared about him because she was weak. He deserved so much better than me. But now, now I am not so sure I am not in love with him, he loves me, it would make sense for me to love him back. Wouldn't it?”

He sat quietly and pondered for a moment before responding. “And Julian, how does he make you feel?”

I smiled at the thought of Julian. Before we left the apartment Brea had walked in, I had thought she was sleeping but as it turned out she was confronting a very drunk Heather whom she had caught sneaking into the building. Apparently she was staying in one of the units upstairs with her sister. After Brea threatened to make her college life a living hell, Heather confessed and told her Julian had broken it off months ago but she had hoped to win him back, albeit rather unsuccessfully.

“It is pretty hard to explain how he

makes me feel without sounding like a weirdo.” I said. He told me to give it a shot.

“I guess you could say I feel like a kid again. Not a *kid* kid, like... I don’t feel like whipping out Barbie dolls and skipping rope or anything silly like that. He just makes me feel like I am not broken. Like I am a whole person, I feel like I could do anything, like I could even fly if I tried hard enough.” I laughed.

“Interesting. Tell me more?”

There was so much more. I wanted to

tell him about the fact Julian was my first real crush. I had known him most of my childhood and even though I was only a little girl I would day dream about white dresses and tuxedos. When Barbie finally got around to her dream wedding, she ended up with one of Nick's GI Joe dolls. He reminded me of Julian, there was no way Barbie would pick Ken when she had a Julian around. The memories warmed my heart.

“I dunno, I know that I can see my future clear as day. I have never seen my future before. I have always lived in the

here and now because you never know what is going to happen in the next second. Julian makes me hopeful for what that next second will bring. Though it all feels kind of silly and unrealistic considering it has been less than a week since we reconnected. I don't know if it is real or if I have become some crazed sex fiend."

Dr. Schneider smiled, "So the two of you have been intimate?" I nodded. "Let me see if I am reading you correctly. And I am taking into account several of our past sessions in this summation. I

hope I do not run you off again.”

He winked at me then looked down to the pile of papers now sitting on the coffee table in front of us.

“You see Brandon as your protector. That is what your head has designated him to be. When things get rough he puts his arms around you and holds you up. Julian is just the opposite. He is more like your savior; he makes you feel as if you can walk on your own two feet without needing to be held up. Does that sound about right to you?”

Suddenly panic flashes through my

mind and body like a lightning bolt. I knew what he was getting at, he was saying the same thing he had said years ago and just like then I cannot control the madness emitting off of me, I cannot breathe. Dr. Schneider senses this and hands me one of the unopened bottles of water sitting in a small wicker basket on the side table. I open it and take a drink hearing his words that plead with me to take a second to find my composure.

“Brandon is my crutch?” I ask.

It was more of a statement than it was a question. The harsh realization that I

have been clinging to Brandon for my own selfish needs tore me up inside.

“I thought I loved him. He could have spent all of these years with someone who would have loved him back. I am a horrible person!” I cried and he handed me a tissue.

“I made a mistake the last time you were here Jemma. I made a very unprofessional off handed comment about you perhaps not even loving the Mr.Ackles and for that I am sorry. The truth is that we lean on the people we love. The fact that you trust Brandon

enough to lean on him shows me that you love him. Don't doubt that there is love there; I don't think it is possible not to love someone who so very obviously loves you. But love has many faces. Learning the difference between friendship and romantic love means finding a love that encompasses every face love has to offer. When you find someone who not only holds you up but also pushes you to walk all while making you feel like you can conquer the world you will see it for what it is, something real."

I hear every word Dr. Schneider was saying to me but I was still confused about Julian.

“I can see you are still struggling with your feelings so I am going to help you along. I want you to make a pact with yourself, and me, to abstain from sexual relations for sixty days. No penetration, no heavy petting, none of it. Continue your medication and keep a journal. Journaling will help you to sort everything out in your head at the end of a long day. The sixty days will also give your body a chance to get used to the

medication because I am taking you off the lithium and putting you combination drug therapy. Have you been getting your blood tests regularly?"

I told him the truth. I had not had a blood test in over a year and he agreed that it was definitely time to have one done and urged me to make an appointment with my primary care physician. After which he directed me to schedule our next visit and led me out of the room.

The drive back to the apartment was a

quiet one. I kept looking over at Brandon, who never took his eyes off the road, trying to figure out if I should tell him about my session. He had tried to hold my hand once we climbed into the car but I pulled away. I could not keep doing this to him and I no longer wanted him to hold me up anymore. I just needed him to be my friend and I could see there was a moment when he had hoped that we might reignite the flame that had once burned between us, something even I had considered. But now that I understood what we had, a romantic relationship

was something the two of us could never again revisit.

We pulled into the parking lot and Brandon parked the car.

“My mom wants to see me before I go back to New York. Do you mind if I just drop you off here?”

I could see the suffering in his eyes. He did not want to be near me any longer than he had to be. We had not said a word but a part of him knew what had played out behind the closed door of Dr. Schneider's office.

“That’s fine.” I paused considering my

next words carefully. “I love you Brandon. I didn’t know how much until today.”

He flicked at his steering wheel refusing to look up. “But,” he said.

“But...you and me, as an us, it is not healthy, not for either of us. You cannot keep running to my side every time I get an itch Brandon. I need to know that you are out there living your life. I do not want to lose you, not because I think I cannot live without you holding me up, but because you are a part of who I am. Knowing that you have even a tiny place

in my life makes everything worth fighting for.”

Brandon looked up at me with tears in his eyes fully aware of what I was saying no matter how much he wanted to hear something different.

“This is it. All I can offer you from now on is friendship and I know that it might be selfish of me but I so very much want you to be my friend. In order to do that I need you to tell me again that you won’t be waiting in the wings for me. Only this time I desperately need you to mean it. I cannot move on until you mean

it.”

My tone had turned to pure desperation. I waited in silence for what felt like years before I finally heard Brandon speak. He wiped the tears from his face, grabbed my shoulders and turned me around to face him leaving his hands firmly in place. He noticed the pendant around my neck, he didn't know it but I never took it off, and looked up into my eyes.

“I, Brandon Coy Hicks will not ever again be caught waiting in the wings for you Jemma Lee Hale. I am your friend, I

will be the best friend that I can be if you promise me that you will be happy. That you will take your medication, see your doctor and take care of yourself. Because even though you are only my friend, I couldn't live another day knowing that I failed you because you Jemma Hale are a part of me as well. A part so absolutely vital that my body would cease to function if anything happened to it. Are you hearing me?"

And the tears began to fall, my sniffing and blubbering increasing as I nodded "yes". Brandon pulled me across the

seat of the truck and into his arms. He cried into my hair and I soaked through his Old navy t-shirt. We were both an emotional disaster.

“I promise, I promise!” I sobbed.

We sat in each other’s arms until the crying stopped and we both felt safe knowing that we would never be completely apart, no matter what came between us.

“Come on, I’ll walk you in. Mom can wait. Besides Brea will have my hide if I don’t say goodbye.”

I laughed at the truthfulness of his

statement and we both climbed out of the driver side of the car, walking up to the apartment talking about how paranoid Brea could get. He never once called me baby and he never reached for my hand. We were friends and nothing more.

We stumbled into the apartment laughing at the fact that I had just cussed out my keys after trying to open the door with the wrong one and we both stopped short at the sight of Ford asleep on the couch. Brea walked out of the kitchen holding a cup of coffee, and bounced up to us, her bare breasts flopping freely

under her baby blue tank top.

“I told him to go home but he was pretty stubborn about insisting he be here when you got back. He fell asleep about an hour ago.”

I heard Brandon shut the door behind me. He was no longer smiling, his face was empty and I could no longer tell what was going through his head. I moved my body forward while Brea stepped back to Brandon taking his hand and squeezing it to reassure him.

“Is that him?” I heard him whisper to Brea.

“Yup!”

I knelt down in front of this big beautiful sleeping man and smiled in awe. He had fallen asleep sitting up, nuzzled into the couch pillow with his head resting on the palm of his hand. He looked like an angel; he seemed so peaceful that you could never imagine him being plagued by a life of suffering. I placed a hand to his knee and he awoke with a jerk.

“Hi,” I spoke softly afraid he might float away at the sound of my voice..

He let out a long breath that sounded as if he had been holding it in for hours.

“Jemma? Am I dreaming?” My smile widened.

I shook my head “*No*” and suddenly everyone in the room disappeared around us. Ford pulled me up off the floor and took my place kneeling before me. He pulled me closer to him pushing his head in the pit of my stomach.

“I’m so sorry sweetheart. Tell me you forgive me?”

Forgive him? What was there to forgive? And then I remembered full

well what there was to forgive only it was not Ford who should be pleading. I fell to the ground, falling right through the hole in the arms wrapped around me and met his stare.

“There is nothing to forgive you for Ford; Brea told me all about Heather.” I said.

“Julian” He whispered. “Please Jemma, call me Julian. I am Julian with you, I’m not Ford, he ain’t real sweet heart, and you make me real.”

A knot rose in the pit of my stomach. He has always been Julian to me as well

but I wanted to respect his wishes to be called Ford even when I struggled to get the words out. He put his hands to my cheeks.

“I know about Axel, sweetheart.” He took a moment to look into my eyes, looking for assurance that I was listening to him. “I know and I don’t care one damn bit about it. As far as I am concerned it didn’t happen.”

He then pulled my face to his and kissed my lips. Our tongues became a tangled mess of love and lust. When we heard the door slam we struggled to pull

away, only doing so when we both remembered that Brandon and Brea were still in the room. My first thought was that Brandon had gotten angry and left but that wasn't the case. Brea had opened and slammed the door to get our attention.

Remembering our manners Julian and I stood up off the floor. A quick glance toward Brandon and I knew the pain the scene that played out had caused him but he had not moved an inch. I felt a sudden jab in my heart and wanted to run to him but Julian's hand took mine into his and I

refused to let go. I looked to Julian and he walked with me over to where Brandon and Brea were left standing.

Julian extended his hand out to Brandon. For a moment I could see the doubt dancing around in his head but being the gentleman he has always been he extended his as well.

“Julian, you must be Brandon?”

Brandon shook his hand but made no comment; instead he dismissed Julian and stepped towards me putting his hand to my locket as he kissed me on the forehead. He then turned to Julian in

defeat, stood up straight, mumbled “Take care of her.” and disappeared.

At Brandon’s leave Brea seemed to come alive “Brandon, wait a sec.” she yelled and made her own disappearing act following Brandon out of the room. I stayed by Julian’s side. It was time for Brea to do whatever it was Brea did for Brandon; it was time for her to hold him up. No matter the promises we had made, once again I had broken his heart. This time around there was no confusion. We both knew where we stood, where I did anyway.

Julian stayed with me for the rest of the day. He filled me in on all things Heather and I filled him in on my relationship with Brandon. I needed him to know that I had no intentions of exorcising him from my life. If he was not accepting of our relationship then there was no future for us. Thankfully he understood that Brandon and I shared a past so great that made it difficult to let go of.

“As long as you have no intentions of going down that road again for anything

other than friendship I don't have a problem with it sweetheart. I could have been in your life as well but I chose not to be. I took the coward's way out."

"I don't understand? It wasn't your fault you had to move away Julian."

"Well, I went back to Montgomery a few times. Gran and I had to set up the sale of mom and pops house. She tried to get me to pay you all a visit but I was scared. I figured your mom and dad would hate me."

I simply stared at him in confusion. How could anyone have hated him for

something so far out of his control? The funny thing is that for years I had thought the same thing about my own mom and dad. That they hated me for being the one that lived. They rarely ever showed me anything resembling parental love after Nicolai was killed, sometimes they wouldn't even acknowledge my existence no matter what I did to deserve a second look.

Julian frantically wiped at his upper legs with both hands, I could tell he was trying to keep them from their chaotic journey through his mane something I

noticed he did every time he got nervous. I put my hands on top of his and glanced up at him from under my eyelids, my eyes pleading with him to calm down and tell me what was on his mind.

“Alright, since we are laying our cards out on the table.” he sighed nervously. “The day everything went down, he shot my mom and pop first. There was no life left in them, they died the second the bullets hit. They had begged and pleaded for my and Nicks lives but it only seemed to make the son of a bitch hungry for more blood. When he aimed his gun

at me, Nick lunged out from under my dad's body and threw himself out in front of me. The guy shot him twice trying to get to me. The injuries I sustained, they were secondary hits from the bullets that killed him Jemma.”

He moved his hand to the top of mine. He was shaking, tears had filled his eyes and I was completely paralyzed. Everything I had heard about that day was from third party accounts from kids at school. My parents never spoke a word about it and nobody dared say anything to me directly.

“He saved me, in the end he was the better man.”

“He saved you?”

After everything those were the only words I could wrap my head around. Nick, the boy who tore the heads of my Barbie dolls, who would steal my chicken nuggets when nobody was looking, had died saving the only person I could see myself sharing my life with. My brother, who was only twelve years old, had died a hero.

I felt Julian lightly squeeze my hand before he reached up to touch my face.

He ran his thumb over my cheek holding my head up with the rest of his fingers.

“Tell me what you are thinking sweetheart?”

I couldn't tell him what I was thinking right then and there because I was completely dry of words. I had done so much talking that I had no speech left in me to react to the bombshell he had just laid out in front of me. I wanted to tell him that I didn't hate him, there was no way in hell that I could, but the words lay lifeless at the back of my throat.

I put a finger up in front of him and did

the only thing I could think to do. I ran into my room and slid a small plastic chest out from under my bed. Inside lay all of the memories of my life before, memories of a life that Julian was such a large part of. I pulled out my old drawing journal and carried myself back to my seat placing the book into his hands.

Without saying a word he opened it and began to flip through the pages. I watched as he flipped through page after page of drawings, my mouth smiling brighter and brighter every time he

smiled. Some of the paintings were normal little girl stuff, rainbows and butterflies, but others well they were all Julian. Some were as simple as his name being written over and over again in bubble letters, some were drawings of the two of us, some little hearts with both of our names scribbled inside, each one a perfect documentation of the childhood crush I had managed to hold onto all through Jr. High.

Julian stopped at one of my self-portraits. It was a drawing of me as a little girl dancing around my parent's

back yard garden with fairy wings. He ran his fingers over the swirls around my body that indicated I was spinning in circles.

“Always wearing those wings, you were such a happy little girl. I loved playing with you, sometimes more than Nick, you were just so carefree. I would get so fucking mad at Nick for being so damned mean to you. He could be such a jerk sometimes.” He looked up at me from the page. “But I loved him like a brother.”

“He loved you, too. And so did I.

Never seeing you again was hard on all of us.” I blinked a tear away. “I have three more of those you know.” I said pointing to the neon green journal.

“My crush on you got worse when you never came back. There was a boy in my sixth grade science class that looked a lot like you. The day it came to finding science partners I paired up with him. Turned out he was mean as sin but I quickly found that as long as he didn’t talk I could sit next to him and pretend he was you. It was completely silly but it made junior high a lot more tolerable.”

Julian laughed out loud and put his arm around my shoulder. “Can I keep this?” he asked.

I shrugged, “Yeah, you can keep it. Most of what is in it is about you anyway.”

He smiled and leaned in for a kiss which I happily returned.

Brea came home around dinner time, we ordered Chinese delivery and put in a movie Brea had picked up from the Redbox before heading home. I could tell Julian wasn't particularly fond of

sitting through Nicholas Spark's *Safe Haven* but he never once complained. Half way through the movie once our stomachs were full of egg rolls, crab Rangoon and Sesame chicken I cuddled up next to Julian on the couch. My body molded perfectly to his as if we were made for each other. I had not felt so contented, safe and *ME* in a very long time.

Chapter Nine

Julian

Jemma was back in my arms, sleeping like a baby which was exactly where she was meant to be. Nothing in my life had ever felt as right as it did when I held her. She was so absolutely beautiful! I couldn't concentrate on the cheesy movie being played out on the television

because all I wanted to do was look at her. I wanted nothing more than to sweep her up into my arms, carry her to her bed, rip her clothes off and bury myself deep inside of her but I had to restrain myself. Especially with Brea shooting me knowing looks from the arm chair.

“She can’t have sex with you. Did she tell you that yet?”

“No, but I don’t see how that is something you get to decide. And where did that come from I wasn’t even considering it, we need some time. ”

“Yeah, uh huh, I am a lot of things but

blind and stupid is not one of them. You were so obviously fucking her in that head of yours. Can't say I blame you, you would be an idiot not to want her but you need to know that according to Brandon the doc says that part of her new plan is *NO SEX* of any kind. Not even Clinton style."

I arched an eye brow up at her strange remark. What the heck was Clinton style?

"Clinton style?"

"You know, *I did not have sexual relations with that woman*, Clinton

style. No touching, no nothing. I am surprised she hasn't told you especially since I know for a fact that it takes every inch of restraint she has not to rip your clothes off."

Does it now? "Has she told you that? How long is this plan supposed to play out?"

"Sixty days. And she doesn't have to tell me, I can see it, it is painfully obvious. Not to mention the fact that if I had a good looking guy like you knocking down my door I would take

you anywhere at any time. She and I might have our differences but in that respect we are exactly the same.”

I moved my eyes from Brea down to the sleeping beauty lying in my arms. How was I going to last sixty days without touching her? Could a man live sixty days without food or drink? If what Brea said was true then we were both going to be suffering through this little pact of hers.

When the credits began to roll I put Jemma's arm around my neck and carried her to bed. I searched her

drawers for something more comfortable, finding a nightgown; I pulled her pants from her body leaving her tiny pink panties with a little bow safely in place. Unfortunately the sight of her treasure sent a heat wave through my body which caused the need to shift the suddenly hardened package in my jeans. Taking a deep breath I continued, unbuttoning her shirt, sliding it off of her arms and gently lifting her up to slide the short t-shirt gown over her head.

My body stiffened upon hearing her sleepy voice quiver out my name. Her

arm shot up in her sleep, trailed down my bicep, sliding over my chest and down to the heavy bulge in my pants. It took everything I had in me not to unzip them and release my shaft into her hands, something she seemed to be demanding even in her dreams. The idea that she was dreaming of being with me again nearly made me come on demand.

I laid her down under the covers and excused myself into the bathroom to relieve the ache in my pants. There was no way I was leaving her but at the same time there was no way I could lay next to

her with a hard on that nearly shot my dick off like a rocket after two strokes. The next sixty days were going to be a nightmare!

Chapter Ten

Jemma

I awakened to Julian's breath between my breasts, his face buried into my chest while he held onto my body for dear life. There was so much heat radiating between the two of us that it was causing sweat to pool in the crook of my neck but I was scared to move. All I could

see was the top of his head but I knew that if I could see his face I would find peace written all over it because peaceful was exactly how I felt. But the need to move away became far too necessary when I found that each breath lit the fire between my legs more and more. I tried inching away but his grip got tighter, crushing my body beneath him.

“No!” he softly cried out.

I tried a different approach, wiggling my hips and legs to glide upward but I only made it a little bit of the way before

his grip tightened to the point of pain. When I realized where his face was now buried I nearly had a heart attack. His breathing intensified with every move I made and the next thing I knew his lips were placing tiny kisses on the little pink bow of my lace panties. My eyes rolled back into my head and I gripped the blanket as tight as I could without hurting myself as his mouth moved softly over the delicate cotton coverings.

Did it count as heavy petting if one of us was asleep?

Julian's hands reached up, grabbed

hold and ripped the panties from my body causing the flames burn all the way into the pit of my stomach. I could feel my nipples harden under my bra and even though I knew I wasn't supposed to be allowing it I could not stop Julian from parting my lips and rolling his tongue across my sensitive engorged heat.

“Julian!” I screamed.

The moment his name rolled off of my lips he jumped up off the bed denying me more of what my body was begging for.

“Holy shit sweetheart!”

His hands went through his hair and I guessed that someone mentioned the pact that I made with Dr. Schneider, no doubt Brea. Given the state of my body at the moment I wasn't sure whether I should be thanking her or ringing her pretty little neck. What I was sure of was that I had to finish what he had started, there was no way I could spend the rest of the day with a painful ache between my legs.

Without thinking I slowly moved my hands down between my legs and began to softly massage the tender space

between my wet lips. I looked to Julian, who appeared mesmerized by the turn of events, pleading with him to take his pants off and willing him not to touch me. Nowhere in my agreement with Dr. Schneider was there anything that said masturbation was off limits and something about *watching* Julian let go right along with me fueled my desire.

“Stroke yourself Julian.” I begged. He sat down next to me in the bed and began to run his hands up and down his hard shaft.

I imagined his hands were the walls of

my desire which caused my touch to become more desperate. I wanted to taste him, to know what his wetness tasted like on my tongue. Suddenly I was filled regret about never having taken him to completion in my mouth. My tongue rolled around my lips while my free hand moved up to pinch my swollen nipples. Both of our gazes moved back and forth between our eyes and the heat between each of our legs until our bodies reached their peak and released the pressure mounting inside while softly crying out each others names.

“My God, sweetheart! You are going to be the death of me.”

Feeling adventurous I smiled at him and decided it was time to solve a question that had been weighing on me since the moment I saw his hard shaft pop free from his pants. I sat up and scooted next to him on the bed. I placed a few kisses on his lips and reached down for his hands that were resting atop his semi erect penis. I put his stroking hand to my face which was wet with his essence and carefully began to lick the salty liquid from his fingertips

one by one.

My eyes never left his but I knew just a few inches away his cock was getting hard again with ease tease of my tongue. The liquid was sweet and salty, it tasted like candy and I needed as much of it as I could get. His breathing was loud, he was panting and I could see he was having trouble breathing. But still I continued until he was licked clean. I leaned in and pressed one simple soft kiss on his lips.

“Don’t die on me yet sweetheart.”

I licked and sucked on the end of his

ear sending a shiver down his arm. What exactly constitutes “heavy petting”? Note to self, next visit with the good doctor request clarification.

“Sixty days until I have your cock in my mouth. I will suck you dry after you have fucked me to the point that I am rubbed completely raw.” I whispered into his ear.

A wave of success came over me as I stepped up off the bed and climbed into the shower locking the door behind me. I abandoned him sitting on my bed, mouth agape holding his erect staff in his

hands.

The next few weeks went by in a blur. Julian started back to school and I had managed to find a job serving coffee alongside Rebecca at Coffee Bean. She felt bad about what had happened between Cole and Brea so she put in a good word for me and I was hired the second a position opened up. She had no clue that she was the “other” woman until Brea showed up one day and threw an entire carafe of half and half in her face screaming a bunch of nonsense

about “stealing her man”. I was still in shock over the fact that she ever considered that moron to be anything other than a play toy in the first place.

If I had been Rebecca I would have been livid about the incident especially because as it turns out, she had been dating Cole for the past two years and wore his engagement ring on her ring finger to prove it. But she was pretty cool about it once the initial shock of being drowned in cold milk eased up a bit and we have all been pretty copacetic ever since. Needless to say

she kicked Cole to the curb, quite literally.

It was hard not seeing Julian, some days he was so busy between classes, homework and his own job at the auto parts store that we didn't have a chance to actually see one another. At times I wished I had not been so lax in high school so we could at least see each other on campus in between classes. Not that it would have mattered much considering I had to put everything off until next semester in order to get my head straight.

We would go out on the weekends, usually for nothing but food and conversation. We learned quickly that movies were off limits since we couldn't keep our hands off of each other in the dark of a cold movie theater. We could not drink because the alcohol would cloud our judgment and if he stayed at my place we slept together with the door wide open. Brea's idea, of course.

Feeling guilty and unsure after our second private play session early the next morning I decided to confront Dr.

Schneider and ask him to define his idea of heavy petting. He pretty much shot down all hope of anything that could possibly lead into something more satisfying. Basically, if we were together it was hands off, even if those hands were our own hands violating our own personal space. I am glad I did not wait until my next appointment because I had already failed pretty miserably. It was probably a good thing we rarely got to see one another. It was getting to the point where every time I looked at him he was naked, no matter how many

layers there were between us.

Brandon and I had also made up, not that I had anything to make up for really. But I did feel bad that Brandon had to witness the emotional connection between Julian and I in such an ‘in your face’ way. Even though it was unintentional he didn’t deserve to have my relationship with Julian rubbed in his face. I called him the day after he left to make sure he got home safely and was pleasantly surprised when he answered the phone after he first ring.

“Hi, Jem,” he said.

I could hear the sadness in his voice and wanted so much to be able to take the pain away from him but there was nothing I could do or say that would make things any easier. There was no take backs this time and he knew it. I apologized to Brandon for what he saw on the couch.

“Bab.....Jemma...”

He stopped himself from calling me his baby and my heart stopped at the realization that I would never again be his “baby”. He had been calling me that since the end of our second date, I loved

hearing him say it because it made him seem real to me. There was always a certain reassurance with the term that told me Brandon was truly mine, it also served as a reminder that I was his.

“I tried to say goodbye to us when I moved to New York but when I came to see you and I saw the way your face lit up when you saw me, I had hope again. But then I had the unfortunate chance at witnessing the connection between you and *him*, how drawn the two of you were to each other, I realized I couldn't keep the blinders on anymore.”

“Brandon...”

“No Jem.” He interrupted. “Just don’t, please don’t. Don’t try to play it down, not that I give a shit but he doesn’t deserve for you to play down the feelings you have for him. I know what I saw, I saw *MY GIRL* giving away something I had been trying to get from her for four years with zero success. I saw my girl giving her heart away; maybe she had already given it to him. Maybe all this time she had no heart to give back to me and I just never fuckin’ noticed.”

“But you do have my heart Brandon; you will always have a piece of it.” And I meant every word.

“I have a place in your heart; I don’t have your heart, huge difference. Don’t worry Jemma, I’m a big boy, I’m going to be fine. If I know that you are happy, I will be fine. Look, I gotta go, call me Friday. It’s hard to give you the time that you need during the week and I have no class on Friday. I love you, I promise, I do.”

“I love you too Brandon.”

And with that we hung up. I no longer

knew what the future had in store for me and Brandon but it gave me hope to know that we had a date to talk. We had been through so much together, he knew some of my deepest darkest secrets and there was no way I was going to lose him.

I made the call from my room all while Julian sat in front of the television watching *The Fast and the Furious*, it was just my luck that he stepped in to hear the butt end of the conversation.

“Movie ended,” he mumbled leaning up against the door jam. I could sense

the quiet sadness emitting off of him.

“I do love him, Julian. I’m sorry if hearing it hurt you but I do.”

Julian nodded his head and walked over to me lifting me off of my bed and putting his arms around me. “I get it. Don’t apologize for your feelings.”

I smiled.

“You know, Brandon said the same thing to me about you.” His eye brow lifted.

“You told him you loved me?”

“I didn’t have to tell him.” I responded.

I had never told Julian I loved the man he has become. In part because of the fact that he was someone I had only recently come to know, it sounded so silly to me, but also because I was afraid to tell him. I did love Brandon, but I was starting to become more and more aware of the fact that I was completely and wholeheartedly madly in love with Julian.

Julian placed a soft kiss on my lips, careful not to put any pressure, then quickly pulled away. We both knew what happened when we opened our

mouths and got lost in one another.

“Sweetheart, I do get it. He was there for you when you had no one.....” He paused thoughtfully.

“He might have been your yesterday, but I was your when, I am your now and no matter what it takes, even if it kills me, I will be your future.”

I let out the breath I was unaware that I was holding in and threw my arms around Julian's neck holding him with all of my might. He wanted a future with me, a future that I could plainly see. I had never pictured myself growing old

with anyone before, everyone in my life left me therefore it was decided that there were no tomorrows. I lived every day for only that day because I knew all too well that planning your future could easily end up leading to misery.

“I love you, Julian.” I whispered into his neck.

He tightened his grip around my waist pulling me closer and held me for several moments before pulling away. He briefly looked into my eyes and returned the words back to me.

“I love you to Jemma Hale, always

have, and always will.”

What I would not have done to have been able to rip his clothes off right then and there. It just seemed wrong to declare our love to one another and not end up a naked tangled mess of pure pleasure. A girl can dream! And dream...and dream...and dream. Five more weeks.

Chapter Eleven

“So what time is Julian and his friend supposed to be here? You haven’t given me a definitive time yet which kind of fucking sucks balls,” Brea said.

Julian had called me a few days ago to let me know that he had a friend coming in from San Juan for a few weeks. He had wanted to spend time with him but since we were both desperate to spend

time together he didn't want to lose the entire weekend with me either. Together we came up with the idea of setting him and Brea up on a double date. She had become a real homebody since her classes started and when she didn't have her face buried in a text book she just moped around the house eating, sleeping and driving Julian and I absolutely nuts. She lectured me nonstop and insisted on being present every time he was here. To say that I was starting to feel a little suffocated by my best friend would be an understatement. Her non stop mother

hen routine made me want to strangle her.

I was a little apprehensive setting her up with someone I had never even seen before. Truth be told Brea was pretty damn superficial and I knew that if she did not like what she saw then she would completely check out on me. Getting to know Brea over the last few weeks Julian fully registered the words and pulled up his friends Facebook page. Not only was he gorgeous but his name was Jonathan, a little tidbit of information I had left out when I asked

her about dinner. Operation “Get Brea the Hell Out of Our Hair” was well under way.

“Seven o’clock.”

“What? Fucking hell Jem, that’s in like, two freakin’ hours!”

I could have sworn I told her already but Brea had a tendency to forget little tidbits like time. Especially when she was nervous and did not really want to participate in an event at the said time, if ever. It took me half a day to convince her to go on the blind date which she only agreed to after I threatened her with

sex.

“Brea, if you don’t come with us I fear we won’t be able to keep our hands off of each other. You have been working so hard at keeping my panties on, I would just hate to have to take them off because you were not around to cock block Julian.”

The fact that she found me even remotely serious was hilarious. Julian and I were adults and as adults we were more than capable of controlling our desire to...oh never mind, who was I kidding? I needed Brea on this date as

much as she thought I did. What was I going to do if she and Jonathan actually hit it off?

An hour and a half later I was ready to go. I sat down in the living room watching Brea, who ran around the apartment with one shoe frantically searching for its mate.

“Brea, you seriously need to chill out.” I yelled.

“Ugh! Don’t tell me to chill out. Not when you got me into this mess in the first place. Now can you kindly get up

off that quarter bouncing ass of yours and help me find my other Steve Madden pump.”

I laughed “You mean this one?”

I pulled her shoe out from behind my back teasingly dangling it by the heel. She rolled her eyes at me and limped my way snatching the shoe out of my hand.

“Haha, very funny. You laugh but I haven’t had sex in a month, you set me up with a photograph, a hot photograph but a photograph none the less and I am going out with said photograph a raging hot mess of fiery loins and achy tits,

dying to be fondled.”

I continued to laugh at the thought of her dragging poor Jonathan off to the bedroom the moment he stepped through the door.

“Awww, Bre Bre, has John Dong run out of batteries?”

She threw a couch pillow at me, I ducked and the side lamp went crashing to the floor as the doorbell rang and Julian came racing through the door like his ass was on fire. His face looked ready for a brawl, and Brea and I burst out laughing.

“What the hell was that noise?” Julian shouted.

And then in strolled Jonathan just as cool and collected as they came. The moment Brea caught sight of him she stopped laughing and began to choke.

I loved Julian but I would have been blind not to notice that Jonathan was a sight for sore eyes. He was a little bit shorter than Julian but not by much with olive skin, sun-touched eyes, full lusciously pink lips, a body to die for and a bulge in his pants that could be seen from a mile away. He was clearly a

commando kind of guy and I could see on Brea's face that not only did she notice but she didn't care one bit.

It took a moment for Brea to register that Julian was trying to get her attention. Within moments of starting the choking had stopped and she turned into a gaping lunatic. I had never seen Brea react in such a way to a man before and it was interesting yet completely hilarious to see my best friend off of her game.

“Earth to Brea,” Julian said making a knocking gesture on her head instantly bringing her back to reality.

“Ow, you asshole!” she cried.

“Welcome back!” Julian laughed, taking her by the arm, leading her in the direction of an overly amused Jonathan.

“Brea Johnson meet Jonathan Briggs. Jonathan, Brea.”

Jonathan offered Brea her hand which she handed him without a moment’s thought.

“Damn Ford, you did not tell me she was a Goddess. Nice to meet you, beautiful.” Jonathan playfully exclaimed.

Jonathan held her fingers and planted kisses on the tips of her fingernails. I watched a long hard chill race down Brea's arm across her bare back and down her right leg. All I could think of as Julian met my smiling face was "Set, match!" With any luck, tonight I would at least be able to kiss the man of my dreams without her breathing down my neck. I know she was just being the best friend she could be but there is such a thing as going too far.

"You look beautiful tonight sweetheart" whispered Julian into my

ear as he cuddled up to me in the back seat. And I agree I did. I finally got around to wearing the strapless little black dress that I had planned on wearing weeks before. It was paper thin with a tight fitted underskirt, had a small hole cut into the area just below the middle of my breasts, the tiniest of neck straps and a wide shimmering belt that accentuated my bosom and rounded out my ass.

Julian figured it would cut a little bit of the sexual tension between Jonathan and Brea if Jonathan drove. Especially since

I chose to be a bad friend and opted to sit with my man instead of next to her. He looked incredible enough to eat in his black pin striped double breasted suit and the closeness gave me the perfect excuse to accidentally rub my hand up against his crotch.

“You aren’t playing fair, my love.”

I looked at Julian innocently and leaned into his ear. “It was an accident and I didn’t realize we were playing a game. Does this game require panties because I am afraid I am not wearing any?”

I breathed out into his ear teasingly and

then crossed my legs toward him, being extra careful to open my knees just a little too wide for my own good. With each movement of my body I watched Julian. His mouth was tight, his jaw twitched and his hands were squeezing his knees for dear life. I knew he could see every single underhanded card I played but he held his composure and kept his eyes in front of him not touching me again until he took my hand to lead me out of the truck.

I know I am playing with fire but all I can do is play so I might as well live it

up. When our time is up I want him on his knees *begging* to have all of me. Julian thrilled me like nobody ever had before, I felt free and adventurous, I was alive for the first time in my life.

The Driskall Grill was beautiful and unlike any place I had ever been to before. I loved Brandon but he was more of a burger and fries kind of guy, not that there was much else in Taylor. Chili's down the road in Hutto was about the extent of the area's culinary offerings. The restaurant was situated inside a

luxurious hotel on Austin's infamous sixth street bar scene. It was dark and cozy with elegant chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. The waiters were exceptionally attentive and the food was something you would find at a restaurant in Paris not the middle of Texas. It was so artistically displayed that I was almost too afraid to eat it.

“Only the best for my girl” piped Julian.

I was his girl. I sometimes think about what Brandon had said to me when I called him in New York to set things

right. He had been explaining to me that he could see how much I cared for Julian, no, how much he saw I *loved* Julian.

“...maybe all this time she had no heart to give and I just never fuckin noticed.”

Those words had not really sunk in until a few days after the conversation. I was so busy hating myself for hurting Brandon all over again that I didn't fully register everything that had been said. But one night, after Julian had left the apartment Brea took a step back and told

me that I looked like I was *home* when I was buried up in Julian's arms.

“I haven't ever seen you look like that before. It's kind of like when you have been away from home for a while and you climb back into that old recliner, a recliner so comfortable that you would end up drifting to sleep in the middle of the best book of your life. You know the second that you hit that recliner that you are home, that you are safe. Julian is like your old recliner.”

It was a strange way to put it but I fully understood what she was saying. Julian

was my old recliner, he didn't just comfort me but instead he healed the ache that had been pulsating in my heart since I was a little girl. He was my familiar, he was my family and yes, he was my home.

This was when I really and truly began to think about Brandon's implications. The fact was that I had spent my life knowing Julian was out there somewhere and somehow I clung to his memory like a life line. I had lost something deep inside of me the day my brother died, even more so when my

mother and father were taken from me. To keep from losing all of me, I gave my heart to Julian without even realizing it, hoping and praying he would bring it back to me along with the innocence that Ignacio Hernandez had stolen from me so long ago. Brandon was right, I had no heart left in me to return the love that he so willingly and freely gave to me. It was Julian's, it had always been Julian's.

Chapter Twelve

Julian

Damn this woman! I wanted her to know that she was mine without any doubts from either one of us. That she had become mine because she was in love with me not because she needed a good roll in the sack to heal her heartbreak. But she was making it really

hard for me not to bend her over backwards and take her sexy perfectly sculpted ass anywhere and everywhere.

Her little show in the truck had set my pants ablaze. It wasn't just the fact that I now knew I was going to have to make it through dinner fully aware that her sweetness was completely naked but because I knew just how wet she was for me. The scent of her boiling heat burned itself into my senses as she crossed her legs making my dick instantly hard with the assault.

It took everything in me not to play out

the image of falling to my knees and burying my head between those pretty little legs. If it were not for that damn doctor I would have done just that, be damned the two people in the front seat. She was all that I wanted and thanks to her games I could not think of anything but my tongue putting out the fire that no doubt flamed inside of her delicate folds. Her games were going to be the death of me if I didn't pull myself together. I decided that I was not going to allow her the satisfaction of seeing my desperation.

Instead I focused on the rear view mirror where I could see, judging by the expression staring back at me, that Jonathan had watched every second of Jemma's show. I also knew that he knew that she had absolutely nothing on underneath the rather short dress she insisted on wearing this evening. My fists clenched up around my knees and all I wanted to do, best friend or not, was knock that crooked little smile off of his face.

To make matters worse Jemma felt inclined to run her bare foot up and

down the length of my calf all through dinner. I was also fully aware at the careful way she placed each bite of food in her mouth, softly moaning with desire at each taste. Inside I was squirming but on the outside I help up my end of the conversation with the rest of the table.

As much as I wanted her, as much as I wanted everything she was doing to me, it was starting to piss me off because there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it.

“Can you excuse us for a moment?”

I had to end this game right now or I

wasn't going to last the rest of the night. I grabbed Jemma by the arm and she jumped up with an "oh" as I led her out of the restaurant in search of someplace more private.

"Where are we going Julian?" She asked innocently as if she had not been toying with me all evening but I ignored her and made my way through the crowd ducking into an empty banquet room. After closing the door behind me I whipped her around and carefully pushed her into it pinning her in place with my arms.

“What are you...” I buried my lips into hers cutting her off before she could ask the question she was fully aware of the answer to. Our kiss deepened and I moved my hand between her legs over the thin piece of fabric keeping the world at bay, cupping her heat just hard enough to feel her desire seeping through the dress. My shaft twitched at the low simultaneous growl that escaped her lips upon my touch. I knew as much as she had been torturing me it was torture for her as well.

“You have to stop this sweetheart. You

are driving me crazy.” I whispered into the nape of her neck kissing the burn that my breath had caused.

“I don’t want to, please take me Julian. I don’t care about the stupid deal I made with Dr. Schneider.” she cried.

“Well I do care. Close your eyes Jemma.” She did as I said. “Listen to me very carefully.”

She nodded as the grip between her legs got tighter.

“My dick is hard for you.” I flipped her around facing the door, never once moving my hand from the position

between her legs. “Use your imagination sweetheart, feel me.”

Her legs quaked as I lifted the back of her dress and pressed my hips into her bare ass allowing her to feel just how hard I was for her behind the walls of my pants.

“Imagine me unzipping my pants and pulling out my raging cock, your hands slide over it taking hold and easing me into that sweet beautiful hot wet pussy that I can barely live without. I am thick and full of cum waiting to shoot off inside of you but first you have to feel

me. I slowly slide my dick in and out of you...” She sighed, pressed her ass into me harder and cupped the hand on her crotch. “My speed increases with each moan, you cry out my name. Say my name sweetheart.”

“Julian!” she quickly whispered with desperation.

“Come for me Jemma.” She squeezes my hand tighter around her as I move my hips deeper into her ass. “Can you feel me, baby? I am moving deeper harder along your walls, so deep you can feel the head of my cock hit your sweet spot.

Tell me it feels good.”

“Julian!” her breathing increases and she begins to grind into my hand as her ass moves up and down my shaft.

“It...feels...so...good.” she barely manages.

“Oh God!” she screams. Finding her release she digs her nails into my hand and I have to fight off the urge to jerk them away.

“I don’t know if that counts sweetheart. But for the next five weeks that is all you are getting.” I whisper into her neck. “You will stop teasing me or I will walk

out the door and you won't see me again until those 5 weeks are up. Not seeing you would drive me nuts but I need to know there are no doubts in that pretty little head of yours. Do you understand me?"

Still trying to catch her breath she pulled my hand from between her legs and turned to face me.

"You would leave me?" she asked.

"I would never leave you sweetheart. I know that I am in love with you and I want you to know that you are in love with me without a shadow of a doubt. If

you had any idea how hard it is for me not to fuck your hot little pussy right down to the core you would not be taunting me like you have been all evening. But if it comes down to not seeing you for 5 weeks or having to live with my own doubt for fear that you have doubts then I take not seeing you. I don't want to live like that and I certainly don't want to live with a stiff one for the next five weeks of my life.”

I pressed my lips to hers. “Now that is out of the way, how about you go keep our friends company while I go relieve

some of the pressure you have been putting on me all night? I am pretty sure they have noticed our absence by now”

Chapter Thirteen

Jemma

“I can’t take it anymore Dr. Schneider! I know we agreed on sixty days but I am not going to be able to make it another three weeks.”

I cannot believe the great Doctor just laughed at me. Were doctors supposed to laugh when their patients behaved like

sex crazed teenagers?

“You have come this far Jemma, I am sure the two of you can get by another few weeks without incident. Many people in the world have gone a lot longer than sixty days without sexual relations you know.”

Well obviously those “someone else’s” did not have a Julian at their beck and call.

“How about we change the subject? How long has it been since you saw your father?”

Not since the day he was walked out of

the court room after sentencing. Why did he want to know? The *last* thing I wanted to talk about was my father but in the end he was one of the reasons that I walked through that door every week.

“I know this is something you are not ready to discuss but your Aunt called me the other day to let me know that your father was being moved to the state penitentiary. She wanted me to tell you that he wished to see you. Apparently she has tried to call you and you haven’t returned those calls, she was worried about you.”

I had received several messages from my Aunt over the last few days but the moment she mentioned that she needed to speak to me about my father, her brother, I couldn't bare the thought of calling her back. She had been visiting my father in the hospital once a week since the first day he was admitted. At first she had tried to speak to me about his condition but I refused. I would put my hands to my ears and storm out of the room every time she made an attempt, eventually she stopped trying altogether.

“I don't want to see my father, she

knows that!" I screamed out in frustration.

"You don't have to but I think you should consider it. The anniversary of your mother's death is coming up and I think it might help you to see that he isn't the same person."

I shook my head.

"No, I just can't Dr Schneider."

I paused, waiting for his response, but he continued to sit in his chair, quietly bobbing his leg up and down. There was a tiny part of me that wanted more than anything to see my father. Even though he

had tried to kill me after taking my mother's life there was still a piece of me that saw him as the loving daddy figure he was before losing Nicolai. That part of me wanted to run into his arms and tell him that I forgave him. I know that he was no longer in control of his actions that day but it didn't make the fact that he put a bullet in my mother's head and with fail attempted to damn me with that same fate any less true.

“Why are they moving him?”

“Well, the hospital is pretty overcrowded and the doctors seem to

think that he is well enough to be let into general population. It is my understanding that he has been doing really well the last couple of years and wishes to have a job. There is a volunteer group that comes in once a week and teaches the patients cooking skills. He has taken a good liking to it and has been offered a mess hall position as a cook.”

“Hm.” That was no surprise to me. As a child my father was always whipping up something in the kitchen and he always manned the campfire roasts

whenever we went camping or fishing. I admired my father's ability to make intricate meals like fish pie, stew and brownies over a hot fire.

My mother's idea of camp food was canned beans and burnt hot dogs. She was a wonderful mother but she never could get the hang of cooking. My father had told us that the first meal she ever made him was scrambled eggs and toast. She burned the toast and the eggs tasted like salt but because he loved her enough to spare her feelings he ate every bite as if it were the best meal he had ever

eaten. It was something they had laughed about after fifteen years of marriage.

I used to love watching my parents together. They had a tendency to speak without words instead conveying their needs with a simple glance or touch. It was hard not to admire the love they had for one another and until the day my mother was murdered I held onto that particular idea of love. I was sure their love could overcome anything, which is one of the reasons why I did not burden them with the pain of my own heart. I kept hoping they would piece each other

back together again like they had done so many times before. I guess losing a child consumes you to the point that you don't even want to anymore.

“Why are you so sure it will help me? What can seeing my father possibly do for me other than tear me in two?” I asked.

Dr. Schneider considered me for a moment before he replied.

“It is not my place to enlighten you any further than necessary, I promised your aunt, but I can tell you that your father loves you very much. And according to

Tilly he has come to terms with a lot of what happened back then. He would like to make a mends and has much that he needs to tell you. I think perhaps visiting with him might bring you closer to the only parent you have left.”

I could not believe that I was actually considering paying a visit to my father but I did want to find closure. Agreeing not to see him had weighed heavy on my heart every time Aunt Tilly had insisted I try. I was so angry with him for stealing my mother and then abandoning me when I needed him most, when I needed both

of them. I left the doctor's office agreeing that I would think about it, I had two weeks to decide. The good news was that I had completely forgotten about my dilemma with Julian.

“Have you given any more thought to seeing your dad?”

It had been two days since my discussion with the great doctor and I was just as confused as ever about seeing him again. What could he possibly have to say that could change

the way I felt about him? I did not want him to apologize; I wanted to hate him because it made more sense than hating Nicolai.

“I just don’t know Julian, what is he going to say to me huh? Gee sorry, princess, didn’t mean to put that bullet in moms head!”

Julian cringed. Sometimes I forgot that he loved my mother too.

“Sorry.”

“It’s OK, sweetheart. I understand where the hostility is coming from.”

But I knew it wasn’t, there was nothing

OK about the things Julian and I had been put through. Nothing OK about him watching my brother and his parents gunned down by some lunatic in the middle of a crowded restaurant, nothing OK about me watching my father crumble and damning my mother to the same fate as her only son and there sure as hell was nothing OK about the fact that my father was spending his life in a mental institution. Suddenly sitting at the kitchen bar watching Julian make us dinner I wanted answers. I knew why Ignacio Hernandez had done what he did

but I wanted to know what exactly was going through my dad's head besides the fact that he missed his son.

“Would you come with me, if I decided to go I mean?”

Julian dropped the spatula on the floor and turned around to face me. I knew this would be just as hard for him as it would be for me but I could not imagine taking this step with anyone else.

“I had already assumed that I would. I would do anything for you sweetheart. How can you not know that by now?”

He reached down, picked up the

spatula and turned back around to flip the chocolate chip pancakes he had cooking on the griddle.

A smile flashed across my face while the words ‘I do, I do know that’ went through my head.

Chapter Fourteen

Julian

I didn't expect the question to hurt so much but when she asked me to go with her to see her dad my heart nearly jumped straight out of my chest. It had been so long since I had seen the man who had been like a second father to me growing up. I had no clue about what

happened until Jemma had told me and I had to admit that I was fifty shades of angry with him for what he had done. Not only what he had done to her mother Elaine who I loved like she was my own mother but what he had done to my Jemma.

Hearing Jemma replay the events of that horrifying day in her head I would say that it was a miracle that she survived. I wanted to kill him for trying to take her from me before I ever even got a chance to love her in the way I had grown to. What once was a love akin to

that more of a brother had turned into the very vessel responsible for supplying air to my lungs and blood to my heart. Every moment away from her I felt my life force dim and I was positive that I would have died an early death without ever being able to experience her fire again.

“I am too Nicolai, I am too gunna be a fairy princess when I grow up!”
Jemma said with her hands on her hips.

“Fairy princesses aren’t even real baaaaby, you can’t be a fairy princess,

you can't be a fairy anything 'cause you are nothing but a little girl."
Nicolai teased.

"Tell him Julian! Tell him they are too real. Julian wants to be a fairy too, don't yah Julian?"

Um, did I say that? Oh right, I did.
Please shut up Jemma!

"Yeah, I bet he wants to be a fairy. Is that right Julian, are you gunna be a flaming fairy when you grow up?"

I was so gonna sock Nick Hale right in the nose if he didn't knock it off.

"No, he don't wanna be a flaming one

he wants to be a prince one you big jerk. He said so, he's gunna be a prince and I'm gunna be a princess and we are gunna rule all of fairy land together. TELL HIM JULIAN!"

"Um, I think I am gunna be a cop Jemma Lee." I said staring at the ground unable to look her in the eye.

"NICOLAI WAYNE HALE Get in here NOW!"

Ah, saved by the bell, or shall I say mom. I wonder what Nick was in trouble for this time?

Jemma watched as her brother

retreated inside and then shot me a look fierce enough to start a forest fire, almost as quickly as it started the fire burned out and a tear rolled down her cheek. She sat down on the cold ground right where she stood leaving me feeling like a total ass. She just didn't understand what it was like to be an eleven year old boy, eleven year old boys simply could not be fairy prince's, not around their friends anyway. But I could not bare to see her cry so I took a seat next to her.

“I’m sorry Jemma Lee, I really do

want to be a fairy prince with you I just don't want Nick to know because he will steal all of my fairy dust. You know I won't be a prince for long after that happens. Nick can be a jerk sometimes. You know that better than anyone."

She sniffled and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Really Julian, really you wanna be a fairy prince with me? Cause fairy princes and princesses live happily ever after. Doesn't that sound like fun Julian?"

I smiled and replied with confidence.

“Yup, I definitely want to live happily ever after with you Jemma Lee.”

Jemma leaned in, placed a kiss on my cheek, stood up and started dancing. I loved to see my Skipper dance!

“What has him smiling like that? Did you two sneak in a quickie when I wasn’t looking?”

Brea strolled out of her room and Jemma laughed at her friend’s ridiculous remark.

“I would like to know that as well. One minute he is flipping pancakes and the

next he is smiling like he just spotted Santa Claus.”

She turned to me and teased, “Did you see Santa Claus Julian? Is old St. Nick going to bring you a shiny new bike for Christmas?”

“Nope, I was just thinking about my first kiss.”

“Yup, I’m outta here!” Brea picked up her keys and walked towards the door. “I am meeting Jonathan, don’t wait up and no funny business.”

Jonathan had decided to stick around for a few more weeks after spending two

days holed up at The Driskall with Brea. I had excused myself to the men's room after showing Jemma who wears the pants in the relationship and she went back to the table. When she got back they were both gone and the check was paid. A few minutes later Jemma found a text on her phone that read "Boom Chika, Chica. Will text later." followed by "Maybe". Jemma took that to mean they got a room and were fucking like chickens. I am not sure how she deciphered that information from that one text but girl code was not exactly my

second language.

“Well, I ask you to come see my murderous father with me and you start thinking about kisses with other women. Explain to me what to make of that Julian?”

“Not another woman sweetheart, you.”

I shut off the stove, wandered over to the bar stool where she was sitting and put my arms around her waist.

“Remember the day Nick got in trouble for painting Old lady Willis’s dog blue?” she nodded indicating that she did indeed remember.

“Well, you got upset with me because I was too much of a coward to tell Nick that I wanted to be your fairy prince....”

“I kissed you on the cheek.” she smiled, her eyes beaming with pure joy.

“My first kiss sweetheart.”

“Don’t be silly, that did not count as a kiss Julian, I was what, six? Plus it was on the cheek!”

I softly placed my lips on her cheek and rejoiced as her body weakened beneath me.

“It counts sweet heart, trust me, it

counts.” I moved my lips to her other cheek. “It counts because you made my knees weak and brought a flutter to my stomach. I went home that day and told my mom I was sick, I thought I was coming down with the flu. Looking back on it there isn’t a doubt in my mind that you were my first kiss.” and the only one that has ever counted since.

“What do you say we go away for the weekend? Maybe head out to Galveston before it gets too cold? We can leave Friday and head out Sunday to see your dad?”

“Galveston sounds good, the dad part, um, not so much! Maybe we can just play that part by ear?”

“Anything you want sweet heart.” I said kissing her on the forehead.

I wasn't going to push her into doing something she did not want to do even though I knew she was going to end up doing it anyway. She needed to see him in order to truly move on, it's possible that I needed it as much as she did.

When Friday came along Jemma was a nervous wreck. I had no class on Friday

so I stayed over Thursday and awoke to her screaming at the top of her lungs covered in sweat. It took me over an hour to get her calmed down enough to lay back down, another half hour of smoothing my hands over her auburn hair to get her to fall asleep. She chose not to tell me about the nightmare but it did not take a genius to figure out that it had to do with her dad.

Once her breathing stilled I crept out of the bed hoping to catch Brea in front of the television. For a while she would come running into the room every time

Jemma woke up screaming. Eventually realizing that I had it under control she opted to put on some cheesy romance flick.

I think it made her feel helpless not being able to run to Jemma's side but being there for her was my job now. I intended on having that job for as long as Jemma would allow. Luckily the only thing that changed was the fact that Jonathan was sitting on the couch next to her. She was stroking his hair while he lay with his head in her lap passed out cold.

“Hey, is she OK?” Brea whispered, muting the television as I sat down in the chair on the other side of the couch.

“She’s asleep. She fell asleep this afternoon and woke up the same way. They are getting worse the closer it gets to time to go.”

Brea turned away and started staring at the muted television. I could tell something was going through her mind so I just sat back and waited until she was ready to speak.

“What if I went with you? Maybe Jonathan might like to go?”

At the mention of his name Jonathans head poked up a few inches out of Brea's lap. "Wha...what? Go where?"

He was still half asleep but Brea never stopped stroking his head instead she responded to him softly as if talking to a child.

"To the beach baby, with Jem and Julian."

"Oh, yeah, yeah sure princess, sure."

"It's settled then, go back to sleep baby."

And with that he lay his head back

down and began to snore.

“Well Julian? Do you mind? I am scared for her and I have never *not* been there, Julian. I *have* to be there for her if she decides to go see him which is something we both know she will decide to do.”

“I agree Brea, you should come. But just so you know, I have plans for the two of us Saturday night. Just us.” I should have chosen my words better because her eye brows instantly shot up questioningly.

“No Brea, not those kinds of plans.” I

replied to her unspoken implication emphasizing the word “those”.

“Then what kinds of plans do you mean that couldn’t include....” and then it hit her.

Why the hell does she have to be so perceptive? Did this unfortunate character trait drive Jemma as crazy as it drove me?

“Show me. I wanna see it!”

I pulled the small red box out of my pocket and opened it for her to see the prize inside.

“I knew it! I knew it!”

“How did you know? I didn’t even tell Jonathan.”

“Uh, I saw the bulge in your pocket and I have seen *the* bulge enough times to know that it wasn’t your dick, hot shot.”

Embarrassed, I laughed. “Damn Brea, you can be so damned crude that I sometimes forget that you are a lady.”

“I don’t have to be a lady for you. I reserve my ladyship status for this gorgeous hunk of man right here.” she said, running her hands over Jonathans sleeping face.

“Of course I also save my bad ass bitch in bed status for him, too. As you can see, mama was a little too much for him tonight.” she winked and I went back to bed.

Way more information than I needed at three in the morning.

Chapter Fifteen

Jemma

The last few days have been pretty rough, last night being the worse yet. I have been having the same dream over and over again as if it were stuck in a loop. Julian and I are out to dinner when suddenly my father appears. He is frantically shouting something at the two

of us that I cannot quite make out but whatever it is has me scared to death. Julian however never flinches; he simply sits in his seat eating his filet mignon like nothing is going on around him.

The next thing I know my mother is behind my father and she is screaming at him in the same muted way that he is screaming at us. Before I know it there is a gun floating up through space, they both reach for it. I never actually see who catches it or even hear the gun go off , the bullet simply appears out of nowhere and I watch in slow motion as

it makes its way into the side of Julian's head. I fly from the table over to his side screaming, as he falls face-first into his plate, listening to the laughter of the sudden crowd surrounding us. My father is standing in a corner next to my mother who is also laughing, but instead of laughter, my father is crying.

This night was the same as it always has been only this time I saw who held the gun that took from me the only man who had ever held my heart in his hands, I saw the fingers that pulled the trigger. Only, I did not just see them, I felt them.

“Hi, Brandon,” I said, picking up the phone.

“Hey, Jem. I just thought I would call and check in. Are you leaving today?”

“How did you know?”

“Brea, she has been keeping me in the loop.” I bet she has.

“Oh, did she tell you that she has a new boyfriend?”

“Yeah, kind of. Some guy Julian hooked her up with. I figured she would have dumped him by now.”

“I dunno, they seem kind of serious, serious for Brea anyway.”

“Humph!”

“What was that humph for?” I ask curiously.

“No reason, anyway, so I just wanted to call and wish you luck seeing your dad. I wish I could be there for you.”

“Don’t worry about it, Brea and Jonathan will be going with us. I will be fine.”

“Humph!” There it was again.

I wanted to give him the third degree

about why it was he seemed so annoyed every time I mentioned Jonathan but Brea walked into the room before I had a chance to pry. He has known Brea just as long as I had and nothing about her dating life had ever mattered to him before.

“Well, Brandon I gotta run, Brea just walked in. We have to head out in a few minutes.”

He then asked to talk to Brea, who took the phone and bounced out of my room with it pressed firmly to her ear. I could have sworn that I heard Brandon’s voice

yelling on the other end. What was that all about? I am not so sure I wanted to know.

Once we arrived in Galveston we were completely famished. Other than the fact that Brea was acting a bit off , having she and Jonathan in the car with us offered good distraction from the racing images of last night's dream that were racing through my head.

We checked into our rooms and Brea and I headed down to the beach while the boys unloaded Julian's truck.

“Jem...” Brea grabbed my hand as I started off to put my feet in the water.

“Can we talk for a sec?”

“Of course, Brea, what is it?”

We both sat down burying our toes in the sand.

“I want to tell you something but I am not sure how you will react. And maybe this is not the time and place to say anything but I need to tell someone and you are generally the first person I would tell. And...”

“Brea just spit it out, OK? Life is not all about me, you are my best friend, I

am sure whatever it is, it is not nearly as bad as you are making it out to be.”

“OK, here it goes, you know the day Brandon saw you and Julian. The day I followed him out after he got all weird and stuff?”

I nodded. I would never forget that day, the look on his face that told me I had broken his heart for the umpteenth time.

“Well, we sat in his car for a while. He was upset but trying really hard to be strong, you know, like he always does when it comes to you.” she stopped for a moment to catch her breath.

“Anyway, so we were talking about you, he was telling me how he didn’t know if he would ever stop loving you, that he had thought you were the one, but he had to try and move on before you killed him. Then he said something else...” She hesitated.

“Tell me Brea? What did he say?” I was starting to get impatient.

“He said...he said, Jem, he said that he wished he had chosen me.”

I closed my eyes for a moment not knowing how to react to the words tumbling out of Brea’s mouth.

“I don’t think he meant it as like, you know an insult to you or anything, he was just hurting. I think it was more of an insult to me actually because Brandon thinks of me as a total whore, something he has made pretty apparent over the years.”

“Why are you telling me this Brea? Are you *trying* to hurt me? I don’t understand why I need to know that.”

I was confused and wanted to know what she was getting at, there had to be more to the story.

“OK, please don’t hate me Jem. When

he told me he wished he had chosen me I kind of lost it. I seriously think all of my brain cells shut down because...because...ugh! Because then I kissed him.”

I stopped breathing and my body stiffened. What did she mean she had kissed him?

“I don’t know what I was thinking. But when he kissed me back...”

“He kissed you back!” I shrieked.

“Very much so. Jemma, we were both so screwed up at the time. One thing led to another and we were in the back seat,

my skirt was up and he was on top of me and...and....I don't..."

I felt her face collide with the palm of my hand before I ever had a chance to register what I was doing.

"You fucking bitch, you fucking God damn fucking whore! Did it have to be Brandon, out of all the jackasses you have at your beck and call, did it have to be him? He is mine Brea!"

And then I realized I had went to far. Brea jumped up and slapped me back.

"How dare you call me a whore? I told you I was in love with Brandon, I told

you and you just blew me off like my feelings didn't count for shit. You of all people should not be judging anyone. Look at how fast you jumped into bed with Julian, twenty four hours later you pretty much raped Axel ruining his friendship with Brandon forever and do not think for one second that Brandon didn't tell me that you tried to fuck him that same night. I have never fucked three guys within 48 fucking hours, so FUCK YOU Jemma Hale, fuck you all to hell!" she screamed.

Suddenly her eyes were no longer

fixated on me. Instead she was staring behind me, her mouth agape as tears began to well up in her eyes. I knew instantly that the guys were behind us. I turned around and caught the stares of Julian and Jonathan. Jonathan was angry, so angry he shook his head at Brea, clinched his fist and walked away. Brea went screaming after him. Julian just watched me as if he were looking right through me.

“Julian?”

“*Your* Brandon? You still think of him as *yours*? What about me Jemma? Am I

yours too? Because you can't have both of us. I will not share you with anyone."

"Julian you misunderstood." Taking a few steps towards him I reached for the hands hanging lifelessly at his side.

"I did *NOT* misunderstand anything, and don't play me like I am an idiot. We heard it all, every last fucking word. Did you know that Jonathan is in love with her? What the fuck does Brandon have, I don't get it. Just tell me, is it true, did you try to fuck him too?"

I tried to open up my mouth to speak, I knew what it looked like but all I could

manage was a mumble.

“You forgave me for Axel.”

“You aren’t in love with Axel, Jemma.” he stated matter of factually and pulled something out of his pocket placing it in my hand.

“This was for later; take a good look at it *sweetheart* and then make up your fucking mind. I will fight for you with everything I have but I won’t tear my own heart out to do it.”

After giving me a cold hard look, he too turned and walked away leaving me standing on a deserted beach with my

raging hormones, haunting thoughts and a little red box.

I looked down at the box that lay in my hands and opened the lid with my thumb. Inside lay the most beautiful ring I had ever seen. In the middle sat one large pink diamond, surrounding it were ten smaller white diamonds, along the side of the thick white band were the words “I believe in fairies” and on the underside “for my Skipper”.

I pulled the ring from the box and slid it onto my ring finger whispering to myself the word “yes”. I then threw the

box deep into the ocean. The ring would never again be locked away inside. I knew one hundred percent without a single doubt that I was going to spend the rest of my life with Julian. Only I had one thing that I needed to do first and I needed to do it alone.

Chapter Sixteen

I left a note at the hotel letting everyone know that I was leaving and took a taxi to the hospital a few miles outside of Galveston. My father had originally been sentenced to a state funded hospital but my aunt persuaded the lawyer into fighting so that he could be remanded to a privately funded facility with a better reputation for rehabilitation. Given the circumstances and my father's state of

mind when he spiraled out of control the courts agreed.

I know Julian had wanted to see my father as well but I needed to get it over with, as much as I loved Julian this was not for him, it was for me. I needed to hear what my father had to say before the suspense crushed me. The morning had already taken a big hit on my emotions and I figured, what time better than the present when my heart was already tied up in knots. There was nothing my father could say that could cause me to feel any more pain than I was feeling right now.

When I arrived at the facility I was asked to hand over my ID, led to a small office space and told that someone would be in shortly. The room was very utilitarian, a large desk with a pair of chairs in front sat in one corner of the room, in the middle was a large conference table surrounded by smaller swivel chairs and the room was decorated in dull paintings of horses and plastic plants. After 45 tedious minutes of waiting, a tall slender man with white hair walked into the room.

“You must be Jemma? I’m sorry about

the wait but we were not expecting you until tomorrow.”

The unidentified man held his hand out for me. I gave it a small shake in return and he continued.

“My name is Dr. Scott. I thought it would be a good idea to talk for a few minutes before your father joined us. He is in group right now so it is a perfect time to get to know one another. He will be along shortly.”

I do not know why I thought this would be an easy in and out visit. I expected to walk in, find my dad sitting behind a

panel of glass while he tells me he screwed up over an equally impersonal telephone.

“So your father tells me you started college recently. How is that working out for you?”

He sat down at the desk and gestured for me join him at one of the chairs situated in front. I followed his lead and took a seat.

“I was supposed to but I ended up postponing things for semester while I figured things out.”

“Ah, I see. Does it have anything to do

with the fact that you started seeing Dr. Schneider again?”

How did he know about that? Aunt Tilly and I seriously needed to have a little chat about boundaries and the fact that my business was not hers to share.

“Your aunt and I are close; we dated all throughout high school. When she came to me to help her brother I was more than happy to do what I could.”

Wait, didn't Tilly say she never seriously dated anyone? *All throughout high school* definitely sounded like a long term commitment to me.

“OK, well, thanks for that I guess.”

“No thanks necessary. It has been a while since you have seen your father has it not?” I nodded knowing full well that he knew the answer to that question.

“Have you been regularly taking your medication Jemma?”

His sudden inquiry into my personal life took me by shock.

“Yes I have but what business is it of yours?” I inquire slightly annoyed.

“I just want to be clear, your father has come a long way and I know that

someone with a manic personality can be difficult if they do not have things under control.”

Was this man actually telling me that he was trying to protect my father from me? The man was a diagnosed sociopath; he murdered my mother and tried to see to it that I met her same fate. I was no danger to him.

“Like I said, I have been taking my medication. You know it was very hard for me to come here today Dr. Scott. I only came because Dr. Schneider seems to think this visit will somehow be

beneficial to me, though I have yet to figure out why exactly. He just said that by being here I might start to discover in me a tiny bit of the normalcy that my father and Ignacio Hernandez stole from me.”

I was angry, angrier than I had been in a very long time only I was not entirely sure what Dr. Scott did to spark that anger.

“Relax Jemma; I am not trying to upset you. I just want to make sure this reunion goes smoothly for the both of you. That is why I am here, for both of you.”

We were interrupted by a buzzing sound on the box in front of him. He pressed a button and a quiet female voice echoed through the room, letting the doctor know that someone had arrived.

"Send him in, Marcy." he said releasing the button and walking over to open the door.

First a large man who didn't look much older than Julian walked through the door. Behind him was my father. Our eyes met instantly and I had to fight back the wave of emotion that would have

surely knocked me off of my feet had I not been sitting down.

His hair was still dark with only a small gray streak running along the side of his head. He was taller than I remembered, his skin lighter but he was still my father and he looked happy, at peace even. He still looked like the same man who had bounced me on his knee in the middle of the night after I awoke from a bad dream. The same man who taught me to swim, how to pitch a fast ball, who taught me that beauty started on the inside, the same man who

murdered my mother; the only woman he claimed to ever love.

“John, why don’t we sit at the conference table, shall we?” My father took a seat at the table never taking his eyes from mine while the man stood behind him.

“Jemma?” Dr. Scott asked gesturing towards the table. Reluctantly I stood, taking the seat opposite my father.

“Well, at last, here we all are. John has invited y....”

“You are beautiful, princess.” My dad interrupted. I could see the admiration

beneath the tears welling up in his eyes. I quickly looked away after mouthing “Thanks”.

“As I was saying John has invited you here because he has hit a stage in his treatment where he is forced to face his demons.”

So I was a demon now?

“During our time together your father has confided in me as well as many others on our staff the events that occurred the night of your accident and in order for him to continue to improve he has been asked to relive those events

with you today.”

I snapped. “I don’t want to relive those events. I relive them every damned day!”

“Jemma, please. You see, the events that you remember and the events that your father has confided are very different from one another. I think it is important that you give him the opportunity to share with you his accounts of the events that took place on the night your mother was killed and you were hurt.”

I turned to my father.

”Why are you doing this to me? I was

there. You cannot tell me anything I don't already know.”

My father looked at me with a compassion that I had not seen since I was a child. Something about it made me want to climb into his lap and cry myself to sleep in his arms. I cringed at the emotions fluttering through me and then my father began to speak.

“Jemma, princess...”

“DON'T CALL ME THAT!” I shrieked.

“OK, I deserve that.” Yes you do, you deserve that and more. “This is not easy

for me either Jemma, I love you so much, I love your brother and your mother as well.”

How dare he talk about my mother as if he was not the one to take her from this world. But then again, wasn't that why I was here? To find out what pushed him over the edge causing the total destruction of what was left of our family?

“I'm listening. I am going to sit here and listen to you. When we are done, I am going to walk that door and I don't want to ever see you again.”

I am not sure why I bothered to tell him. I could have just sat quietly while he went on his merry way spouting off broken I love you's but I had to reassure him, reassure myself. With uncertainty he nodded in my direction and continued.

“All I ask is that you listen. Jem, I know what you remember of that night. When they played that video tape and I heard what a monster you thought I was my heart broke into. I knew so much of that night was skewed inside your precious little head but I would rather

you think me a monster than remember whatever shook you so hard.”

My father stopped speaking and turned to his doctor as if asking for assurance. “Continue John. It’s OK.”

My father then returned his attention to me but before he could speak we were interrupted by the ringing of Dr. Scott’s cell phone.

“Will the two of you excuse me for a moment? There is an emergency in the front office. I will be back shortly.”

Dr. Scott stood up and walked out of the room leaving me alone with my

father and who I can only assume was his bodyguard.

“So is he your bodyguard or something?” I asked.

My dad smiled. “No, he is here to make sure I don’t strangle myself...or Peter.”

“Peter?” I asked.

“Dr. Scott.” Ah.

A few moments later Dr. Scott returned to the room looking a little bit out of sorts.

“So, well, it seems there is a young

man here for you Mrs. Hale. He was rather insistent that he be by your side. Julian he said his name was.”

“Julian?” My father and I both said in unison.

“Yes, I am going to go out on a limb here and guess that this is “*the*” Julian?”

My father turned to me anxiously awaiting confirmation.

“Yes, Julian Ackles.” I said to my father.

“Do you want him here?” My father asked.

I know I had ran off to see my dad on

my own but now that he was sitting in front of me I wasn't sure I could handle it without Julian by my side. He was so angry with me when he walked away this afternoon that I could not imagine why he bothered to come after all. Not that the reason mattered. He was here and that spoke volumes to me.

I nodded at my father and he nodded back at me understanding my need without words just like he had done so many times with my mother.

“Let him in. I don't mind if he is here. I would prefer it actually.” He said.

“Very well, then.” Dr. Scott pressed the button on the desk. “Send the young man in.” he mumbled into the air.

A moment later, Julian stepped into the room, his eyes first falling to my father and then to me. I stood up in front of my chair and then desperation took over as he ran to my side and threw his arms around me as if nobody but us were in the room.

“I am so sorry sweetheart! When I got back to the room and saw your note my stomach dropped into the pit of my stomach. I know you said you wanted to

see him alone but I could not bear the fact that you took off without knowing how much I loved you. I forgive you. I forgive you over and over again.” He said wrapping his hand through my hair and kissing me softly on the lips.

When he reached up I grabbed the hand that was still on my face. “I love you so much Julian.” Julian kissed me again and then took notice of my left hand.

“You’re wearing it?”

Yes I was because even though I had never uttered the word the answer was yes, yes to every second, every minute,

and every hour of our lives. Julian smiled with his usual confident smile and it made my heart dive.

“Well, I hate to interrupt such a lovely reunion but we really should continue. If you will both have a seat.”

Julian pulled out my chair and sat down beside me. I looked to my father and found him smiling, tears once again pooling into his eyes.

“Good to see you again Julian.”

With his jaw set in a straight tight line Julian simply nodded. I am sure he had a million things that he would like to get

off his chest but because he loved me those would have to wait for another day.

“Continue John.”

“Yeah well, like I said, I saw the videotaped statement and I knew that I could not see you hurt by the truth so I decided to plead guilty.

What did he mean he did not want to hurt me? He was guilty, I remember everything!

“I remember the night your mother was killed like it was yesterday. I loved her so damn much, she was my everything. I

have hated myself all of these years for not being able to see how broken she had become. I kept telling myself she was handling everything so well, she went with me to my appointments, she worked, and she took care of you and our home. She seemed fine; I was not expecting to come home after survivors group to find her with a gun.”

I gasped and my father took a second to compose himself.

“We had that parents support group every Friday, do you remember? You would go spend the night at Brea’s and

we would go to group. Only that night your mother said Brea wasn't feeling well. I offered to stay home with her but she would not have it. She wanted me to go and I thought nothing of it since it was just like her to consider my needs before her own. When I got home, I knew something was wrong. The entire house was dark but your bedroom. I heard your music playing and saw your shadow dancing along the wall. When I walked in I found your mother. She was standing at the bottom of the stairs, just standing there with a gun in her hands. I was

thrown; nothing about what I was witnessing made any sense to me.”

I opened my mouth to speak but Dr. Scott pleaded with me to let him finish. Julian grabbed my hand and pulled it into his lap squeezing lightly to remind me that he was there.

“I confronted her; she jumped and started to cry. One second tears were falling and the next she was screaming at the top of her lungs.

“I can’t do this anymore! I need to be with my son! He needs me, Nicolai needs me!” She yelled.

I finally got her to calm down long enough to get the gun out of her hands. I walked her into the living room and sat the gun on one of the end tables next to the couch. When I urged her to sit down she began to yell again, this time when I tried to calm her down she started hitting me over and over.

I guess your mother had been in denial putting all of her focus into my illness and everything else, once she broke she became angry and irrational. Then you walked in...”

He bit back a sob and Dr. Scott handed

him a bottle of water which he took a long drink of.

“You walked in and grabbed the gun off of the table. You looked so scared. So broken, I think it was the first time either of us had actually noticed that you were hurting as well. And for that I am so sorry princess...so so sorry!”

I watched as my father broke down into tears. Julian and I both sat frozen at my fathers reaction to something that could not be helped and to the story unfolding in front of us. And then like someone playing a movie at high speed everything

began pouring back into my head. The yelling I heard from my room, my mother smashing her fists into my daddy's head and the gun...*the gun*.

“Oh my God...” I blurted. “Oh my God.” I buried my face into my hands and tried to control my breathing but there was no way that I could. I was panicking and my thoughts were out of control. I jumped from the table, ran over to the garbage can at the end of the desk and heaved mercilessly into the can. Julian was behind me in seconds pulling my hair out of my face; my father

tailed behind him body guard in tow.

“Just breathe sweetheart, breathe for me Jemma.” Julian begged.

A few moments later, after I emptied the last remnants of my stomach, which were few and far between I stood up meeting the concerned stare of my father and I began to cry.

“Daddy! I’m so sorry.” I choked. I lightly pushed Julian off of me and walked into my father’s arms.

“It’s OK princess, it’s OK.”

For the first time since I was eight years old my father comforted me. He

held me in his arms, smoothed my hair and told me everything was going to be alright.

Eventually the silence in the room weighed down on Julian.

“Can someone please tell me what the hell is going on?” He asked, clearly as concerned as he was confused.

“I feel it best if we all sit and allow John to continue.” replied Dr. Scott

My dad walked me over to my seat but I wasn't ready to let him go. He grabbed my hand and squatted down next to me. “It's OK princess, I'm not going

anywhere. Julian is with you. Julian?”

My dad looked over to the boy who he had once thought of as his own and placed my hand in his.

“Take care of my daughter?”

“With everything I have, Sir.”

My dad walked back to his seat and began to tell the story that my brain had tried so hard to forget. Not the story that had burned itself into my head as a young girl but the story as it was. Only now he was telling the story to Julian because he knew that I remembered

everything a fact that did not make hearing it any easier.

“The first thing we saw was Jemma’s face. I think it took us both a second to realize that it was our little girl standing there holding us both at gun point. She looked so different than she had the last time I saw her earlier that evening. She was so pale, all of the life had drained from her eyes. She was screaming at us both asking us why we didn’t love her anymore. Then she started saying that all she wanted was to be with Nicolai. She said it over and over again. We both

pleaded with her to put down the gun, it looked so big in her tiny hands but she didn't hear us, she couldn't because our princess was no longer present.

When she began to pull the gun up to her head Elaine and I lost all composure, she started screaming and I bolted across the room. There was no way I was going to lose another child, no way. I grabbed the hand that held the gun but Jemma wouldn't let go. I started to plead with her.

“Please stop, princess. Please give daddy the gun.” I begged and begged.

After a few seconds she dropped it. I wasn't prepared for it to fall, when it hit the ground it just went off. I don't know if I ever touched it or not. I just know it went off and I watched the only woman I had ever love crumple to the floor. And then Jemma took off running and I knew I had to help my daughter. Before I took off after her I picked the gun up off the floor for fear that she might get hold of it again."

"By the time I made it upstairs Jem had locked herself in the bathroom. She was screaming at the top of her lungs like

someone was trying to kill her. I heard things being thrown around and glass shattering so I started banging on the door begging her to unlock it to no avail. When the noise stopped I began to kick the door until it gave way. The first thing I noticed was the destruction in the bathroom. She had left nothing untouched, everything was thrown around the floor, the shower door had been shattered and then I noticed the window. I climbed out and found my princess walking along the edge of the roof. Despite my pleading she refused to

come back inside so I climbed out with her. I was scared to death that she would fall”

“Once again her screams begin to ring in my ear but I continued to move closer begging her to stop. Not paying attention to anything but her I tripped on the antennae cable and the gun went off. I had completely forgotten it was in my hand. Jemma jerked, lost her balance and fell from the roof. I tried to catch her but I wasn’t fast enough. I looked down and saw her lifeless body lying atop one of the bushes that surrounded the house.

The next thing I know the police were there and I thought I had lost everything. Had the gun not fallen when I tripped I swear to God, right then and there, I would have put a bullet in my own head.”

He let out a small cry and wiped his face with the sleeves of his shirt. Then he turned from Julian who was shaking his head side to side and faced me.

“The police arrested me on the spot. I was so far gone by then that I had no defense for myself so I just let them keep throwing charges at me. If it were not for

Tilly I would not have even had a lawyer, even though I refused to speak to anyone, she insisted on getting me the best money could buy. By the time I found out you were still alive Jem, the sickness had taken over and it seemed whatever sickness had taken over me had also taken over you because your memories of the events as they happened were gone.”

And there it was. I Jemma Lee Hale murdered my mother and my brain was too much of a coward to fess up to it. How was this supposed to help me?

Julian and I rode back to the hotel in silence. I didn't want to talk, I didn't want to be touched, I didn't want any of it, life that is. I left my father's side with him reassuring me that nothing was my fault.

“Princess, if anything that happened that night was anyone's fault it was mine and your mother's for not being there for you. For getting so caught up in our own selfish needs that we forgot about the one person who mattered most of all.”

But it *was* my fault. It was my fault because my head was broken, and I did not function like other little girls. Other little girls did not even need to '*function*' they just woke up with smiles on their faces and went about a day of coloring and playing without a care in the world. Not me, I held guns, I killed people with said guns.

Julian tried his best to comfort me but I did not want it. I wanted every bit of the pain inside of me; I wanted to suffer for every second my father had to suffer, every second that he had to spend rotting

behind bars once he left that God awful hospital.

“You had blocked out what happened for a reason and for whatever reason that was believing that I pulled the trigger then went after you made you feel better about everything. Not only did I not want to hurt you more than I already had but Tilly said you seemed happy. And if you were happy, I refused to take that happiness from you.”

That was his reasoning for choosing to suffer twenty five years to life for a crime that he had nothing to do with.

Julian walked me into our room at the Radisson and my thoughts immediately went to Brea.

“Is Brea here?”

Julian looked at me with pity in his eyes.

“No sweetheart, she and Jonathan took the train back to Austin. They have some things they need to work out.”

I needed my friend, probably more than I have ever needed her in my entire life but in truth, she did not need me, she never had. After everything that had gone down on the beach earlier I was positive

that she didn't even want me as her friend anymore.

“I’m going to take a shower.” I disappeared into the bathroom not waiting for Julian’s response. My body was so numb, I just needed to let go of it all.

I turned the shower to hot and waited for the steam to rise before stepping in fully clothed. I had no strength in me to strip myself down. I sat down in the tub under the spray, pulled my knees up into my arms and buried my face into them letting the water scald my body as I

cried mercilessly into myself from the pain.

I don't know how long I was in the tub before Julian walked in. I could tell he was talking but it sounded as if he was speaking into a glass. The words were muted and heavy, for some reason they made me laugh. Julian turned the water off and pulled my shirt and bra over my head. He grab hold of my arm and lifted me up from the tub tugging my pants down before grabbing a towel to carefully dry my skin and hair. I caught a glimpse of him as he lifted me into his

arms, his face was red and his eyes were full of tears. I felt nothing. I buried my head into his neck and he carried me to bed. I felt an invisible presence pull the blanket up over my sensitive skin right before I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Seventeen

Julian

I saw what looked like smoke rising out from under the bathroom door and ran over to it praying it was not locked. When I opened it was overwhelmed by a wet fog rising out of the tub and nearly knocked off my feet by the heat.

“Jesus fucking Christ!” I yelled as I

spotted Jemma in the tub.

She was fully clothed, hiding inside herself crying. Her arms and neck were blood red. I ran to the shower and immediately turned it off.

“Come on sweetheart, Oh baby, please cooperate with me.”

I grabbed hold of her shirt along with her bra and pulled them up over her head. She did not fight me but she did not exactly cooperate either. Her back was streaked with redness, luckily from where I could see she was not badly enough burned for me to call for help. I

just needed to get her out of the tub and into bed so she could sleep off the madness of the day.

I wished she would talk to me but I know how much she was hurting and it was tearing me up inside. I would have given anything to take this pain from her, I would have done anything.

I pulled her up by her arms and pulled her pants from under her bare feet leaving her standing naked in front of me. For the first time, seeing her naked did nothing for me. All I wanted was to hear her voice.

“Please talk to me sweetheart. Please say something, anything. Please!” I begged with no response from her. I felt like I was talking to myself. Not pushing it any further, I dried her off and carried her to bed.

I wanted to climb in next to her but seeing her in so much pain was too much for me to handle. I actually felt a sense of relief that she instantly fell asleep, the relief was followed by guilt. How was I supposed to help her if I could not even reach her? Instead of climbing into the bed I sat in the chair next to it and

watched her. For the first time in a long time I was truly afraid, I was completely unsure how to help her and even more unsure what she would do when she woke up. Perhaps she would just float away because for the brief moment our eyes had met in the shower she had seemed as empty as a balloon.

After about half an hour she rolled over and reached for my side of the bed

“Julian?” She cried out for me which sent a painful itch through my heart.

I lifted myself up out of the chair, pulled my shoes off and climbed into

bed with her. Still asleep she inched closer to me, throwing one arm over my chest, burying her head into the nape of my neck. I kissed her forehead and followed her into dreamland where I could only pray she was finding even a tiny bit of peace.

I awoke sometime later to a darkened room after hearing the faintest whisper from Jemma who was running her fingers across the line of my jaw. “Julian” The way she said my name was different from the way she had before. There was something in it that spoke of

lust and desire.

“Yes sweetheart.” I whispered back to her.

I could see the soft essence of her face thanks to the dim light of the moon reflecting off of the ocean outside of the balcony window, just enough light to make out the pure desperation hiding beneath the beautiful blue eyes that glowed like fireflies.

“Please Julian, please take the pain away.” she pleaded.

I had heard those words before the night Axel came barreling through the

front door of the frat house and explained that Jemma had seduced him, begging him to take her pain away. I had wanted to rip his throat out after hearing that he had taken advantage of her in her weak state of mind. But seeing the desperation pouring out of her I could see why he had to give into her. But I could not give in; there was no way in hell that I could just be 'some guy'.

She pushed herself on top of me and began to kiss her way down my neck but I grabbed her before she could do any more damage.

“No sweetheart, we can’t.” I forced the words out of my mouth barely able to understand them myself.

“Julian, I know what you are thinking, this is not the same. I need you...” then she moved back up to my ear and whispered “I need *you* Julian, only *you* can fix me. I am begging you. Please fix me, you promised.” She said, emphasizing the word “you”.

And then the words of her father came rushing back through my head. Right before he was escorted out of Dr. Scott’s office he placed a single hand on

my shoulder .

“I knew it was going to be you son. I always knew. Please take care of my daughter; she is all I have left.”

And then I made the promise that I had already made many times before, “I will do anything and everything that it takes to make her happy. Anything she needs, I am hers, always. I promise you that.”

She nipped and licked my ear lobe, making her way to my lips. Then she sat up and said the words that undid me.

“It’s only ever been *you* Julian. I only

need *you*, I ache for *you*, make love to me, let me feel *you*, claim what has always been *yours*, please.”

She *was* mine, she had always been mine and I ached for her just as much as she ached for me. There was nothing unsure in her voice, nothing that said I was just anyone. Every word she spoke told me that I was all she needed, she needed me and only me, there has never and would never be anyone else. Jemma Lee Hale was mine, now and forever.

I flipped her over onto her back and let her help me off with my shirt then

stepped out of bed to remove my pants. Climbing back on top of her I remembered that we had no protection. We had decided not to bring any as incentive not to do just what we were planning on doing.

I kissed her on the lips and whispered “We can’t, I don’t have anything sweetheart.”

She dug her nails into the back of my neck and pulled me into her, claiming my mouth with such force that she stole my breath.

“I don’t care, make me yours Julian.”

She peered into my eyes and I fully understood the message she was trying to convey with just a look.

In that moment I no longer cared about anything that would prevent me from touching her the way I had yearned to. I took her mouth back into mine then slowly trailed it along her neck. Stopping for only a moment to taste her breath I continued down to the soft pink flesh between her legs.

I parted her folds with my tongue and began to caress her plump nub with my kiss. Her cries of desire guided my

tongue and lips to her first explosion of pleasure. Her wetness poured onto my tongue, causing my long hard shaft to throb at the taste, it needed to find her, to take with it every ounce of suffering.

“Now Julian, NOW!”

Following her lead I moved back to her mouth and claimed it once more as the tip of my shaft found its mark. As if it had a mind of it's own it pushed itself inside of her. She squirmed beneath me and her hips aided my shaft deeper into her body.

“I need to fuck you Julian. Let me show

you how much I need you.”

I allowed her to guide me onto my back. As she took total control of my body, she sat herself down hard onto me and began to ride. I reached up and firmly squeezed both of her large round breasts into my hands. Damn she felt good, how the hell did I live all of these weeks without having all of her.

“Julian!” She screamed as she rode me harder, bouncing her body up and down until there was nothing left of me to take.

“Sweetheart, you feel like fucking heaven, pure fucking heaven!”

I could feel and hear her wetness slapping up against me. She moved her hands from my stomach to my knees deepening the connection between us. From this position I could see every budding bit of her heat as it moved up then back down my glistening shaft, I was suddenly overcome with the need to touch our sex. I moved my fingers to the base of my shaft and felt her movements, slowly moving my hand back to her hips.

“Touch me, Julian.”

Her request came out in a hush cry and

I moved my thumbs onto her clit, circling it around and around with pressure, she bounced up a few more times and screamed out my name. I felt her body clench tightly as the wetness poured from her body, seeping out onto the pit of my stomach.

I flipped her onto her back once more and made my way down to sop up the delicious nectar that had pooled between her legs. It was as if I were lost in the dessert dying for water, I sucked and licked until her body was thrown overboard again fully satisfying the thirst

within me.

“I need you Julian, fuck me please.”

I moved my cock back into the only home it was ever meant to have.

“Fuck me hard Julian!”

Upon her request I shoved myself inside of her and buried myself deep enough to ensure that she would feel me there for the rest of her life. I dug into her over and over again with the same force until I couldn't take it anymore.

“I need to come sweetheart, where do want it?”

“Come inside me Julian. Make me

yours, I only want to be yours!”

I was aware of the possible consequences of her request but I didn't care. She was like a wolf in heat giving me permission to mark her, making her my mate for life which was all I ever wanted. I was in love with this beauty, this perfect vision of everything I had ever wanted. I was inside of her and she was inside of me. Whatever came of this moment would be made of the two of us and there could be nothing more perfect in the entire world than that.

So I took her, ruining her for any other

man, making her mine as she was making me hers, both of us mutually finding our release. I exploded inside of her hot, wet cavern and filled her up with every ounce of love I had to give and it was a lot of love.

We spent the rest of the night and most of the morning making love and I happily gave myself to her every time taking with each release the pain that had began to destroy her. I was not sure what the future would bring. All I knew was that I wanted her like she was right now, every second of every day, for the rest of

our lives.

Chapter Eighteen

Jemma

I needed him and I could not have cared less about the decision to wait sixty days. I had gone long enough denying myself the one thing that could truly make me happy simply because I was unsure as to whether or not it was real. I knew with all of my heart that this

was real. I wanted to give him everything and I wanted to take all that he was willing to give be damned the consequences. And so we both gave and we took until we were so completely spent that our bodies could no longer move.

Yes I ached, yes I needed to be healed but this was nothing like the ache that had shadowed my decisions so many times before. This was not an ache that yearned for a temporary fix, this ache could only be healed with a cure and that cure was my prince, my Julian.

The entire room smelled of sex and sweat both of which seemed to drive the intense need for more. We fucked, we made love, he tasted, I tasted and then we fucked some more. It was weeks of pent up desire motivating every erection and fueling every release. If there was ever a doubt that two human beings could be completed and totally one hundred percent molded, crafted and designed one for the other that doubt could finally be put to rest.

Julian was my other half. We were

made to fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Without each other neither of us made any sense. All we did was skate through life never finding a real connection because we had not made our way back to one another. And so here we were, wrapped up in each other's arms making sense for the first time in a very long time and it was the very definition of Heaven.

Julian decided to forgo his Monday classes so that we could spend the day together. We didn't have a chance to see much of the beach not to mention we had

slept in through check out time. Only realizing we had done so after the maid walked in on us, Julian's head buried between my legs his tongue desperately feeding both of our needs. She retreated out of the room just as fast as she had walked in not the slightest bit embarrassed. I could imagine she had seen much worse. Julian finished up his healing session, taking me from behind and filling my body for the fifth time with his salty sweetness. He was still hard when he called downstairs to add another day to our charge.

“I think a shower is in order sweetheart.” he said hanging up the phone.

I looked down at his hard shaft and bit my lip. “Only if I can have another taste,” I teased.

“You are insatiable!” He replied.

“Is that a yes?”

Julian nodded his head then I crawled on my knees over to where he was standing and took his erection into my mouth. For the first time, no matter what trick I used he wasn't able to comply.

“Give it a minute, Angel. I am positive he is just napping.”

I pouted and he threw me over his shoulder dragging me off to the bathroom giving my bare ass a gentle slap. Half way through the shower he was hard again, not that he had ever actually gone down, this time there was plenty of him to go around.

After our shower we walked downstairs for lunch at the small beach cafe next door. We were so hungry that we ordered everything but the kitchen

sink and ate every last bite. After which we walked down to the beach, Julian smoothed out a small blanket and we applied sunscreen to each other's backs. Julian taking extra care to slide his hands down into the crease of my ass.

“I want to take this someday.” he whispered into my ear.

“I did say I wanted to give you everything. I meant *EVERYTHING*.”

Julian smiled a devilish smile and all I could think was ‘What did I just get myself into?’

We spent most of the day between the

water and the sand. No matter where we were our hands never strayed far from each other. Most of the time he was on his back people watching while I lay on my stomach reading a book.

“Julian?”

He squinted and turned to face me.

“Hm?”

“Can you help me help my dad? I cannot live with him spending what could possibly be his entire life in prison for something that he didn’t do.”

“I am not sure how we can but I am

sure the truth to the right people would be a good start.”

“Yeah, the truth, that is what I am afraid of.”

“You have nothing to worry about sweetheart. It was an accident, an accident that was so traumatic to you that you could not remember it for almost ten years. Nobody is going to fault you, you were only a little girl.”

“I know, at least, I think I know. I also know that I cannot marry you until he can be there with us. Besides Tilly and your grandmother he is the only real family

we have left.

Julian shook his head at the sad tragic truthfulness of it all.

“He’ll be there sweetheart. I promise, I keep my promises to you. Your dad WILL be at our wedding if I have to break him out with my own two hands.”

All I could do was smile at his confident assurance.

“Speaking of which...” He stood up and reached for my hand. “Give me back my ring, woman!” he demanded.

I frowned playfully as he pulled the delicate pink diamond from my finger.

“I never did get to do this right. I had the words planned and everything,” he joked in his best pouty baby voice.

I put my hand to my mouth to stifle the giddy, childish giggle at the awareness of what he was about to do on a crowded beach as he got down on one knee. In one hand he held my left hand, in the other he held out the ring. And even though I had already said yes, the little girl who had always dreamed of this moment became overly emotional and teary eyed.

“Jemma Lee Hale, my Skipper, my

fairy princess, love of my life since before you were ever even born. I want to spend the rest of my life dancing in the sunlight, proudly showing my fairy wings to anyone who would care to see them with you for the rest of my life. Only I don't want to be your prince anymore, we are no longer children and it is time to grow up. No, I want to be your king side by side with you, my queen, and together we can lead all the land towards love everlasting. I will never leave you and I promise to be everything you need me to be. I love you

Jemma, will you marry me?”

After I gave Julian the obvious answer of “YES, YES, YES!” he bowed before me and took my hand, placing the ring back on my finger. He then pulled me to him and we danced. We danced until the sun set on the horizon.

“Julian, put these on.”

Jemma asked handing Julian a pair of blue sparkly fairy wings. She was never without her purple wings and she knew Julian would love a pair of his own.

Maybe he would even want to live in fairyland with her. She knew it would take the towns people a while to warm up to him but as princess of fairyland she also knew that the rest of the fairies had to like him simply because she said so.

“OK Skipper.”

Though he knew Nick would give him hell if he found out he was prancing around as a fairy, Julian could never say no to Jemma, no matter what she asked of him. He didn't know why, he just knew that he wanted to make her

happy.

Nicolai had been asked to ride with his dad over to the lumber yard to help haul back wood for the fort they were building in the back yard. Mrs. Hale just told him to hang out until they got back so he decided to do what he always did when Nick was not around. He went to find Jemma who he found dancing around in the back yard in full leotard complete with those shiny purple wings.

“Wanna be my fairy prince? I am the fairy princess and all princesses need a

prince. You would make a fine prince Julian.”

*Did he want to be a fairy prince?
What exactly did fairy princes do?*

“Sure Skipper, I will be your fairy prince. What do I have to do?”

Jemma put her finger to her cheek, pressed her lips together sideways and began to think.

“Well, whatever the fairy princess asks him to do of course!”

That would not be much of a stretch; he already did whatever she asked him to do.

“Well then, what have you of me my lady?” Julian said taking a bow all the way down to his toes. He knew he must have looked ridiculous but the mile wide smile on her face was worth it.

“First things first, we have to make all the other fairies fall in love, the kind that lasts forever like my mommy and daddy’s kind. Then everyone in fairyland will have someone to give them kisses when they are sad. Everyone will be so happy that they will laugh and dance in the sunlight all the time. Fairy’s love dancing in the

sunlight you know?”

“Okaaay...How do we do that?”

“Well, we have to dance silly. You are my prince now so we have magic powers, but only when we dance.”

And so they danced. Julian danced not just because she told him to, though he would have done so had that been the only reason, but because every time he had ever laid eyes on her dancing in the sun he had wanted nothing more than to dance right along with her.

Chapter Nineteen

The drive back to Austin was a long one, Julian and I had not slept much during our trip so we were exhausted and I still had to face Brea. Jonathan sent a text to Julian letting us both know that they made it home in one peace but we never heard another word. Brea was angry with me when she left as I was with her. I knew that I had no right to be, not after the way I had treated Brandon

and in all honesty it should not have surprised me that they found comfort in one another, after all she was the person he turned to after I unceremoniously kicked him to the curb.

“I don’t know if I can face her right now Julian.”

We had been sitting in the parking lot for the last 10 minutes. I know that I was being a coward but so much had happened over the weekend and I had simply had enough drama to last a lifetime.

“You have no choice sweetheart. As

much as I would love to sit in this car for the rest of my life with my mouth taking in every last inch of you, I think it's about time to suck it up and go make up with your best friend. ”

I stared up at the empty balcony of our apartment and opened the door. Julian was right, it was time to put on my big girl panties and face my best friend, even if it seemed the word *best*, or even friend, no longer applied to either of us.

We made our way upstairs to find the apartment basically untouched. Besides the fact that Brea's bedroom door was

locked I would have thought she had never even come back home.

“I guess they made up, her door is locked.” I said. I shrugged my shoulders and followed Julian into my room where he dropped off my luggage.

“Well, I hate to be a downer....” He put his arms around my waist grabbing me by my jean loops and pulling me close. “But I have a paper due in the morning that I haven’t even begun to write yet so I am going to have to check out.”

The fact that he put his life on hold to spend a weekend with me warmed my

heart. Besides the drama, the weekend with Julian was a dream come true and though I did not want to let him out of my sight I knew we had to get back to life as it is when we aren't buried inside of each other. Though the idea of spending the rest of our lives doing exactly that appealed to me like nothing else in the world.

“Julian, why didn't you tell me? We didn't have to go away this weekend.”

“Oh yes we did, we absolutely we did. Don't make me remind you why!”

“Please remind me. I seem to have

forgotten.” I teased grabbing both of his butt cheeks and giving them a tight squeeze.

Julian crookedly smiled and put his mouth to mine, stealing my kisses with every ounce of fire he had left until sleep took over and he pulled away to yawn. He had almost fallen asleep twice on the way home, I knew he was exhausted.

“Sorry. sweetheart.” He mumbled mid yawn.

“It’s OK, why don’t you go go back to the frat house and get some rest. Call me later?”

I walked Julian to the door where he paused for a moment to kiss me goodbye before disappearing down the hall. Like a schoolgirl I ran to the balcony just in time to watch him get in the truck and drive away.

“Jem?”

I turned to see a red faced Brea rubbing her eyes behind me and the smile that was on my face quickly faded. She looked as if she had been up for weeks, her face was whiter than usual, her nose was chafed, her eyes were blood blotched and the circles under them

looked as if they had been done by make-up artists on a horror movie. I quickly ran to her side and put my arms around her neck without saying a word.

Never, in all of the years I had known her had she looked so absolutely destroyed before. She had her moments of sadness, when Martin Aldan, a boy whom she had been pining over all of freshman year, told the school that she had a butterfly shaped birth mark between her legs she had cried for a full 24 hours straight.

She had never gone all the way with a

boy before but she thought he was amazing, he said and did all of the right things, they dated for months, he was patient, kind and good looking. Who would have thought he would turn out to be such a jerk? But once school started the very next day her tears dried up and her pain escalated into pure hatred. When we showed up she dragged me around campus twice before we finally found Martin holed up in the upstairs boys' bathroom. Brea left me waiting outside and dragged him out into the crowded hall by a handful of his shirt.

Brea reached down and cupped his balls giving them a tight squeeze hard enough to make Martin cry out and then she kissed him. She kissed him hard and long making sure everyone saw her. When she pulled away from him Martin was standing up against the locker speechless. While the two were lip locked Brea had undone his pants allowing his hard on to spring free for the entire school to see, not that there was much there to see.

Brea made a show of looking down at his tiny penis before shrugging her

shoulders and looking him dead in the eye.

“Meh, never mind. Wouldn’t be worth it anyway, there just is not much for a girl to work with.”

Then she grabbed my hand and we walked away leaving Martin completely exposed while half the school laughed at him. I did not say a word; I just watched it all play out, in shock, just like everybody else. From then on out nobody cared about Brea’s birthmark. Except Brandon who promised to rearrange Martins face the next time he

saw him, which he did, thoroughly.

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?”

Brea cried into my ear.

“It’s over Jem, he was so angry, he just got out of bed and left. I haven’t heard from him since.” She said hysterically.

“I’m so sorry, sweetie.” I ran my hands through her knotted hair and walked her over to my bed. “Tell me what happened? Was he that angry over what happened at the beach?”

“No!” she sniffled. “No, we made up before we ever left. We only left because I didn’t think you would want

me there anymore and Jonathan and I needed to talk anyway.”

“Then tell me, if you two made up I don’t understand why he left.”

“We had been a sexual emotional wreck since the plane. We had sex in the bathroom but it wasn’t enough, both of us wanted more. Well we came back here, the moment we walked through the door he shoved me up against the wall and we had the most amazing sex of my life. I am telling you it was *THE BEST*.”

She sniffled some more and I grabbed the tissue box by the side of the bed. She

took a few and blew her nose.

“OK, keep going.”

“I woke up, I dunno maybe one-ish and just stared at him. I realized then that I was crazy about him. I mean, I already knew that I liked him but Jem, I realized then that I was in love him. He was lying there, looking so fucking perfect, he was mine. He didn't care about all of the guys I have slept with, he never judged me for anything. I love him Jem.”

Her tone became urgent and I was having even more troubling understanding why she was behaving the

way she was.

“Honey, I love you, but I am seriously have a hard time following here. You love him, he loves you too, even Julian says so. Jonathan told him that he was in love with you.”

And then she screamed and what was just sadness turned into total anguish. The tears she poured were thick, heavy tears and I didn't know what to do to help her. Her heart was breaking more and more with each tear and I couldn't wrap my head around it.

“Please Brea, please talk to me.” I

pleaded, doing everything I could to hold back my own tears. Her pain was my pain. I could not bear to watch her fall apart.

Though they were still falling like heavy rain she wiped his tears away with the palms of her hands.

“Jem...” she cried barely able to say my name. I looked at her reassuringly, begging her once again to please speak to me.

“I love him so I had to tell him Jemma, I had to and when he found out he left me, he didn’t say a single word, his face

said everything I couldn't bear to hear him say.”

“What did you have to tell him Brea?”

“I...” she gulped. “I’m pregnant!” She screamed the words at me just before losing control all over again.

“What? That son of a bitch!” I shrieked. Needless to say, I was pissed.

“What kind of a man leaves a woman after she tells him she is going to have his baby?”

And then Brea stopped sobbing, her tears became silent but they continued to fall. In slow motion I watched the

change in her face and as her head began to move side to side I knew what had made Jonathan walk away because for a split second that was all that I wanted to do.

“How long have you known Brea?”

“A few weeks.”

“The baby is not Jonathans?”

“No Jem...” The pitiful look in her eyes said everything I needed to know. “It isn't Jonathans.”

I was not OK with the information my friend was relaying to me but at least for once in my life I did not feel like crying.

I maintained all composure, somehow hoping that everything I was hearing was a lie even though I knew that there was no way it could be.

“Brandon knows?”

“Yes.”

“Is that why he was upset about Jonathan?” Brea bopped her head. “It was just sex, I get that you are pregnant with his child but why would he be mad about Jonathan Brea?”

“Because it wasn’t just sex, Jemma. Brandon doesn’t do *just* sex and I would

never *just* have sex with Brandon.” She paused for a moment to choose her next words. “He asked me to marry him when I told him about the baby Jem. I said no, of course.”

“Oh but of course you did!” I replied sarcastically.

“Jemma, please!” She begged. “Jem, do you think I want to be pregnant with my best friend’s ex-boyfriends baby? I feel like I am living in a fucking Jerry Springer episode! And what makes it worse is that I am nothing but your fucking shadow. My *baby daddy* has

been dreaming of what your two little bouncing bundles of perfection would look like since he was fourteen. How the fuck could I ever compete with you when it comes to Brandon?”

Brea jumped up off the bed and began to pace the room.

“Are you saying you wanted to say yes?”

Her pacing halted and turned to me.

“The truth?” I nodded. “The truth is that I have been dreaming of my wedding since I was fourteen years old. I know that we have never talked about it, we

haven't because my dream was a dream and that is all that it was. But the dream always included Brandon."

"When he began spewing at me a bunch of crap about 'doing the right thing' by me I wanted to jump through hoops to let him. But there was just no way that I am a 'do the right thing' kind of girl. Before Jonathan I thought I was going to have to live the rest of my life pining for someone I could never have because I didn't think it was possible to love someone so much twice."

"And now Brea, what do you want

now?”

“I want Jonathan to walk through that door, throw me over his arms like a caveman and tell me that it doesn’t matter.”

I stood from the bed trying to process the information being thrown at me. To say that I was overwhelmed by the nonstop turn of events the last few days would be an understatement. Between my father’s bomb dropping, finding out about Brea and Brandon, then finding out about Brea, Brandon and their unborn child I felt like my head was going to

explode. How much more could I take?

On top of everything, I needed Julian and Julian was probably sleeping like a baby completely unaware of anything but the fact that I just might be joining Brea in baby bliss. It was then that I too became aware!

“I don’t know what to say Brea.”

“Say you forgive me. Say you will be here for me. Don’t hate me because I need my best friend.”

I took a deep breath and looked hard at Brea not really sure that I could answer those questions but I did anyway.

“I forgive you and even though this is REALLY, really weirding me out right now I am not going anywhere. I am here as long as you need me.”

As the words came out of my mouth I knew that I meant them. Brea threw her arms around my neck, she apologized, thanked me, cried a bit, told me she loved me and thanked me some more before pulling away.

“Oh my God Jemma, all this time and I completely forgot about your dad. How did the visit go?”

I cringed at the thought of reliving the

news that came with visiting my father for the first time in seven years but I knew I wouldn't be able to leave my friend in the dark. I spent the next half an hour recounting the events of my visit. She would stop me every once in a while to gasp or ask for some kind of clarification when she wasn't quite sure she heard me right.

“So what happens now?” She asked.

“I guess I have to figure out some way to get him out of this mess. I figured perhaps speak to his lawyer or go straight to the DA, I honestly have no

idea.”

“What about Brandon?”

Confused and almost defensive I ask,
“What about him?”

“Besides the fact that he chose to attend a college with one of the top law schools in the country and has probably met tons of people that could help there is that little fact that his dad is one of the top prosecutors in central Texas. Don’t get all defensive, sheesh!”

I don’t know why asking Brandon for help had never crossed my mind. I guess I had been just as angry at him as I was

at Brea and I had temporarily erased all thought of him out of my head.

“Oh, well there is that!” I joked.

We both laughed and decided to head into the kitchen for something to drink. I took a seat at the bar and Brea popped the cap on two bottled cokes setting one in front of me and taking a drink from the one in her hands before she let out a high pitched “OH MY GAWD!” and grabbed my hand.

“I am such a fucking bitch Jemma! I completely forgot Julian was proposing!”

How the hell did she know?

“You knew?”

“Um, I might have noticed the larger than normal bulge in his pants at one point and cornered him. I see you said yes, you cow! You could have called to tell me you know, it would have sure made the last 24 hours go over a little bit better.”

I smiled guiltily. “Besides the fact that I thought you were pissed at me for....”

“For calling me a whore?”

I cringed and shrugged my shoulders.

“For that, but you called me one too so we are even. As I was saying, Julian and I might have been a little too *preoccupied* to call anyone.”

“You didn’t? What happened to waiting Jem?”

“Fuck it, I got tired of waiting, I have never wanted anything so bad in my life. Though, after over two handfuls of orgasms I might be willing to let Julian suffer every once in a while if it awards me a repeat performance.”

“*TWO HANDFULS?* Wow babe, you really are a slut!”

I threw a potholder at Brea then we both curled over with laughter. After calling in Pho delivery, the two of us ended up spending the evening in front of the TV watching *Meet Joe Black*. If anyone could heal a breakup, it was Brad Pitt in a tuxedo.

The next day it was business as usual. Julian and Brea, who was a lot perkier than the day before, went back to class. Julian had called the night before and I filled him in on the reunion between Brea and I. He wasn't surprised that we

made up but he was surprised about the pregnancy. I was a little unsure about whether or not Brea would want me to tell him about it but I figured Jonathan would end up filling him in eventually. Julian had still not heard a word from Jonathan by then, I was sure he would turn up.

I did not have to work until the afternoon which I knew was when Brandon had his first class so I thought it would be a good time to call him about my father. I dialed the number terrified of having to talk to him about Brea, he

didn't know that I knew about any of it so I figured if I kept my mouth shut we should be able to avoid a very uncomfortable subject.

“Jem” he answered sleepily.

“Hey Brandon, can we talk?”

“I...I'm not sure I want to talk about that right now Jem. It's just too early.”

So he did know? When did Brea even have a chance to tell him?

“Brandon, I am not sure what you are talking about but I am calling to talk to you about my dad. I went to see him Saturday.” I said pretending to be

completely clueless to avoid the drama.

“Oh, yeah...Um, how did it go?”

“Did Brea not tell you?”

“Yeah, she did. Sorry Jem, I just thought it would be nice if you told me instead of having to get everything through her.”

He snapped at me, so in defense I too I snapped back.

“Is that all you are going to apologize for?” I regretted the question before the last word left my mouth.

The line got quiet as if Brandon had

completely stopped breathing on the other end.

“I won’t say that I am sorry Jem. She is having my baby, I won’t be sorry for my child. It may not be a child that I had planned but it’s mine. Maybe Brea and I should never have let things go as far as we did but damn it Jemma...Damn it!”

I had not intended to talk about any of this. All I had wanted to do was make a quick phone call to see if Brandon knew anyone who could help me. I was starting to think Brea was right about Jerry Springer because my life was

turning into soap opera hell.

“I wanted it to be you, that was supposed to be our baby but you fucked everything up, *EVERYTHING*! So don’t you dare give me hell about this. I moved on, live with it!”

I would have given anything to hang up the phone right then and there but I could not put the damn thing down. The phone was glued to my hands and ears by invisible super glue.

“Gawd damn mother fucking shit! I cannot do this right now Jemma Lee. I am saying shit I don’t want to be saying

and if I don't hang up this phone you can bet your ass this will be our last phone call."

He only called me Jemma Lee when he was angry with me.

"Brandon, please don't yell at me. I should not have mentioned anything."

"Look, I fucking loved you, I do love you. But Brea, damn it, she has been there for me when I thought I wanted to die. I have said it before and I will say it again, you fucking ripped my gawd damn heart out and Brea was there helping me pick up the pieces, the whole time telling

me how much you fucking loved me. And when she came with me to my truck that day, after I realized I would never get you back, something snapped inside of me. I saw her differently, she wasn't your friend Brea anymore. She was mine. I fucking saw what had been in front of me the entire time I let you trample all over me and I fucking wanted it, so I took it. I made love to her and I am sorry if this hurts you but I fucking made her mine, I don't regret one damn second of it. And I sure as hell am not sorry. This might make you hate me for

the rest of your life, I will hate that you do because I will always love you, but I want *her*. She is carrying my baby and I fucking *want* her. Not because my child is growing inside of her but because she was the one who was there when you shit on me. That you might be hurting, that is ALL I will apologize for. Call my dad Jemma, you have the number.”

Brandon has never spoken to me like he was speaking to me now. I wanted to yell at him, to tell him that I hated him because a small part of me truly did. But I couldn't. What could I say? I had

driven the two of them together with my selfishness. Not to mention I was happy. Despite the fact that Brandon's words hurt, I could honestly say that for the first time in my life I was truly happy. I had Julian, he made me whole again, taking with him all of the pain that I had endured for far too long.

More than anything I wanted someone to do that for Brandon, take away all of the pain that I had caused and there was only one way that it could happen.

"Brandon." I whispered hoping not to be interrupted.

“What!” He barked.

“If you want her, come and get her.”

I hung up the phone finally giving him away, the boy that I had secretly been holding onto, because he was no longer mine to hold.

After I hung up the phone with Brandon I made one of the hardest calls of my life. I called Brandon's dad, a man who had cursed the ground I walked on since the day he first found me making out with his son on the family room pool table. OK, so maybe we were not *'just'*

making out. I might have been half naked with my head bobbing between his legs. It was safe to say I was not the kind of girl he had imagined his Ivy League son carrying on the family name with.

I would love to be a fly on the wall once he found out his precious was going to father a child with the woman he had once declared “The town mess hall, everyone has had her and nobody wanted to go back for seconds”. The one time she had stepped inside his two and a half story Barbie dream house, he told Brandon right in front of me that he

never wanted to see Brea back in his house again because “God only knows what rancid de cease she brings with her!”. Yeah, he was going to shit a brick!

“Alexander Hicks speaking.”

The receptionist had put me on hold for fifteen minutes before finally transferring me through.

“Yes, Mr. Hicks, this is Jemma Hayes.”

“I know who you are Miss Hayes, what can I do for you?”

I could tell how annoyed he was with me for calling him but I had to suffer

through for my father. Alexander Hicks was one of the best criminal prosecutors in the state, if he couldn't help me nobody could.

“It's about my father sir.” I paused.

“Go on, I don't have all day Jemma.”

I let out a breath and filled him in on everything. By the end of the conversation his demeanor had changed and gone from slightly annoyed to *in the zone*, with him agreeing to meet with me during his lunch hour the next day.

By the time my shift ended at The Coffee Bean I was ready call it all in. I didn't think anything could possibly get worse in the ridiculous soap opera life I was now living but it did. Half way through my shift Heather walked in. I had not seen her since the day she strolled into the Omega party with Julian and I had high hopes never to lay eyes on her again. Unfortunately for me, I seemed to be living in Crazyville with no way in sight for escape. All I could do was pray that she didn't recognize me so I put on my brightest smile and

pretended to be completely clueless.

“Welcome to Coffee Bean, how can I help you?”

Heather thoughtfully considered her choices, glancing back and forth between the menu on the wall behind me, to me directly.

“I will have a non fat decaf Ice blended Mocha, no cream.”

“That will be \$4.23 cents please.”

She pulled out a five dollar bill and passed it my way.

“Hey...” She pulled the money away.
DAMN IT, couldn't she just pay and go?

“Aren’t you that girl Julian was all hung up on?”

I sighed. “That would be me. Though there is no *was* about it.”

“Oh, I see, so you two never dated? Isn’t that just like a man, they decide they want a roll in the hay and end up turning it into something that it isn’t. They say girls are bad, but really men are so much worse.”

I honestly wanted to slap her.

“No, I mean he is still hung up on me. We are dating, actually we just got back

from a romantic trip to the beach.” You stupid, too hot for your own shit, *bitch*!

“Hm, that’s interesting, I spent the morning with him and he never mentioned you or the beach. He was just his usual sexy hot self.”

I swear on my life this woman is going to lose an entire head of hair if she does not leave and I mean now. I can feel the heat flowing into my cheeks and I am sure that at any moment steam began to steep out of my ears.

“Can you please pay me for your drink so that we can make it and you can gag

on it?" I blurt out.

I hear Rebecca stifle a laugh behind me, failing miserably to hold the entire thing in.

"Jemma" she giggles. "Um, we are out of mocha mix; think you can go grab some? I will man the register."

How the heck did Brea ever hate this girl? Right now I loved her so much I would almost be willing to make out with her right here and now. I did not need this crap, I did not need some spoiled little brat coming along and making everything in my life worse than

it already was. If I had to stay in the room with her one more second I was seriously going knock her right on her fat Puerto Rican ass. I took in a deep breath, gave Heather one final glare and stormed off into the store room.

How dare Heather bring her scrawny butt into my place of business and behave like my man gave a flying fuck about her. I knew what Julian and I had, I knew what we always had and it was a thousand times more than anything she would ever dream of having with him. We belonged to each other. I was going

to be his wife. I looked down to the ring on my hand. And he was going to be my husband.

Just then I felt my cell phone go off in my pocket indicating I had a new text, it was from Julian.

Julian: *I miss you*

Me: *Miss you too. Want to have dinner?*

Julian: *Can we have Sushi? You could lay naked on the table and I could eat it off your body.*

I seriously loved this man!

Me: *Only if I can eat dessert off of yours.*

Julian: *Sounds like a plan. Pick you up at 7?*

Me: *Perfect, I will be good and starved by then.*

Me: *Actually I am good and starved now, come feed me.*

Julian: *Oh, how hungry are you?*

Me: *Hungry enough to devour every last inch of you. Come to the bean so I can show you just how hungry I am.*

***Me:** Mm, I just checked, I am really really wet. My fingers are glistening.*

Of course I lied. I am pretty sure most business frown upon their employees fingering themselves up in the back room.

***Julian:** Fuck me! I think I just got hard. The girl sitting next to me in my Soc. Class is staring at my cock.*

***Me:** She'd better not go near your cock. Your cock belongs to me and I don't share my cock with anyone.*

That includes Heather and she better

remember it if she wants to wake up tomorrow with all of her limbs still intact.

Julian: *I want you so bad right now. Stop texting me before I jizz all over Mr. Bedichek's classroom. I love you sweetheart.*

Me: *I love you too. 7 is fine. If you are a good boy I will let you jizz all over me.*

Julian: *Damn it woman!*

Me: *You started it. Now, shut up and pay attention to your professor like a good little boy.*

Julian never failed to bring a smile to my face when I needed it the most.

“What is that smile about? You are beaming!”

Rebecca walked into the store room, picked up a bag of paper cups then took notice of the phone in my hands.

“Wait, were you just sexting?”

I blushed. “No! Thank you so much for getting me out of there. I was about to go ninja all over the place.”

“I saw, so that’s Heather huh? She’s kind of hot, but dumb as a box of rocks.

There is no way Julian could ever go for her. Not when he has you around.”

“Thanks, but I am not the least bit worried.”

The doorbell rang at exactly 6:23 and even though I had yet to put on the finishing touches for our dinner date I was excited to see Julian. Brea decided to hit the public library for books on everything baby so we had the house to ourselves. Since I had been like a cat in heat since our text earlier in the day I could think of a million things we could

do to fill the extra time. I was sadly disappointed when I found that it was not Brandon at the door instead finding Jonathan leaning against the doorway looking as if he had been ran over by a train. He said nothing; he simply lowered his head to the ground and stepped inside.

“She’s not here Jonathan.”

I honestly didn’t know what to do. He looked almost as worse for wear as Brea had the night before but other than the fact that he was Julian’s friend and obviously from the looks of it crazy

about my best friend I hardly knew him, let alone knew how to comfort him. I barely knew how to comfort myself.

“Is she with *him*?” he asked sadly.

“With who?”

Jonathan looked up at me with his puppy dog eyes.

“You mean Brandon? He is two thousand miles away Jonathan, they aren’t together, she is at the library. You can wait if you want.” Jonathan shook his head and sat down on the couch head back to the floor.

“I need to finish getting ready, Julian

will be here soon. Just make yourself at home, OK?”

Realizing he was not going to answer I turned and headed for my room but was stopped by the slight sound of his voice behind me. I did not actually hear what he had said so I asked him to repeat himself.

“I said how can you stand it?”

“It isn’t easy. Brandon and I have a past that is pretty well ingrained, loving Julian helps. I don’t love Brandon like I love Julian, not anymore. I am not so sure I ever loved him like that.”

Julian looked up at me with a pool of tears forming at the base of his eyes.

“But she does. I have never met him but she talks about him all the time. And now this. I feel like I know him and I hate him.”

The rage in Jonathan's eyes burned through me. Taking a moment to reflect on what he must be going through I walked to his side and sat down. I found myself desperately wanting to reassure him but I can't. I know Brea says that she wants Jonathan but what would she do if she knew Brandon wanted her, *REALLY*

wanted her?

“They have been friends for a very long time Jonathan. I don’t know where she stands with him.”

“But you know where he stands with her?”

I did know. I knew because Brandon, the man I loved half of my life, shoved it down my throat earlier that morning. He told me that he wanted her and then I told him to come and get her.

“I can’t answer that, I won’t. What Brandon feels for her has nothing to do with how she feels for you and I know

that she loves you.”

Jonathan’s eyes shot up and I could tell that my words offered him a tiny glimmer of hope.

“How do you know? Did she tell you?”

I could not help to smile at this grown man suddenly seeing him as child in the middle of a candy store.

“I have known her since she was nine Jonathan and yes, she told me. In all the time I have known her Brea has never told me she was falling in love with anyone. And I have never EVER seen her cry over a man for more than two

seconds. She was devastated when I got home.”

“I’m sorry for that. I just left, I couldn’t think and I wanted to yell at someone so I just left. I left before I said something that I had no way of taking back.”

I looked to Jonathan with understanding.

“What should I do? Tell me what to do Jemma. I don’t want to lose her.”

Remembering my previous conversation with Brea I let out a little laugh as I pictured Jonathan throwing Brea over his shoulder and carrying her

out of the apartment like a caveman.

“Throw her over your shoulder like a caveman and claim what is yours?” I joked.

He looked to me as if he were actually considering the idea.

“I don’t know, start by talking I guess. But the baby, it’s not going to just go away, she is keeping it. Brea could never abort a child, she will have it and she will love it. I will tell you that whatever you decide, Brandon will also be here to take care of that baby, no matter if he is halfway across the

country. He will be here. You have to be able to live with that.”

And then I realized something that had yet to truly sink it...I had to live with it as well.

I was so thankful when Julian walked into the apartment. He walked over to Jonathan and shook his hand letting him know that he was glad to see that he was OK. He seemed to be coming around at Julian's appearance so I excused myself to finish getting ready but before I could even put on my lipstick Julian peeked into the room.

“Uh, babe, a little uncomfortable out here. Can you come back please?”

I sighed annoyingly, what now? I left the room to see Brea standing against the front door of the apartment staring at Jonathan as if they were the last two people on earth. Jonathan was silent, still and staring at her as well. There was something ferocious in his eyes and I could see between the two of them why Julian was so uncomfortable, it was just plain weird. Even stranger when the silence was broken by the sound of Jonathan's feet rushing towards Brea. It

all happened in a matter of seconds, he grabbed hold of the back of her head pulling his lips into hers and kissing her harder than I have ever seen two people kiss in my life.

When they both pulled away they looked two each other for only a second before Jonathan scooped her up into his arms, flung open the door to the apartment and vanished down the hall taking my best friend with him. A sudden need to *save* Brea from her captor came over me and I started to run for the door, only I could not move. Julian had me by

the wrist and he was laughing.

“Oh no you don’t, let it happen. Leave it alone.”

I wanted so much to rip Julian off of me and rescue Brea but he was right. This was what she truly wanted, for Jonathan to show up and carry her away, so who was I to stand in the way? I only feared that Brandon was not taking my advice and running to scoop her up as well.

“Now, go finish doing whatever it is you needed to finish up earlier. My dick is hungry for Sushi and since we will

have the apartment to ourselves it will get to have its fill.”

Forty-five minutes later we were walking back into the apartment with two bags of raw fish.

Julian sat the bags of sushi down on the bar and without so much as a single word began to slowly undress me. This entire time I had thought he was only joking about eating dinner off of my body but according to Julian it was very much a reality.

“This has always been a fantasy of

mine.” explaining that he had seen the scene play out in a movie once. I had never seen him so excited so I decided not to argue and played along.

After he took from me my last piece of clothing he laid me out on the coffee table placing a couch pillow beneath my head.

“Damn you are sexy” he said disappearing into the kitchen and coming back with our dinner. He strategically placed each piece of Sushi on top of my body making sure to balance a tuna roll on the tips of my nipples ordering me not

to move an inch. Once his work was complete, he began to trail a finger in and out of the design he had created sending chills up and down my arms and legs.

“Do you like that sweetheart?”

I nodded unable to speak for fear that I would send our food falling to the floor. As hungry as I was for his touch I had barely eaten anything all day and my stomach was growling.

“Are you hungry?” He snaked his fingers up my leg with chopsticks stopping at my right hip. He slowly

picked up a piece of Unagi with the delicate wooden sticks and brought it to my lips.

“Taste?” I nodded lightly and bit into the sweet salty piece of eel on top of a bed of white rice. I felt kind of silly laying there on my back chewing but all was right in the world after Julian swallowed his half and leaned down to kiss the very hip he had taken the piece of fish from. We continued the taste test until the two of us devoured every last bite. He would pick up a piece, I would eat half, he eat would eat the other and

then he would kiss the place he got it from as if I were burned by the fish and he was trying to make it all better. By the time we were finished both of us were full but my wetness proved that I parts of me were still very, very hungry.

“Don’t move sweetheart.” He ordered coming back about 5 minutes later completely naked and as hard as a rock. He picked me up into his arms and carried me to a warm bubble bath complete with candles.

The tub in my bath room was small but that didn’t stop Julian from climbing in

first and pulling me between his legs. Never saying a word, he kissed a trail down my neck then pulling my head to the side he continued his sweet caress on my lips until he pulled away to soap the sponge hanging from hook on the side of the wall.

He started with my neck, slowly guiding the sponge to my breasts. After they were clean he lightly ran his fingertips over each one until a chill washed over my body, he followed with a gentle squeeze and pinched my hardened nipples until I cried out. Once

he was satisfied with my response he moved the sponge down into the water and over my heat, teasing me with his free hand until I couldn't take it anymore.

“Julian, please!” I begged.

Hearing my plea he let go of the sponge and shoved both hands between my legs cupping me and pulling me tighter into his body. Before I knew it he slid a finger inside of me, then two more until I was full. The three fingers moved in and out of me while the thumb on the other hand circled my warm swollen nub.

“Julian, yes!” I screamed. I had needed the release all day and though I wanted to feel him buried deep inside of me I would settle for anything he was willing to give me right then.

“Are you going to come for me sweetheart?” he whispered into my ear.

“Yes, Julian, don’t stop! Please don’t stop.”

And he didn’t, he continued the assault on my fragile core until I was pushed over the edge and barely able to recover.

After I came down from my orgasmic

high I switch places with Julian when running the sponge over Julian's hardened staff I remembered that I had yet to have my dessert.

“You promised that I could have dessert! How about we get out of this tub and I allow you to properly feed me?” I playfully exclaimed.

I ordered a very naked Julian to bed and left the room just long enough to grab my goodies. I had picked up a can of whipped cream and cherries on the way home. Though I did not believe him to be serious about the sushi I had every

intention of having my fill of him.

I returned to find Julian on his back, hands behind his head and his fully erect cock standing at full attention. Oh yes, I was definitely going to enjoy taking my time tasting every last inch of his beautiful shaft until he comes in my mouth.

“I called Alexander Hicks today.” I whispered into his chest watching his nipples harden at the sudden impact of my breath. After finishing up dessert and

making love we were both so spent we could barely climb into each other's arms.

“And he is?” I had completely forgotten to tell him.

“Brandon's dad, he's a lawyer, criminal prosecutor actually. I am meeting with him for lunch tomorrow.”

“I see, has he agreed to help?”

I shook my head side to side. “Not yet, but seeing as he hates me and still wanted to meet with me I would say that is a pretty good sign.”

“Hate you? Don’t be silly, I don’t think anyone could hate you.”

I wish that were the case but I knew all too well how Alexander Hicks felt about me. He had cornered me about the third time Brandon brought me over to the house. Brandon had gone to help his mom unload groceries from the car leaving me alone in the family room. His dad startled me when he walked in.

“I know who you are. You’re not good enough for my son.”

It shocked me to hear Mr. Hick’s excruciatingly blunt confession. I had

visited several times before and he had always seemed so kind and genuine.

“I did some digging Miss Hale. Brother and mother murdered, father serving a life sentence for the murder of your mother and you seem to have some health issues that I do not find very settling. You are trouble Miss Hicks, trouble my only son does not need.”

“No, he very much hates my guts.” I replied.

“For what it’s worth, I could never

hate you.”

For what it is worth, that is the only thing that matters.

“Julian.” He replied with a “Hmm?”

“What happens if I am pregnant?”

I don’t know why my head chose that very moment to think about the possible outcome of our weekend sex-fest but suddenly all I could think about was babies. Julian rolled me over onto my back and climbed half way on top of me.

“What happens is the same thing that would have happened anyway just a

little backwards. You get all dolled up in a pretty white dress, I get a tuxedo; you take my breath away as you walk down the aisle with your father on your arm...”

Suddenly I became very teary eyed at the prospect of my father walking me down the aisle towards the man he has known since he was a small boy.

“...and we show the world exactly how much we belong together. Only I will be even happier than I would have been to begin with because I won’t just be marrying the girl of my dreams, I will

be marrying the girl of my dreams who is also the mother of my child, our child. Everything in my life would be as it should be which is perfect.”

I smiled, “How do you always know the right thing to say Julian?”

“I don’t always know what to say sweetheart, I only always know what to say to you. Because you aren’t just you, you are me as well. We are one in the same and a part of each other.”

I reached up, grabbed his cheek and pulled him into my lips. “I love you Julian.” I said.

He lay back down next to me pulling me back into his chest.

“Can I ask you something else, something I have been wondering for a while?”

“You can ask me anything Skipper, anything at all.”

I smiled at his childhood nickname for me.

“I was just wondering how you managed all of these years having to live with that you lived through. How did I become so fucked up and you stay so level headed?”

He sighed “Hm, well, I wouldn’t exactly say that I was always level headed. I guess it helped that my Grandmother got me the heck out of Taylor, I was not stuck having that day shoved down my throat by every person in town every five minutes.”

I fully understood what that could do to a person.

“If it were not for my grandmother I would have had to experience just that. Did you know that my parents had a will that named your parents my guardians should anything happen to them?” I

looked up at his face and shook my head no.

“Well, they did and from what my grandmother said, they wanted me but she would not allow it. She was scared that they would one day come to resent me and make my life a living hell. I am sure they never imagined being taken from this world by a sorry piece of shit like Ignacio Hernandez right alongside Nick when they had the will written up. She expressed her feelings to your dad and he agreed to let her take me understanding the fear she had as

legitimate. If he did not agree she had every intention of fighting it.”

“So, um...you could have been my brother?” I let out a small giggle.

He threw me back onto my back and bore a stare into my eyes.

“I absolutely one hundred percent could NEVER have been your brother...” He pulled my hand down to his erect shaft and strategically wrapped my fingers around it. “..There is nothing brotherly about this. That is how it gets just about every single time I look at you.” Nope, definitely nothing brotherly

about that!

Julian stayed with me that night but left early due to the fact that he had class and no clothes here to change into. I was thankful for the time alone to gather my thoughts enough to figure out how I was going to handle my lunch date with Mr. Hicks. I was still unsure why he had even agreed to meet with me. Did he want to see my face when he told me that I was hopeless? After hours of beating myself down with an endless array of ridiculous scenarios I decided it was

time to check out for a while. Before I made it back to the comfortable silence of sleep Brea called to tell me that Jonathan had pretty much carried her all the way to Puerto Rico.

“What the hell Brea? What about your classes?”

“I have a paper due Friday, everything else is just lecture and review. I already called Tim and asked if I could borrow his notes for English, Music appreciation was canceled this week, the professor is sick, and Rebecca is going to fill me in on Political science. I

will be back by Thursday.”

“Why did he drag you off to Puerto Rico in the first place?”

“He says you told him to.”

I was amazed by his serious mistranslation of my caveman comment.

“I never told him to take you to Puerto Rico! I told him to drag you off like a caveman and I was joking.”

Brea was laughing, I could hear Jonathan yelling at her to “Get off the phone and get back on my dick woman!”. I had a feeling he was only half way joking.

“Well, whatever you said. THANK YOU! I have to go. The baby is getting a serious lesson in sex education.”

“Uh, uncalled for!”

“Whatever, I just wanted you to know that I was OK.”

And then I heard Brea moan just before the phone hit the floor.

“Brea!” I called out but she was no longer listening, she was screaming Jonathans name in the background while sounds of wet flesh slapping together burned itself into my ear. Admittedly a

part of me wanted to stay glued to the phone but decided it best not to embed the image of Brea bent over backwards filled the hilt with all things Jonathan into my head any more than it already was.

Chapter Twenty

Mr. Hicks sent me a text confirming our meeting and we both agreed to meet at The Hollow, a small French restaurant in Georgetown right up the street from his office, Bentley, Strathmore and Hicks. I pulled my hair back and put on my most capable outfit, a knee length pinstriped skirt, a pair of black pumps and the silky white button down blouse that I saved for job interviews.

I arrived to find that he was not alone, sitting next to him was a man about average height, , blonde hair very neatly groomed, glasses, suit, tie and a certain confidence that let you know that he thought he was important.

“Miss Hale.” the men rose. “This is District Attorney Mike Adler. Mike is the lead DA for Williamson County.”

Mr. Adler motioned for me to take a seat, both men sitting down right along with me.

“After we spoke yesterday morning, I thought it might be a good idea to have

Mike sit in on our meeting today. I have briefed him with the news in which we spoke yesterday and he agreed to be here.”

I was feeling a bit overwhelmed but at the same time I was pleased to see that Mr. Hicks was willing to help without prejudice.

“I would actually like to hear the entire story from you Miss Hale. You have to understand that the State of Texas takes its convictions very seriously, your father admitted his guilt, so should I even consider giving this case a second

glance you would need to provide me with some sort of incentive other than “I forgot”.

“I didn’t just forget Mr. Adler, I had a complete mental breakdown. I was just a little girl, I had lost my brother, my parents were miles away from me and I felt alone. Always so alone.”

“I see, I am assuming that you were seeing someone, a therapist or grief counselor perhaps, after said breakdown?”

“Many someone’s. I was diagnosed with Post traumatic Stress Disorder by

most of them. Eventually I was seen by Dr. Schneider, who is my current doctor, and I was then diagnosed with rapid cycling Bi-Polar disorder. Something he felt was triggered by the events that had caused the PTSD. He was the one to suggest the visit with my father who was encouraged by his own doctor to admit to the truth that happened the day my mother was killed. It was an accident Mr. Adler, a horrible accident. Truthfully I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive myself for the fact that my father has spent the better part of a

decade suffering simply because I had a bad memory.”

“Would you be willing to submit to a polygraph and sign a release allowing us full access to your psychiatric records?”

I had not even considered that the courts might want to see my records. The thought of everyone knowing every tiny detail of my fucked up life terrified me. But if it would help my father I would be willing to do anything. I owed him that much.

“Anything you need, I will do it. I want my father out of that place, he did not do

anything wrong. My father had to suffer the loss of his entire family locked up in an institution. I cannot begin to comprehend how much he has suffered. I have to help him and I will do whatever it takes.”

“Good to know. You understand that should everything lean towards the fact that your father was wrongly convicted and I began the pardoning process it could still be a while before he sees the light of day?”

I nodded, I did understand.

“Good. Alex, am I to assume that you

will representing the Hales in their endeavors?”

Mr. Hicks bobbed his head. “I would do anything for my family.” He stated with fact.

It was then that I knew Brandon had called his father on my behalf. I don’t know what he said to get his father to agree to help me but I was happy for whatever it was.

“Very well, I will have my secretary send over the necessary paperwork.”

“Excellent, now let’s eat, I am starving!” Mr. Hicks exclaimed letting

out a small laugh.

We spent the rest of our lunch eating and talking about the process which could lead to a pardon. Mr. Adler informed me that since my father had confessed , his conviction would still be on record, something that Mr. Hicks assured he would fight to have removed. He felt confident that given the fact that his state of mind was impaired as was mine that he could at the very least obtain an order of non disclosure which would pretty much seal my father's arrest records.

“Shall I walk you to your car Jemma?”

Mr. Adler had already made his getaway letting us know that he would be getting back to us within the next few weeks with his decision. Before he left he made it a point to let me know that he wanted no part in leaving an innocent man to rot behind bars. If my father was in fact innocent, which I knew he was, then he would stop at nothing to see to it that he was set free.

Mr. Hicks reached down and took my hand helping me from my seat and we

began the short walk to my car.

“My son tells me that you ended things. He muttered a bunch of nonsense about wanting to postpone Columbia and then you ended things. I must say Miss. Hale, that I truly underestimated you. But then I have known that for quite some time. I want you to know that I hold no ill will towards you.

I didn't even realize ill will was a possibility, I just thought that he hated me.

“I understand more than most what a father will do for his child Mr. Hicks.”

He smiled. “Yes, it seems you do. I just want you to know that I am not just doing this for my son. I am doing it for you, no offense Jemma, but you stopped my son from making one of the biggest mistakes of his life.”

At least we both agreed on something, had Brandon stayed it would have been a huge mistake. He and I were not cut out to be together. I have no doubts that I would have still met Julian and in the end I would have probably hurt him worse.

“I love Brandon. I was not worth that

kind of sacrifice.”

Mr. Hicks looked at me as if he was determining which tie to pair with his new suit, putting his hands to his chin, as I had seen his son do many times before. Then, taking me completely by surprise, he laughed.

“I am not so sure about that Jemma Hale, I am just not so sure.” After which he opened the door to my car and walked away letting me know that his secretary would contact me within the next forty eight hours to come in to sign a release of records.

Chapter Twenty One

More than three weeks had passed before we actually heard from the District Attorney, thankfully when he finally got around to calling it was to let us know that he would be going ahead with the Pardon suggesting that a letter to The President detailing the official events of the night in question would help. Of course I agreed to write the

letter; however I ended up needing Julian, my life line, next to me while I wrote it.

Dear Mr. President,

My name is Jemma Lee Hale, I am 19 years old. Ten years ago I had the unfortunate life experience of losing my brother Nicolai in a horrific crime. You see, Nicolai was gunned down in the middle of a crowded restaurant after a crazed man by the name of Ignacio Hernandez shot and murdered his wife and her lover. There was no reason for this man to murder my

brother who was only twelve years old at the time, it was an evil act carried out by an evil human being. Not only was my brother killed that day but so were the parents of his best friend Julian, who was also injured in the attack. It was hard for my parents to lose their child in such a horrible and tragic way but it was also hard on me as well. Not only dealing with unimaginable loss but also watching my entire family fall apart before my eyes.

My mother, who was the foundation of

our family, hid her heartache well, on the surface she went about her daily life as if nothing happened while inside she was slowly breaking. She threw everything she had into helping my father who was diagnosed with Schizophrenia a few months after the incident. I watched my parents fall, rise and fall again in such a short amount of time that I was exhausted. During this entire time, I, myself, was falling apart. I don't fault my parents for being caught up in their grief, I can only imagine how alone a parent would

feel after losing a child but the fact is that for a long time I went unnoticed. Nobody saw that my eight year old heart was breaking into, I was quite possibly more alone than any of them but never said a word. I just went about my life and tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, they were hurting and I did not want them to have more worry.

And it worked, we moved away and things began to get better. That was, until my dad stopped taking his medication and ended up having to

enter a psychiatric hospital to help control his illness. After a long stay he came home different, better. He was not completely whole, how could you expect him to be, but he was more like my father than what I had remembered in a very long time. Again, things kept getting better, though it seemed like my mother had become more withdrawn than ever.

Then one day, when I was 10 years old I heard a commotion downstairs. I went down to see what the fuss was about and found my mother with a gun

in her hands. My father begged her to put the gun away but she kept yelling at him, saying that she just needed to see her son, that he had nobody to protect him. I remember thinking to myself "What about me, why don't you protect me? Why don't you even look at me?" Heck, I had been standing there for at least ten minutes and they never even noticed I was there.

Eventually my father managed to bring my mother back to reality long enough for him to get the gun from her hands. He took it and sat it down on a

table right in front of me. They still did not see me, I didn't try to hide, but I was simply invisible to them. After my father sat down the gun he went to my mother's side and put his arms around her, but I guess she did not want to be touched because she became completely unglued.

Everything from this moment on I remember in slow motion, I watched her arms fly out from her side and she began to hit my dad over and over again screaming that everything was his fault. That he didn't try hard

enough to keep Nicolai home. She yelled and she hit, over and over again. All I wanted was for everything to stop. I wanted her to stop hitting my father, for him to not be sick anymore and for me to just get some sleep, something I had not done peacefully for quite some time.

I was suddenly very angry and all rational thought seemed to vanish from my young mind. Even now, I don't completely remember picking up the gun, all I remember for certain is seeing it in my hands. I began to yell at

the both of them “I hate you, none of you love me, I want Nicolai...” all kinds of nonsense that I am sure seems very juvenile to you but I was only ten and I only understood as much as any ten year old could.

I saw the look on both of their faces when they finally noticed me standing there with the gun in my hands. They were not only shocked but they were heartbroken. My father mumbled something to me, I don't remember what, and then he ran to me placing his hand on the top of the gun in my hand. I

remember watching his mouth move the whole time but I don't actually remember a word that he said other than "Jemma baby, let go of the gun princess." And so I let go only he wasn't quite expecting my grip to loosen as quickly as it did and the gun hit the ground going off on impact.

I put my hands to my ears and began to scream. My father noticed my mom first; I could barely open my eyes. When I finally did open them I saw that my mother stood in place grasping her stomach with both hands, it took me a

moment to realize it was because she had been shot by the escaped bullet. I watched as the blood pooled between her fingers, after a few seconds her hands vanished, covered in red.

When she hit the floor fear spread over me, all I wanted to do was run and so I did. I turned around and bolted up the stairs, my father following me, begging me to stop every step of the way. I was terrified that he was going to hurt me; in my head I had just murdered my mother. It did not matter that the gun went off after hitting the

floor. All that mattered was that had I never touched it in the first place my mother would not be bleeding to death in the middle of the living room floor.

I eventually made it to the upstairs bathroom and locked myself inside. When my father started screaming at the door I instantly became overcome with fear, fear of what I do not know, and I began to scream. I felt like someone had their arms around me and was tossing me all around the room. It was not until I heard my father's first kick that I realized I had destroyed the

entire bathroom making that unidentified fear even more intense.

Not being able to face my father I crawled out of the bathroom window just as he managed to kick in the bathroom door following me out onto the roof. I saw that he had the gun in his hands. He was not pointing it at me; it was just there, until it wasn't. The moment I heard the loud pop of another bullet I jumped. My father tells it like I tripped but it was him that tripped, not me. He tripped, dropped the gun, it went off and I wished like hell that it

had hit me. When I realized that it had not, I jumped from the roof.

I was ten years old and all I wanted in the entire world was to die. I no longer wanted to live in a world where strangers killed brothers and stole friends, a world where parents went crazy and ignored their children and a world where a little girl count no longer remember what it was like to be a little girl. I myself only faintly remembered what the world was like before my brother was so tragically taken from our family, a world of day

dreams, where I was a beautiful fairy princess and danced in the sunlight all day long. A world where Barbies married Julians and not Kens. A world where I could just be a child.

I woke up days later in the hospital. According to doctors I had suffered a horrible concussion but amazingly survived thanks to a very painful holly bush that left scratches and cuts all over my body. The worst part for everyone involved was that the memory that I had of the night in question was not even real. Somehow in my young

mind I saw my father murdering my mother, I saw my father trying to murder me. I still do not fully understand why my head remembered it so skewed. My Doctor says that children who have suffered tragedy have a way of protecting themselves from the worst kind of pain, it often times includes making up a completely fictional life or in my case story. I am just thankful that after years of therapy I can finally remember the events as they actually happened.

Soon, I am going to be married to a

wonderful man, a man who came back into my life after being absent far too long. This man was my brother's best friend; his parents were killed the same day that Nicolai was by the same gunman. His name is Julian Ackles and he was like a second son to my father, who has been suffering for a crime that he did not commit for way too long.

I want more than anything to have my father home again, to have him walk me down the aisle and give me away to the man of my dreams. You have daughters of your own Mr. President, you know as

well as any man what a blessing it would be to give your daughter away on that day to a man that you would proudly call your son. Julian is that man for my father.

Please, besides my aunt, he is the only family that I have left. He is a good man; there is not an ounce of evil in his entire body. Please do not let my father be another victim of the monster who took so many lives. Ignacio Hernandez is the only evil person in my sad but all too true tale.

Sincerely,

Jemma Lee Hale

Chapter Twenty Two

“What does it say?” Brea asked pounding on the bathroom door.

“Come on sweetheart, it has been way more than three minutes, open up!”

It has been six weeks since Mr. Hicks and I first met with the DA and we were still waiting for word as to whether or not my father's pardon had been approved or denied. In the meantime,

there was something else that I had been waiting for as well...my period. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I am not really sure how to look at it, it was four weeks late.

Julian and Brea had both wanted to come with me into the bathroom for the test but I refused to allow either of them see me straddle a toilet while pee poured out of my body onto a tiny little stick. It was gross enough for me to have to watch.

Brea had also insisted that Jonathan join us in said bathroom. Thankfully for

me Jonathan didn't even show up.

“Oh no I'm not, this is for Julian and Jemma, and I know where I am not wanted. Unlike some people I know.”

What Jonathan did not know is that there was no way I was taking this test without my best friend and she knew it. She might not be in the room with me watching me piss myself but she was close enough that if I flipped out she would be by my side in seconds.

Jonathan and Brea had been getting along great and by the time they got back from Puerto Rico Jonathan had an

apartment lined up and was ready to start school with me during the upcoming semester. Not only that but he had asked Brea to marry him. She thought about it a few days but in the end she said yes.

Brandon called me a few days after the proposal to confirm with me that it was true. I am not really sure why he thought Brea would lie to him about it but Brandon rarely thought rationally where love was involved. Sadly, once the fact was confirmed Brandon vanished from both of our lives. Brea and I have both tried to call him but he refuses to answer

the phone which is so unlike Brandon.

“Jemma open the gawd damn door, chica!”

I really wanted to open the door but at the same time I found it kind of funny listening to each of them sweat.

“Ouch, damn it Brea, don’t fucking pinch me!”

I heard through the door.

“Then be the Alpha, make your woman get her happy ass out here so I can find out if I am going to be an aunt!”

Giggling I opened the door a crack. “Julian, please Brea, only Julian” I said

trying my best not to give anything away.

Brea pouted and let Julian join me in the bathroom understanding that this was not about her but about me and the man I would be giving my life to in a few short months, though no piece of paper could give him something that he already had.

“Well sweetheart, what does it say?”

“I kind of took all three.”

Thanks to Brea, I had the inside scoop on pregnancy test taking. She ended up having to buy three tests before she actually got a response. I figured, better

safe than sorry!

I fanned the three tests out in front of Julian, making sure all three windows were showing.

“I don’t understand, what do two pink lines mean?”

I smiled as I heard Brea scream from the other side of the door where she was obviously listening in.

“IT MEANS SHE’S PREGNANT, STUPID!”

Julian looked at me for confirmation and I just bobbed my head up and down.

“Are you serious? I’m going to be a

daddy?”

“Uh huh!” Seeing the joy on his face brought tears to my eyes.

Julian threw his arms around my waist and softly kissed me on the lips, so softly you would have thought that I was made out of glass.

“Oh Skipper, you have made me the happiest man in the world! What do you say we put on those wings and go dancing?”

He pulled me closer and in the same delicate way he kissed me again. This

time however, I did not allow him to pull away. Instead I ran my tongue over his lips and reached my hand down into his pants causing him jump.

“Not yet daddy, mommy is hungry. In fact I would say she is downright starved!”

Epilogue

“I look like a beached whale!” I declared. I had waited for this moment my entire life and here I was, four and a half months pregnant looking like I was ready to explode at any minute.

“You do not, you look incredible.” Brea said zipping me up into what felt like two tons of wedding gown hell.

“Oh shit, it’s too tight. It fucking hurts bitch, help me take it off!” I pulled and tucked at the waistline on the dress trying to get it to fit right but it was no use. Every day it seemed like I had added on another twenty pounds.

“Will you shut up and stop your whining! Jesus Jem, I’m several months further along than you are, my bladder hurts, I have hemorrhoids growing out of my ass and I swear, she has gotten so big that I am positive Jonathan stabbed her in the head with his dick last night.”

“TOO MUCH INFORMATION

BREA! You are gonna to make me puke my breakfast all over the damn dress. And don't you dare complain about your tiny freakin' baby, if these little guys don't get off of my bladder I am going to end up peeing myself up and down the aisle!"

Julian and I went in for our first visit with Dr. Wilkerson, eager to see our little peanut when we got the shock of a lifetime. We were not having one little peanut, we were having three little peanuts. A few months ago there was not a doubt in my mind that I did not want

children and here I was happily in misery carrying three of them. I honestly blame Brea, she jinxed us, three tests, three babies. Not that I did not cherish each and everyone of the beautiful blessings that were proof of the love between myself and my soon to be husband.

“One more time, suck it in.”

“I am sucking it in, there is nothing to suck in I am as hard as a rock.” I shrieked back at her.

“That’s what Julian said right before he stuffed you good and full with his

spawn.”

“Oh shut up!” I barked just before noticing my dad smiling from the doorway of the dressing room.

“How about you let daddy give it the old Texas try, princess?”

Two days after Julian and I got the news that I was pregnant with triplets we finally got the call that we had all been waiting for. The president had granted my fathers pardon in full. A week later Julian and I drove my aunt down to Galveston to bring him home and he has pretty much been by my side

ever since.

“Please, Daddy! Brea is trying to kill me with all of her pulling and tugging.” I begged.

“Waa, waa, waa. She has been doing nothing but whining since we started getting ready. PLEASE by all means zip her up so we can shut her up.”

My dad laughed at Brea. “OK girls, Brea when she sucks I will pull the back together, you zip.” Brea nodded at him in understanding. “On the count of three: one, two, three!”

It was zipped! We all cheered with

excitement as if the “I do’s” had just taken place. I know a lot of people wait until after the baby is born to get married when faced with my kind of situation but there was no way we were waiting. The two of us had waited for one another far too long, it was time to become one and start down the road to forever together.

“You look absolutely stunning, sweetheart. That boy is going to drop dead the moment he sees you.”

Then Brea mumbled... “Oh, he is going to drop something alright and dead isn’t it.”

“BREA!” I snapped. “My dad is here!”

“Oh please, he’s not blind you know, he knows you aren’t a virgin.” She said patting my very pregnant stomach.

I looked to my dad who was not only beaming with pride at the daughter who he had unintentionally missed grow up, but he was blushing at the thought of his daughter being molested by the big bad wolf.

Brea adjusted my veil as my father reached to grab my hand.

“Ready, Princess?”

I nodded pausing for a second to ask

my father a question that had been weighing on my mind since the day at the hospital months before.

“Daddy, how did you know? You told Julian that you always knew he was the one. How did you know who I was going to end up marrying, I was only a little girl.”

My dad smiled recalling my childhood.

“A father knows. Even though your brother was not always the best friend, that boy stuck it out and it wasn't because of Nicolai. In all the time they were friends, he never once failed to

find time with you. Even when you were a baby, he would stare at you while you slept, he watched every moment you were in your mother's arms like he was waiting to catch you if she dropped you."

I could feel the smile on my face listening to my father's memories of the boy who knew me when. I couldn't see my smile but I knew that it must have gone on forever.

"And on your fourth birthday he brought you these cheap purple fairy wings that his mother said he got from

the Dollar Tree, he had insisted on buying them with his own money. I remember your face when you pulled them out of the bag, you looked like it was the greatest present you had ever gotten, when we told you they were from Julian...”

“Julian bought me those wings?” I did not remember that at all. I wonder if he remembered. If he did he sure has never let on.

“Um hmm, when we told you he bought them you put them on and didn’t take them off again until they got so worn out

we had to throw them in the trash. You went so bat shit crazy when you couldn't find them that your mother sent me out to find another pair. Thank God I had the mindset to buy every pair they had because we ended up having to replace them once every few months. We never told you they were a new, we just let you think they were the same wings. You never even noticed that the holes vanished in between pairs.”

The truth was that I chalked it up to the fact that they were magic and far as I am concerned, even now learning the truth,

they still are.

“Anyway, I would sometimes catch Julian watching you while you danced all over the yard in the wings he bought you. That is when I recognized the look of total and complete awe. I knew that look well; I had the same look every time I looked at your mother. Like she was the only woman in the entire world.”

“Oh my gosh, how sweet!” I forgot Brea was even in the room.

I was so entranced by my father’s story that I even forgot I was standing before

him in my wedding gown looking as if I had sucked in a yoga ball.

“I love you, daddy.” I said then took his hand. “I am ready for you to walk me down the aisle now.”

The doors opened to the chapel and before the music began to play I looked around at all of the people that I loved. I missed seeing Brandon's face in the crowd but I knew how hard it would be for him to watch me marry another man, his heart might now be breaking for Brea but at one time, for the longest time his

heart broke for me. I did not forgive him for not showing up, because there was nothing to forgive.

I found the faces of all of our college friends, extended family from both sides and in the front of the small church I found the empty row that we saved for the family who could not be here. In the pew sat their photographs in simple black frames where they would have been seated had they been here. On the end of the aisle sat a small plaque that read,

Reserved in

memory:

Nicolai Wayne

Hale

Elaine Marie

Hale

Howard Reed

Ackles

Victoria Maria

Ackles

Though they may be

gone,

They are not

forgotten.

Julian and I both agreed that there could be no wedding without the four of them and so we did the only thing that we could. I then looked over to my friend Brea who stood alone as my maid of honor. She was as beautiful as the day we met. And then my eyes found Julian. I had purposely saved the best for last. He stood in front of Jonathan who I barely noticed because I only had eyes for Julian.

Finally, he stood before me, probably

the sexiest man ever to don a tuxedo, wearing a pair of bright blue fairy wings, the very wings I had given him so many years ago. He smiled lovingly in my direction after watching the silent laugh make its escape from my lips.

After guiding me to Julian's side my father and I stopped, waiting for our cue from the pastor.

“Who gives this woman to be wed?” my father beamed with joy.

“I do!” He then turned me to face Julian. After which he gently removed my arm from his and gently placed my

hand into Julian's.

“She's all yours son, take care of my family.” He said giving Julian a nod.

“Forever, I will take care of them with everything I have for as long as I live. That's a promise sir!”

My dad smiled and stepped away. Then Julian leaned into me and whispered into my ear.

“I told you I would be your fairy King but you seem to have forgotten that you are to be my fairy queen.”

Julian motioned to Jonathan who pulled from the back of the front pew the most

beautiful pair of fairy wings I had ever seen in my life. They were not only huge, but completely white to match my dress. Once Jonathan moved them closer I could see the faintest hint of purple sparkle. He handed the wings to Julian who then slipped them over my arms whispering once again into my ear.

“No more Dollar Tree wings for you my queen.”

I giggled and a tear slipped down my cheek. Everything about my life was perfect, I was happy and marrying the one person who had ever owned my

heart. It was his yesterday, it is his now and it will be his every day for the rest of our lives.

Julian is my King, my true love, my best friend. He was my when, he was my yesterday, and he will be my tomorrow, forever, always and every second in between.

Beginning

The End

Stay tuned for part 2 in the
From Boys to Men trilogy,
The Boy who knew me best,
Brea's story.

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I want to begin by thanking my husband
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My Grandmother for teaching me that

beauty is so much more than a pretty face
and for giving me the strength to survive.

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when my head was a giant mess.

And a BIG HUGE thank you to Julian, Jemma, Brandon, Jonathan & Nicolai who are so much more to me than names on a page.

Lastly, to my experiences. I have suffered the effects of Bi-Polar disorder since I was 13 years old. At that time it was called Manic depression. Mental illness has taken a huge toll on my life but thanks to so many supportive people I have been able to keep it under control keeping my incidents at a minimal level. There are days when I am bouncing off of the wall and days where I just want to

cry but I always muscle through it. According to the US census approximately 57.7 million people suffer from some kind of mental illness, it is a horrible disease that can seriously take over your life if you do not seek help. If you suspect you need help or know someone who might need help please speak out. You have no idea how wonderful life can be if you treat the symptoms. You are not powerless, you are everything, you can beat it!

