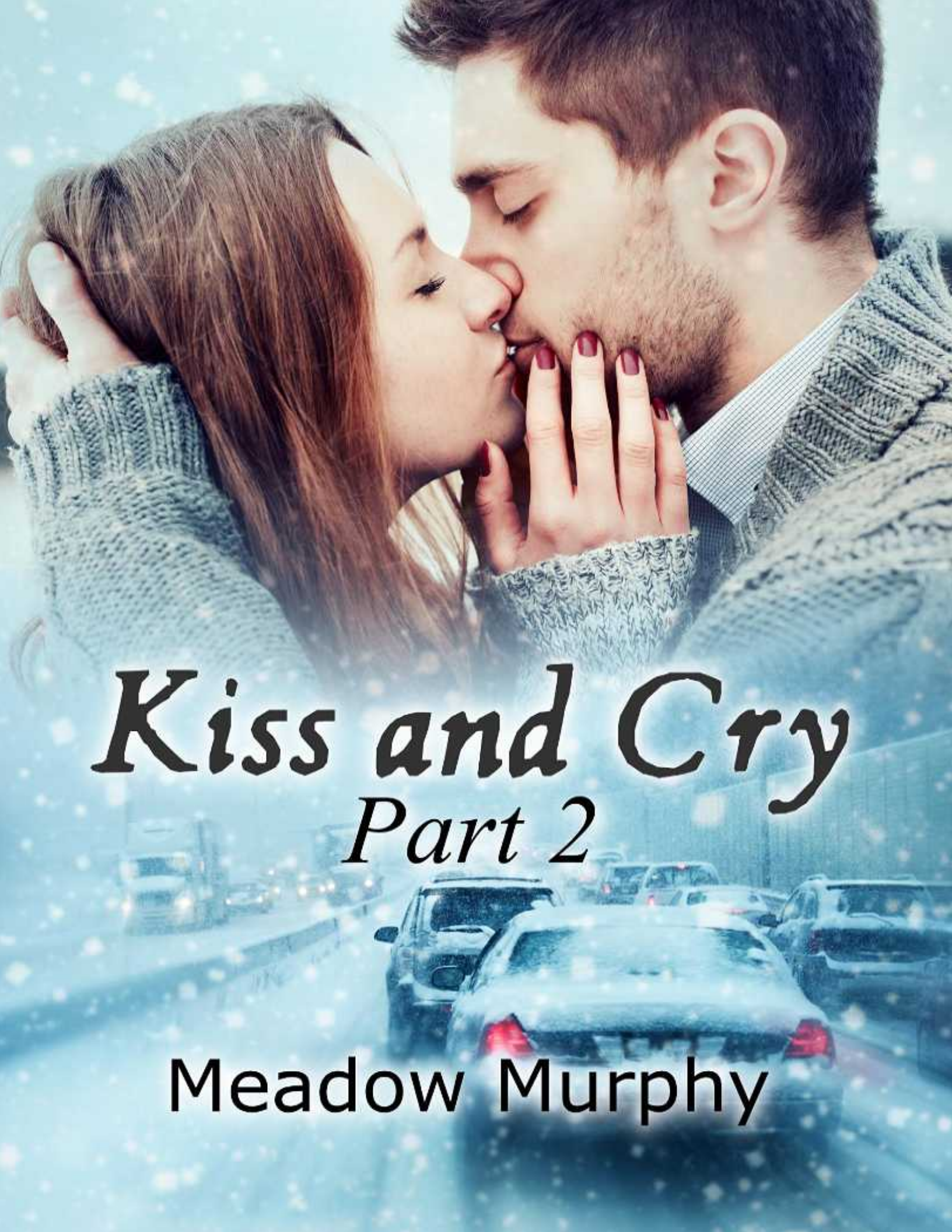


A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace, kissing. The woman has long brown hair and is wearing a grey knit sweater. The man has short brown hair and a beard, also wearing a grey knit sweater. They are in a snowy environment, with snowflakes falling around them. In the background, a traffic jam is visible on a highway, with several cars stuck in the snow. The overall mood is romantic and cozy.

Kiss and Cry

Part 2

Meadow Murphy

Kiss and Cry

Part 2

What if you can't forgive and forget?

By
Meadow Murphy

[Obooko Edition](#)

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Prologue

We figure skated the best pairs program of our lives and I collapse on the ice in sheer physical and mental exhaustion as the fans scream and wave their Canadian flags; the applause is thunderous. Flowers, stuffed teddy bears, and cards of condolences tumble onto the ice from all directions. The Olympic sized arena is packed to capacity, not an empty seat can be found, and not a single person remains seated. Flashes nearly blind us as photographers and fans alike snap up pictures of us in our moment of glory. It is exactly the way I dreamed it to be with one exception; dad isn't here to watch me. He died of a massive heart attack four days ago.

An army of little girls called sweepers in cute skating dresses and long ponytails step onto the ice to collect our flowers while Ryan carries me off. Coach Hicks waits for us at the boards to help me; his face is covered in tears. Coach walks me over to the Kiss and Cry so Ryan can put his guards on.

I face the camera and mouth "I love you" to mom who is home mourning the loss of my father. She couldn't bring herself to come and watch me compete. I was about to forfeit the competition, but she reminded me how much it meant for him, for us to try and win an Olympic title, so Ryan and I did it for him.

A hush falls over the crowd and the announcer's voice booms over the speakers: "The marks for Ryan Kennedy and Dalia Middleton!" Our marks are posted for all to see; we take first!

Ryan and Coach Hicks hug me with tears of joy. The crowd is on their feet again.

The elated feeling is badly marred by my father's death. Our win feels more like a load of bricks being lifted off my shoulders rather than an excited state of euphoria most people feel when experiencing this moment.

Ryan and I become immortalized in Olympic History.

Later, the announcers call our names, and we skate to the podium. The third place couple moves over so Ryan and I can step on the platform that represents gold. We congratulate the other medalists with hugs and handshakes. We all face the television cameras after waving to the public in all directions of the arena so everyone can get pictures of us on the podium.

The announcer comes on, "Everyone please rise for the Canadian national anthem." The Canadian flag inches its way into the air. "O'Canada" blares through the overhead speakers. Flashes go off in all directions, tears are continuously flooding my eyes, and everything is a blur of colours. All the years of sacrifice and training paid off to accomplish this moment with Ryan, it's bittersweet.

Ryan grabs my hand tightly as tears of pride fall from his eyes. It's the second time I've ever seen him cry, the first is when his attempt at saving my dad's life fails. He swipes them away quickly but they are rapidly replaced with new ones.

I'm sure my two so called best friends Sierra and Tara are watching us proudly from their living rooms unaware I found out about Sierra's indiscretions with my skating partner Ryan. She led everyone to believe that she was pregnant with her boyfriend Jeremy's baby, all the while it was Ryan's. The loss of dad overshadowed their betrayal until now, the Olympics is done and now it returns to the forefront of my thoughts.

After the national anthems belonging to the silver and bronze medalists are played, we step down, our moment is over. Several Olympic stations vied to be the first to interview us; we are the Canadian Sweethearts who suffered a tragic loss before heroically winning an Olympic Gold Medal for our country.

Chapter 1

Paparazzi are all over the airport trying to capture photos of Olympic athletes as they board their flights. Ryan and I seem the most sought after, so he makes sure he never leaves my side. His protection of me is charming, but I grant interviews regardless of his valiant efforts at fending off the reporters.

Ryan is dressed handsomely in a black suit and tie. I chose comfort over style and wear the new Canadian Olympic Team outfits given to us when we qualified.

We check our luggage and board our plane. The brunette stewardess directs Ryan and me to our seats. He hoists my carry-on bag overhead before letting me take the window seat. The pilot and attendants do their spiel and the plane takes off.

Ryan's dark eyes bore into mine, "Are you ready to listen?" His hand covers mine and he speaks quietly ensuring that other passengers wouldn't be eavesdropping. His tone is unmistakably firm in nature. He is alpha male since the beginning with me, forcing me to break up with Adam just to skate with him. He insists there is no room for relationships while training for the Olympics; they are a 'distraction.'

"Do I have a choice?" I hiss.

"No," he orders. "We have to make our relationship right."

"You're mistaken, there is no relationship," I clarify.

Coach Hicks said that while we were in the public eye we had to sell ourselves as a couple. It would win the hearts of our audience and increase our chances of winning. So we did it, and we've won. The only people who are wise to us are our so called best friends and our parents.

“We’ve already won so our charade of being a couple can end now,” I inform him sliding my hand out from underneath his.

“We’re more than that, and you know it,” He says firmly.

“You’re sorely mistaken about being in love with me if you can sleep with my best friend. Do you have any idea how betrayed I feel?”

“She convinced me that you weren’t over Adam yet saying something about a ‘golden’ rule you had. She told me you staked a permanent claim over him. I heard you talking to Tara in the kitchen about him and then saw you in bed with him later that night. What did you expect me to believe?”

“We didn’t DO anything. Why wouldn’t you confirm your suspicions rather than fall into her arms?”

“She was believable and I was angry at you for having feelings for him. Sierra and I were only together one time, and I was wasted.”

“Let’s not forget the one night stand you had with that other girl in the car. Was it passionate the way it was with us?”

“Don’t compare that to what we have,” he pleads. “Every time I’m with someone, I close my eyes wishing they are you,” he says poignantly.

“That makes me feel better,” I say sarcastically. “Sierra didn’t tell you that she was pregnant with your baby?” I ask.

“No, she told Jeremy it was his.”

“Jesus, I even pleaded with her to keep it,” I say more to myself.

Ryan tips my chin up forcing me to look at him, “I didn’t know the baby was mine, until it was already aborted,” he explains.

“You still hid it from me after that, when you did know.”

“It was too late to save the baby, but I still had a chance of saving us.”

“You think there’s a chance of saving us?” I say speculatively. “So what are you saying?” he asks.

“There has to be an US to save.”

“There is an ‘us’, you’re just not willing to acknowledge it,” he argues.

His hand slips behind my neck pressing me firmly into him as his lips cover mine. He is too strong for me to pull away from him so; I surrender to his kiss and the touch of his hand, making me melt into him.

Chapter 2

We disembark at 8:00 p.m. Toronto time, to find the media waiting and fans cheering for us inside the terminal. Ryan stands protectively by my side while people were clamouring to get photographs and autographs of us. More condolence cards and flowers are handed to me from people of all ages, it's touching.

I find myself counting down the minutes to be alone so I can grieve for dad. We hail a cab and instruct the driver to take us back to my house. Ryan's mother Sara has taken his car home for him after the funeral.

We pull up in the driveway, and I notice the house is dark. Unlocking the door I call out, "Mom!" and wait for her to answer.

Ryan steps passed me asking, "Do you want me to put your bag in your room?"

"Please," I answer.

I turned the light on for him and watch as he goes upstairs.

"I'm in here," mom calls back. Her voice sounds like it is coming from the basement. I go downstairs and find her going through boxes I've never seen before.

"What are you doing mom?"

Practically tripping over a box, she comes barreling over to greet me, "Congratulations Dalia! I'm so proud of you!"

"Thanks mom."

"I'm just packing away some of your dad's belongings to donate. It's so hard seeing his stuff everywhere I turn."

"Do you need help?"

"No thanks, I'm almost done. Let me tape up this box and come upstairs. I want to congratulate Ryan. Is he here? I have some messages the two of you need to hear."

“He’s here; he just brought my luggage to my room.”

“Great!” mom says walking to the stairs.

We go up to find Ryan standing at the front door. Mom walks over to him giving him a hug, “Congratulations Ryan! Your mom and I are so proud of you. We watched you skate both of your programs together.”

“Thanks Mrs. Middleton,” he says releasing her.

“Stay for a minute, are you guys hungry?”

We looked at each other and shrugged, “No mom, we ate on the plane.”

“Good,” she says more to herself. “I have messages I want you guys to listen to. You have major decisions to make and I’d prefer you to make them sooner rather than later.” She walks briskly to the answering machine and hits play. She put it on speaker and increases the volume:

“Dalia Middleton? This is John Banks calling, I am a sports agent, and I would like to represent you and Ryan Kennedy. Please give me a call. XXX-XXX-XXXX”

“Dalia Middleton? This is Sophie Anderson from Stars on Ice. Could you or your agent please give us a call at your earliest convenience? My number is: XXX-XXX-XXXX”

“Dalia Middleton? This is Keith Yewchuk from Disney on Ice. Could you or your agent please give us a call at your earliest convenience? My number is: XXX-XXX-XXXX.”

“Dalia Middleton? This is the University of Toronto, after reviewing your application we would like to extend to you a fully paid athletic scholarship. Please call us at your earliest convenience XXX-XXX-XXXX.”

“Dalia Middleton? This is the University of London, Ontario, after reviewing your application we would like to offer you an athletic scholarship. Please call us at your earliest convenience.”

When we finished listening to the messages, Ryan and I look at each other in amazement over how quickly people are responding to our win, we never imagined having all these doors open for us.

Mom smiles at us, “I warned your friends that you would be really tired, but they insisted on waiting for you at Tara’s. You can either take your dad’s car, or I can drive you to Ryan’s to get his if you want.”

I’m not in the mood to go out but I can’t not show up. I look at Ryan, “Can you drive dad’s car?”

“Sure, I’ll just call my mother and let her know we landed safely.”

“Okay.”

He strolls off to another room so mom and I can talk.

“You looked beautiful on the ice Honey.”

“Thanks mom.”

“Now listen,” she says. “I want you and Ryan to take your time and chose what you want to do with the next few years of your life wisely.” *It hasn’t dawned on me that after the Olympics, decisions about my future will be shared with Ryan.*

“Whatever you select, I will support you.”

“Thanks mom.”

“Aunt Rosalind asked me if I want to come live with her in Florida.”

“You said?” I ask mom.

“Yes,” she answers immediately. “I’m going to apply for a transfer at work.”

“Do you think you’ll get it?”

“They’re always looking to transfer people out. You’re more than welcome to apply to the University of Florida and join us. I just thought you wouldn’t want to leave your friends.”

“It’s all a little overwhelming for me,” I admitted.

“Undoubtedly, I’ve already had a few days to think about what I want to do. You’ll probably need the same.”

“I haven’t even had a chance to be alone yet,” I complain.

“You’ll have plenty of time when the dust settles. Take it from me; its better to keep busy.”

“Please don’t base your decisions around me. I’m going to be okay,” mom reassures me.

“Are you sure about that?” I ask concerned.

“100%” she sounds stronger than I’ve given her credit for.

“No matter what you choose, I’ll make sure you are settled comfortably before I leave,” she says.

“Will you be okay if I go to Tara’s tonight?”

“Of course, Honey, stop worrying about me. Sara’s been a great friend, and Aunt Rosalind has been calling me every day. Really, I’m going to be okay.”

“Will you wait up?”

“No curfew tonight,” she says with a tired smile, “I’m just glad you’re home.”

Ryan comes back to us, “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” I answer reaching for dad’s keys. The thought of getting into his car saddens me and drives mom’s point across that everything around here reminds her of dad.

“Are you sure you are up for this,” Ryan asks.

“I’m sure,” I try convincing him.

Chapter 3

He opens the passenger door for me. When I sit down, I smell the faint scent of dad's cologne. I close my eyes and inhaled deeply. Ryan gets into the driver's side, and his hand rests on my headrest as he starts the car and backs out. He caresses the back of my neck while my eyes remain closed. I don't have the energy to beat him off me.

"Whenever you want to leave, you just say the word and I'll take you home," he offers.

"You know I'm going to have it out with Sierra and Tara don't you?"

"I suspected." I lean into his gentle fingers and he rubs a little harder soothing me.

We arrive at Tara's and ring her doorbell. The house is lit up like a Christmas tree. Sierra opens the door and greets us enthusiastically before calling out, "They're here!"

Our friends cluster in the hallway to congratulate us including: Jeremy, Carter, Adam, Sierra, Tara, Harper, and a few familiar acquaintances that I'm not so close to. I'm surprised to see Harper. We aren't exactly close after I started dating her ex-boyfriend Adam. She's always throwing herself at other guys ever since they broke up. I can't help wondering who she is going to be hanging off of tonight.

Everyone is taking pictures of us with their cells and hugging us before Tara calls out, "Can I get you guys something to drink?"

Ryan looks down at me waiting for an answer, "I'll have whatever you're having," I say to him. He follows Tara into the kitchen while everyone else follows me into the living room.

Sierra is beaming when she asks me, “So what does it feel like to be an Olympic champion?”

“I don’t know,” I appear to be contemplating her question, “why don’t you tell me what it feels like being a whore?” I ask her. My words slap her in the face. I think it’s well deserved at the time. She goes pale and her smile fades quickly.

“You know,” she says flatly. I can hear the dread in her voice.

“Give the bitch a medal!” I announce sarcastically.

Ryan hurries back into the room with our drinks. He hands me mine, “Dalia, take this somewhere else,” he orders.

She gets up off the couch and chooses to go into Tara’s room. I stomp up the stairs behind her.

“You have no right to be mad at me,” she states.

“No?” I ask.

“No, Tara told me not to date Adam, because it bothered you, so I stayed away from him. Neither of you told me I can’t see Ryan.”

“He is my PARTNER,” I emphasize.

“Exactly, someone you skate with.”

“We kissed.”

“So! You say that he doesn’t allow relationships while he’s training. He was training.”

“How many times were you with him?” I ask quietly knowing she has a valid point.

“Just the once, he called me Dalia by accident and it completely ruined the mood for both of us. I regretted it before he even finished in me.”

Wow, that was too much description for me. I imagine Ryan finding pleasure in Sierra and emptying himself in her, I’m ready to wretch.

“Did you bring it to his attention?”

“No, it would have made things worse. I just wanted to forget it ever happened.”

“When did you know he was the father?”

“A month after he got me pregnant.”

“Why didn’t you tell him?”

“He didn’t have feelings for me and I knew there Jeremy did. I was hoping if Jeremy thought the baby was his, he’d step up. Everyone would come out unscathed. He ended up treating me like trash, even when he thought it was his.”

“You acted like trash.”

“If I had ever thought you even had the tiniest amount of feelings for Ryan, I would never have given in to his moves. I’m still in love with Jeremy.”

“He started it?” I can’t hide my surprised.

“Yes, I swear.”

“I believe you,” I exonerate her; “I just need time to make it a bygone.”

“Hug?” She asks.

“Soon, I’m trying to keep it together until I get home. I haven’t been alone to grieve over dad yet.”

“If you need anything,” she offers.

“Thanks,” we walk back to the others, together.

My eye snags Tara, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It wasn’t my place to tell,” she admits honestly. “We thought you liked Adam more than Ryan.”

Adam’s and Ryan’s eyes lock onto each other from across the room, their animosity is palpable.

I break the tension by diverting my attention to Jeremy, “Can I speak with you for a minute?”

“Sure,” he says.

He gets up from the couch and follows me upstairs to Tara’s room. It is the best room to go for privacy.

He stands at the foot of the bed really close to where I’m standing and asks me, “How are you doing?” He raises his hand to me, moving a lock of hair behind my ear and then letting his fingers glide down my neck. He’s always had this crush on me that neither of us ever acknowledged. Our friendship is too important to both of us to ruin. He is my go to friend for anything.

“I’m sad Jer, how are you doing? You’ve been though a lot too.” I’m glad to deflect some of the attention off my own misery and concentrate on someone else. “I want you to know I’ve forgiven her for sleeping with Ryan Jer. It’s much easier

than holding a grudge. You might want to consider forgiving her too. I know she's still in love with you. She just told me, and I believe her."

"It's tough, I keep picturing them together. I wasn't betrayed by my girlfriend with anyone, she went to RYAN, my fucking best friend."

"I know Jer, I'm not defending Ryan. He betrayed both of us."

"Do you think you'll be able to forgive him as easily as you did Sierra?"

"I don't think so," I admit.

"Ryan and Adam are both in love with you," he informs me. "It's hard to pick, who loves you more, they talk about you so much when you're not around, I'd have to say Adam."

"I'm finding it hard to believe either one of them love me. Ryan sleeps with Sierra and Adam moves on after our break-up so easily. Maybe I just haven't found the right guy yet."

"He's right here," Jer flirts with me.

I reach for him, holding him close to me, "I love you Jer."

"I know," he says, "I love you too! I'm so proud of you"

"Thanks Jer."

"In Adam's defence he hasn't been with anyone since that one girl after you. He dropped her like a hot potato and has been waiting for you ever since."

He puts his arm around my shoulders and escorts me downstairs. When we reach the bottom I glance at both men who are glaring at Jeremy with jealousy. He intentionally leaves his arm around me just to piss them off. The party isn't feeling like a party to me, my mood is too dark and there is too much to resolve with too many people.

My eyes finally settle on Adam while I feel Ryan's penetrate me. "Adam, your turn," I smile. I glance over at Ryan to explain, "We need to discuss some things."

I don't give Ryan a chance to answer. I motion for Adam to follow me upstairs. I turn back to get a second look at Ryan. His jaw tightens and he rakes his fingers through his hair, but he doesn't try stopping me. I look at him apologetically and said, "You don't mind do you? I'll just be a minute." It won't stop me if he does mind. I just said it.

Adam takes my hand and leads me the rest of the way up the stairs. We go to Tara's room closing the door behind us. He stands in my personal space cupping my cheek with his hand. His gentle touch comforts me immediately.

"I'm sorry about your dad," he offers.

"Thanks. It's been a tragic blow for me and my mother, but I didn't bring you up here to talk about that. Jer told me you still have residual feelings for me, but I need to hear it from you."

His eyes lock with mine, "I never stopped loving you. I think about you all the time. I don't want anyone else." I close my eyes feeling lightheaded.

He guides my face to his and gently kisses me. It's more than a kiss; it was a statement proclaiming his love for me. I never witnessed this vulnerable side of him until now. He is putting himself out there for me. Intrigued, it makes me want to see where this will go.

"I need time to think," I plead.

"Take it," he breathes. "Just don't turn to him while you're considering your options."

"I won't."

He cups both of my cheeks and kisses me one last time, making me melt into him.

He releases me from the kiss and holds my hand leading me back down the stairs. Ryan is standing by the door with his jacket on waiting for me so we can leave, "Are you ready to go?" He asks.

"Sure, let me grab my coat," I say.

I start heading towards the closet door when Adam refuses to release my hand and pulls me back into him. He slides his fingers through my hair and sweeps me into this passionate kiss I'm not expecting. I only slightly hesitate before returning it knowing Ryan is watching us. There is something wildly erotic about Ryan watching Adam and I kiss. Adam is slow to release me, his eyes bore into mine. "Take care," his tone is warm and charming.

Ryan's eyes are dark with hate, "Stay the fuck away from her," he threatens. "You had your chance with her and you blew it."

“You stay the fuck away from her,” Adam warns. “You had your chance with her too, and you more than fucked it up. You messed up your best friend and your girlfriend when you slept with Sierra,” Adam snaps.

“Who I sleep with is none of YOUR business.”

“It is my business when you chose to fuck my best-friends girl.”

“They were broken up,” Ryan defends his actions even though he apologized for them on the plane.

“Which is it Ryan? Are you defending what you did or are you sorry for it?” I confront.

“You’re taking advantage of Dalia’s vulnerability,” Adam accuses Ryan.

“Nobody’s taking advantage of me,” I tell Adam.

“That’s my girl,” he goads territorially. That’s when Ryan’s fist smashed into Adam’s nose. Adam ready for him, returns the punch.

“No!” Tara screams.

Carter and Jeremy come running over to break them up. Jeremy grabs Ryan pinning his arms so he can’t take another swing, and Carter does the same to Adam.

“You better leave,” Tara encourages me.

Jeremy releases Ryan first so we can leave, after the door is closed, I assume they released Adam. We can hear him cursing profanities from within the house as we walk in silence to dad’s car.

Ryan opens the passenger door and waits for me to get in. He runs around to the driver’s side and when he gets into the car he stares out the windshield for a few seconds before starting it. He puts his hand on my headrest the way he always does when he backs up, “Come over to my house,” he invites. “We need to talk and you don’t have a curfew tonight.”

“I’m finished talking Ryan, I want to be alone,” I explains.

“Not until I’ve said my piece,” he insists.

“You said it on the plane,” I argue.

He removes his hand from the headrest, and shifts into drive. We ride in silence.

It is 12:20 a.m. when we pull into my driveway and he turns off the car. We’re both exhausted from the day’s events. He faces me waiting for me to say

something. When I don't, he says with disgust, "Why did you kiss him in front of me."

"He kissed me," I correct.

"You didn't fight him off."

"No, I rather enjoyed it," I say spitefully. "It was one harmless kiss, I didn't sleep with him or get pregnant from him after declaring my love to you, the way you did," I say throwing his indiscretion back in his face.

"You are making a statement. If you want that son-of-a-bitch then go back with him, but don't shove him in my face to punish me or expect me to pick up the pieces when asshole hurts you, AGAIN."

"You're angry," I lack empathy. "I know exactly how you feel."

"Too right I'm angry. I watched him hurt you and then you chase after him because of me."

"He's chasing me," I correct.

"Ask yourself why is it so much easier to forgive him over me?" Ryan points out.

"Because what you did hurt me way more than what he did," I confess. "You drop your load into my best friend. What the fuck did you expect to come out of it? Do you love her? Is she prettier than me? Did you want a relationship with her?"

"I MADE A FUCKING MISTAKE! You're angrier at me than him because you're in love with ME Dalia; YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH ME. I SHOULD BE GETTING THE SECOND CHANCE NOT HIM," he yells at me.

"After everything that's happened between us, he told me tonight that he's still in love with me," I think out loud.

"Whoop di do! So am I," he stabs. "I won't stay around and watch him hurt you again. I've waited long enough to be with you," he resolves.

"What are you saying, Ryan?"

I reached up and touched his cheek where Adam hit him. He takes my hand and in a broken voice he says, "You know what I'm saying, Dalia."

"No, I don't. What are you trying to say Ryan?"

"I'm saying that if you want him go get him, but I'm not watching you do it or waiting around to pick up the pieces after he treats you like shit."

“There aren’t going to be any pieces to pick up, and I never said for sure I’m going back to him, that’s an assumption you’ve made, and who’s to say you aren’t going to be the one to treat me like shit? You’re in the lead with what you did with Sierra.”

I get out of the car, leaving him there. I go inside the house and straight up to my bedroom. I hear his car leave the driveway five minutes later.

Chapter 4

Mom taps on my bedroom door before peeking in, “Did Ryan take your dad’s car home?”

“Ya, I’m sorry. Can we go pick it up after I shower?”

“Sure, sounds like a plan,” mom says warmly. “We’re meeting with Ryan and his mother at Memphis barbecue for 6:00. We need to discuss your options,” she says before closing the door.

This is going to be awkward.

I take a hot shower and dress in my warmest clothes. Mom drives me to Ryan’s, but doesn’t pull into his driveway, “You’re not visiting with his mom?” I ask.

“No Honey, I have errands to run. You can reach me on my cell if you need anything, don’t forget about dinner tonight.”

“I won’t.”

I get out of the car and watch her drive off. Ryan’s black Mercedes is parked next to dad’s shit box in his two car driveway. I stare wistfully at his house from where I’m standing and try to figure out which window is Ryan’s.

Memories from yesterday come flooding back to me. I wish we went straight home from the airport. If I had to do it all over again then I would have just asked Ryan to take me home and sent Tara a text explaining I was just too tired to party with them. If I didn’t have the nerve to cancel, I definitely wouldn’t have kissed Adam in front of Ryan.

I stop daydreaming and start hurrying so I don’t risk the chance of bumping into Ryan now, outside his house. I unlock dad’s car door and get into the driver’s seat. I put the key in the ignition and it growls, row, row, row, nothing. *Shit!*
Please God! Don’t do this to me now! I turn the key again, row, row, row, nothing.

I pump the gas in panic mode and try again, row, row, row, nothing. Now I can smell gas. I flooded it. Great, now I have to sit here and just wait.

Ryan comes out of his house with a sweater and jacket on and his workout pants, “Pop the hood,” he says through the window.

I reach down by my feet and pulled the latch. With the hood being up, I can’t watch what he is doing. He calls out, “Try again.” I turned the key and this time it starts.

I rolled down the window and call out, “Thanks.”

He nods in my direction and then turns on his heel to walk away, going back into his house.

I secure my seatbelt and shift into reverse heading towards the cemetery to spend time with dad. I park close to the gravesite turning off the motor praying it will start back up for me when I’m ready to leave. It is one thing to get stuck in Ryan’s driveway but another to get stuck in a graveyard.

There is fresh snow on the ground and the cold outside is tolerable. Dad doesn’t have a headstone yet, but I find his spot without any difficulty. I kneel down and speak to him, telling him all about the Olympic Games. I tell him how Ryan and I dedicated our program to him and described every little detail. When I finish, I tell him what happened when we got back and how much I miss him. I’m freezing by now so I get up and head back to dad’s car.

In the distance I see what I think is Ryan’s black Mercedes. I start walking towards it to get a better look. There is someone sitting in the driver’s side. It has to be him. When I get closer, I know for sure it is. He must have followed me here. He rolls his window down so I can talk to him, “How long have you been here?” I ask.

He has a serious expression on his face and he is still wearing what he had on when he helped me with my car, “Just a few minutes.”

It amazes me how good he is at figuring me out, “How did you know I was here?”

“I knew you would come here to be with your father. I was worried your car would strand you after turning it off.”

“You could have come over or told me you were here,” I say kindly.

“I didn’t want to interrupt you. Go see if it starts. I’ll leave you alone when your car moves.”

It’s big of him to do all this for me after last night. His thoughtfulness is endearing. I walk back to my car and turn the key in the ignition. It purrs to life on my first attempt. I put my car in drive and let it slowly roll out of the cemetery parking lot while I text him a thank-you message.

Chapter 5

We take mom's Acura to the restaurant and park in the last spot in the back. The Mercedes is already there. Judging by the parking lot, the restaurant looks busy, so we are hoping Ryan and Sara already have been seated.

We open the door and find ten to fifteen people waiting to be seated. Ryan and his mother aren't in those groups so we start looking at the tables. We hang up our jackets and join them.

Sara smiles and gets up when she sees us, she gives mom a big hug, they must have bonded when we were away. I smile and nod in Ryan's direction before taking my seat.

I make sure I'm dressed to the nines in my casual clothing. I tie my hair back and wear a beige angora sweater with a very low neckline. My newest jeans look the oldest with rips and holes in all the right places and cowboy boots that are more like weapons with sharp metallic blades on the toes that Tara and I call ball busters. We picked them up last summer at a store just off Yonge Street.

Ryan sits opposite me, my mother across from Sara.

Melanie a waitress who works there since I can remember comes to take our orders and then everyone focuses on me and Ryan.

Mom starts, "Have the two of you talked?"

"You might call it that," Ryan says sarcastically.

Sara looks at him, "Did you guys make any decisions?"

"No, we didn't get around to it," he admits honestly. His gorgeous dark brown eyes glare at me, "We had a disagreement at Tara's last night and didn't get a chance to discuss anything yet." I study his face to see if I can notice any swelling on the side where Adam hit him.

“Well, as long as the two of you didn’t fight,” mom comments referring to the time I slapped Ryan at the rink, causing coach Hicks to get mad..

Mom and Sara don’t seem to notice the subtle swelling of his one cheek. If I hadn’t seen them fight, I probably wouldn’t have noticed either.

Mom looks at me curiously, “What was the disagreement about?”

”Nothing really, just about Ryan trying to control me on and off the ice.”

“I hardly think being alone in a room with your ex-boyfriend at a party is appropriate, especially when he’s shit-faced,” Ryan twists the truth to make me look bad.

“Your ex-boyfriend?” mom asks. She turns to Sara, “I never liked that boy. I always feel Ryan is a much better fit.”

“Mom, we are sitting right here for heaven’s sake. Plus, I’m free to do whatever I want now that I’m not competing anymore.”

“Not while you are living under my roof you’re not,” mom says.

Sara glanced at me, “Let’s talk productively, Dalia, what would you like to do?”

Melanie comes back with our drinks and places my Elvis Presley in front of me. I take a sip of my shake and I pitch daggers in Ryan’s with my eyes. I don’t have any answers for them and I’m pissed over his interpretation at Tara’s party. Maybe I should let him mom know how he screwed my friend and got her pregnant. I’d like to see Ryan’s reaction when he’s forced to come clean with her. Everything put aside, in my heart of hearts, I know I’m not ready to give up skating with Ryan, at least not yet, “Shows,” I blurt.

“What about school?” mom asks.

Ryan answers, “If we go to the same University, we can do both. We just have to make sure that the University we choose has rink time.”

“So we’ll skate together, go to school together, why don’t we just live together?” I say sarcastically.

“Great idea,” Ryan says spitefully.

Sara looks startled by my idea and mom jumps at it, “I think that’s a wonderful idea. I wouldn’t worry about Dalia half as much knowing Ryan’s living with her and we could be paying one rent instead of two. The kids are so beautiful to watch on the ice.”

“I think you’re on to something,” Sara says enthusiastically after listening to mom’s reasoning. “How should we do this?” She asks.

“Ryan and Dalia can pick the programs they want to take, and we’ll go on MLS and find them an apartment. We can go take a look at it together. We’ll make a day trip out of it!”

I’m tripping.

“Which University are you considering?” Sara asks mom.

“I’ve done my research and personally I like Western. It has the best programs and the most nice time, the downfall is the two hour drive for you to visit them.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” Sara says, “I’ve heard their medical program is phenomenal, Ryan always wanted to become a doctor.”

“Great, so then it’s settled,” mom says triumphantly.

“Don’t we get a say?” I ask. “I haven’t even talked to Tara or Sierra to see what they are doing.”

“That’s what holidays are for. You can catch up with your friends on your breaks,” she informs me. “Those girls will never amount to anything,” mom said judgmentally.

Mom grins at me and starts digging through her purse, “Dad had a surprise for you kids. It’s sad he can’t be here to see you open it. He got it when you qualified for the Olympics and he was waiting for the right time to give it to you.” She starts pulling debris including a tampon from her purse looking for whatever it is she’s looking for, while Melanie comes by with our dishes that we ordered. I’m totally embarrassed.

“Found it,” she says pulling an envelope from her purse. She hands it to me. I slice it open with my finger and pulled out the short hand written note from my father first, reading it out loud.

Honey,

We couldn’t have been more proud of you and Ryan for making your dreams come true. Dedication and hard work will always pay off in the end. We are very proud of you.

Love Mom and Dad. xoxo

Included in the envelope are two round trip plane tickets to Las Vegas.

I look up at mom, "I thought you were out of vacation time for this year!"

"I'm not going silly; your dad bought the tickets for you and Ryan. It's not like you too haven't traveled alone before."

I glance at Sara, "You're okay with this?"

Sara smiles at me, "Sure I am. Your mother and I already discussed it."

Ryan remains silent, "Did you know?" I asked.

"No, I didn't," he answers.

"Then I guess were going to Vegas," I shrug happily.

"Great!" mom says. "You leave the day after tomorrow, so you kids pick the programs you want to take in University and leave the rest for us. When you get back from Vegas we'll go apartment hunting!"

Chapter 6

I have my phone on mute at the restaurant. I arrive home and pull it out of my purse to check it. It's flashing blue. When I hit the button, it shows two texts: one from Adam and the other from Tara.

Adam: I'd like 2 C U 2night. Can U get out?

Dalia: Sure :-) Time?

Adam: 9 I'll B waiting down the street.

Dalia: Sure, C U then!

Tara: Can U come over? Or do U want 2 go 2 Memphis?

Dalia: Was already there with Ryan & his mom. I can go 2 your house but I can't stay long. Adam wants 2 C me. Can U pick me up?

Tara: Will B there.

Dalia: Can U pick me up @ Tara's instead of my house?

Adam: Sure, same time?

Dalia: 9:30 pls?

Adam: Sure.

Mom isn't home so when Tara arrives at my house we split right away. I get into the passenger side of her car and she starts backing out of our driveway. I notice she doesn't put her hand on my headrest the way Ryan does when she backs out. It must be a habit only Ryan has.

We go upstairs when we get to her house, seeking the privacy and comfort of her bedroom to catch up, “I’ve been dying to talk to you,” she admits. “I can’t believe the way you kissed Adam in front of Ryan!”

“He grabbed me! I wasn’t planning it.” I try to explain.

“How lucky are you! Two gorgeous guys fighting over you. Must be hard,” she sympathizes. “You totally looked like you were enjoying that kiss!”

“Was it that obvious?”

“God, Yes! So are you giving Adam a second chance?”

“Yes, I think so; he says he still loves me.”

“Do you believe him?”

“He has no reason to lie; Jeremy told me the same thing. He says Adam hasn’t been with anyone since that one girl right after we broke up. He told me that he’s been waiting for me.”

“That’s so romantic,” Tara gushes.

“Did Ryan confront you in the car?”

“Hell ya, he was pissed! He doesn’t understand why I’m giving Adam a second chance and not him. He said that he’s not going to stand around and watch Adam hurt me all over again. He already did that.”

“So, the two of you are history?”

“Ya, he dumped me like yesterday’s trash.”

“I find that hard to believe,” Tara says skeptically. “If I had to choose, I think I would pick Ryan,” Tara teases.

“The choice has been taken out of my hands,” I explain. “There’s more, I went to pick up dad’s car from Ryan’s house and it wouldn’t start. He must have heard me from inside. He came out and helped me get it started and then he couldn’t get away from me fast enough. Then when I went to visit dad’s grave, and he showed up. He watched me the entire time. He said he wanted to make sure my car didn’t strand me again. He must still care about me, what do you think?”

“I know he does, it’s obvious. That was super nice of him,” Tara comments. “How was he when you went to Memphis? Who planned that?”

“Mom did obviously; she wants to discuss our future.”

“What did you guys decide?”

“The correct question is, ‘What did mom decide?’ I told everyone I wanted to do shows. I’m not ready to give up skating yet, I enjoy it too much, and I can’t see myself skating without Ryan. So then, Ryan suggests we go to the same university together. I took it farther as a joke, saying, we might as well just live together. Never in a million years do I expect them to go along with my stupid idea, I was totally JOKING. They took me seriously Tara! Mom is all over it like a bee to honey. So now, Ryan and I are going to be sharing an apartment together, going to the same University and doing shows TOGETHER.”

“Get the fuck out of here! That’s not going to go over well with Adam.”

“Don’t you know it! Mom thinks Ryan walks on water as you know. Ryan had the nerve to tell her I was alone with Adam in your bedroom. That’s probably why she jumped at me living with Ryan, out of her hate for Adam.”

“But to allow this?”

“That’s not all, there’s more.”

Tara grinned, “Go on!”

“Mom gave us a present dad bought for Ryan and myself after we qualified for the Olympics. He wanted to surprise us with it. I think he was going to give it to us the night he died.”

Tara’s mood darkens, “That’s so sad Dalia. What did he buy you guys?”

“Four nights and five days in Las Vegas.”

“So you’re going on a trip with Ryan after you get back with Adam?”

“Yes, the day after tomorrow.”

“Oh.My.God. How are you going to tell him?”

“Exactly, I don’t want to lose Adam.”

“Just tell him the truth and keep your fingers crossed,” Tara advises. “Start with the trip, and don’t break the University thing to him until after. I don’t think any guy would trust their girlfriend to live with a hottie like Ryan and not expect the two of you to cheat. Your relationship with Adam is doomed, unless...”

“Unless what?”

“You get him to move in with you and Ryan, but there’s no chance of that, hell hasn’t frozen over yet.”

Chapter 7

The mustang rolls silently up Tara's driveway with the headlights off. I scurry to his car and get into the passenger seat waving bye to Tara who is peering out her window at me. When Adam begins backing up, I notice her wink good luck. I'm so nervous, my hands are sweating.

He takes me to his house. There are two cars parked in the driveway.

"My parents know you're coming over. Dad starts work at five so they're already in bed," he explains. "They want to meet you," he adds.

I smile and take his hand once he has the front door open. He silently leads me to a carpeted staircase going downstairs. He turns the lights on so we can see our way down. He looks rougher than usual with a six o'clock shadow and a cut slicing across his swollen nose.

We face each other on the couch and I caress the cut on his nose, "Does it hurt"

"You're worth it," he flatters me. He takes my hand and weaves his fingers through mine. "You're palms are sweaty, are you nervous?"

"Yes," I admit.

"Don't be," he encourages. I stare into his eyes and he kisses me hard and demandingly. The force of his kiss is so great, the upper part of my body starts leaning backwards. He continues the momentum by crawling over top of me kissing me aggressively.

My increasing apprehension is ruining the moment for me. I start pushing him off, "I need to talk to you about something." He backs off and waits for me to continue.

"There's no easy way of saying this," I hesitate.

"Then just say it," he instructs.

“Dad bought Ryan and I tickets to Vegas when we qualified for the Olympics and now we are going. There, I said it. Mom told us about it tonight.”

“You were with Ryan tonight?”

“Yes, mom wanted to give us the tickets over dinner. We’ll be gone for four nights and five days.”

“You have got to be fucking kidding,” he seethes. “Tell me you’re not going,” he demands.

“I have to go Adam; it’s the last present from my father. You have to trust me please!” I plead. “I swear, he wants nothing more to do with me and the feeling is mutual. He knows I’m back with you.”

“You are asking a lot,” he informs me.

“I won’t let you down,” I promise.

Chapter 8

Ryan is waiting for me in my driveway at the crack of dawn so we can arrive at the airport an hour before our flight. He pops the trunk open and I hoist my over packed Vuitton knock-off bag into his car, being careful not to scratch his paint.

I get in the car and can't contain my grin of excitement, "This is going to be so much fun," I gush. "Whatever happens in Vegas is totally staying in Vegas!" I promise.

"Excited?" he asks sarcastically.

He places his hand on the back of my headrest, and starts backing out of the driveway, "Do you have everything you need?"

I start digging through my purse, "Almost everything, I just have to make a call." I find my phone and dial my provider. I need to get a deal so I can place calls and texts from Las Vegas. The last thing I want is to be nailed with astronomical roaming charges.

Last year Sierra went on a vacation with her parents without calling her provider beforehand. When she got back, they tried charging her \$800 +. Her mother was furious, took her phone away from her for TWO MONTHS! I would just die if that happened to me.

When I finish the phone call I check to see if I have any messages. There is one from Adam:

Adam: Have a safe trip. Will pick U up from the airport Sun night. Xoxo.
I'm trusting U!

Dalia: No worries! Can't wait to C. U. Sun night. xoxo

I place my phone back in my purse and look out at the road ahead, “Done, do you have everything you need?”

“I pack light. I have a surprise for you in my wallet, check it out!” He goes digging into the back pocket of his jeans and pulls it out.

“You want me to open it?”

“Please, I’m driving. I don’t have anything in my wallet you can’t see with the exception of condoms and lube,” he kids.

I spot tickets right away. They are for ‘Le Reve,’ “Wow, what’s this?” I ask.

“It’s a show at the hotel we’re staying at. It has swimming, acrobatics, it looks awesome! It better be for what I paid.”

“Oh that’s going to be so much fun,” I gush again. “It gives me an excuse to dress up.”

“I thought you would like that.”

“I do, thanks Ryan.”

We park the car at the Park and Fly, taking the shuttle into the terminal. We have thirty minutes waiting time after we check our luggage in, so we find vacant seats close to our assigned gate and start playing with our phones to pass the time.

They called our flight quickly. I turn my phone off and grabbed my boarding pass from my bag. Ryan smiles at me before motioning for me to take the lead. I’m determined to make this trip fantastic, because I know that’s what dad would have wanted.

Chapter 9

We check into the Wynn late afternoon. The weather is disappointing for most travellers but 63 degrees to Canadians like Ryan and is rather balmy! Ryan being chivalrous to a flaw, carries both our bags to our room situated on the twelfth floor.

I inserted the card into our door and the light flashes green. I pray for two queen beds before opening the door but as my luck would have it, we find the room to have only one beautiful king sized bed with a white diamond tuck headboard.

Ryan follows my gaze and realizes our first dilemma, "I'll take the couch, you can have the bed."

I place my bag on the table staring at his reflection in the mirror, "Surely we can be adults about this and share the bed." I'm really fooling myself when I suggest this.

"You're okay with it?"

"I wouldn't offer if I wasn't."

"Do you want to run it by Adam?" he asks albeit sarcastically.

"None of that jealousy please. I'd rather he not know about our sleeping arrangements as this is out of our hands. I trust that it's all right with you?" I smile mischievously.

He nods at me running his hand through his dark wisps, "Rest assured, he won't be hearing anything from me. Nothing I do will leave Vegas!"

"Nothing leaves Vegas," I chant.

Ryan lays his suitcase on the white bedspread and starts digging through it while I explore the rooms in our suite. The bathroom is gorgeous with a large soaker tub and a stand up shower. There is a large lowered countertop with two

mirrors and two places to sit, just to apply makeup and do hair; it is the size of a small apartment.

“I’ll take a hot bubble bath after your shower,” I call out not knowing Ryan is standing directly behind me.

He drops his head down and speaks quietly to me from behind, “You don’t have to wait until I’m done, there’s nothing we haven’t seen before.” His proximity gives me goosebumps.

“Well, if you really don’t mind,” I say flirtatiously, I walk over to the tub and start running the water. I take the complimentary bubble bath and pour in a generous amount. When the water is high enough, I start the jets so it was overflowing with bubbles.

Ryan looks from his shower to my bath, “Your bath looks more fun than my shower.”

“Oh Behave!” I say mimicking Mike Myers. ‘Austin Powers’ was one of my favourite movies of all time. “Nothing leaves Vegas?” I confirm timidly.

“Nothing leaves Vegas,” he reassures.

“Then join me,” I say lightly. “There’s enough room for two.” I tell myself it was no different then being in a pool with Tara or Sierra, naked. I watch as he begins removing his clothing. I can’t stop myself from admiring his Charlie Hunnam-like body. I’m slower to take my clothes off being way more self-conscious than he is. There is a lot to be said for bubbles hiding nature’s flaws, critically aware of my own imperfections.

He takes my hand and guides me into the warm water making sure I didn’t slip before getting in behind me.

“Do you want to face each other?” I ask.

He speaks into my hair, “No, I want you against my chest.”

Oh my, if I don’t know any better, I would say he’s being quite flirtatious with me too. Knowing I’m the only one who needs to show restraint, I’ve already managed to place myself in a very compromising position. My resolve is very weak at best where Ryan is concerned, thank goodness everything is staying in Vegas or I would have already been in trouble when I got back home.

We lower ourselves into the hot water and I rest against his warm chest, closing my eyes and focusing on the sound of the jets blowing the water around. I

can feel him harden while he's pressed gently against me, "Oh my, is this too much for you?" I ask faking concern.

"Never enough," he breathes into my ear. He covers my breasts with his hands and wraps his legs around mine like a vine. "Are you comfortable?" he asks.

"Too comfortable," I say relaxing into him. When the water becomes cold, we force ourselves to vacate our very pleasant bath, "Shower the bubbles away?" I suggest.

"Thought you'd never ask," he says.

He throws a towel onto the floor and assists me getting out of the tub before he follows. We walked over to the shower where he adjusts the temperature for us and step in. He guides the water over my body removing all the bubbles from the bath and I do the same for him. Our hands slowly caressing each other as the water beats down on us. When we're finished, we dried each other off, never once breaking down and kissing each other.

"We can't do that again," he says grimly. "You picked Adam not me, and even though everything stays in Vegas, my feelings have to come home with me." He reminds me.

His brown puppy dog eyes lock onto mine and his chocolate hair looks richer than normal because it is still damp from our shower. My fingers want to glide through his locks and my mouth wants to taste his, he's so delectable, I feel like I can eat him up.

"Forgive me," he says before pulling the towel covering me from my grip. His mouth covers mine and his hands frisk my naked body, so much for being proud of myself for not kissing him. My fingers dive into his silky hair while my mouth welcomes his invasion. His warm tongue frolics wildly with mine as he backs me up against the bed lowering me down. He pauses for only a second waiting to see if I will stop him, and when I don't he slowly inserts himself into me. Every thrust deliberate, his eyes never leaving mine. When he finishes, he pulls out and let his juices spill over my stomach.

He grabs the towel from the floor and wipes my stomach down. I figure he's finished with me until he slides down the bed and begins spreading my legs for a snack. He feasts on me; his tongue is magical as he makes every part of my body tingle in response to him. He is relentless, working me until I'm calling out his

name and shaking out of control on the bed. My toes curl and my hands clench his hair. I cry mid-orgasm feeling an overwhelming sense of closeness to him. What are we doing? Why can't we control ourselves?

We don't talk about the tender moment we shared, or the inexplicable passion between us. Neither of us have the courage or strength to fight it off, so we just bask in it, unwilling to move.

Chapter 10

I wake up the next morning with my head on Ryan's chest and my leg flung across his body. His eyes are open and he's staring up at the ceiling. My body is literally pinning his, and the bed renders him motionless until I move, "How long have you been awake?"

He turns his head to look at the clock, "About an hour."

"Why didn't you wake me or at least move me so you can get up?"

"I didn't want to. You need your rest."

I start stroking the short hairs on the back of his neck and he closes his eyes to concentrate on the feeling, "You like that don't you?"

"Love it," he admits.

I glance over at the bedside table next to me finding my phone flashing blue. I disconnect it from the charger and hit the button to see what's waiting for me, one missed call and two texts.

I call mom back right away and confirm our safety. She's upset, that we didn't call her last night, but I tell her we were exhausted and hungry from our trip and it slipped our minds. She won't let me get off the phone until I promise her I will call her first thing tomorrow morning when I wake up. She fails to ask about our sleeping arrangements and had she; I would have told her the hotel provided us with two queen beds. She is liberal since we won the Olympics, but I don't want to test it.

I continue stroking Ryan's hair when I click on the text messages. The first is from Tara asking how it's going, and the second is Adam.

Ryan sees me click on his name, and crawls out from underneath me, "I'll give you your privacy," he says, I can tell by the tone of his voice he's frustrated.

Adam's text message asks me if we arrived safely, and says Ryan better stay away from me.

I text him back, reassuring him emphatically that Ryan is being a perfect gentleman and he has nothing to worry about. I lather it on saying how much I miss him, which is a huge exaggeration since Ryan has been attending to all my needs.

I take a quick shower after Ryan comes out. When I'm done I go back into our room to find Ryan reading my phone with a pissed off expression on his face. I don't have time to get upset with him as he confronts me, "If you're missing him so much, I'll hail you a cab to the airport," he snaps.

"You snooped," I say dismayed.

"My battery didn't charge. I didn't think we had anything to hide from each other, I guess I'm wrong. I'll see you back here at five," he leaves the room letting the door slam shut behind him.

I follow him out into the hallway, calling out, "Ryan!" but he keeps walking never turning back.

Chapter 11

I have fifteen minutes to spare before Ryan is expected back so I focus on looking good for him as a damage control measure. When I hear the door handle, I do one last quick check of myself, making sure I approve , hair, makeup, outfit, all look good. It's my way of dampening the situation.

I notice the scent of his cologne making it's way to me and the six o'clock shadow is drawing me in.

His eyes leave mine but only to take in the rest of my appearance. Is he undressing me with them? I feel them glide over my breasts, hover between my legs and then slowly gliding back up to mine again. I don't move, giving him the time he needs to take me all in. His eyes don't give his emotions away. I don't know if he's still angry, or pleased with what he see's and I don't guess. What I wonder is why I care THIS much? I never needed or cared for his approval before, so why do I now? Adam's my boyfriend for fuck sakes!

I tell myself to breathe because I feel like I've been sucking my gut in this entire time and I notice the intensity of his stare towards me. His eyes are darker, more tormented than seconds before. I see him for what he is now, I'm hit with the realization that the guy I skated with has matured into this awesome man standing before me. He's someone who tried saving dad's life but failed, he helped me keep it together so we could win the Olympics, never leaving my side no matter what since we've met, with the exception of a few indiscretions. Adam can't be compared fairly because he hasn't had the challenges Ryan's had.

"Are you ready?" he asks in a gravelly tone.

Speech evades me, so I nod.

"Are you up for Italian?" he asks holding the door open for me.

“Sure, I love Italian.” A voice! Something is finally working for me. I feel the light touch of his hand on the small of my back as I walk passed him through the doorway.

I want that hand all over my body, but I have to be sure. He says he’s taking his feelings home with him, so I have to give them strong consideration. I can’t take everything so lightly anymore because it’s not all staying in Vegas. I can’t let anything happen between us, because I don’t want to hurt him, not until I know where I’m at with Adam for sure. “What did you have in mind?”

“Allegro’s? It’s here in the hotel.”

“Sounds great,” I tell him. I follow him to the restaurant. He never reaches for my hand, and it’s so unusual for us. We hold hands all the time.

The restaurant is busy but Ryan’s lucky enough to find us a table close to the entrance. He pulls my chair out for me before taking his own. The waitress comes by with menus shortly after we sit down and we study them for as long as we can to avoid the palpable tension between us. When she comes by, she removes them and takes our order, forcing us to face one another.

I sip my water hoping it’s spiked with courage before commenting, “You look SICK tonight.” (Hot, gorgeous, mouthwatering, not feeling ill sick)

Ignoring my compliment, he goes straight for the jugular, “How long are you going to ignore your feelings for me?”

“For the same length of time it takes me to realize I’m not in love with Adam, this dinner isn’t going to work” I answer impulsively as I get up from the table. “I lost my appetite. I’ll see you back in the room.”

I stormed off mentally kicking myself for not keeping it together. When I got back to the room I throw myself onto the bed in frustration. A short while later, the door opens and a stream of light comes in. Ryan is back.

He closes the door behind him, but doesn’t turn on the lights. I feel the bed dip as he sits down next to me, “You’re in love with Adam?” he repeats in disbelief. I can hear the hurt in his voice.

“He was my first boyfriend,” I try explaining. “The first guy I ever kissed..”

“You don’t need to go into details.” He stops me from continuing. “Do you know how hard it is to spend time with you alone when I know he’s going to be waiting for you when we get back?”

“No, I don’t. Do you have any idea what I’ve been through?” I remind him.

“Tell me, let it out,” he says.

“First I’m forced to accept your hook-up with Sierra. I keep imagining your lips on hers, you touching her, and part of me thinks that it should have been me you were with, it makes me sick. Dad, well you can’t imagine how sad that makes me. We were so close. I went to him for everything, and now he’s gone and I’ve barely had a chance to mourn over him. I’ve never been as close to mom, but she’s still my mom and now she’s leaving me to go live with Aunt Rosalind in Florida. I know she needs to do this for herself but I’m still going to miss her. I finally get back together with Adam after you forced us apart and to whom I still have feelings for just to find out that I’m going to be moving in with you and going to school also with you, which of course Adam knows nothing about. Honestly, I’ve never felt so alone in all my life. I can’t breathe.”

“I want to be there for you,” he says weakening me more.

“I know you do, but I need my space.”

“Will Adam give you your space?”

“That’s none of your business, you need to stop concerning yourself about him and worry more about yourself.”

“If you are in love with Adam, there’s no way you can be intimate with me. Did you ever consider that?”

“Touche with Sierra.”

I weave my fingers through his, which is so natural for us. Everything between us is natural. “Ryan, I do know that you’re my best friend, you’ve been with me during the highest and lowest points of my life. The time we’ve spent together over the last two years has meant so much to me. I’ve watched you become a man in two short years.”

“With needs,” he adds.

“That I shouldn’t be filling,” I say.

“Why not? Fill them,” he challenges.

“You know why,” I insists. “It was never in our equation.”

I reach up to turn the lamp on, “Are your feelings the same for me?”

“Stronger,” he admits, “even though you aren’t with me.”

“Well, technically I am with you,” I say mistakenly trying to lighten the mood. I search for my purse and find the box with a token of appreciation I bought at the gift store for him. He opens it and stares at it before looking at me with those bleeding eyes of his, “Best friends? Really, that’s what you think of us?”

“There's nothing wrong with that, it's a lot.”

“Is it? Do best friends do this?” He pulls me in to him, kissing me hard on the lips. It’s different from all his other kisses. There’s no tenderness or love behind it; its forceful and done to prove a point.

When he releases me I smash my open hand against his face. He grabs my wrist and growls at me, “Don’t ever do that again.” I escape into the bathroom locking myself in.

I yell at him through the door, “Don’t ever kiss me just to prove a point again.”

I try rinsing my face and ridding myself of the red splotches I get when I’m upset. I don’t have my phone with me, and I don’t want to spend the entire night in the bathroom. It’s much more comfortable feeling sorry for myself in bed, so my resolve weakens yet again, and I slowly come out about twenty minutes later.

Ryan doesn’t say anything, his cheek is still pink under the stubble, his pride hurt. My hand cools from the warmth of the slap, I justify it by telling myself that he had it coming, but I swear I will never raise a hand to him again. Violence doesn’t solve anything and for the most part he has always been nice to me.

“I’m sorry for slapping you,” I say to him softly.

“Tonight was the most beautiful I’ve seen you,” he admits. He’s already in bed. I assume we aren’t going to the show after tonight’s events. I undress and get into bed facing the opposite direction. The rest of the trip is cordial at best, with the last two days dragging. I’m thankful to be going home. It saddens me that dad’s present wasn’t more enjoyable.

Chapter 12

I know the plane ride home is going to be my last alone time with Ryan for a while, it's my chance to apologize to him. It's really hard to build up the courage I need. He's brooding for most of the flight, assumedly knowing Adam will be there waiting for me. The tension between us is mounting.

The plane lands and Ryan and I go to the luggage area to pick up our bags. Once we have all of our pieces we walk towards the gate with significant distance between us. Ryan notices Adam first, "Your BOYFRIEND is to your right," he growls. I ignore Ryan seeing Adam right away. I rush over to him, dropping my bag on the way to give him a big hug.

He greets me with a kiss which I cut short placing my hands on his chest to stop him, "In the car," I encourage. When we get to the car, I barely sit down and Adam's hands are on the back of my neck guiding my face to his.

Between his kisses, he manages to say, "I missed you."

"I missed you too," I say gliding my fingers through his hair, pulling him closer to me.

"Did you have a good time?" he asks.

I fudge the truth, "Sure, it was fun."

"What did you guys do?"

"We weren't allowed to drink or gamble so there wasn't much to do. It sucks being eighteen in a place you need to be twenty-one for everything."

"With the exception of marriage, you can get married in Las Vegas at eighteen."

"You looked that up?"

"I was just curious," he admits.

"So Ryan and I should have gotten married," I tease.

“You didn’t?” he asks sarcastically.

“The chapels were booked up. It seems like everyone who goes to Las Vegas in February wants to get married.”

“Must be the cold weather,” he surmises.

It’s nice to have a light conversation with Adam. It seems like all the ones Ryan and I have together are all intense. The drive to my house flies by. It’s late, and the lights are off, so I assume mom is already in bed. Adam shuts his car off and I remove my seatbelt before he leans into me sweeping me into a passionate kiss.

I run my fingers through his hair as I open my mouth to him. His kisses are slow and deliberate becoming more demanding and frenzied with each one. His hands fist into my hair and he holds my face close to him. When he releases me he says, “Next time I want to be your travel buddy.”

“Promise,” I reassure. “Thanks for the lift.”

“I’ll see you at school tomorrow. Do you want me to drive you in?”

“Thanks Adam, but I think Tara has it covered.”

I kiss him again before he pops the trunk to get my suitcase.

The next morning Tara and Sierra are already waiting for me out in the driveway before I have a chance to text. I get into the back thrilled to see them again, “Hi! I missed you guys so much!”

“The feeling is mutual baby girl! How was your trip?” Tara asks looking at me in her rearview.

“Not so good,” I admit. “Ryan and I had a falling out.”

“Seriously? What happened?” Sierra reaches around grabbing my hand.

“I don’t know where to start.” I say shaking my head, “Let’s just say he’s too intense.”

“Did Adam pick you up from the airport or your mom?” Tara asks.

“Adam,” I say with a smitten tone.

“He must have been really happy to see you,” Tara says pulling into the school parking lot.

“Definitely,” I confirm.

We split up to go to our individual homerooms. Adam is already in his seat and Mrs. Uptight was staring me down. Her eyes follow me to my chair before she lectures me in front of the class, “Just because your grades have been submitted to the Universities, doesn’t mean you can take time off to go on vacation. Your final grades may impact whether your admission is revoked or not if there is a substantial difference. The principal wants to see you,”

“Right now or after the Anthem?”

“Now.”

I look over at Adam questioningly. He shrugs. I grab my gear and head for the principal’s office. The secretary nods for me to take a seat and holds up her finger motioning that he’ll be with me in a minute. I search through my bag finding my phone ensuring it’s off. I’ve never been called to the office before. When I look up, I see Ryan walking towards me.

The secretary motions for him to take a seat next to me. The principal makes the morning announcements and then tells everyone to meet in the auditorium.

The secretary says, “You can go in now.”

I point questioningly at me because I was here first, but she says, “Both of you.” I think for sure it’s because of all the school we’ve missed. The same must be for Ryan too. We better pull our socks up! Principal Watson is sitting behind his grand desk. There are two wooden chairs with leather padding in front of him that he motions for Ryan and me to take.

He holds his hand out to us and says, “On behalf of the school I want to congratulate both of you on your Olympic gold medal.” He turns to me, “Dalia, it must have been very difficult for you after losing your father, our sincerest condolences. We are so very proud of you and all of your accomplishments. Your father would have been too.”

“As the schools way of rewarding both of you for your accomplishments we’ve decided to name a bursary in your honour. The first year you and Ryan will be the recipients to assist you with your college expenses. You have brought great honour to our school by achieving such high standings in your academia along with your athleticism.”

“Thank you sir,” I say shaking his hand.

Ryan also reaches for the principals hand, who also thanks him.

“Come with me,” he smiles. Ryan and I follow him out of the office. I’m so relieved we aren’t getting in trouble that I’m not paying attention to where he’s taking us. We follow him through a door I’ve never gone through before and then onto a stage. O.M.G. Now, we are standing in front of the entire school. Our peers break out into a huge standing ovation when they see us. Everyone rises from their seats, clapping, whistling, and calling out our names. I’m taken by surprise, unexpected tears start running down my cheeks, it’s overwhelming.

The principal stands at the podium and adjusts his microphone, “Okay, settle down!” It takes a minute or two but the auditorium quiets down and the lighting dims. “Dalia Middleton and Ryan Kennedy, on behalf of the school we want to congratulate you for winning the Olympics.”

The principal can’t continue because there is a roar of applause and then everyone is back up on their feet screaming and stamping them. The principal waits a second and motions for everyone to be quiet and sit down again. This time it takes a little longer for that to happen.

“For your excellence in academia and your athleticism, the school awards you a bursary named in your honour.” The principal walks up to us and hands us both an envelope.

“Dalia, there has been an outpouring of students who want to wish you their condolences personally on the loss of your father and I promised them they could do it at this assembly.”

He brings a huge bag filled with envelopes to me and then students one by one line up to come on stage offering me flowers and hugs of support. I don’t think there is a dry eye to be found. Staff start helping me to collect the bouquets so I can take them home.

Finally when everyone is settled, they replay Ryan and my short and long programs, me being carried off the ice by Ryan and Coach Hicks, ending with us on the podium. At that point I’m a sobbing mess and Ryan holding me as everyone applauds one last time before filing out of the auditorium. It’s such an honour.

Mom, Ryan’s mom, and Coach Hicks come running from the other side of the stage completely taking us by surprise to squeeze the bejeezus out of us gushing about how proud they are, their eyes full of tears, shed and unshed. Then

they say that they have to go to work because they aren't the ones who were granted bursaries. They always know how to make us smile.

Chapter 13

Our routine is off kilter since the Olympics, Ryan and I both know we have to get back on track sooner rather than later, but it's nice to have the time off. Final exams are only a few weeks away and I need to study for them, so when I'm not with Adam I'm spending every possible minute with my face buried in a textbook.

Mom keeps busy making all the arrangements. Her friendship with Ryan's mom blossoms and it's going to be hard for the two of them to part ways. They promise to visit each other even after the big move to Florida.

I hear through the grapevine (Jeremy) that Ryan is dating Harper. I'm dreading the moment I turn a corner and run into them or walk out into the parking lot and see them snogging each other. Harper turns out to be my high school nemesis. Any guy I have a thing for seems to have one for her.

Jeremy and I have each other's back. It's an alliance that grows from betrayals we've both suffered. I'm deluded thinking that Ryan and I will ever be close enough to be able to confide in each other again. Obviously that isn't the case because he never brings himself to telling me that he is dating Harper, he's had so many chances.

It's a blessing that I haven't bared witness to them in school or at parties yet. I try to prep myself, knowing it will happen eventually. I tell myself that it won't bother me, shouldn't bother me, but who am I kidding? Their relationship won't be real for me until I see them together with my own two eyes.

Summer Break

“Okay, pens down.” I feel a tap on my shoulder. Exams from behind are being passed forwards. Once the teachers have our papers in their hands, the gym is complete chaos. School is out for summer, and my high school years are officially over. I crack my knuckles and stretch my shoulders and arms as I stand up searching the gym. Tara is up front with Carter.

I wrap my arms around Tara, “It’s over! Time to get wasted!”

“My pool’s not open yet,” she warns.

“Don’t worry; as long as you have spirits, I’m sure it will be fine. Do we have the place to ourselves?”

“As Per!”

“I’ll go home and have dinner and then come right over.”

“You don’t need to, have dinner at my place.”

“Okay, I’ll text mom.” I pull my phone out of my school bag and turn it back on.

Suddenly hands cover my eyes, rendering me blind, “Sierra?”

“Fuck, you always get it right!” She complains excitedly.

“Well, Tara’s standing in front of me you twit! How did you do on your exam?”

“Not bad, considering I hardly studied for the fucking thing!”

“Shut the fuck up!” Carter admonishes, “The teachers haven’t vacated the gym.”

“So what are they going to do?” Tara challenges. That is when I see HIM with HER. They are leaving the gym together. His arm is cloaked around her shoulders like they had been together forever. They run into Jeremy who is looking through the glass on the gym door for probably us. I’m fixated on them as I watch them talk for a few seconds. Jeremy points to us, in particular Tara and then Ryan nods.

They leave the gym, but Jer comes in. He is headed straight for me. “Tell me you didn’t?” I ask.

“Invite them to Tara’s? Of course I did!”

“I’m going to have to look at them all night?”

“You better get used to it,” he advises expertly.

“Where’s Adam?” I ask.

“He went to the liquor store. I told him I’d take you home.”

“You’re going to have to break that promise; I’m having dinner at Tara’s.”

“Can I join you guys? Mom’s cooking fish tonight and if I have another frozen dinner, I think I’m going to puke.”

“Don’t ask me,” I direct, “ask Tara.”

Tara looks up, “Sure, the more the merrier!”

Sierra looks pleased that Jer is coming over early. We walk to the parking lot together. Tara, Sierra and Carter go in one car, Jer and I in his.

When we are alone in his car he asks, “Is Sierra seeing anyone Dalia? Tell me the truth.”

“She is very single. I don’t think she’s dated since the abortion.” He winces at my words. “Are you thinking of getting back with her?”

“I miss her Dal,” he admits.

“No worries, she misses you too.”

He smiles looking hopeful, “How are you and Adam getting along?”

“Amazing, but I don’t expect it to last.”

“Why not?”

“I haven’t forthcoming with him,” I admit.

“You need to be,” he encourages.

He pulls into Tara’s driveway turning off the car. He gives me a big hug and I whisper into his ear, “Good luck.” The front door is left open an inch for us. Music is blaring from within.

I see Sierra adjusting the music and scream over the noise, “Turn the volume down, I can’t hear myself think!” Jer follows me in waiting for her to turn it down. I don’t hang around and watch them stumble into a heated conversation. I search out Tara to help plan dinner.

Tara is searching for something in her freezer when I find her, “Have you heard from Adam?”

“Carter says he’s on his way back.”

“Oh shit, I better go do my makeup.” I dig in my pocket pulling out two twenty dollar bills, “Let’s order Chinese, here’s all I have.”

I take the stairs two at a time rushing into Tara’s room to get started on my makeup when a big blob on her bed catches my eye. I turn the light on and recognize Sierra and Jer right away. He’s on top of her and their clothes are strewn all over the floor. The blanket is covering his buttocks, but I can see his bare back and her breasts. They don’t waste any time.

I turn the light off and scoot passed them into her bathroom closing the door behind me. I put the fan on to muffle their sex noises. I’m praying tonight will go well for them.

I hear voices from the front door, Tara is greeting Adam. I cover my eyes as I pass by the bed again and leave Tara’s room to say hi to Adam whose standing at the base of the stairs, “Hi Dal! Where’s Jer?”

“In Tara’s room with Sierra,” I say slightly embarrassed.

“Stupid fuck, he’s taking her back,” he says more to Carter than to me.

“They love each other,” I defend Jer’s choice.

“She slept with your fucking partner,” he curses. Tara is getting angry at Adam’s zealous comments; it’s obvious by her stance alone.

Carter steps out of the living room handing Adam a beer, “Chill, let him make his own fucking mistakes. You can’t tell him who he can dick.”

He takes the drink from Carter, “Thanks bro.”

Tara and I look at each other completely disgusted by Adam and Carter’s vulgarities. He saunters over to me after taking a swig of his beer and kisses me, his mouth wet and cold from the beer, his kiss aggressive, making me want him.

I’m curled into him on the sofa nursing my second drink when Ryan walks in with Harper, his arm is cloaked over her shoulders. It’s a hard pill to swallow, seeing them together for myself, my best friend dating a girl that doesn't deserve him. He’s a status symbol to her, popular, Olympic athlete, driving a Mercedes, she’s using him, can’t he see it? Can anyone see it?

Tara greets them at the front door, helping them with their jackets. “So nice of you guys to make it!” Tara gushes. “Help yourselves to drinks in the kitchen. We ordered Chinese food for dinner.” Tara is gauging my reaction. Adam and

Carter are distracted in the midst of a heated discussion about an exam they wrote two days ago, so I motion to Tara with my eyes to meet upstairs.

Her sheets are all messed up on the bed and underwear is still lying on the floor. Maybe it's Tara's? "They could have at least given me the common courtesy of making the bed after doing it here," she complains.

"They are back together again," I tell her.

"How do you know?" she asks.

"He told me he's going to ask her in the car."

"Oh that's so sweet!"

"What do you think about Ryan and Harper?"

"Lucky Bitch! What do you think?"

"I think she's using him."

"Can you blame her? He's so friggin hot! How you can choose Adam over him is beyond me!"

"This conversation isn't making me feel better," I complain.

"It's not supposed to," She reasons, "I'm trying to talk sense into you. Do you still have feelings for him? Are you going to finally admit to me and most importantly to yourself that you're madly in love with him?"

"You're talking stupid Tara. I'm in love with Adam."

"If that's the case then why does seeing Ryan with Harper bother you?"

"Point noted," I acknowledge.

"Does Adam know you're going to the same University as Ryan?"

"Not if I can help it," I grin.

"Seriously, he needs to know, it's only eleven weeks away."

"I've been meaning to tell him," I say honestly.

"Someone might beat you to it. I'd get on that," she suggests.

"We better get back down before they notice."

"Where's Sierra and Jer?"

Grinning, I point to the bathroom door where I notice light escaping from the bottom. It was locked but Tara knows how to open it. She pries the lock open and we burst in, the lovebirds are soaking in her tub, "I should charge you" she says. "Make the bed when you're done and please wipe down the tub!"

"Add some fucking bubbles!" I crack sarcastically seeing way too much.

We run out of the bathroom giggling. When we get back downstairs the mood turns like the wind. It changes from light and happy to serious and dark. “The air’s thick down here,” I comment.

Carter glances up at us, “We’ve been discussing which Universities we’ve chosen.”

“Oh!” *Shit! Ryan is smirking. His arm isn’t around Harper anymore. She looks pissed.*

Carter continues, “Ryan was telling us he’s chosen Western, that’s the one you’re going to, isn’t that right?”

“Oh, yes, that is the one I chose too. What a coincidence!” I try keeping my voice light and upbeat not shit-baked and caged. I down the rest of my drink using that as an excuse to leave the room.

I hear cushions shift and someone behind me. I’m hoping it’s anyone but Adam, but his growl is unmistakable, “Not so fast! You knew didn’t you?”

I turn to face him, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I say innocently.

“You knew, why didn’t you tell me.”

“I didn’t, honest.” Wow, now I’m telling bold faced lies.

I pour myself an even stronger drink than before. Adam pins me against the fridge and starts rubbing himself against me mimicking fucking motions. His lips cover mine claiming me. He grabs my sex whispering, “Get the fuck upstairs, I’m going to fuck you silly.”

He releases me and I start rushing out of the kitchen when Carter and Tara come in smiling, “Fix the sheets when you’re done.” He chases me up the stairs slamming the door behind us. Adam mixed with the spirits I’ve had side-tracks me from thinking about Ryan and Harper.

Chapter 14

The next morning mom pops her head into my bedroom, “Good morning sweetheart, we think we found you and Ryan an apartment. They’re coming over this morning so we can go take a look at it and put a deposit down if we like it. They will be here in fifteen minutes.”

“Oh.my.God! Why didn’t you wake me up sooner?”

“You need your rest. I heard you chatting with the tidy bowl man last night. Have a bit too much to drink?”

I don’t answer her question knowing it would lead into an inquisition. I bolt upright in bed and check the time, it’s after ten. It feels like the middle of the night. My mouth is pasty and my head throbs. Ignoring how I feel, I hop out of bed and rush into the shower, each step causes my head to pound more. I wait for the water to warm up and step in choosing my favourite body scrub. There is little time to waste.

I don my favourite navy sweater with a cute little navy pencil skirt. I wear flats so I don’t look dressed up. The rest of the time, I spent applying makeup that highlights my features without making it look like I put any effort into it. Then I add the piece de resistance: Coach Perfume. Three misty sprays and I then I’m done.

The fresh aroma of percolated coffee wafts upstairs. “Do I have time for a coffee?” I call out.

“Sure I’ll make you one,” mom offers. I go downstairs and find her in the kitchen already pouring me a cup. I have about two sips when we hear the car pull in, “It’s okay, finish your coffee. I’ll tell them you’ll be a minute,” mom says. She goes outside to the passenger side of Ryan’s car and starts talking to Sara while I

finished. I pop a gum in my mouth, grabbing my purse and phone off the charger before joining them.

It's sunny and room temperature outside. The grass is turning green and summer is in the air. Mom hears me coming and opens the back door. Sara gets out of the car and joins her in the back.

"What are you doing?" I ask politely.

"I'm sitting with your mother. You can sit up front with Ryan."

"You don't need to move for me," I insist.

"I WANT to sit with her," she smiles. "We'll guide you from the backseat."

I roll my eyes at Ryan, "Great, two backseat drivers!"

He smiles, "You look nice today."

"Thanks," I say, "you do too," I'm totally sarcastic. He's wearing his wife-beater T-shirt with a grey sweater and sweat pants. He couldn't have spent more than two minutes on his appearance.

"She didn't tell me we were going anywhere until twenty minutes ago," he says referring to his mother.

"Same here," I smile.

"How are you feeling after last night," he asks quietly while turning the music speakers to the back of the car drowning us out?

"Rough, why did you tell everyone which University you chose in front of Adam?"

"Why wouldn't I? It just came up. I had no idea you didn't mention it to him. Does he know we're sharing a flat together?"

"Are you crazy? Of course not! Not yet," I add. "Does Harper?"

"She knew more than Adam did. She's aware we picked the same University but not about our living arrangements."

"You haven't told her yet," I state the obvious.

"No," he admits.

"Shouldn't you?" I ask.

"Shouldn't you?" He rallies back to me.

It so weird, sitting in the car and NOT holding hands. I'm not used to it. I just want to reach over and lace my hand into his. Come to think of it, he didn't put his hand on my headrest when he backed out of the driveway either. He's more

distant. This wall has gone up between us and our being even a little bit physical with each other is a part of the past.

Mom leans up between Ryan's and my seat. "Ryan, your mother told me you have a new girlfriend. Is that true?"

He blushes and mom pinches his cheek, "That's so cute Ryan. What's her name?"

"Harper, Mrs. Middleton," he says politely.

Mom laughs, "Just to think, you and Dalia had your mother and I believing you guys were totally in love with each other. The two of you missed your calling. You should have been actors," she says affectionately before returning to her conversation with Sara. A heavy silence falls over us the rest of the ride.

Ryan pulls up to a newer apartment building and parks the car. We call the landlord who lets us in and meet her in the lobby. She introduces herself as Macy. She is heavy set woman with strawberry blond hair that looks like she cuts it herself with a pink complexion littered with acne and eczema. Her glasses are from the eighties giving coke bottle rims a whole new definition.

We introduce ourselves and then she asks us to follow her. She walks with a bit of a waddle due to her oversized belly or maybe she has issues down there that makes her walk like that. She looks like she just rode on a saddle.

She brings us to apartment 214. Ryan and I enter first then Sara and Mom follow behind us. The light maple coloured floors are either laminate or hardwood, having to guess I would say laminate. It's cozy, I like it immediately. On our left is a kitchen that boasts of new wooden cabinetry with nickel plated handles. The stove is hooded with under cabinet lighting. The living room is quite spacious and will easily hold two couches, a table, and a nicely sized LED television. There is only one bathroom with a shower and tub and two carpeted bedrooms that looked approximately the same in size.

I looked at Ryan questioningly, "What do you think?"

"Perfect, you?"

"Perfect."

Mom and Sara hug, "Rented!" Mom grins at Macy, "We'll give you the deposit today and the kids will move in the beginning of September."

“Oh no, no, no,” she says pointing her finger at mom. “The ad clearly states immediate occupancy. You either start renting the first of July or I’ll find somebody who will.” I subtly looked at mom with pleading eyes.

She turns to Sara, “The kids like it and there isn’t too much to pick from, what do you think?”

“It will give them plenty of time to move in and get settled,” she says more to herself.

Mom reaches for Macy’s hand, “We’ll take it.” It took us over an hour to tie up loose ends and sign our lives away before we heading out for food.

Chapter 15

My phone vibrates in my pocket while Adams finger is stimulating my clit during a repeat viewing of Fifty. The reviews are terrible, but I'm still a fan. I can never get enough of that movie. Adam is my Christian :-) I'm going to have to buy it, theatre pricing is killing me.

The curiosity of whose texting me is killing me so I come up with an excuse to go to the bathroom to check my texts. I ask Adam if he wants anything from the concession stand, he says he's fine.

I get up and walk quickly out of the dark theatre. I pull my phone out of my pocket and see a blue flashing light. I press the menu button and swipe the screen: a text. I press the text button:

Ryan: Mom booked us private ice. She's worried we've been off 4 2 long.

Dalia: When?

Ryan: 2morrow 10pm (Cheaper). I'll pick U up.

Dalia: Ok, I have to go back 2 my movie right now.

Ryan: What R U watching?

Dalia: Fifty

Ryan: Biting my lip, you're a fan too? Go figure! (Pardon the pun). C.U.
then.

Dalia: I'm looking 4ward 2 it.

I delete the string of text with Ryan before putting my phone back into my pocket.

I step into the theatre waiting for my eyes to adjust before finding my way back to Adam. He looks at me oddly, "Didn't you say you were going to get a drink?"

“Oh, changed my mind. I just had water from the fountain.”

He silences me from talking with his lips kissing my rhythmically while his finger resumed its arduous work. This movie inspires him, making him more in tune with my needs.

I hear Ryan’s car pull into the driveway at 9:30. He’s alone in his Mercedes. I grab my bag and head out the door. Mom already knows where I’m going, and what Adam doesn’t know won’t hurt him. I don’t know what I’ll tell him if he asks me where I was, maybe the truth. I don’t like thinking about it much.

Ryan pops the trunk and I put my bag in before joining him in the front seat. He puts his hand on my headrest and backs out of the driveway. I have an uncontainable grin on my face, “It’s been three weeks since we’ve been on the ice,” I mention, “Not that I was counting.”

He is smiling too, “Too long,” he comments.

“It was really nice of your mom to rent it for us.”

“Thanks, I’ll tell her you appreciate it, maybe she’ll do it more often.”

His hand rests on the shifter. When we arrived in the arena parking lot, he pops the trunk and carries both our bags into the arena.

We have ten minutes to get ready before the ice is ours, no coach, no spectators and no parents. It’s just me, him, and our sport. I wear a regular practice dress and a hoodie to keep me warm. Ryan wears his hoodie and exercise pants.

Before stepping out onto the ice, I close my eyes. The last time I was on the ice was at the Olympics. The image remains vivid in my memory. The pressure of making it is permanently removed and now I’m able to skate for the sheer love of the sport. I take a deep breath in and then slowly release it savouring the scent of the arena.

Ryan stands immediately next to me on the edge of the platform, “Are you ready?”

“Just give me a minute.”

“Sure, take all the time you need.” He doesn’t step onto the ice; instead he remains by my side, not rushing me. *He gets me.*

“I’m as ready as I’ll ever be,” I tell him. I step on the ice first. He follows behind me. I slip my blades back and forth a few times limbering up my ankles

before starting to move. When I pick up speed his arm goes around my waist the way it always does. *He's touching me again. I miss his touch, it reaches my core.* I tear up making the wind feel cold against my face.

Ryan notices, slowing us down until we're standing still facing each other. I slide my hands into his sweater touching his strong, hard, muscular arms. He leans down as though he's going to kiss me, but stops himself. The heat from our bodies nearly melts the ice beneath us. Our non-physical moment of intimacy surpassed anything I've ever felt before.

Chapter 16

The rule is we train for shows during the week and we move our belongings and stay in our apartment on the weekends until school starts. This isn't going to go over well with Adam. He still doesn't know who my roommate is going to be. The first weekend of this new living arrangement is swiftly approaching and it is time to come clean with him. I struggle trying to figure out a way to break it to him gently. Unsuccessful, I chose the 'easiest' way. I text him.

Dalia: Adam R U there?

Adam: Yes

Dalia: I have 2 tell U something.

Adam: Waiting.

Dalia: Uhm..

Adam: What is it?

Dalia: I don't know how 2 tell U this.

Adam: R U breaking up with me?

Dalia: No.

Adam: Then it's not that bad, just go ahead & tell me.

Dalia: This is so hard.

Adam: Do U want me 2 come over?

Dalia: No, I've been trying 2 tell U in person & I can't, that's why I'm texting U.

Adam: Just stop thinking, and type it.

Dalia: I'm going 2B living in an apartment with Ryan off campus. U've nothing 2 worry about, I'm in <3 with U. He's dating Harper. U can visit me anytime U want, I'm sure Harper will B visiting 2.

I wait for his response but he never writes back. I keep texting him, but no response. I call and it goes straight to voicemail. I put out a social media APB. I texted Tara and Sierra a group text:

Dalia: Adam knows I'm moving in with Ryan.

Tara: How did U tell him?

Dalia: I couldn't build up the courage so I texted him.

Sierra: How brave! lol

Tara: How did he take it?

Dalia: Bad, he hasn't texted back, won't answer my calls. If U hear anything can U guys keep me posted? He has 2 contact either Jer or Carter eventually right?

Sierra: 4 sure, don't worry, we'll keep U posted.

The first weekend we go up in Ryan's car armed with two packed bags of clothes and Sara's credit card to Lee-on's. Mom is giving me the furnishings from our house, so the only thing we have to put on the card is a bed for Ryan.

The novelty of having our very own place hasn't worn off yet. We chose to go there first before dropping our bags off. Ryan stops at the door not letting me into the apartment. I looked at him confused, "What are you doing?"

He lifts me into his arms after opening the door and says, "I'm carrying you over the threshold."

I playfully hit his chest squirming gently in his arms, "Put me down idiot! That's what you do when you get married!" He refuses to lower me to the ground. He continues walking with me in his arms across our threshold. Once we are in, he allows me to stand on my own two feet. "Can I pick the room?"

"Sure, which one do you want?"

"I want the room at the end of the hallway."

"Sure, have you and Adam talked since you told him?"

"I don't want to talk about it," I cut him off.

"He'll get over it," Ryan reassures.

"How did Harper take it?" I ask curiously.

"She isn't happy about it, but in the end, she doesn't have much of a choice."

“Nothing is ever easy when it comes to us is it?”

“No, I guess not. R U ready to go?”

“Yes.”

We drive to the local Lee-on's. We have just walked into the store and an aggressive salesman instantly accosts us. We try to look in a different direction but he starts following us. He's walking pretty quickly so we speed up our pace to get away from him. I get irritated with his aggression and chose to confront him rather than run away, “Can you stop following us, you're freaking me out.” It is empowering. He looks at me dumbfounded and slithers away.

Ryan points out a cherry wood veneer headboard (everything in the store was particle board or veneer), “What do you think of this one?” He asks.

“No good,” I answer after zero contemplation.

“Why not?”

“Nowhere to latch the handcuffs too,” I answer.

“Point noted,” he says grinning.

Eventually he choses a wrought iron headboard with multiple spokes to attach handcuffs too. Its perfect, and then we moves on to mattresses trying everyone in the store. Finally Ryan thinks he's got it narrowed down to the perfect mattress. He's beaming with accomplishment. He says, “Lay on this one.”

I try the one he's pointing to and a few more.

“What do you think?” he asks.

“Honestly? Terrible.”

“Why?” he sounds frustrated.

“Too soft, you won't be able to perform good thrusts when you're sinking into that mattress. It will affect your performance.”

“You think?”

“I know.”

“Which one should I get?”

I pointed one out. Its firm but not too firm, comfort, without too much give. “It's all about the ride.”

“Point noted, thanks Dalia.”

“You're welcome,” I say.

Ryan turns to the lady and points to the mattress that I persuaded him to buy,
“We’ll take that one!”

Chapter 17

It was our last formal gathering before we go our separate ways to college. After long discussions about where we were going to hold it, we decided to switch it up a bit and have it at Tara's. This time it was going to be different, special. She insists on a dress code; this is going to be a classic pyjama party. Sierra and I chose to get ready at her house, giving us a chance to catch up.

Boy-friendless, Sierra has to text Jer for our chariot to come and pick us up. The humiliation of it all, Adam hasn't spoken to me since the infamous text we shared and I'm hoping beyond hope that he won't show up tonight. I have no idea what I will say to him or how he will react to me if I do. He never misses parties; my stomach is unsettled with nerves.

We plan wisely ensuring ingestion of alcohol without the need for a ride. Tara said Jer can sleep over, she will hide him, and it will be our little secret. Sierra and I go downstairs to grab food out of her fridge so we don't drink on empty stomachs. If mine doesn't settle down soon, I won't be drinking at all. I chalk my uneasiness to the imminent confrontation with Adam.

Jeremy gets out of his car while it's still idling in Sierra's driveway to open our car doors for us. He holds open Sierra's first while looking at me saying, "Girls you look sick!"

"I feel it," I say under my breath.

"What's wrong?" asks Sierra.

"You don't know?" I say watching Jeremy run around to the driver's side of the car to get back in. "I'm going to see Adam tonight."

Sierra puts her hand up gesturing it's nothing, "No worries, he doesn't have a new girlfriend."

“He’s been a miserable prick ever since he found out you and Ryan are going to be living together. What the fuck brought that on?”

“Not what, you mean who? My mother of course. She thinks if we’re going to perform together and go to school together we might as well live together, it makes sense to her.”

“Only in her world,” Sierra comments.

“I could have helped you break it to him,” Jeremy offers too late,” he advises. “He’s really mad at you for texting him.”

“It would have ruined our summer together,” I admit.

“True,” he agrees.

“It’s all water under the bridge,” Sierra comments.

I look at her with furrowed brow, “No it’s not, and the shit hasn’t hit the fan yet. The shit always hits the fan before it can become water under the bridge.”

“How do you think he’s going to act towards me?” I ask Jer.

He looks in his rearview, “He’s had three weeks for his anger to fester, and I assume he’s going to explode tonight. Alcohol isn’t going to help the matter. Ryan and I will keep an eye on you, we’ve already discussed it. Don’t go anywhere alone with him.”

“Oh my,” I say nervously. It’s only a little reassuring that they are going to watch out for me.

We pull into Tara’s driveway and get out of the car forgetting to wait for Jeremy to open our chariot doors. We knock on the door and Tara answers wearing her favourite Victoria Secret camisole and matching lace undies, nothing else. She invites us in, I’m tempted to tell her to put something on, I’m not interested in seeing her snatch, but I refuse to be the lame one.

She hugs each of us saying, “Everyone’s in the dining room.”

She has a rectangular dining table set for eight. The girls are on one side, the men on the other. Tara and Carter are at the heads. I’m across from Adam and sitting next me is my arch rival, Harper, who is completely unaware of how much I hate her.

It’s beyond my comprehension how none of the girls like her, yet they keep inviting her.

Tara takes a sip of her drink before leaving us to get the first course.

Ryan looks at me, “Dal,” he greets nodding his head formally. He is topless wearing a pair of exercise pants I’ve never seen him in before.

“Ryan,” I say back to him.

Tara comes back into the room placing soups and salads in front of us. Our glasses are filled with red wine but there is also water as an alternative.

She takes her place at the head of the table and holds up her wine glass to start a toast, “To our last get together. Good luck in all your future endeavours’, let’s make sure to stay in touch.”

“Here, here,” Carter says wearing a minion onesie raising his glass. We clink glasses before sipping our wine. Carter rises from the table and walks over to Tara. He gets down on bended knee pulling a box from his chest pocket, “Tara, will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?” None of us see it coming; we are happily surprised for them. We wait for her to answer, and we wait. Carter looks dumbfounded and then angry, probably expecting an excited, ‘yes,’ instead he gets an uncomfortable silence.

She looks around at all of us with her eyes finally landing on Carter, “If you’ll please excuse us for a second?” The two of them leave the room. Tara’s bedroom door slams shut and then we hear Tara’s voice talking quickly but it’s hard to make out her words. Then Carter’s voice is thunderous and he is easy to make out. Tension mounts by the second as we vainly try to fill the air with conversation and drown out the torrid argument we are inadvertently being subjected to.

I glance over at Ryan, “Does she know?”

“Know what?” Harper asks.

Adam looks at her, “That your BOYFRIEND is shacking up with my ex-girlfriend off campus.”

“I’m not your ex,” I snap. “You have to break up with me for me to be your ex!”

“I haven’t called you in three weeks, make the assumption.” Adam says across the table.

“You’re moving in with HER?” Harper yells at Ryan.

“You don’t have the balls to break up with me,” I taunt Adam.

“That’s rich coming from you, who texted me your new living arrangements, why should I give you the curtesy of breaking up with you?” Adam spits back.

“You heard him,” I say to Harper. “He’s moving in with me!”

“Stay out of it bitch!” She snaps at me, smashing her open palm against me cheek. Adam gets out of his chair and comes over to me. He speaks into my ear, “Get out of your chair now,” he seethes.

Instantly I get up.

“Not here,” Ryan growls at Harper under his breath. He hates public scenes, I know this first hand, and I cause enough of them.

Adam grabs my wrist and drags me away from the table. “You touch one hair on her head,” Ryan threatened.

“I’ll fuck her if I want to,” Adam yells back at him. “Worry about your own fucking girlfriend.”

Ryan grabs my other wrist, “Don’t go with him,” he pleads protecting me.

I look up at him, “I need to.” My cheek is warm and stinging.

He takes me to the master bedroom turning the lights on and closing the door. “We’re finished Dalia. I don’t want to see you anymore. There you go, that was easy.”

I’m still trying to get over what Harper did, “You’re just angry. You don’t mean it.”

“Damn right I’m fucking angry, I loved you. I waited for you to compete, I trusted you with him, and I would have done just about anything for you. You broke my heart,” his voice cracks. He leaves the room. I’m alone feeling another newfound loss, its real now.

I call a cab and watch for it from the bedroom window until it comes. I walked quickly down the stairs and leave Tara’s closing the door behind me. It’s humid and dark outside. Low lying clouds move briskly past and the smell of rain is in the air.

The cemetery is creepier at night than I expect it to be, but I need to talk to dad.

The cab driver opens his window, “I don’t know if I feel good about leaving you here all alone, in pyjama’s no less.”

I turn back to him, “I have a cell phone with a full battery. I’m going to be okay.”

“Are you sure?” He asks doubting me.

“Ya, thanks.” I said.

He drives off I guess not knowing what else he could do. It’s harder to find dad’s gravesite at night than it is during the day, mom is still waiting for the headstone. I’m going to tell Dad about my plans with Ryan and what happened with me and Adam but when I find him, I just collapse on my knees and start crying. I long to burry my head in his chest the way I did when I was a little girl.

I don’t know how long I cried for, but I noticed flashes of lightening through the trees and the humidity increasing. Little drops of rain start tickling my face. Arms wrap around me from behind, startling me. I know it’s Ryan without having to look, that’s what he does. I’m not scared. I turn to him sobbing into his chest. He picks me up in his arms and says, “Let’s go home now.” I don’t ask him what happened to Harper, or how he knew where to find me, or even why he was looking for me, I’m just glad he came.

Mom’s flight is scheduled for the day after Tara’s party. Sara and Ryan come over to pick us both up. Mom and I are trying to start a new life the only way we knew how, whether we live in the same house or not, we carry our memories of dad with us forever. It takes everything in me not to break down when I watch mom crying on Sara’s shoulder in the backseat of Ryan’s car. The image of mom brokenhearted is terrifying. Every whimper I hear makes me feel helpless and vulnerable. I want to take mom’s pain away so badly it’s breaking me.

I notice Ryan’s eyes glistening when he weaves his fingers through mine; it’s hard for him seeing her too. I tell myself that I have to stay strong for mom; it’s all that I can do.

We arrive at the airport and Ryan pops his trunk before getting out of the car. He pulls out her suitcases and waits at a distance while we say our good-byes.

“They’re going to take care of you,” mom reassures. “They promised me.”

“I know mom. I’m worried about you. You take care of yourself.”

“I will. It’s going to be great living in the Florida with Aunt Rosalind. I just worry about you. I feel like I’ve failed you.”

“Oh God mom, you’ve never failed me. You’ve been the most amazing mom.”

“You’ve been the most amazing daughter. I’ll send you tickets to fly out and see me for Christmas. It will be easier if I know that I have something to look forward to.”

“I’d like that,” I tell her.

She holds me in her arms before grabbing her bags and leaving me with Sara and Ryan outside the terminal.

I get back into the car so we can drive Sara home before our big trip to college. When we arrive at Ryan’s, Sara and I hug and then I wait for them in the car so Ryan can be alone with his mother to say good-bye.

We are alone now and the car is heavy with emotion. I expect Ryan to get onto the highway, but instead he turns in a different direction.

“Where are we going?” I ask.

“I thought you would like to say good-bye to Tara and Sierra before we leave. They’re expecting us.”

“I’d like that.”

When we arrive at Tara’s they were waiting for us, peering out the front window. Before we stop the car they come running out, their cheeks stained with tears. The day is getting more and more difficult.

I hug Sierra first and when we are close she whispers into my ear, “Jer and I are back together.”

“I’m so happy for you,” I say giving her a kiss on the cheek. “I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you too!” She cries.

Tara already has her arms stretched out for me, “Come here you crazy shit!”

I run into them nearly knocking her over, “What happened in the room.”

“I ended it Dal, I’ll never marry him, and it isn’t fair to hold onto him anymore. I should have broken up with him two years ago.”

“Are you going to be okay?” I ask concerned.

“I’m a tough nut,” she reassures.

“What happened with you and Adam?” she whispers.

“He broke-up with me.”

“Are you okay?” she asks.

“It feels real now, I think so. I don’t know Tara.”

“Call me anytime,” she encourages, “and I’m going to be visiting you.”

“You do that,” I encourage. I looked over at Sierra, “Make sure you guys visit me,” I tell her.

“What happened with Ryan and Harper?” asked Tara.

“I don’t know,” I never asked him. “We haven’t talked about that.” He’ll tell me if he wants me to know.

Ryan gets out of the car giving Tara and Sierra a hug before the two of us get back in and hit the road again.

This time he still doesn’t get on the highway, “Where are we going now?” I ask sounding more frustrated than I feel.

“One last stop, I promise.”

I know exactly where he’s taking me, or so I think. Only the graveyard isn’t in this direction. I don’t ask. I just let Ryan take charge the way he always does and find him pulling into the rink parking lot, Coach Hicks! I get out of the car and run into the arena, past the lounge, onto the ice, lunging into his arms. He stumbles back a few feet but catches his balance. He knows this is good-bye and instantly he tears up. It was a sobering sight.

“I love you coach.”

“I love you too Dalia.”

Coach Hicks has his arm around me when we see Ryan walking towards us in the lounge. Ryan and Hicks give each other manly hugs, the kind you see on TV. Coach Hicks wishes Ryan good luck who looks over at me, “Living with her, I’ll need it,” he teases.

“Watch it or I’ll slap you,” I warn.

“Not on my ice!” Coach laughs reenacting the first argument Ryan and I had when we started out together. We’ve come so far since then. The skaters on the ice cluster around us, congratulating us and saying good-bye, gossip travels fast here.

Our good-byes are finished with the exception of Harper, I don’t dare ask.

Chapter 18

When we enter the apartment, I check to see if Ryan's bed has been delivered. I open the bedroom door stopping suddenly when I see it, perfect!

"It's here!" I call out thinking Ryan is still in the living room. He follows me not expecting me to suddenly stop, causing him to walk into the back of me. I feel his body press up against mine, "Oh," I say surprised, "sorry."

"Don't be," he says into my ear.

Swooning, I feel shivers all over. How can two words from HIM have such an impact on me? I step forward not keen on increasing the space between us and he steps forward closing that distance I made. Oh my!

Thinking now is as good a time as any, I face him digging into my back pocket for the little housewarming gift I bought him, at the time I didn't think it was inappropriate, but now, I'm starting to wonder.

I smile and placed the box in his hands, "A little house warming gift for you," I explain. "It's not much," I warn.

"You shouldn't have," he says quietly.

We sit on his bed and he grins at me before removing the wrapping paper. He opens the lid looking at the contents, "For your bed," I explain.

"Can we try them?" He asks staring at me.

"You can use them on whomever you want," I say casually. The thought of him using the handcuffs on Harper makes me want to hurl but I should have considered that before buying them.

"No," he clarifies, "with you."

I have to catch my breath for a second. His chocolate wisps are falling into his face as his eyes that are boring down on me, I'm mesmerized by him. Have I always felt this way?

He leans towards me and his lips press softly against mine as his fingers slowly start undoing the buttons to my blouse, “Harper?”

“No Harper.”

His light touch makes my breasts tingle with excitement making my nipples harden as he glides my shirt over my shoulders and down my arms.

His eyes land on my breasts and hover there making me blush. He reaches behind me unclasping my lace bra letting it fall open. With two fingers he peels the straps down and makes it land close to my blouse. He’s gaping at me. We’ve seen each other before, naked, but this time is different, sensual.

Ryan removes one set of handcuffs holding them in the air, “Give me your wrist,” he orders. I hand him both, he doesn’t have to twist my arm. It has been weeks if not months since I was with Adam and I’ve been pretty deprived. He slaps the cuffs on me like its second nature, taking the key and tossing it away from the bed onto the nightstand.

He takes the second pair out of the box.

“What are you doing with those ones?” I ask.

“Lay on your back with your hands above your head,” he instructs. He uses the second set to secure me to his headboard rendering me helpless.

I like where this is going, “Oh, how alpha male of you!” I compliment Ryan in a swooning tone.

He kneels over me tossing the second set of keys where he tossed the first and reaches for a pillow that is lying on top of a box and places it under my head.

“See they are perfect,” I say. “You can get all sorts of kinky the next time you have a girl over. I’ve been meaning to talk to you, about Harper, I don’t think she’s right for you.”

He rubs up against me, I’m not sure if it was intentional, but it turned me on, “Oh, you don’t do you? Why not? Did you have someone better in mind? I want to get kinky now,” he rasps, his eyes are all dark and hooded, “with you.”

“Okay, very funny, stop teasing me and let me go,” I giggle trying to squirm away. He interrupts my plea of having them removed by kissing me passionately. Oh my, he is so hot. His lips press softly against mine, lingering, leaving me more breathless than before.

His hands fist into my hair and his kisses become more frenzied. His lips brush against mine, then his tongue licks them, nipping and pulling me, biting me playfully. He is such an animal. His muscular body rock hard, like his dick.

Instinctively I want to wrap my arms around him causing the cuffs to tighten around my wrists. I moan into his mouth and his incessant kisses became even more demanding than before. My lips begin to swell and my sex is pulsing needy for him.

He stops and stares longingly into my eyes before rolling me over to unzip the back of my skirt. He slides my skirt and panties down at the same time rendering me stark naked.

“Do you mind if I get comfortable?” he asks.

“By all means,” I answer in barely a whisper, “it is your room after all.” He leaves me on the bed and slowly strips down in front of me. I’m awestruck by the sheer width of his muscular chest but when I see the size of his cock I gasp at the enormity of it. He holds it absentmindedly before joining me back on the bed to focus on me.

“I’m going to enjoy this,” he says under his breath.

He spread my legs as wide as he can and slowly glides his tongue up my thigh, kissing and licking until he gets to the part that needs him the most. His soft tongue slowly caresses my sex swirling around, and making me pant. His finger begins gliding in and out of me while his tongue keeps licking my clit making me almost squeal with delight. He inserts two fingers and keeps lapping me up like I’m a tasty treat. His tongue dives deeper into my folds before his fingers start penetrating me more aggressively. I’m about to lose it and come around his fingers when he stops dead in his tracks, in the nick of time, knowing I’m close, “Not yet,” he says, “not without me.”

He rests the tip of his thick cock against my sex. I want to grab him and the cuffs bang against the headboard cutting into me again. His hands grab my ass and he angles me to suit him and then he drills into me ruthlessly, overfilling me. Even though my juices naturally lubricate his shiny thick cock, he’s not a one size FIT’s all kind of guy, “Ryan!” I scream. Over and over again, in and out, argh! It feels like he’s tearing me in half. I’m at his mercy and he isn’t letting up, each thrust knocking the wind out of me. I feel lightheaded, almost dizzy.

Beads of sweat are collecting on his forehead. Its earth shatteringly wicked. My mouth parches from the screaming and panting, our bodies trembled into orgasm. Overcome with raw emotion, he pours himself into me. I drop my head back in sheer exhaustion.

He frees me from my cuffs and hold me in his arms. “Thanks for the gift,” he says lightly.

Chapter 19

I wake up the next morning an hour before Ryan's alarm is set to go off. I never made it back to my room. I slide out from beneath his covers and start creeping towards the bathroom with my privates feeling tender. I sit on the toilet to void, and feel a burning sensation, agh does it hurt, reflecting back on last night's activities, it was well worth it.

I run a bath and slowly lower myself in. The warm water soothes me as I lean back in our new soaker tub. I press a button on my right and jets start swishing the water around. The noise from the tub is too loud and I don't want to wake Ryan up so I turned them off.

Dripping on the floor, I go over to the towel rack and pull the hand towel down to dry myself off. The door opens just as I'm finishing. I reach for my housecoat and cover my naked body as he silently walks passed me.

I'm ready for school before he is, so I make our breakfast while he showers. He comes out of the bathroom in a pair of jeans and nothing else, "Is that how you dress for breakfast" I ask.

"Sometimes," he answers, "does it bother you?"

"Not at all," I admit.

"We can take it back into the bedroom," he offers.

"I don't have enough time; I have class in forty-five minutes."

"I'll only take two minutes," he beams brightly.

"I seriously doubt that after last night's performance," I say sipping my vanilla cappuccino.

"Give me a few minutes and I'll drive you in," he offers.

"I can take dad's car, that way you don't have to pick me up."

"I'll pick you up," he insists, "we need to talk."

Ryan grabs his keys from the front entrance and asks, “Are you ready?”

“Why don’t we walk? It looks nice outside?” I suggest.

“Sure, it will give us a chance to talk,” he says ominously locking the door behind us.

We take the stairs to the lobby. School is only five minutes by car; it almost seems silly to drive. It’s warm and sunny for a September day. We live off an older busy street close to the university core that is pedestrian friendly with sidewalks on both sides and old trees shading areas of the walkway.

“What did you want to talk about?” I ask curiously.

He weaves his fingers through mine as we start strolling towards school, I look sideways at him grinning, “Are we back to pretending?”

“I’m not pretending. I want to be with you. I’m tired of waiting,” he said petulantly. He’s never moody, so his tone catches me off guard, making me feel defensive.

“You were waiting for me? Really? How is dating Harper waiting?” As soon as I say it I want to take it right back. Why the fuck did I go there? He drops my hand like acid fell on it.

“What did you want me to do, wait around for you while you get it on with Adam?” I feel my face grow warm and a wave of nausea hits. Does he actually think I’m naive enough to believe there’s nothing going on? He hands me back my bag and walks in the opposite direction from me with a big attitude.

I chased after him, “Ryan wait!” I call out.

He stops and turns back to me, his wisps flopping in his face as he moved, “What?” he growls.

“Nothing,” I say utterly deflated. There isn’t anything I can think of saying that will fix this. I go to school with a heavy heart.

My first class is Art History taught by Jed William a renowned Canadian artist from the Hamilton Art Museum. The lecture hall is jammed full of students, some having to resort to sitting on stairs just to attend it.

The girls sitting next to me gush about how fascinating he is and how his class always has a waiting list. A minute later he walks into the lecture hall and it is like a celebrity just entered the room. Everyone jumps to their feet and starts applauding. I'm a little thrown off, does this happen to all the teachers on the first day of class? This can't be normal, can it? A guy sitting on the other side of me notices my confusion and brings me up to speed, "He just sold a painting on e-bay for a little over a million dollars and donated seventy-five percent of it to the Hospital for Sick Children." Now, I understand, he's more than a talented artist and a professor, he's a humanitarian.

We take our seats after a few seconds and he begin his lecture. He spent one hour reviewing the course syllabus and another half hour discussing plagiarism. I zone out fifteen minutes into it, reflecting on what happened between Ryan and me this morning. In my heart of hearts, I know Ryan would do anything for me because he is made from the same cloth as this Professor Williams.

I try picturing Ryan not being in my life, and it's unimaginable. I pulled my phone out of my bag and text him:

Dalia: I'm so sorry for this morning Ryan.

I put my phone on vibrate and waited for him to respond checking my texts every few minutes. I have one more class after this. The next class is scheduled for three hours, its psychology. The lecture hall is just as big if not bigger than the first, only the students aren't sitting on stairs because there weren't enough seats and this teacher doesn't receive a standing ovation. I'm bored to tears after, and long to make things right between me and Ryan.

When I finished class I go straight back to the apartment to find Ryan sprawled out on the sofa watching Sons of Anarchy. He doesn't acknowledge my presence when I first get there, so I know I have a lot of work ahead of me. I go into the kitchen and help myself to a Diet Coke before sitting next to him.

I cracked open the can, "You're cuter than he is," I flirt before taking a sip of my coke.

“Half-Sac? Jeepers, thanks,” he says sarcastically. “I always wanted to be cuter than a character with one testicle.”

“No,” I giggle, “Jax!”

He looks at me suspiciously, “What do you want?”

“Nothing,” I say too quickly, hardly believing myself. I reach for his hand and cover it with my own. He doesn’t pull away from me so I know I’m making progress. His skin is soft and his fingers thick. I love his hands, wishing they are doing their magic on me rather than just resting on the couch.

Ryan’s profile distracts me from the show; I notice his face looks rougher than usual with more than its share of stubble on it and his shaggy hair even by my standards definitely needs cutting. He looks tired and is apparently letting himself go. This is the first time I’ve noticed it.

“Do you want to talk?” I offer.

He turns from the TV, to face me, “I said everything I needed to this morning.”

“You’re letting yourself go.” I observe.

“You just compared me to Jax,” he reminds me. He takes my can from the table and helps himself to my drink. I watch as he swallows. The urge to run my fingers over his stubble is too strong for me to deny. I climb up on his lap facing him, waiting for him to protest, when he doesn’t I close my eyes and touched his face. “Open your eyes and look at me,” he demands.

All too happy to oblige, I open them, continuing to run my fingers along his face. His eyes lock onto mine and when my fingers touch his mouth, he captures one between his teeth and then he slowly brings it into his mouth, sucking it. I close my eyes focusing on the feeling he’s giving me when he suddenly nip at my fingertip. He doesn’t have to tell me twice, I open my eyes again and continue staring into his while he sucks. I know what he’s implying, what he wanted me to do.

I dismount off his lap and kneel on the floor before him. He spreads his legs and unzips his pants for me. I wrap both my hands around it and gingerly kiss the tip. He leans his head back and closes his eyes. I stop instantly and say, “Open your eyes and look at me.” His eyes snap open and then I glide his piece against my lips feeling his soft warm skin against my mouth. His hand nestle into my hair

and I glide my tongue all over the top of his hardness. I'm throbbing for him. I suck voraciously.

His hand starts tugging at my hair and I can tell he's nearing the brink, I don't let up until every last drop seeps into my mouth. I get some Kleenex and wipe him off before cleaning myself up in the bathroom. I join him back on the couch. The television is turned off and the room is silent. He stretches out resting his head on my lap; I stroke his soft hair, lovingly.

"We skate tomorrow after our classes," he informs me.

"Good, there's something I need you to know Ryan."

"What's that?" he asks.

"I love you."

He kisses me again and then places his head back down on my lap while I continue playing with his hair.

"I love you too, Dal."

Chapter 20

Ryan insists on driving me to the airport, even though I told him he doesn't have to. He drops me off at terminal one and asks me to wait for him while he parks the car. It's snowing outside and the roads are slushy, so I point out where I will be waiting for him and go inside. I watch his black Mercedes drive off, his tires lose traction as pieces of snow fly up from the road. I stare wistfully as he drives off wishing he'd come too. Lately we've been inseparable, and it will be more fun if he comes.

A skinny lady with two little boys that appear to be five and seven walked by me. Both kids are playing with toy airplanes mimicking captains of crashing flights. The mother shudders when the kids create a sonic boom noise as the two planes collide into each other while she continues to struggle carrying her one very large suitcase.

Ryan's familiar touch distracts me from the lady and her two sons, "Are you ready?" His chocolate brown hair reaches his shoulder blades and his warm eyes and sweet smile make me dread our separation. It's going to be a long seven days.

"Sure am," I say sounding more enthusiastic than I really feel. I reach for my bag, but Ryan gently swats my hand away, to porter for me. We find the long line belonging to the domestic flights booth and wait to check in. Ryan reaches for my hand with his freehand and holds me while we stand in line. I stroke his fingers and get lost looking into his dreamy eyes, "Tell your mother I say hello, and make sure you text me on Christmas."

"I'll call you," he corrects, reminding me he's not into social media the way I am. I eat, sleep, breathe it, whereas he can live without it. When it's my turn in line, Ryan steps aside while I hand the lady my boarding pass. He places the luggage where she directs him to and then we find a secluded area in the airport

near my boarding gate where we can snuggle without too many passengers seeing us.

We lean against a glass wall overlooking the Air Canada hangar, unknowingly giving all their employee's a full visual. We keep it clean kissing each other frantically only breaking away when I hear the last boarding call to my flight to Florida. I have to push him away which isn't an easy feat and dash to the gate before the plane leaves without me. I turn to him one last time and wave before leaving him.

Mom and Aunt Rosalind pull up in an old Cadillac convertible with lowered suspension creating the illusion that the car is only a few inches above the ground. It's sunny outside but the temperature is only sixty so I'm surprised to see them driving with the soft-top down. They are wearing sunglasses and their hair is all disheveled, but they appear happy.

The trunk pops open as I approach and I place my bag into it before getting into the back seat of the car. Mom and Aunt Rosalind look back at me with huge smiles on their faces while drivers impatiently start honking at us for not moving quickly enough. Mom throws the car into drive and pulls away from the curb placating them. As our speed picks up so does the wind, whipping strands of my own hair into my face. I hold it into a make-do ponytail with my hands as I try to take in my surroundings.

Mom pulls up to a large wrought iron fence hiding a pretty little bungalow. Magically the fence slowly opens allowing us entry to the curved driveway lined with shrubs. Mom parks the car under the canopy situated next to the house. The modern house is adorned with a stucco exterior and a rust coloured Spanish roof. Oddly enough it's the bay window that captures my attention housing Aunt Rosalind's most precious plants, "It's lovely," I compliment.

"Thanks," Aunt Rosalind answers proudly, "Dinner will be ready in an hour." Mom pops the trunk, causing my attention to be drawn away from the house. I grab my bag and followed them inside. They give me a grand tour of the house showing me their modern kitchen with new appliances modelled after the nineteen-fifties era. There are three nicely sized bedrooms and the one living room

with the bay window that houses the only television in the entire house. I can foresee seven days of boredom, thank God for my cellphone.

I put the hour to good use unpacking my bag and taking a shower before hearing Aunt Rosalind call out, "Dinner's ready!"

They are already sitting at the table by the time I arrive. I take the vacant chair and stare at my plate. It's a meagre portion of salad with a vinaigrette dressing over top. Their salad has carrots, nuts, shredded cheese, "Did you forget to make mine?" I ask sarcastically. The memories of starving while living with mom come flooding back.

Mom places her fork down on the table and looks at me exasperated, "You can't turn into a fat blob if you want to do shows. You have to look pretty on the ice, like a princess to get the good contracts."

She looks over at Aunt Rosalind for help, who looks back at me, "Well dear, unless you're trying for the part of Fiona from Shrek, you're definitely too chunky to be a princess and that hair of yours, when's the last time you had it cut?" She says utterly disgusted.

"You must have gained twenty pounds since the Olympics! What have you been doing?" Mom complains. "I know we've both been through a lot but you don't see me packing on weight! What's Ryan feeding you?"

Aunt Rosalind looks worried, "Please tell me that gorgeous boy isn't following in your footsteps?"

Mom glares at Aunt Rosalind, "Surely you jest, and that beautiful boy will never have an ounce of fat on him. That reminds me I must call Sara and wish her a Merry Christmas!"

Aunt Rosalind ignores her and says to me, "We'll book you in with Clive after Christmas so he can fix that matted mess of yours. He does amazing perms and colour treatments. His cuts are great when his arthritis isn't acting up."

Mom grins, "Wait until you meet him! He is as queer as they come and for a ninety-five year old he's a natural Edward Scissors Hand."

"What happens when it flares up," I ask worried.

Mom shrugs, "He usually cuts too much off. We just complain and then he gives us an extra five percent off on top of the senior's discount."

"I'll wait until I go back home," I tell them.

“You don’t know whose good where you live, trust us, they don’t get better than Clive. He might retire next year; this might be your only chance to meet him.”

Rosalind looks up dreamily, “If only he were thirty years younger.”

“You’re such a dirty old woman,” mom complains.

Clearly offended Rosalind reminds mom, “This is coming from someone who watched Fifty Shades TEN times?”

Mom ignores her turning her attention back on to me, “Dalia, I hope you and Ryan aren’t screwing just because you live together?”

“Hardly appropriate dinner table conversation,” Rosalind comments.

“It’s not like her dad is here to hear it,” she defends.

“We’re dating,” I admit.

“Not for much longer if you pork out,” mom says under her breath.

“Let’s just have a nice meal,” Rosalind buffers.

“I don’t think that’s possible,” I answer. “Have you seen what I’ve been given to eat?”

“Don’t worry sweetheart,” Auntie Rosalind pats my hand, “you’re having the same soup as us.”

I retire to my bedroom early for some serious sexting with Ryan, but first I want to catch up with Sierra and Tara.

Dalia: Hi Tara, how’s single life treating U?

Tara: Jeez Louise! Who’s had time 2 notice?

Dalia: What’s wrong?

Tara: I took a full course load +1 thinking it would B a breeze.

Dalia: It’s not?

Tara: I’m doing the shits in 1 course & its 2 late 2 drop it. Its going 2 bring my whole g.p.a down.

Dalia: What’s the course U R having trouble with?

Tara: Sociology of Religion

Dalia: Always pick ‘C’

Tara: Sigh, I’ll remember that. Thx 4 the great advice! Totally sarcastic

Dalia: Welcome :-)

Tara: How is school?

Dalia: Should B called sedation. It's boring with the exception of this art class I'm taking. The prof is hot & he's a real humanitarian.

Tara: Yum, what's his name, I'll google him.

Dalia: Jed Williams.

Tara: Hold on, looking, not bad, can't hold candle 2 Ryan.

Dalia: I know. I can't believe I'm dating him. My nipples get hard just thinking about him!

Tara: TMI! How's your mom doing? It has 2 B nice Cing her again?

Dalia: Oh ya, 2 hear I'm fat, my hair looks like shit, & if I'm not careful I'll lose Ryan. That was 10 min in2 dinner if U call lettuce & a cup of soup dinner.

Tara: Don't listen 2 her. She's crazy. How much did U gain?

Dalia: Ten kilo's, if that. She and Aunt Rosalind said the only part I'll get is playing Fiona in Shrek.

Tara: Cruel, but she's probably telling the truth. Send a selfie.

Dalia: Fuck Off!

Tara: Just kidding.

Dalia: Text 2morrow

Tara: Will do!

Dalia: Hi Sierra!

Sierra: Hi Dal! How's it going?

Dalia: Great, I'm in Florida now

Sierra: How R U & Ur mom?

Dalia: She's doing well, I miss Ryan.

Sierra: How long R U going 2B away from him?

Dalia: 7 long days.

Sierra: U will cope! How's is school?

Dalia: Fine, U?

Sierra: Fine, I'm really liking Political Science. Can U C me as a Prime Minister?

Dalia: Nope, you're dirty deed would make headlines; stick with being just a member of parliament.

Sierra: 2 right, sigh. The baby would have been 18 months now.

Dalia: I'm sorry.

Sierra: It's ok. I don't want 2 4get. Jer & I will have babies when we're ready.

Dalia: How's he doing? Tell him we say hi!

Sierra: Will do. I think he's going 2 pop the?!

Dalia: OH! How cool is that. Jer's a good guy. U guys deserve each other.

Sierra: Thx.

Dalia: No problem I have to go, Ryan's probably worrying about me right now. I haven't called him yet.

Sierra: Ok ttyl.

Dalia: xoxo

I'm not sure if I should call or text him so I text.

Dalia: Ryan?

Ryan: Call me on mom's line.

Dalia: Ok

I dial his mother's number and he picks up right away, "Dalia?"

"It's me."

"I've been worried."

"Sorry, I would have called you earlier, but I was saving it for right before bed."

"Is that where you are right now?"

"Ya,"

"Me too," he admits.

I miss him. It feels comforting just to speak with him on the phone. His voice is deep and gravelly. It has a sexy tone, even when he isn't trying to be. I cuddle under my covers with the lights off in my room and concentrate on him, his breathing, his words, pretending he is lying next to me. I touch myself gliding my fingers over my sex pretending they are his. When he notices I'm quiet, he asks what I'm doing, I admit that I'm masturbating to the sound of his voice and he says

that is so hot, he starts stroking himself too. I listen to his short breaths that get shorter as he gets closer to coming, and then there is a long sigh. I know he's finished. He whispers into the phone, "I love you."

I whisper back, "I love you too."

Chapter 21

Sara calls just before dinner on Christmas Eve asking to speak to mom. Aunt Rosalind passes the phone to her and mouths to me ‘Sara’ questioningly. I mouth back, ‘Yes, Ryan’s mom.’ Her eyebrows shoot up as she mouths back in acknowledgment, ‘Oh!’ We sit on the sofa together watching mom intently as she listens to Sara.

Aunt Rosalind whispers to me, “It doesn’t look like she’s just wishing your mother a Merry Christmas, something is wrong.”

“How can you tell?” I ask.

“Look at your mother’s expression. She’s dying to get off the phone and tell us, I know that look anywhere.”

Mom looks up at me covering the receiver so Sara wouldn’t hear, “Have you heard from Ryan today?”

I shake my head, “No yesterday, why? What’s up?”

She puts her finger over her lips to silence me and I looked at Rosalind insulted by mom’s gesture.

“Did you want to talk to her?” Mom asks passing the phone over to me. Mom takes my spot on the couch and watches me as I spoke with her.

“Hi Sara, Merry Christmas!”

“Thanks, Merry Christmas to you too,” she says. “I’m sorry to bother you, but have you heard from Ryan?”

“I spoke to him last night but not today. Isn’t he with you?”

“We had an incident at the house in the middle of the morning and he stormed off. I haven’t heard from him since.”

“Did you try Jeremy? Maybe he’s there.”

“He was the first person I called,” she says. “He doesn’t keep a list of friends with numbers, they’re all saved into his phone and he has it with him. Jeremy said he hasn’t heard from him. I was hoping you did.”

“Sorry Mrs. Kennedy, I haven’t heard anything. I can send out a few texts to see if I can find out where he is.”

“Would you Honey? You don’t know how worried I am. When he left here this morning he was really angry, there’s no telling what he will do.”

“Sure, I’ll give you back to my mother and start texting our friends.”

“Thanks dear.”

I hand mom back the phone and Aunt Rosalind is waiting for me to say something. I look at her realizing how little I know of the situation myself, “Ryan’s gone missing. Apparently he was really angry last night and he stormed off.”

“Oh my,” she says more to herself than me.

“I have to help find him.”

I wonder what happened to make Ryan so angry. I went to my room to initiate a social media all-points bulletin on Ryan. I Faced, Tweeted, Pinned, texted, e-mailed anyone and everyone I could think of who might have heard from him, even people who didn’t.

It was a waiting game that had me feeling antsy to do more. The search felt like it was leading to nada until it struck me that there was one person left I hadn’t contacted, Coach Hicks. I dialled the club and after a few minutes of waiting I was put right through to him.

“Coach?”

“Dalia?”

“Yep!”

“It’s so nice to hear from you,” the relief in his voice is unmistakable.

“Its great to hear your voice Coach! I don’t mean to bother you when your on the ice, but there’s a problem.”

“You can’t find Ryan,” he finishes.

I let out a breath of relief, “So, you know where he is?”

“No,” he corrects me, “his mother called me yesterday.”

“Oh,” I say disappointed, “I was hoping you knew where he was.”

“Sorry, if I hear from him I’ll have him give you a call.”

“Sure, that would be great.” I say disappointed.

“I have to get back on the ice now.”

“Okay, Coach. Thanks a lot!”

“Your welcome, it’s always nice to hear from you.”

If I didn’t know Coach Hicks so well, I probably would have believed him, but something made me think he’s lying. I just hope when I get there, he tells me the truth about where Ryan is.

The rest of the night is spent badgering mom and Aunt Rosalind to buy me a ticket to Toronto, promising them I will spend Easter in Florida to make up for Christmas.

I don’t let up until my ticket was ordered. Mom does everything in her power to keep me there, I argued that I have a place to stay in Toronto, and Ryan needs me more than she does right now.

I fly out early Christmas morning.

Chapter 22

I land in Pearson realizing my first problem is transportation or lack thereof. I whip out my trusty cell and call Sara telling her where I am. She offers me a lift back to her house and I graciously accept. I wait outside the terminal in my toasty bomber jacket and my warmest sweats wishing Ryan had chosen a better time of year to go AWOL.

Sara pulls up in her snow covered car looking all pale and tired, “You look awful,” I comment.

“Thanks,” she answered.

“Do you want to tell me what happened?” I ask.

“Do you mind if I smoke?” She asks as she lights up. I’ve never seen her with a cigarette before, she is crazy upset. She takes a long drag of her cigarette and rolls the window down before exhaling it, “His dad came back.”

“Get out! Why? Does he want to get back together with you again?”

“Is the Pope Jewish?”

“No,” I answer on the brink of confusion.

“Does he want to be a part of Ryan’s life again?”

“Is the Pope Jewish?” she repeats.

“No, he doesn’t give a damn about Ryan. He just wanted to show off his twenty year old fiancé, fucking trollop. Her tits are bigger than my ass and even that looks fake!” She takes a drag of her cigarette and blows it out the window consciously trying to keep the smoke away from me.

“Wow! So what did Ryan do?”

“They said some choice words to one another that I’m far too much of a lady to repeat and then they came to blows.”

“Who hit who first?”

“Ryan threw the first punch, it happened so quickly. I tried to get them to stop, but I was completely helpless. Ryan skulked off like a wild wounded animal. I haven’t seen him since.”

“Did his father hit him back?”

“Did he ever, I never seen him raise a hand towards Ryan before last night. Dalia, it got ugly. I threatened his father saying if he didn’t leave I’d have to call the cops. I’m so glad you’re here. I hate that I had to interrupt your visit with your mother.”

“I’m glad I’m here, I just hope I can find him. I’m going to need to borrow your car to look.”

“No problem Dalia, just drop me off and take it. I’ll call you if I need to go anywhere. Someone should always be home in case he comes back.”

“I doubt he’ll come back if he thinks his father’s there,” I say intuitively.

When we are a few blocks from their house, Sara invites me in to freshen up, but I want to start looking while the trail is still hot.

She nods with understanding, “Okay, I’ll bring your bag in for you. You can stay in Ryan’s room until he gets back.”

“You don’t mind?”

“Of course not, keep me posted if you make any progress.”

“Will do,” I said as she pulls up to their house. She presses a button on the dash and the trunk lid pops open.

Sara gets out of the driver’s side of the car leaving it idling with the door open to retrieve my bag while I get out of the passenger seat and switch to the driver’s side, “I’ll bring your bag in, you go on,” she encourages.

“Thanks see you soon.”

I drive back to where I used to live; I needed some time to figure out how I’m going to approach the search. I parallel parked against the curb in front of my old house and memories of dad comes flooding back to me. I remembered him letting me play outside making snow angels in the front yard while he toiled away shovelling the snow from the front driveway. It was our special time together when I was young. Mom always had hot chocolate waiting for us when we got back, and the whole house would smell of baked bread.

I pulled my cell out and scroll through my contacts until I find the Coach's number. He answers on the second ring and I greet him happily trying to mask the worry in my voice, "Merry Christmas Coach!"

"Dalia?"

"Ya Coach, it's me. I just left my mom in Florida to look for Ryan. If you have any idea where he is, you better tell me. His mom and I've been worried sick."

He hesitates for a minute, "He doesn't want to be found. He needs to be alone." I start the car and let it idle while I continue talking on the phone.

"He needs me, Coach Hicks, tell me where he is."

"Fuck Dalia," he whispers, "he is going to kill me."

"What's your address?"

"140 Wilson Avenue, I'm in the white house directly across the street from the club."

"I'm coming right over," I say not giving Coach a chance to respond before hitting end and calling Sara who answers on the first ring, "Dalia?"

"Ya, I think he's at Coach's house. I'll text you when I know for sure."

"Thanks Dalia!" she says with relief. I can't drive their fast enough. The roads are slick and the tires aren't gripping. I fishtail several times causing me to slow down. Luckily most people are home celebrating the holidays so I narrowly avoid only one collision and got there in a reasonable amount of time.

I park in the two car driveway behind Ryan's snow covered Mercedes. Judging by the amount he has on his windshield, it looks like it hasn't been moved for a while. I ring the doorbell to the two story Victorian styled house waiting for the Coach to answer. He answers giving me a kiss and motioning upstairs, "First door on the right. I'll be at the Paddock having a few drinks, pick me up when you guys are done whatever it is you're going to do," he grins at me.

I kiss the Coach on the cheek liking where his thoughts are going as he leaves the house.

"You owe me one," he says.

I walked upstairs and stop at the first door on my right. I knock twice and wait, no response. I turn the handle and open it slowly. The door creaks and I see Ryan's partially naked figure lying on the bed, with the lights off, he doesn't move.

I turn the light on and he instantly shields his eyes. I turn it off again protecting him from the blazing light. He lifts his head off the bed to look at the intruding figure, me.

“Dalia?” he says quietly. “Get out!”

I ignore him and sit on the edge of the bed. He turns away, hiding his face.

“Look at me,” I order. He faces me in the darkness, I can tell his eye is swollen shut and his features are marred with bruises and cuts. There is so much I want to say to him but instead I stroke his cheek lovingly with the back of my hand. His skin is soft and tender. My lips close in on his, “I was so worried,” I admit.

“I’m sorry,” he apologizes. I remember his mom and text her:

Dalia: I found him. He’s okay.

Sara: Thank God.

I turn my phone off and pay my attention to him.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I ask.

He turns away from me, “No, I don’t want you seeing me like this.”

“Like what?” I ask

“Like THIS,” he says frustrated.

I get off the bed and walk around to the side he’s facing and I stare rebelliously into his one open eye, “I’m looking at you, and I’m seeing you like THIS, and I’m still in love with you. If THIS is you being weak, I will love you back until you’re strong. We pick each other up when the other one is down because that’s what WE do.”

His own father broke him down making him vulnerable and I hate him for that. We faced each other, and he unzips his jeans as I slide my pants down for him to take me. I never took my eyes off him as he made love to me slowly in the Coach’s guest bedroom.

Chapter 23

Ryan packs up his belongings and puts them in his Mercedes before we head to the Paddock in separate cars to thank Coach Hicks. The Paddock is a bar located in the core of Toronto, with a large wooden door, small round tables, dim lighting, and all the makings of a cozy atmosphere. We find Hicks at the bar nursing a cold one with what appears to be a few of the regulars.

He sees Ryan and I walk in and gets up to greet us staggering as he does so.

“Do you want to get a table?” he offers.

Ryan and I look at each other before answering, “Thanks coach, but we just want to go back home. Here’s your key, thanks for letting me stay with you.”

“Anytime Ryan, my door is always open to both of you.”

“Did you want us to drive you home,” I offer.

“No thanks,” he grins giving us a hug and inoffensively shooing us out the front door of the pub, “you kids go have fun, you shouldn’t be in a bar with old fuddy-duddy’s like me on Christmas Day! You should be out doing fun things, go get married!” he jokes.

Ryan walks me back to his mother’s car and opens the driver’s side door for me, “I’ll meet you back at moms,” he says.

“Too right you will, I’ll be driving behind you the entire time, so don’t try losing me!” I say scolding him playfully by wiggling my finger in front of his face.

“I never want to lose you,” he says in that breathy hot way of his. He leans towards me, connecting his lips to mine. We fit together like Lego. I tingle as his tongue dives deeper into my mouth, taking charge of the kiss. A guttural moan escapes me as I want Ryan in the worst way. I wrap my leg around him trying to rub up against him, desperately needing him inside of me for relief. His hand tangles in the hairs on the back of my neck and I peek at his battered face through partially opened eyes as he tries to consume me. His tongue swirls around mine

wildly and the force of his kiss pushes my head back as his body starts pressing against mine, “Marry me,” he says in-between kisses.

I try pushing him away so I can get him to say it again but he holds me tighter, kissing me harder.

“Yes,” I breathe, because I became we when I fell in love with him, resulting in both of us never being whole without each other.

Sara is waiting for us in her living room when we arrive home. Ryan walks in quietly with his bag flung over his shoulder. He sees her and drops it giving her a hug. She starts crying in his arms, “I was so worried for you. I’m so sorry for what your father did to you.”

“It’s not your fault mom,” he says rubbing her shoulder.

She steps out from his hold and asks, “Are you guys hungry? Can I make you something?” she dotes.

I can’t even think of food, floating on cloud nine. I want to shout our engagement to the world, call mom, text everyone, post it on Facebook, send an Instagram to every user in the universe, but something makes me hesitate.

It’s a combination of wanting to hear Ryan tell his mother, and our age. I’m not even sure if we are legally allowed to get married. I’m still eighteen and Ryan is only nineteen. I don’t know the Ontario laws, whether we are of age. We haven’t discussed anything, maybe Ryan wants to elope. Note to self, Google legal marrying age in the Province of Ontario.

I imagine breaking the news to mom and Aunt Rosalind. Auntie would probably think it’s wonderful while mom will freak, or maybe she won’t. She is so unpredictable.

Ryan starts walking towards the kitchen, “I’m starving, Dalia are you hungry?”

“I think I’m more tired than hungry, can I just have something light?”

“Sure, how about a sandwich?” Sara offers.

“Perfect,” I confirm.

We eat in the breakfast room next to the kitchen. Sara and Ryan are having their leftover turkey, while I have a turkey sandwich. We keep the conversation light, avoiding various topics like Ryan’s father or our engagement. I am so

disappointed he didn't tell his mom about us, my cheeks are hot. I start questioning to myself whether he was serious or not. I don't dare ask why in front of her, it will have to wait until we are alone.

I have troubles finishing my very dry turkey sandwich, delicately sipping milk, trying to get the bird to go down my esophagus. Ryan is staring, Sara notices but doesn't say anything. She knows there is some sort of trouble in paradise, but she is wise enough judging by Ryan's mood not to go there.

I shower the first chance I have stripping down to nothing before enjoying the hot water pelting against my skin. I lather up with loads of Ryan's body wash loving the smell of him all over me. I wrap myself with a towel and walk passed him on my way to his bedroom. I feel him turning around to follow me but I lock the door behind me preventing him from coming in. I'm too tired to have any kind of discussion tonight. He snubbed me by not telling his mother our good news, so he will have to suffer the consequences of not being invited back to his room.

The following morning I find Ryan and his mother sitting at the breakfast table halfway done their breakfast. They have a place set for me and unlike being at home, there's FOOD on it.

Sara gets up from the table and asked me, "Do you want juice, water, or milk Dalia?"

"Juice will be fine." The smell of eggs and bacon are mouthwatering and I can't wait to dig in.

I don't notice myself glaring at Ryan, but apparently I am. When we head back to our apartment he accuses me of it, saying that the only reason he told her at breakfast was because of the look I gave him. He wanted to wait for a better time. I told him that look he thought he saw wasn't me glaring at him but me thinking.

I start sipping my orange juice when he turned to her and blurts, "I've asked Dalia to marry me last night mom, and she said yes."

Floored, I'm floored.

She starts laughing like he cracked the most hilarious joke she's ever heard, but when she notices we weren't laughing with her, her expression turns deadly, "You're not joking?"

"No," he says, "I'm not."

She looks at me, “Are you pregnant?”

He slams his fork down offended by her question, the rest of the cutlery lying on the table clinked loudly, “No, she’s not pregnant. We’re in love with each other.”

A little Ryan running around wouldn’t be the end of the world. It would ruin the contract we signed for the shows we promised starting up in January. I’m sure people have become pregnant during a contract in the past; our lawyer would deal with it, maybe extend the contract or decrease our pay. Would I be allowed to skate while I was pregnant? I’d probably lose the baby if I fell hard enough. I better not skate, it’s not worth it.

“Dalia?” Ryan startles me out of daydreaming with his edgy bordering on irritable tone.

Suddenly, I notice both of them staring at me, I squirm in my chair, “Ya?”

Sara stares at me concerned, “Are you all right?”

“I’ve been much worse,” I answer honestly.

“Let’s go,” he grumbles as though I paid attention to their exchange.

“Where? I’m trying to enjoy my breakfast, you know I never get breakfasts like this Ryan,” I whine.

“Let her eat,” Sara snaps, “she might be eating for two.”

“She’s not fucking pregnant,” Ryan growls.

“You don’t know that,” I say shocking both of them into silence.

Chapter 24

His anger feels like a current of electricity in the air. He carries our luggage to the car slamming the trunk and his door closes in the process. I sit in the passenger side of the car petrified he'll get set him off again.

Sara waves at us from inside the house. I wave back hoping Ryan doesn't notice, but he does.

His hand lands on the back of my headrest and he backs up. I chose my words wisely so doesn't go on defence, "I was hurt when you didn't tell your mother about us on Christmas."

"I wanted your mother to be there too," he explained. It amazes me how considerate he is. I just wish he realizes that I can't read his damn mind.

"Oh, so then why did you tell her today?"

"You were glaring at me. I felt like I had no choice."

"How so?"

"You ignored me last night and this morning you were acting funny at breakfast."

"I wasn't glaring, I was thinking," I correct him innocently.

"It was a glare," he argues. "Could you be pregnant?"

"Sure, its possible I guess. You haven't been wearing anything and I'm not on the pill. It's not impossible."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I doubt I am. I would think you would be more careful after Sierra. If I was pregnant with your child, I wouldn't have aborted it or pass it off as someone else's; I would have adore him or her."

"We're too young to have a baby, we're not ready."

"You feel we're ready to get married." I argue.

"That's different!"

“If you feel that way then you better protect us,” I snap, “I on the other hand would embrace it.”

“Fine,” he snarls.

We drive the rest of the way in silence. When we enter the apartment our eyes locked onto each other. He predatorily closes the distance between us. He’s broody, and his face badly bruised and scruffy. I loved his six o’clock shadow, his wayward chocolate hair which is a sexy uncontrollable mess. He’s shooting pheromones at me that I’m helpless to resist. He stands tall and muscular; I weaken at the knees for him.

If I wasn’t so attracted to him, I would be scared shitless at this point, but no matter how angry he is at me, I know I never have anything to fear with the exception of his monstrous cock causing havoc on my poor insides while he shows me who’s boss. I want him so bad; I have to wet my lips from panting.

I bolt like I’m being attacked. He chases after me, causing me to half scream half giggle, feeling him close in behind me. His hand wraps around my waist the way it always does and he spins me around making me face him. He cups both my cheeks with his hands and then he tilts his head before advancing his lips to cover mine.

Each kiss is more demanding than the last. They keep getting longer and longer, it’s getting harder to breathe. I gasp for air whenever I can; pushing him away, but that is stupid because he just holds onto me tighter.

He savagely tears my blouse popping off every button, then with the snap of a finger I feel my bra strap loosen and then dangle. “Was that really necessary?” I ask.

He shuts me up with his lips and backs me into his room. I want to tear his clothes off but he’s controlling everything, I just try to keep my head above water, its game over for me.

He is naked again. I really want him.

Chapter 25

Mom is flabbergasted when I tell her we're getting married this Valentine's Day. Frantically trying to stall she blurts, "You're too fat to get married now! You don't want to get married fat! Lose weight and marry him, NEXT year or two, dear. What's the rush? You are too young!"

"We're getting married THIS year. If you don't want to arrange it, then we'll just fly to Vegas, but we thought you'd want to be a part of it." That comment wins our battle. Mom flies down to stay with Sara while they plan our wedding, leaving me and Ryan to continue like normal attending school and keeping our practice times on the ice. We stay in separate beds of course; I am desperately trying to re-virginize myself before our wedding night.

There is only one place Ryan and I can get married, and that is where it all began, on the ice. Against their better judgment, mom and Sara arrange everything the way we want it, because they know if they don't we'll elope. I think they're secretly hoping something will go wrong in those sixty days so we don't get married. As it so happens, nothing happens until two days before. What is it with terrible life altering events and us?

We are watching television in our living room after practice when we get the call. I sat quietly listening and then passed the phone to him.

Mom tells Ryan what she just told me, that his mom collapsed in the kitchen at her house about an hour ago. They just arrived at the hospital and she's waiting for the cardiologist to come see Sara.

Ryan passes me back the phone so I can speak to my mother again, "You and Ryan need to come, don't speed, the roads are slick."

"Sure, we're on our way," I say.

We go to our separate bedrooms and throw clothes into our carry-on bags assuming we aren't going to be back tonight. We hurry to his car and I offer to drive under the circumstances. He keeps urging me to go faster, but once I remind him that the roads are slick, he stops encouraging me.

I glance over at him and reassure him, "It's going to be okay," when I don't really know and I'm as scared as he is.

"Sure, because you know, right?" He snaps sarcastically. "She's all I have," he explains to me breaking down.

"She's not all you have," I say firmly. "You have me too."

A tear escapes from the corner of his eye, making its way slowly down his cheek. I swipe it away taking his hand in mine and I don't let go. It's not knowing what's wrong with her, which makes the car ride feel like an eternity.

I pull up to the Emergency doors telling him to go in, I'll find him. He opens his car door and stands, taking a deep breath of the cold February air. He looks back at me, our eyes lock, "Thanks for bringing me here. I don't think I could have driven here safely by myself."

"You're welcome. Text me when you find her."

"Okay," he says before closing his door and turning to face the hospital.

I find an information booth before he has a chance to text me. The volunteer who looks to be in her late sixties with grey hair and small silver framed glasses with a pearl chain linking both arms waited for me to ask for help, "Hi, I'm looking for Sara Kennedy's room."

I stare at the monitor's reflection on her glasses as she searches, it takes a minute or so but she finds it, "She's been admitted to our cardiac wing, room 263." She points to the elevators and says, "Take the C elevator to the second floor."

Room 263 is at the end of a long corridor directly across from the elevators. Her door is closed so I tap lightly on it and mom calls out, "Come in."

I pushed the door open to see her sitting on a chair by Sara's bedside. Sara isn't there, "Where's your mom?" I ask Ryan as I walk over to mom to give her a hug.

"She's in the bathroom," he says.

"Hi Sara," I call out to the bathroom door.

“Hi Dalia!” She says reentering her hospital room. She gives us a hug. Some computer game or something rubs against us as we hug. She looks down, “Oh, that’s my heart monitor.”

“Are you okay? What happened?” Ryan asks.

Sara looks confused, “I don’t remember, I was in the kitchen and then next thing I know, I’m on the floor in her kitchen.”

I turn to mom, “What have the doctors said?”

Mom’s expression appears troubled, “The heart doctor wants to monitor her for forty-eight hours.”

“Does he know that her son is getting married? Can she go to the wedding and then come back?” I ask.

Sara answers me while looking at Ryan, “We told him, he said I’m not stable enough to leave the hospital. If I go, it will be considered against medical advice. I will lose the bed.”

“So you’re missing our wedding?” he’s floored.

She shrugs her shoulders, “I have no choice.”

My social media goddess brain clicks in, “You don’t HAVE to miss the wedding,” I suggest to Sara.

“What do you mean?” she asks hesitantly.

“Ya, what do you mean,” Ryan repeats suspiciously.

I gave him a look, “We’ll Skype!”

“We’ll Skype?” he asks cynically.

“We’ll Skype,” I repeat. “If you can’t come to our wedding we’ll bring our wedding to you.”

“I’ll watch it with you!” mom offers. “It’ll feel like we’re there together!”

“Are you sure, you don’t have to do that,” she says to mom.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” mom reassures.

“Ryan, we better go, we have a lot of planning to do,” I inform him.

When we get back to the car Ryan gets into the driver’s seat, “Where to?”

“Your mother’s house,” I direct. We have to get their clothes ready for our big day. I pull my phone out and call Coach Hicks asking him to arrange to have a large projector screen and a computer at rink side for our wedding day. When we

arrived at Sara's I gather the clothes and makeup for both ladies and Ryan works on creating a Skype account s from his old laptop.

Working diligently until Ryan's computer is ready to bring to the hospital, we drive back that night delivering it with their wedding attire. We teach the ladies how to sign into Skype so they could watch us.

The following morning we meet up with Coach Hicks at the arena and make sure everything on his end is organized and working well. The club isn't too impressed by our numerous demands but they kindly accommodate us due to our unforeseen circumstances.

We have the last half of the day to run out and get beautified. I hook up with Tara who manages to get us a last minute hair appointment at our favourite salon on the morning of my wedding and Jer takes Ryan for a badly needed tidying up. Oh, how I'm going to miss those wisps that grow so nice and long. Both our moms said they are glad he isn't going to look like a, 'hoodlum' on our wedding day. When we leave the hospital room I googled the word.

As if!

That night I stay at Tara's and Ryan stays at Jer's.

Chapter 26

Tara's alarm wakes us up at seven giving us eleven hours to eat and get ready. My nerves are killing me, I can hurl any moment. Tara remains calm focusing on ensuring we are organized and punctual carrying out all of my mother's plans.

The hairdresser brings my hair back into a ponytail fastening white flowers in it creating the illusion of a tiara. It isn't my first choice for a hairstyle, but I know immediately after our vows, Ryan and I will be performing our show program so I can't wear my hair down.

My gown is a white silk skating dress covered in real pearls and rhinestones. It's the most beautiful dress I'd ever worn and for the first time ever, I wish I listened to mom and tried harder to lose twenty pounds because damn it's tight. The only thing stopping it from wedging up my ass are my nylons.

Tara drives us to the arena and we sneak in the back so we won't be spotted until the big event. Sierra is waiting for us in the senior girl's locker room with hairspray and makeup to do the finishing touches. I put my skates on and make sure Sierra has the ring before we hug each other and go upstairs to the ice surface.

The Wedding March starts playing over the speakers in the arena. The lights turn off and spotlights shine on Coach Hicks, Jeremy, the officiant, and Ryan who are all standing on a red carpet waiting for us. Sierra and Tara walk slowly next to me as I glide in my skates. Behind the Officiant on a big screen are mom and Sara sitting in their hospital room dressed to the nines. It brings tears to my eyes seeing them watch us. Ryan and I wave to them mouthing, 'I love you.' They start crying before it even begins.

When the Officiant is going to pronounce us husband and wife, we ask if we can say a few words. He pauses allowing us our time and we speak to each other like we are the only ones there. He starts first:

“Dalia, I would have done anything to save your father. All those times I saw you talking to him at his grave broke my heart. When you’re sad, I’m sad and when you’re happy, I’m happy. I want to be there for you the way your father was. I will do anything for you.”

I nod to him mouthing, “I know you will.”

He continues:

“You gave up someone you thought you loved just to skate with me and you have no idea how much that means to me. You are all I’ve ever look for, all I’ll ever need and now you are mine.”

The officiant looks at me, “Dalia, did you want to say anything?”

“Please.” He nods for me to start:

“Ryan, you’re handsome, strong, intelligent, and utterly amazing. You became my partner, my best friend, and sorry mom, but my lover and my rock. You’re always hard as a rock.”

I pause. Sierra and Tara giggle because they catch on to the innuendo. Ryan blushes and mom and Sara wag their finger at me.

“Our intimacy isn’t just in the bedroom; it’s also on the ice. You have the ability to make love to me just by looking into my eyes. I will love you forever.”

The officiant announces us as husband and wife. Everyone claps while mom and Sara cry hugging each other. Coach and Jer remove the carpet, and they put the lights on. Ryan and I remove our guards while Sierra and Tara carefully walked off the ice.

We take our starting positions and perform our show program to the song:

‘Because You Loved Me’. When Ryan lifts me over his head it gives me goosebumps because I can feel dad watching us and when our program is over I’m blinded by my own tears of happiness, he wipes them away and kisses me for the first time as husband and wife. We wave good-bye to mom and Sara before shutting off Coaches computer. Everyone hugs us, then we quickly change to go to the hospital before mom and Sara have a chance to undress. They don’t know we are coming, so we have the staff occupy them until we arrive.

When they see Ryan, me and Coach Hicks dressed in our wedding clothes, a nurse throws on the wedding march over the intercom, and mom and Tara come out of Tara’s hospital room with shocked looks on their faces. The gesture of us

coming to the hospital brings them all to tears. Nurses and patients are lining the hallways to see what's going on. Everyone is all weepy over the idea that since his mom couldn't go, we brought the wedding to her. They are still dressed in their gowns, and look beautiful.

The wedding song stops and I pull my iPod out and press play as the groom asks his mother for the second dance of the evening. He holds her close as they danced in the centre of the hall. He's doing everything he can including holding the bridge of his nose trying not to cry as he looks over his mother's shoulder to me mouthing, 'Thank you.'

Patients watched from their rooms. Coach Hicks holds out his hand, wordlessly standing in for dad. Mom weeps as she watches us dance. Ryan finishes dancing with Sara, then takes my mother into his arms and dances with her. The staff takes pictures for us with our cameras and we group hug each other before having to leave them, visiting hours are over.

The Four Seasons

We are given the choice of a small reception with a closed bar and I mean completely closed or four nights at the most luxurious hotel in Toronto. We chose the no brainer, inviting Sierra, Tara, Jeremy, Carter, Adam, and Luke back to our room.

I didn't suggest inviting Adam, it was Ryan's doings. He argues, "We can't invite Carter and Jeremy without inviting him."

"It's going to feel uncomfortable," I gripe.

"Why? You don't still have feelings for him do you?" Ryan asks.

"No of course not, it's just that I think your invitation will be perceived as rubbing his nose in it," I complain.

"We're not forcing him to come, but we should invite him. If we don't, he'll assume I feel threatened by him."

"Do you?"

"No, Should I?"

"No."

There is a plan; they trickle in at 9:30 p.m. giving us time to get back from the hospital. Ryan and I order the pizza and wings, they are supplying the booze and absolutely nobody is staying overnight, they can walk home for all we care.

We already obtain our pass card to our suite but we haven't seen it yet. Ryan and I are giddy from the day's events. We are married! He is my old man, worse half, consort, mate, groom, hubby! I was his bride, mate, companion, better half, and most importantly SEX SLAVE. I can't wait until we were alone, my body's been missing him something fierce.

He opens the door and carries me caveman style into our suite. Our king size bed has a plush white comforter with rose petals scattered over it. The sitting room consists of a white leather sofa, matching love seat with a contrasting patterned wing chair. There is a small fridge locked and a beautiful bathroom with a multi jet tub and very large shower with jets aimed at all levels of the body. I'm sure we are going to have fun in it.

"Do you like it?" he asks.

"I do," I grin.

He walked over to me and places his hands lightly on my shoulders gliding them down my arms slipping off my fingertips, "What you did for my mother was amazing, I'm never going to forget it."

He started pecking me. Short little closed mouthed kisses. They are sexy because I know they are building up, I open my mouth to his peck inviting him in. He takes the opportunity to fill me with his tongue and I tingle with excitement like waking from a deep sleep. I miss my friends but my need is taking precedent and a part of me is wishing we hadn't planned this get together.

He grabs the elastic holding my ponytail and removes it, placing it onto the bathroom counter. He fists my locks as he comes in for a deeper kiss, then we hear the first knock at the door.

"Damn," he curses. "I'll get it, make yourself comfortable."

He reaches for my hanger bag and hangs it up on the shower door for me before leaving to get the door. It sounds like Sierra and Tara. I quickly remove my wedding clothes and put on my Olympic tracksuit, hiding the most beautiful red silk undies with white decorative lace, because after all it was Valentine's Day. I can't wait for Ryan's fingers to peel them off me. It's going to be a long night.

I open the door and gush, “Tara! Sierra!” They come over to me giving me big hugs.

Sierra gets to me first, “We’re so happy for you. It was perfect!”

She releases me letting Tara have her turn, “It was the best! I can’t believe the two of you are married!”

“Either can us!” I speak excitedly.

Ryan is using his cell, I assume he’s ordering the pizzas; he puts his finger up gesturing he’ll be a minute and steps out of the suite.

Sierra picks up a rose pedal, “I wish Jeremy would be romantic and ask me!” she says wistfully.

“You never know,” Tara said. She looks at the door, “Who is Ryan talking to?”

“He’s probably ordering the pizza and wings,” I guess.

Sierra looks at me with shocked eyes, “I can’t believe you guys invited Adam.”

“Is he coming?” I ask.

Sierra grins, “Jeremy is picking him up right now.”

“What were you thinking?” Tara admonishes.

“Can you believe it was Ryan’s idea?”

Sierra’s eyebrows lift, “What? Why?”

I shrug, “He has his reasons.”

“It’s going to be a very interesting night,” Sierra warns.

The door opens, I’m expecting Ryan. Instinctively I turn to it to find Jeremy and Adam entering the suite. I freeze; my body starts doing funny things, damn butterflies in my belly, sweaty palms, burning cheeks. I haven’t even had a drink yet.

Obviously, I still have feelings for him, what the fuck? Worse yet, he seems to notice. Would Ryan? He stares back at me, his face saying it all, his disappointment conspicuous, anyone can see it. Now Jeremy, Sierra, and Tara are staring at us.

Jeremy elbows Adam in the gut breaking the tension, “She’s his now,” he reminds Adam. “You blew it.”

Adam can’t peel his eyes off me and he blasts Jeremy, “Fuck off bro.”

“Maybe you guys should go into the bathroom and talk,” Sierra buffers.

“That will look real good,” I say sarcastically. Shit, I made it sound like I want to but I can’t. He probably thinks I want to be alone with him now.

“There shouldn’t be anything to talk about,” Tara says.

“There is,” Adam says with a deep voice.

Jer looks at Adam, “Dude, she’s married now, to my best friend. Try anything on her, and I’ll have to pound you.”

The door opens again, it’s Luke. Luke is Ryan’s gorgeous lab partner in bio-physiology class. He has wavy blond hair and blue eyes. His face is so perfect, he hardly looks real. We both think he would be a perfect match for Tara since she’s so particular with whom she dates, the exception being Carter in my book. It’s an unspoken set-up neither of them are privy too. I had reservations about it since Carter is going to be here, but Ryan insists he’s over her. I can’t even repeat what Ryan said, not even in my head.

Tara looks at him, “Excuse me, can we help you?”

“Ryan let me in,” Luke explained.

Using him as a tension breaker I started introducing him to everyone before going to him to give him a hug. I explain to Tara for the most part, “He’s a friend of Ryan’s from College.” Her eyebrows pop up, I take it she’s attracted to him.

“Congratulations,” he says into my hair. “You guys make a great couple!”

Adam is searing, “Where the fuck is Carter, I need a drink. Douche bag is always late when it’s his turn to bring the booze.”

Jer whispers under his breath, “If you can’t take this leave, but you’re not ruining their night.”

Adam holds up both hands like he was surrendering, “It should have been our night Jer, she was mine.” He snaps as Ryan re-enters the room.

“Pardon?” Ryan asks predatorily, clearly hearing what Adam said.

“Sorry,” Adam says to me under his breath, he glares at Ryan, “You heard me!”

“You need to go,” I insist.

“That’s not what you want,” Adam says confidently.

I nod, “It is.”

Ryan stares Adam down, “She’s my wife now. You shouldn’t have come if you still have feelings for her, get the fuck out of here.”

“Their mutual,” he says on the warpath.

“I’m in love with RYAN,” I emphasize, “See! I told you we shouldn’t have invited him!”

“I’m glad you did baby, because it gives me a chance to do this!” Adam punches Ryan as hard as he can in the gut, but Ryan must have locked his stomach muscles because he doesn’t flinch.

Jeremy jumps in-between them. Kudos to him, the guy has balls.

Carter comes strolling through the door, “Sorry I’m late, couldn’t find parking.” He looks at us and then asks, “What’s going on?”

Sierra asks Jeremy, “Can you see Adam out?”

Adam spits at Ryan, “Don’t worry, I’ll see myself out. You don’t deserve her asshole.”

Adam turns to me, “I’ve always loved you, one day you’ll come back to me.”

Jeremy wraps his arm around Sierra, “Dal, are you going to be okay?”

Tears begin welling in my eyes, “This isn’t how I pictured my wedding night.”

Sierra looks up at Jeremy, “We’ll go,” she says speaking for everyone.

“We’ll get together another time,” Tara consoles me. “Ryan shouldn’t have invited Adam.” They start grabbing everything they brought, ducking out as quickly as they can with the exception of Ryan.

He wipes my tears away with his thumbs as he cups my face, “Are you all right?”

“It was hard seeing him again,” I confess. “Tara’s right, you shouldn’t have invited him.”

“It shouldn’t have been hard for you. You are mine now,” he reminds me. “You promised yourself to me and I’m keeping you to it. I’ll never stop fighting for you or letting him know you’re mine. It’s just you and me.”

“So you did this to prove a point?” I asked already knowing the answer. I’m angry he played this game, especially on our wedding night, but I’m not going to let it ruin the rest of our evening.

He undresses me like I'm a gift and he takes me slowly. Later, as we stare up at the ceiling satiated he admits, "He's never going to stop loving you, he's proven that, but just know I love you more."

If those four days were any indication of how our life was going to be together, I'd have to invest in shares of lubrication. I'm roughed up so bad, I didn't think I'll ever be able to wear panties again let alone skate in shows.

Chapter 27

We are booked solid for shows every other weekend of the school year. We fly/drove out Friday's after Ryan's last class to perform Saturday and Sunday evenings. Then we fly/drive back for a Monday evening class I have. It's a gruelling schedule, forcing us to restrict the number of performances to only two weekends a month.

Our last show of the year is booked for the beginning of June which happens to land at the end of our school year. I'm secretly texting Aunt Rosalind, planning to surprise mom with a visit. We'd spend a week with them, then a week with Ryan's mom and the rest of the time in Gravenhurst with our friends. I'm looking forward to getting away from everything for six glorious weeks.

Aunt Rosalind takes mom to an early bird dinner at the local pancake house to give me and Ryan time to clean up and grab a bite to eat before heading to the rink. We make sure there are no traces of us left at the house before closing the door behind us. The tickets will be waiting for them at the box office when Aunt Rosalind manages to get mom there.

I'm really excited because mom hasn't watched us skate since our wedding, and even that wasn't live. Our choreographer worked on a new piece with us that I'm bursting to show her. We put it together with her in mind. The song was remixed by Beyoncé for Fifty Shades called, 'Crazy in Love.' I want to use

paraphernalia from the movie in our program but Ryan reminds me that it isn't suitable for all ages.

The show is starting in twenty minutes. We dress but don't bother putting our skates on because we are fourth in line to perform. The lights are on in the rink and people are busy getting food from concession stands and finding their seats.

The big screen located strategically in the air at centre ice plays commercials and then start focusing on unsuspecting audience members until they noticed themselves and start pointing foolishly up in the air at the monitor before waving. The camera will then pick another unsuspecting group and do the same to them.

I keep glancing at the screen hoping they will capture mom and Aunt Rosalind's face on it, but I think the cameraman focuses more on the fans in the nosebleed seats. Ryan works his magic and manages first row, centre ice for them.

The lights start dimming down and that is our cue to find our designated change rooms and start getting ready.

The knock on my door is Ryan's usual pattern warning me we were next. I put the finishing touches on to my hair and makeup before meeting him out in the hallway. He's wearing a white shirt and grey tie with black dress pants that are made to have more give than normal pants. He looks delicious!

We are introduced to the audience as Ryan and Dalia Kennedy. The first two or three shows after we're married, I'm not used to the name change and every time they announce us, I start grinning because the novelty of our wedding hasn't worn off yet.

Now, I have that same silly grin but this time it's because I know mom and Aunt Rosalind are watching us. We skate to our starting positions and pose until our music begins. We aren't able to see them because the lights are off and spotlights are focused on us. It has taken me ages to get over my fear of skating in the dark with Ryan but with patience and practice we are able to master it. People always compliment us for the chemistry we depict on the ice; its palpable even to us.

If we aren't too tired after our shows, we usually end up doing insane acrobatics in our marital bed; its there that I was taught endurance and flexibility.

Our program is four minutes long and we skate flawlessly before taking our bows and curtsies and leaving the ice in sweaty messes. We dry ourselves off and

change quickly before meeting mom and Aunt Rosalind at the front of the arena well before the show ends. They whisk us away to their safe haven where we are able to shower and catch up with them. Mom is so happy to see us, she never once comments on my weight the entire evening.

Chapter 28

The next morning, I wake up to the smell of bacon frying on the frying pan and freshly brewed Arabian coffee, I'm famished.

I look over to the muscular god lying naked next to me and decide to treat myself to hors d'oeuvres before breakfast.

I remove the cotton sheet covering him and slide down on the bed so my face is in line with his dormant shaft. I hold the base of it and take the rest in my mouth. His skin is warm and he's starting to get hard quickly. Savouring the familiar taste, I take pleasure in pleasing him by licking it unhurriedly.

When he awakens his hands fist into my hair pushing me deeper onto his swollen cock. He starts moaning indicating his impending eruption. I try to evacuate the area in time but he isn't having it, gripping my hair firmly he forces me to swallow his pleasure, he's so alpha male.

He likes what I do for him and rewards me by sliding his thick fingers into my panties and impaling me, kneading me. I can't make a noise because mom and Auntie are so close to us so I take his flesh into my mouth and bit down hard making him gasp in pain, this is enough to anger him and make him all hard again. He ruthlessly shoves himself into me, punishing me for the bite. I welcome his hard fucking because it's amazing. I want to scream at the force of each thrust but know better than do it. He's a savage beast until he fills me, causing me to explode wildly around him.

I don't know if anything is different but I'm insatiable when it comes to Ryan. I can have sex with him all day long.

We take turns showering before we head downstairs for breakfast. Mom is bringing the dishes two at a time to the table. She lays hers and Aunt Rosalind's down first and then goes back for mine and Ryan's.

I'm astonished when I see my breakfast plate. Mom sits down, so now everyone is at the table. Juice and milk pitchers are lying in the centre so we can help ourselves.

Ryan notices my shocked expression, "What's wrong?"

"My plate," I pause, "there's food on it!"

Mom glances up from her food and smiles, "Of course it does, you're eating for two now."

Oh.My.God. mom thought I'm pregnant! How ridiculous! "Whatever gives you that impression?" I ask.

She looks at me knowingly, "Your face, is fuller than before, you're glowing; even your hair is thicker. I can just tell it's obvious."

Aunt Rosalind studies me. Her eyes sparkle, "Oh ya! I see it now, she's right."

"You're both being ridiculous," I scold. "This is not in our plan. We're waiting until Ryan finishes school to have kids. We can't do our shows if I'm preggars. I don't even know if I can skate pregnant."

"Probably not," Ryan answers.

Mom gushes more to Aunt Rosalind than to me or Ryan, "Won't it be so nice to have a grandchild running around here! Dalia looks just like me when I was pregnant. Maybe their baby will be a champion figure skater! We should call Sara!"

"Don't call Sara. I'M NOT PREGNANT!" I yell.

I'm getting more upset by the second, my cheeks are hot and my stomach is doing flip flops. Mom is rambling on like I'm giving birth tomorrow. God only knows what Ryan is thinking since it impacts him profoundly too.

What will happen if I'm pregnant? Will our shows really stop? Will we have to drop out of school? How will we live? The unknown is scary but Ryan will figure things out, he always does.

I'd love to snuggle with a baby Ryan in my arms. It has to be a boy, but it will also be okay if it's a girl. I can see us strolling down sunny streets pushing a pram passing ladies who will complement our baby saying, 'What a beautiful baby.' I will look lovingly at Ryan, before thanking the woman who stops to complement OUR baby.

We are going to have children eventually anyway. Maybe, sooner is better. We can be young parents. It will help us relate to little Ryan Jr better.

Ryan's voice pulls me back into reality, "We better make sure. Can we borrow your car Mrs. Middleton?"

"Of course dear," mom says. "The drugstore is just down the street. You'll see a Walgreens on your right when you turn left on the main drag."

"I'm sure we'll find it. We'll call you when we know the results," he reassures.

"Aren't you doing the test here?" Aunt Rosalind asks.

"We'll call," Ryan repeats sounding edgy.

We get into mom's car lost in our own thoughts, he starts it adjusting his seat and mirrors before throwing her into reverse. He appears to be brooding while I daydream.

We pass a park with a baby being swung by its mother.

I picture myself standing next to her pushing our baby on the swing, while Ryan sits on the bench watching the pram holding our second child. We live here where it's warm all year long, just walking distance from the park. Mom or Aunt Rosalind will babysit anytime we want a night out. I start looking out my window for houses for sale. Maybe we will fluke it and find our dream house. Life will be amazing.

The car starts slowing down and Ryan pulls up to the Walgreens. He parks directly in front of the store and waits impatiently for me to get out of the passenger side of the car. He takes my hand and walks briskly into the store. Once inside, he stops to read the signs figuring out which aisle we need. The first aisle he chooses is wrong, so we walk down a second aisle slowing when his eyes land on condoms. Immediately next to them is lubrication. I grab a tube for us. He grins at me, "What's that for?"

"That monstrosity of a penis you have buried in your jeans, its time to be more humane to me, I'm getting awfully sore!" I answer sarcastically. My eye catches the tests, "They're there," I point out.

"Get the one that detects the pregnancy hormone the soonest," he suggests. Grabbing the brand that's always televised, we go to the register to pay for it.

"Where should I do it?" I asked.

“Mc.D’s?”

“Nice,” I say sarcastically.

“Its better than doing it at your mothers. This way we have some time to digest the results.”

“Good point,” I agree.

We walked next door with the test in my purse. Ryan orders us coffees and we chose a small private table to sit and read the instructions before taking the test. It’s simple enough, pee on the stick and wait a few minutes. If it has one line, its negative, two lines are positive. Ryan makes me promise not to look at it until we’re together, so the plan is we read it in the car.

I’m too excited to finish my coffee, “I’m doing it now.”

“Good luck,” he wishes.

I get up from the table and go to the ladies room. I’m so excited I have to wait a second before my pee starts. I get just enough onto the stick before replacing the lid and enclosing it back in the box. When I leave the bathroom he’s already waiting for me at the doors of McDonalds.

We go back to the car holding hands. He opens my door for me and then goes around to his side. I hand him the box.

“How long do you think it’s been?”

“I think we should wait a few more minutes,” I say looking at my cell for the time, “the instructions say five. It’s probably been three or four.”

He puts the key on accessories and after two minutes pass he started opens the box. He pulls out the test and breathes a huge sigh of relief handing it to me. I don’t have to look at the test to know its negative just by Ryan’s reaction, but I do anyway.

“You’re relieved,” I observe, my voice sounding flat.

“You’re not?” he sounds caught off guard. “It’s too early,” he reasons, “we’re still doing shows.”

“Here I am thinking how nice it will be to carry your child, and the entire time you’re holding your breath praying I’m not.”

“One day it will happen, just not right now,” he says taking my hand. He’s always the voice of reason in our relationship; I tend to be the flighty romantic one.

I shake him off.

“You better text your mother,” he suggests.

“You better,” I correct, “you’re the one who promised we’d inform them right away.”

“You’re being childish,” he chides.

I pulled my cell out obediently and text:

Dalia: Not pregnant

Mom: Sorry Sweetheart. R U ok?

Dalia: upset

Mom: Is Ryan ok

Dalia: Happy

Our reactions to taking our next step in our relationship are so polar opposite. I wonder if we will ever align as far as starting a family is concerned.

The remainder of our trip is spent sightseeing with Aunt Rosalind and mom. They take us to every bingo parlour in a twenty mile radius. We have four o’clock dinners at restaurants taking full advantage of their senior’s discount. Its great seeing mom so well adjusted after losing dad. Moving to Florida is the right thing for her to do and knowing how well she is doing brings me peace of mind.

Chapter 29

The desire to become impregnated is sewn into my brain at mom's house, and with each passing day the need grows more. Knowing better than to bring it up to Ryan again, I figure if something 'happens' it will be by accident. This will be carefully planned, of course not really being an accident at all.

I know he will be meticulous towards birth control following the 'scare,' but if I can get him all concupiscent maybe he will let his guard down. It will be like Adam and Eve, I will make him so lustful that he will be irrational and forget all about protection.

My ingenious plan is to cut him off for a while which will be easy staying at his moms, and then I will restrain him while performing lewd sex acts. It will be his fault for losing control and I will be his very happy victim. I wonder if he's strong enough to break our bedposts?

Once impregnated, I'm sure he'll warm to the idea; he wouldn't really have a choice. I can't wait to bounce my idea off Tara. When I found myself alone, I'll text her.

We are stoked to be flying back to Toronto, seven glorious weeks of no skating, school, or the pressures that accompany either. Its like returning back to civilization after being isolated with the golden girls.

We spend the better half of our first afternoon in Sara's living room catching up with her on what it was like performing in shows, how school is going and of course how mom is doing. We are partially jet lagged so kicking up our feet and having a discussion about our married life is engaging. I could rest on Ryan's couch listening to them catch up for hours. Their chatter is more like friends than mother/son. I can't help envying their relationship, it resembled mine and dads.

Ryan and I aren't the only ones doing the talking though, Sara announces, "I have news," before disappearing into the kitchen. We hear cabinets open and the clinking sound of dishes being placed on the counter, the water from the tap is running before she calls out, "Does anyone want a tea?"

Both Ryan and I call back; "Sure!" before he comes over to my couch and gives me an opened mouth kiss that makes my toes curl. I can taste his mint bubble gum that we bought for the plane ride on his breath; he has been chewing it since minutes before the plane began its descent. I dug my fingers into the back of his wild and wispy hair that he threatens to cut every time it hangs in his eyes. He reaches down between my legs grabbing me and I receive the feel immensely pushing back up into his hand.

The plan flashes in my mind for a second and I wonder if I will be able to execute it when I'm needier than him. When we hear his mother's unusually loud footsteps we part ways, and I try to regain control of my breathing. Ryan makes it to the couch he was sitting on before she reappears into the room.

Sara glances at me first and asks, "What do you take in your tea?"

"Milk and sugar."

"Ryan?"

"The same," he says.

She turns to go back into the kitchen and before you can say, 'fiddle sticks,' his hand is sliding down into my panties again. I spread my legs apart increasing his access so he can insert two gloriously thick fingers into my vaginal opening. I begin moaning and his lips frantically covered mine, his tongue filling me, muffling the sound.

"Are you okay in there?" she calls out chuckling.

We stop kissing so I can answer her. He whispers in my ear, "I want to fuck you now." I lose control and come around his fingers my body going into spasm as he sweeps me into a kiss like I've never experienced before.

She turns the corner re-entering the room we're in, her steps not as loud, casting the element of surprise on us. We are covered yet our aftermath is clearly unhidden, she lays the teapot and cups on the table and says, "Here isn't the place." I must have turned fire engine red with embarrassment.

Ryan looks his mother square in the eye as he plays the stupid card with her, “The place for what mom?” I consciously slow my breathing down and focus on the tea laid out before us, hoping my skin colour will revert to its usual shade.

“What’s the news?” I try redirecting the attention cast on us.

She pours the tea into all three cups taking hers, “I have a boyfriend! His name is Ian, I work with him. You’ll be meeting him tomorrow.”

“Since when?” Ryan asks slightly defensively.

“Is it serious?” I ask.

“Not long after you moved away. He transferred from Alberta to work here, and yes Dalia, very.”

I remember Ryan telling me his mother works for an editor of a textbook publisher. Her job sounds dry to me. I’m curious what he does at her company, “What’s he do?”

She grins at me, “He’s our new C.E.O! He’s flown in to restructure the office, laying off tons of employee’s. He says our office hasn’t run efficiently in ages and this really needs doing.” She studies Ryan, “You don’t have to worry, my jobs not at risk.”

“Good to know,” he says.

We chat into the wee hours of the morning before Ryan and I decided to go to bed. I dressed in my favourite purple teddy nightgown mistakenly commando and Ryan dressed in his usual, nothing.

We share our traditional peck on the cheek goodnight before I roll away from him in effort to fall asleep but he isn’t having that. Since I was the only one to receive any type of sexual gratification today he rolls me back towards him and kisses me aggressively. His hands find me and he’s fucking me with his fingers. Before I know it, he’s filling me to maximum capacity. I’m moaning salaciously into his mouth as his tongue swirls wildly around mine. My dry mouth is getting moist by his, he fills me slowly; his thrusts deliberate and earth shattering. They quickly gain momentum using enough force to jar my entire body. I grip onto his muscular arms for dear life as he withdraws from me, spraying me with his cum. It bothers me that he pulled out but I liked him marking me as his, it’s so territorial.

I give him a, 'that's it?' expression and he's forced to use his fingers to finish his work on me with his extremely bold, skilled hand he has me in orgasm two more times.

We slept in the following morning after our late night frisk attack. Sara leaves a note by the front door telling us she won't be home until dinner time, and not to forget that Ian is coming over that night for dinner.

Chapter 30

Ryan calls his mother at work telling her she doesn't have to lift a finger for dinner, that we have everything under control. I do a brisk cleaning of the main floor which already looks good and set the dining room table. I'm not sure if this is a fine china moment so I go with using her everyday dishes. Ryan starts prepping by chopping the vegetables and then we work together on the main course. We chose a salad and minestrone soup followed by a vegetarian lasagna. By the time Sara finishes work, the house smells of marinated pasta sauce.

Our work is done for the most part when Ryan grabs his keys from the table and calls out, "I'll be back."

"Where are you going?"

His face goes all cute on me, "Where do you think I'm going?" He kisses me on the side of my lips.

"Don't I plead; you look so cute like this? I hate when your hair is too short, it makes you look like you've been in combat."

"It doesn't matter what I look like on the outside, it's what's on the inside that counts," he insists.

"That's only what ugly people say," I joke. "I'll just have to find another husband who will stay sexy for me," I warn.

"I'll give you sexy when we're alone tonight," he teases. "Let me go now, or I won't be back in time. I still have to hit the liquor store," he says impatiently.

"Get red," I order.

"Sure."

He pecks me on the cheek and makes tracks out the door. He is going to massacre his best feature next to that gorgeous body and chocolate brown eyes of his while leaving me alone to my own devices.

I continue cleaning placing loose papers in the drawers they are adjacent to. That is when I notice a photograph of a couple hanging out of an opened envelope inside the drawer. Curiosity gets the better of me and I pick it up, removing the picture to have a better look. Naturally never having seen Ryan's father before, it's understandable that I'm curious. That's what I tell myself when I pull the picture from the drawer.

My eyes landed on Sara who looks to be about the same age as she is now and then the man, oh my God, the man! I have to blink and rub my eyes making sure I'm not seeing things. The man is undeniably my father. They are standing so close in the picture and he is kissing Sara and it isn't on the cheek! It's the kind of kiss that well, that he don't shared with anyone other than mom. This photograph is unmistakably romantic.

Dad!

I checked the back of the picture for a date. It was taken two years ago. I search the envelope finding a piece of paper with it that reads:

Sara,

We'll tell the kids after they compete. There's no reason to upset them beforehand. Once we tell them, I'll file the papers.

Love Alex

My heart pounds, as my blood hits boiling temperatures while coursing through my veins. I take deep breaths telling myself I'm jumping to conclusions, but the picture is worth hundreds of words and it explains so much. Mom and dad became so distant from each other before he died. He was spending more time at work and less at home. I never really knew how my parents found out about Ryan needing a partner, but this explains everything.

I can't imagine how long their affair has been going on. I wonder if mom was ever suspicious or worse yet, does she know? If Sara and dad were together, than why didn't he mind my relationship with Ryan? Maybe he didn't take our relationship seriously; he probably figured we wouldn't last, a teen romance that would fizzle out in time. Ryan and I would have ended up as step brother/sister rather than husband and wife! Why didn't Sara tell us after he died?

I have to know if Ryan was aware and if so, if he kept it from me. I can ask Jeremy, he'll tell me the truth. The big question is do I want to know the truth, and if Jeremy knew about his mother and my dad and didn't tell me, will I be able to forgive him?

I decide to shower before everyone returns. I feel heavy with disappointment in dad, Sara, maybe even Ryan. I place the photo back the way I found it before lowering the heat on the oven and removing the lid to the lasagna so the cheese on top will melt.

Dad and Sara? Really? Was he that unhappy? Why hadn't I noticed? How could he do that to mom? How could he do that? The disappointment I feel towards his actions overwhelms me. Suddenly the shower curtain moves startling me. It's Ryan, his hair is now cut short, and I hate it, "I was calling you, are you okay?" he asks.

Words evaded, nodding yes when I'm not. He turns the water off and hands me a towel, "They're here, and you better get ready."

"Thanks."

I look into his warm brown eyes, that have given me so much comfort over the past few years, and then it clicks, he knew. I don't have to ask anyone. I just know, he knows.

When I get downstairs they are all in the family room. Sara is sitting with a handsome dark haired business man that looks to be in his mid-fifties. When I enter the room, everyone stands making me feel self-conscious. Sara glanced at Ian, "Ian this is Dalia, Ryan's wife, Dalia this is Ian."

"Nice to meet you," I say pleasantly, reaching for his hand. I glance at Ryan then back at Ian and Sara.

"Dinner is ready," Ryan hurries us.

The lid must have been off the lasagna too long, because I can smell burnt cheese as I pass the kitchen on my way downstairs. Ryan and I hand out the soup and place the salad and lasagna in the middle of the table for everyone to help themselves. Sara sits at the head of the table, Ian the opposite, Ryan and I on the sides. I stay quiet the majority of the dinner conversation listening to Ryan and Ian

get acquainted on small talk. Ryan appears to be enjoying himself and genuinely happy for his mom.

I will have a word with him later, after our dinner guest leaves.

Chapter 31

I turn in earlier than everyone else hoping to fall asleep before Ryan goes to bed. I change quickly and snuggle under Ryan's cozy comforter. I'm hoping the evening will run into the early hours so I won't have the urge to confront him on what I know tonight, but I'm not that lucky.

Ryan comes into his room shortly after I retire. He switches the light on and sits next to me on the bed, "Okay, would you like to tell me what's bothering you? You were noticeably quiet at dinner." I shield my eyes from the obscenely bright light until they adapt, "No, I'd rather not, I'm tired Ryan."

"Tired of what?"

"Just tired."

The walls feel like they are closing in on me. People that I care for the most are failing me. If he wants to know what made me quiet at dinner, I might as well show him. I scramble to get out from underneath his blankets, "Where are you going?" he stammers.

"To show you what's bothering me."

I cover myself with my housecoat walking quickly towards the staircase. Ryan follows close behind. I notice a stream of light coming from his mother's room, she is still awake. I switch the light on in the family room and retrieve the photo, handing it to Ryan. He takes it in his fingers and studies it before looking at me and shaking his head before dropping the photo onto the table. He cups my face but I step back and ask, "Why didn't you tell me?" I was incensed with anger.

"I was protecting you, us." He admits.

"You were protecting me? Us? Seriously? He was my hero, Ry! You knew what he meant to me and you still kept his shitty humungous secret. Did you know while he was alive?"

He hesitates which gives me my answer, "I'm sorry."

“Does mom know?”

Looking down, he’s unable to maintain eye contact, “No, she doesn’t.”

“Didn’t you think I was going to find out eventually? It’s on you Ryan, if they didn’t tell me, you should have. How long was your whore mother fucking my father for anyway?”

Ryan’s eyes turn black and if I wasn’t so angry the look he is giving me probably would scare me but instead, it pisses me off more. He grabs a lamp which is the closest thing to him, and throws it hard against the antique mirror lying over the fireplace, smashing it to bits. Shards of glass fall to the floor and Sara’s bedroom door opens. He storms out of the house slamming the door behind him, leaving me alone in the room with mess he made and the incriminating picture. His tires squeal angrily as he drives down the street.

Sara slithers back into her room; I can hear her door close. I take the picture but leave the glass on the floor and barricade myself back in Ryan’s room.

Hours later it is pitch black when I hear Ryan downstairs cleaning the glass. When he’s done, I hear his footsteps and then my door. The bed dips stirring me. He turns the light on, forcing me to shield my eyes.

His bloodshot eyes lost their look of anger and he reeks of alcohol, “I love how much you loved your father. The last thing I wanted to do was destroy your hero. I hate mom for choosing Alex, but he chose her too. I begged them to stop but I never seen her happier. She loved him the way you did.”

“I hate him for being with her, I hate you for thinking that you had to keep it from me, and I hate her for doing that to mom. How can she look at my mother in the face after what she did? You should have told me.”

“I’m sorry.”

I begin sobbing into my pillow. He strokes my hair. The picture lays on the night stand next to me, “I’m not staying in HER house after what she did to my family. I’m telling mom what they’ve done. I don’t want her to ever find out that I knew and didn’t tell her, the way you did.”

“Will she benefit from you telling her, or will it just hurt her? Whatever you do, don’t let this affect our relationship.”

“Of course it affects us. YOU DIDN’T TELL ME!”

Ryan works on me tirelessly, thinking he's fixing what needs to be fixed of my broken heart. The fact that he doesn't or can't confide in me puts us miles apart from each other. He attempts to right his wrong, using his soft touch, gentle kisses, and lovemaking. I participate but I'm not feeling it. I'm merely going through the motions so the conversation will end sooner.

Chapter 32

Sara never tried stopping me from leaving. I walked passed her out the front door with my luggage in tow, never turning back.

Ryan followed me out, "Let me drive you."

"You don't need to. Tara will pick me up. I'm going to text her now."

"Don't. I want to take you," he insists.

His black linen shirt is open at the top and his pants hang off his hips, making him look illegally delectable, "If you must." My natural attraction to him is breaking through my resolve.

The warm breeze carries his fresh scent over to me making me want to bury my face in his chest. If it wasn't for his mother did, I probably wouldn't be leaving but then again, he threw the lamp, siding with his mother, maybe leaving is best.

He pins me against his black BMW kissing me full on the lips as I slide my fingers across the stubble on the back of his head. His lips linger on mine, he rubs hard against me. He reluctantly releases me allowing me enough room to open the door and wait for me to buckle in before grabbing my bags and throwing them into the back.

"I wish you'd stay and talk to mom," he admits.

I look out the front windshield knowing that isn't happening anytime soon, "I'm so angry at you for keeping these secrets from me, first Sierra and now this. That is huge Ryan. There's also no telling what I'll do or say to your mom given half a chance. I have to leave. I expect you to be there when I tell mom."

"Did you take the picture?"

"Yes, it's in my bag. I kept it in case mom doesn't believe me. The separation will do us good. Maybe you'll think twice before keeping something like that from me again."

"That's not fair Dalia, I was protecting you."

“You were harming us rather than protecting me, don’t you see that? How is keeping me in the dark defending me? It’s chipped away at my trust for you,” I say pulling my hand from his.

He turns the car off parking down the street from Tara’s, “Are we okay?” he asks.

“I guess so,” I say unconvincingly. “I’ll see you Friday.”

“Okay.”

I know he doesn’t believe me, I didn’t believe myself. Things aren’t okay.

I reach for the door when he slides his fingers through the sensitive hairs at the base of my neck pulling me in for a kiss that is perfect and unhurried. Our lips press against each other, neither of us want it to end. His skilled tongue makes its way into my mouth fucking me orally. Every second we are locked in a kiss, my resolve to leave the car and create space weakens. The spell he casts on me is too strong. What we have will never get old.

He carries my bags to Tara’s door and pecks my lips one last time, before leaving me to go back to his mothers. I watch his cool swagger as he returns to the car unaware I’m staring him down, have mercy.

The front door to Tara’s house finally opens, her and Sierra shriek with excitement. Arms stretch out ready to embrace me; we hug in our traditional fashion. Its great seeing them again; tears of happiness flood my eyes. Sierra notices first, “None of that now! You’ll make me cry and nowadays it doesn’t take much.”

“Let her walk in the door Sierra,” Tara scolds.

“You just want to go first,” Sierra accuses her.

“Oh my! I take it we have a lot to catch up on?”

“Too much,” Tara says knowingly. “Let’s grab some sandwiches and do some sun worshipping by the pool.”

Sierra leads the way to the kitchen. We work on our snack without delegating tasks. Sierra got the drinks, Tara the sandwiches and I looked for sweets. We are set. We place everything on a silver platter and carry it to the patio table.

“Should we change into our suits?”

Tara grins, “You can if you want Dalia, I’m on my period and Sierra refuses to go into a chlorinated pool in her condition.”

Sierra scowls at Tara, “You’re such a bitch! You ruined my surprise!”

Tara waves Sierra off, “I’m sure she’s guessed! You don’t think she can tell?” she asks in disbelief.

I look at her very prominent bump, “It is obvious,” I confirm.

“Really?” she asks stroking her belly.

“Stop stroking your damn belly, we all know you’re pregnant,” gripes Tara.

“Do I hear a pang of jealousy?” I tease her.

“Absolutely not! She’s pregzilla and she’s driving me crazy with it. Baby this, baby that, I don’t ever want to hear that word again!”

I look over at Sierra, “You’ve really been driving her crazy, haven’t you?”

“Is there anything more fun to do?” asks Sierra.

“Who’s the daddy?” I ask.

“Jer of course!” she says indignantly.

“Boy or Girl?”

“I’m waiting to find out.”

I look over at Tara, “Girl,” she answers.

“Double bitch!” Sierra snaps.

Tara defends her honour, “Dalia knows you’re too impatient to wait nine months!”

I take a bite of my sandwich, listening to them bicker like an old married couple. A sparkle catches my eye on Tara’s finger. She sees me look at it, “You’re not?”

“I am! Luke asked me to marry him!”

“You’ve only been dating ten minutes, when are you getting married?”

“Wait a minute,” Sierra interrupts. “I’m not done with my news yet.”

We both turn back to her, “I dropped out of Uni.”

She waits for an earth shattering reaction which she doesn’t get, staring at us angrily, “Aren’t you going to react, say something?”

“It’s hardly surprising. I can’t see you taking care of a baby and finishing school,” I explain. “Is Jer dropping out too?”

“No, his parents are supporting us until he finishes.”

“That’s a relief.”

“Can you finish telling her please,” Tara says impatiently.

“When I found out I was preggars, I dropped out of University and enrolled in beauty school. I finish a month from now. When the baby is born I can work out of my house.”

“How far along are you?”

“Seven months!”

I grab her wrist pulling her close to me, “Congratulations!” I say hugging her, “You deserve it! I can’t believe you never mentioned all this in your texts!”

She pulls away studying me, “Tara suggested we save our big news for when you come. Will you let me practice cutting and perming your hair for my final?”

“You are not perming my hair!” I say guarded. Her expression turns to disappointment and makes me feel guilty enough to make a sacrificial offer, “You can dye and cut it.”

She lights up, “Thanks Dalia. You’re way better than a dummy!”

Tara giggles, “That’s what she would have used if you said no. Don’t worry; we’ll record it so you don’t have to sit in a classroom. She can just send the video in to her teacher and if the video isn’t good enough, then you have to go in.”

“Why aren’t you doing it Tara?”

“I can’t have her fucking my hair up before the wedding,” she says wisely.

“Good point Tara, I’ll just let her fuck mine up.”

“I’m not fucking anyone’s up,” Sierra says defensively.

I blow a kiss to Sierra trying to lighten her up and then focus my attention on Tara who appears to be bursting at the seams with her news, “What about you, Tara, tell me about Luke!”

“He’s amazing, sweet, everything I ever wished for.”

“And?” I ask.

“And what?” she asks confused.

“Tara, he goes to school with me and Ryan, when do you ever see him?”

“He visits every weekend.”

“Why hasn’t Ryan said anything about this?” I ask suspiciously.

“I don’t know, Luke said he told Ryan. You should ask him why he never told you.”

My stomach churns thinking about all the other stuff he didn’t tell me. Was he protecting me from this as well? “Later,” I dismiss her suggestion. “When are you getting married?”

“We chose to get married this Labour Day weekend!”

“Seriously? What about school?”

“I’ll transfer to yours!” That is enough to get me excited; finally I will have at least one of my friends with me again. We start jumping up and down squealing.

“Maybe you can move into our building!” I suggest. “I’ll get the number for you to call.”

“I’m sure Luke already has them. OMG. I would love to live near you,” Tara gushes.

We take a break from chatting to finish our sandwiches and downing our first of many screwdrivers. Tara takes the pitcher to refill it. We drink the entire day, so I can see us getting pretty liquored up.

Sierra looks at me expectantly, “What about you, do you have any news?”

“Not really,” I say evasively.

Tara looks at me suspiciously, “What’s wrong? Trouble in paradise?”

“We had a pregnancy scare.”

Tara looks down at my belly, “I don’t think I could handle to Pregzilla’s, I take it you’re not?”

“Sadly no, he was over the moon happy about it, which pissed me off.”

Sierra looks at me knowingly, “So you wanted to be?”

I sip my screwdriver, “Of course, I’d love to carry Ryan’s baby.”

“You have your shows and school, I see why Ryan thinks it was a bad time,” Tara adds.

“Doesn’t take my disappointment away.”

“It will happen when it’s the right time,” Sierra reassures.

“Is that all that’s bothering you?” Tara asks.

“No, his mother slept with my father and Ryan never told me,” I blurted.

“Apparently, dad was planning on leaving mom. I’m so angry at him for not telling

me and you don't even want to know how I feel towards my father. Now I have to tell my mother so she doesn't find out the way I did."

"Holy shit!" Tara and Sierra said in unison.

"Why does Ryan feel the need to keep such big secrets from me?"

"He's protective of you," Sierra explains.

Sierra looked like she was having troubles grasping the news, "Your dad and Ryan's mom? That's so hard to believe. He's such a family man. He's always been there for you. Why didn't Ryan tell you?"

"He said he was protecting me. He knew how close I was to my father."

"He should have told you," Sierra says.

Tara nodded, "I agree. Did you guys fight?"

"That's why I'm here, fucked if I'm going to sleep under that whore's roof."

"Tell me you didn't call her that to him?"

"I didn't call her that to him," I say laughing.

"You called her that?" Tara asks.

"I did."

"Holy shit, what did he do?" Sierra asked.

"I bet he defended his mother," Tara guessed.

"Indirectly, he smashed his mother's lamp against a mirror."

"So your mom doesn't know? Are you sure?" Tara asks.

"Yes, I'm sure."

Sierra looks concerned, "Are you going to tell her?"

"She should know, so she doesn't learn about it from someone else."

"Who's going to tell her," Tara asked. "I don't think you should tell her. What she doesn't know won't hurt her."

"I can't take the chance of her ever finding out. How's Carter?" I ask changing subject.

"Who knows," answers Tara flippantly.

Sierra starts laughing, "She knows! She's just too embarrassed to tell you he idolizes the other team!"

"What do you mean," I ask confused.

"Okay, how do I put this nicely? We were going to a bar downtown to meet Luke when we bumped into Carter. We saw him but he didn't see us."

“And?” I encouraged already fascinated by the story.

Sierra tries answering but keeps breaking out into fits of laughter, “Let’s just say, Carter was dressed better than both of us! Stilettos, pencil skirt, push up bra, the works!” Tara shakes her head, looking down with embarrassment.

“Bullshit!” I said disbelievingly.

“On my baby’s life,” Sierra swears.

“Don’t swear on that,” Tara admonishes.

“Wow,” I say grinning. “Wish I were there. I never thought he was very attractive as a guy, but maybe as a girl, is he pretty?”

“Pretty ugly,” they answer in unison.

“Does Jer and Ryan know?”

“We didn’t say anything,” Tara says. “It could ruin their friendship.”

“True,” I agree. “What about Adam? Have you heard anything about him?” I ask.

Sierra shrugs, “He’s just got this new amazing part-time job he boasts about all the time with the CSA. I can’t remember what he does or what it stands for.”

I gasp.

They looked at me with concern, “What?”

I don’t answer, “Is he single?”

“Yep, he tells Jer and Carter he doesn’t have time for dating, he’s too busy with work and school. He says he’s got huge goals.”

“Why are you shocked?” Sierra asks curiously.

I swallow, “It’s the Canadian Skating Association. They run: shows, competitions and create the rules to my sport. They can make or break us. I find it hard to believe that this new job is coincidental.”

When we finish catching up I excuse myself for a few minutes to get changed into my bathing suit.

I returned to the pool to find Tara and Sierra rifling through wedding magazines discussing Tara’s upcoming nuptials while I tried to digest Adam’s new job. I stroll over to the deep end and stand at the edge of the pool with my toes curled around the lip wondering his intent. I can picture him at Tara’s last party manning the music like it was yesterday. He had to be over me, this new job of his was merely a fluke. The alternative is too scary.

I spread my feet so they are shoulder width apart and bend my legs before popping into a shallow dive. The cold water gives my body a jolt. I stay submerged the entire length of the pool.

Chapter 33

It's cloudy early on in the morning and the sky is dark grey with low lying rain clouds that threaten a downpour. We spend the day inside cooking our favourite dishes for the boys. Tara runs to the liquor store just before it starts raining, while Sierra and I tidy up.

We spread the food out on the dining room table buffet style and bring all the chairs we can find into the living room so we can sit together in front of the television to watch the last few episodes of Sons.

The doorbell rings, and with Tara still gone, I answer it. Carter and Adam stand soaking wet side by side after running from their car in what appears to be a mix of rain and hail. I smile at them quickly stepping aside so they can come inside. Their clothes are plastered to their bodies as they drip all over the floor leaving puddles at their feet.

"We need some towels!" I call out to Sierra.

She comes down with an armful of towels handing each of them one, "Hi guys!" she says casually.

"Hi," Adam says while staring at me, "I'll go to the upstairs bathroom, Carter, you take the downstairs one. Girls, do you think you can find us something to wear?"

"Sure," I say heading towards Tara's room to look for clothes. When I find something suitable, I tap lightly on the door and wait for Adam to answer. He peaks out and then grabs my wrist pulling me in with him, closing the door behind me.

He's already removed his top and his nipples are hard from the cold. The zipper to his pants is open and he stands boldly peeling the rest of his clothes off as I watch. I turned to leave but he places his foot at the base of the door preventing me from opening it without hurting him. I turn to face him and before I know

what's happening his lips are on mine and my entire body responds to him in a way I don't expect.

I push him away but he pulls me closer. I went to slap his face but he catches my wrist and somehow manages to make my swing and miss a sexy part of his kiss. The more I resist the stronger his hold gets and then I realize I had no choice but surrender to it or he will never let me go, so I go limp in his arms and kiss him back. I try to break free a second time from him, but I'm unsuccessful and he just whispers, "It's all right to like it," and keeps kissing me. I hate myself for liking it. He pulls back to look into my eyes, they were filled full of sexual and emotional frustration.

"I'm married," I remind him.

"He manipulated your choices."

"How so?"

"His ultimatum, who does that?"

"I chose HIM."

"You're allowed a mistake."

"He's not a mistake. You are," I blurt not meaning to sound malicious.

My words pack him a devastating blow, Adam steps back and I instantly regret saying it.

"Leave," he whispers. I leave the bathroom just as Ryan is walking into Tara's house.

I run downstairs and straight into his arms. He wraps them around me squeezing me tight, making me feel safe and comforted. He strokes my hair while gently kissing the top of my head, "Is something wrong?" he asks.

"No," I lie.

The door to the upstairs bathroom opens and Ryan looks up to see Adam leave from the direction I came from.

"What were you doing in the bathroom with Adam?" asks Ryan.

"Nothing," I say casually, "Adam and Carter got caught in the downpour and we found them some clothing to wear."

He grabs my arm pushing me roughly into the closest room we are standing next to. He pulls his phone out and puts it on the camera setting before taking a picture and handing it back to me, "Look at you," he growls.

I look at the phone and see my messy hair and smeared lipstick, damn! “He grabs me and pulls me into the bathroom and then he kisses me. I try pushing him away but he won’t let me.”

“You wouldn’t have told me if I didn’t show you what you looked like,” he accuses me.

“That’s not true,” I deny, but I know it’s true.

“You betrayed me,” he says angrily. “What else did the two of you do?”

“Nothing, I swear!”

“Go upstairs and wait for me, I’m not finished with you yet,” he demands.

I wait in Tara’s room closing the door behind me. I heard thunderous voices downstairs as Ryan and Adam begin yelling fiercely at one another. Sierra is begging and pleading for them to stop. Then I heard flesh on flesh as the two of them resort to physical blows. Sierra yells for Carter to stop them and then begins screaming and crying hysterically. I’m nauseous with fear contemplating whether I should call the police to break it up, when suddenly I notice it gets quiet in the house.

The front door opens and I hear Tara yelling, “What the fuck happened? What did you do to him? He’s bleeding all over my mom’s carpet! Call an ambulance!”

“I’ll take him, you don’t need to call an ambulance” Carter volunteers.

Then Tara asks Sierra, “Where’s Dalia?”

The sound of footsteps start getting louder as they get closer to the room I’m in. It reminded me of the fights my parents used to have when I was a kid; I hid in my room hoping I wasn’t the cause of their fight. Now I’m cowering on Tara’s bed feeling scared and guilty for causing this. If I had brought the robe to Carter, none of this would have happened.

The door opens and Ryan stands there breathing heavily, his right eye is swollen shut, a large cut just above it. Blood is splattered on his shirt that obviously isn’t his, “If you ever let him go near you again, we’re finished for good,” then he turns and walks away.

I have no idea where I stand with him anymore. He refuses to see or talk to me for the rest of the summer. I know why he’s angry, first calling his mother a

whore and then catching me kissing Adam. I blame myself for eagerly bringing him the clothes and enjoying the kiss way more than I should have. As time passes, remorse over my foolish decisions grows. The summer is dark and gloomy even on the brightest days. It is a lesson well learned and I swear I'll never disappoint Ryan or allow myself to be put in a vulnerable position again.

Chapter 34

September came quickly and when I wasn't brooding over Ryan I was assisting Tara with her wedding plans. She kept it simple, a small chapel wedding, followed by dinner and dancing at a fine Italian restaurant close to the church. The honeymoon is Hawaii for seven nights and eight days before joining us in London. I promise I will secure an apartment for them in our building. I'm not sure how I'm going to do it, but I don't want them worrying about it.

The closer it gets to Tara's wedding, the more I try breaking the ice between me and Ryan. I call, text, even go to his house but I can't bring myself to ring the doorbell so I leave a note in his mailbox reminding him about it. He never responds. My displeasure is Tara's relief. She is tired of Ryan and Adam's constant bickering and refuses to let them ruin her wedding.

The invitation was mailed to Adam weeks ago, and she isn't going to revoke it, not after all he has gone through. The fight between him and Ryan left him with a broken nose and jawbone. Sierra said that if Ryan lays another finger on Adam, Adam will press charges. I want to warn Ryan but he doesn't return my calls or texts. I'm getting desperate now.

Sierra decides she is going to have Tara videotape her hairdressing exam the night before the wedding. She claims it makes perfect sense. If she does my hair the night before, all she will have to do on the day of the wedding is touch me up. Sierra's idea sends Tara over the edge complaining it's too close to her wedding, but Sierra argues that we can treat it like a bachelorette party and drink our liquor from Tim Horton's coffee cups. Sierra of course doesn't drink, but we do.

She warns me that the changes will be dramatic seeing it's for a final exam. I'm so beside myself over Ryan feeling ugly on the inside, it didn't matter to me

what I look like on the outside. I just hope for Tara's sake that she does a good job, because I am part of the wedding party.

Tara and I drank Rye and Coke, fifty/fifty split in medium size cups so after having the first one on an empty stomach, I'm feeling pretty good and ready for Sierra to do her magic. By the third coffee I'm seeing two Sierras' and two Tara's. When she is finished I'm left with a trendy chin length bob that does wonders for my curls, for sure I'm going to save on hairspray, and maybe the bees will stop chasing me.

The morning of her wedding, the sun shines and the birds sing, its perfect. We isolate ourselves from the rest of the world and go to work getting ready for the wedding. I can't even count the number of times I check my phone to see if Ryan called. I give up trying to call him. It becomes clear to me that he will contact me when he's ready to.

The church is torture; every time the door opens I turn hoping to see Ryan. Each time it isn't him, I feel more and more disappointed. I keep telling myself to stop thinking about him and start focusing on Tara but its hard. I wanted to curl up in a ball and cry, but I know I have to be strong and not let it show.

The priest begins the service talking about cherishing the sanctity of marriage, when the faint echo of the door opening catching my attention. The final guest files into the church. I feel his presence before I see him. I coyly turn in the direction of the noise needing to make sure its him. I want to run to him, kiss and hug him but I remain in my designated spot as the priest drones on. I find myself checking continuously making sure he doesn't disappear.

When I join everyone outside Jer notices me first and comes over to me giving me a warm hug. He pulls back to get a better look at me, "You look beautiful!"

"Thanks, I don't feel it," I say miserably.

"Go talk to him," he encourages.

"He avoided me all summer Jer, why is he going to talk to me now?"

"Because he loves you," Jer reassures.

I glanced over at Ryan who was talking to Carter. Luke and Tara are still in the church signing papers. Sierra and Adam are talking to someone I never met before who appears to be pregnant but not as far along as Sierra. I take Jer's advice and start approaching Ryan who notices and closes the distance between us.

We stop a foot away from each other and stand silently taking each other in. He is the most gorgeous guy here.

"Ryan."

"Dalia." We say in unison.

"You go first," I offer feeling really nervous.

He looks around, "I don't think here is the time or the place."

"Then let's go somewhere," I suggest.

"Now?"

"Please?"

"My car is parked down the street," he offers.

"Okay, we'll go there."

I walked with him noticing he doesn't reach for my hand. I fight back my tears as he pulls his key fob out from his trousers and opens the doors causing the car to make its familiar beep noise. We get in and he stares out the front windshield. I notice he isn't looking at me or touching me. The vibe I'm feeling is scaring me. My tears were now blurring my vision. Neither of us has the courage to go first.

Risking rejection, I mount his lap so we are facing each other and my tears begin falling once I notice his cold expression, "Please stop ignoring me, I can't take it anymore," I plead, "I promise I won't hurt you again."

"I've heard all this before," his voice is deep and resolute. He sounds sure of himself, appearing strong, "I won't live with you in London, that part of our relationship is over. You can have the apartment."

The severity of his words make me gasp. I'm stunned by the critical turn in our relationship. "No!" I'm horrified. "Our life is with each other! I don't want anyone else. You can't stop loving me that easily. What about our shows and school?"

“I’ll never stop loving you Dalia, it’s just not enough. I’m filing for separation; we can still do the shows if that’s what you want. I need to move on with everything else.”

“Okay, we’ll still do the shows,” I agree frantically wanting to keep him in my life as much as possible. If it’s the only way I can see him then I will take it. Maybe he will change his mind, I can hope.

“I’ve had a lot of time to think and I don’t trust that you’ll never go back to him again, and without trust we have nothing.”

“Please don’t give up on us,” I plead. “If we can win the Olympics, we can get through this.”

“I’m sorry,” he says solemnly.

His mouth covers mine, nourishing my primal needs. He raises me a few inches at the waist, and tears my panties off like they are made of tissue paper. He unzips his pants before lowering me onto him, taking me one last time. When he completes the act, I unravel in his arms.

We know we should get back to the wedding but Tara is aware of the troubles we are having and if we don’t return, I figure she will understand. Ryan looks at me expectantly, “Do you want to go back?”

“No,” I say feeling drained. “Can you take me back to Tara’s so I can pack? I just want to go home.”

“Sure,” his eyes are bloodshot, lost. He starts the car and we head back to her house so I can pack. Ryan sits on the bed watching me fold my clothes. He looks as miserable as I feel.

He helps me with my suitcases placing them in the trunk of the car before getting in. He places his hand on my headrest the way he always does when he backs up and starts looking in-between the two back seats when our eyes lock onto each other and a tear rolls down his cheek. I swipe it away with my finger. Seeing him cry starts me crying all over again.

He put his car into drive and places the hand that is on the headrest onto his shifter knob. We drive in silence for about fifteen minutes before his hand covers mine, “I didn’t want to tell you at the wedding, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I reassure, “we needed to talk.”

“I didn’t think you would agree to do shows after I told you,” he comments. We pass a sign saying there is a McD’s two kilometres ahead, “Do you need food?” he asks.

“No just you,” I reply. He squeezes my hand in response to my comment. The thought of food made me ill.

Ryan’s eyes are fixed straight ahead, “You don’t have to tell your mother about us, she already knows.” He spoke to mom about us, telling her that we were never going to be together again. I can’t help it, I start crying again. He continues to explain why he called her, “I thought it would be easier for you if I told her and for all intense purposes we had to figure out your new living arrangements. She knows it was my decision and believe me, she gave me an earful. Please stop crying.”

I looked up at him and now tears are running freely down his cheeks, “Damn it,” he curses. He pulls over onto the side of the highway and throws it in park before swiping his tears away and pinching the bridge of his nose like that’s going to make him stop crying or something.

“Does she know why?” I ask meekly.

“She doesn’t know about Adam,” he says roughly.

“Your mother can’t afford more than what she’s already giving you, so if you need money I’ll provide for you. You won’t have to pay it back. I don’t care about the money. We can increase the number of shows we do if you want, to make it easier for you.”

“We’ll have to,” I say miserably.

“I’ll need some time to find a new place, I’ll have to stay with you until then,” he informs me.

“Sure,” I agree.

I place my elbow on the car door and leaned my forehead into my hand closing my eyes. He puts the car back into drive and accelerates to highway speed before pulling back onto the highway. We only have a few more minutes before we arrive back home. He parks the car in the lot and carries both our bags up.

Chapter 35

It feels good to be back home. I follow Ryan as he lays our bags down on the bedroom floor. The lights are off and the bed is made. It looks inviting; I'm so tired from crying, physically and emotionally exhausted.

I slide my shoes off and pulled the bedspread back. I feel Ryan approach me from behind.

"Do you need help with your zipper?" he asks.

"Please," I say.

His fingers tips touched the back of my neck as he slowly glides the zipper down my body. He places his hands on my bare shoulders and then lowers my dress off me until it falls to the floor. I close my eyes and lean back into him.

Just standing near him like this feels amazing. The cold air on my warm skin and the feeling I me he's near gives me goosebumps. He leans away from me so he can unclasp my bra, letting it fall to the floor too.

With the gentle touch of his fingers he guides my head forward giving him more access to my neck and then his soft lips caress the sensitive area near my nape, "You looked beautiful today, your hair always covered your beautiful neck," he whispers before taking a large portion of my delicate skin into his mouth and sucking hard. He is marking me.

His hands cover my breasts and then the tips of his fingers search blindly for my nipples. By the time he finds them they were already hardened, and he pinches them making me moan quietly. I'm throbbing for him, and I touch myself before placing my hands near his lips so he can taste me. He releases my neck and takes my fingers into his mouth sucking on them gently; I have to take slow deep breaths to stop myself from coming.

He's so hot.

I face him and he gingerly removes his jacket. When the buttons are undone I reach up to lower it off his muscular shoulders making it fall to the ground where my clothing lays and then I start working on the buttons to his shirt. He's hard and waiting for me to free him but I'm not on his pants yet, so he painfully has to wait.

When I'm on the last button, I push his shirt out of the way on both sides but don't completely remove it, "You are so beautiful Ry, I love you," I profess. I touch his stomach with the palms of my hands and slowly glide them up his chest and then down his arms concentrating on the feel of his butterfly and then the large curves of his biceps. His muscles involuntarily flex underneath the pads of my fingertips, his entire body is responding to me.

My lips part slightly and then he leans down filling my mouth with his. I push his shirt the rest of the way off his shoulders until his chest is naked. I love him naked. I'm ready for him to take me.

He grabs my wrists firmly and says, "Before we go any farther, I need you to know, this isn't going to change anything. I don't want you to get your hopes up." His disheartening words don't make my need for him to be in me stop. My eyes fill up and he releases my wrists waiting to see if I'm going to continue or not.

I continue.

My tear filled eyes stare flagrantly into his as I reach for the zipper to his pants and slowly lower them along with his underwear down to the ground. He steps out and is full Monty.

"Let's finish this in bed, the right way then," I say softly. He closes his eyes to my words and then when he opens them again he guides me into our bed under the covers. I don't give him a chance, I slide down to the foot of the bed and guided his legs apart while I take him into my needy hands and start kissing him everywhere before my tongue licks him wildly, sucking him like he's this rare piece of exotic tasting candy. He is groaning and his hands nestle in my hair. He is tugging at it trying to get me to stop so he won't come but I want to drink his fluids. I want him to lose his control when I work on him, and he does. I feel his warm cum collect in the back of my throat. I swallow all of it, enjoying the feel and taste of his dick pulsing uncontrollably in my hands and mouth. I'm hoping that if he loses control, then maybe he'll see how much he needs and wants me.

He lays on his back breathing heavily, spent. I join him now that he is finished. We stay like that for a minute before he starts sliding down the bed, I touched his shoulder and tell him, “You don’t have to just because I did.”

His eyes look sadly upon me, “I need to see you happy, it’s what I want” he admits.

“Then stay with me,” I resort to begging.

He slides down and his big hands held my thighs firmly apart. I can feel the cold air on me, completely exposed to him. His finger rubs my nub before he does long leisurely strokes with his tongue. I can feel myself coming apart as his strokes quicken and he starts ruthlessly using his tongue to toy with my clit. I start running my fingers through his short hair and focus my concentration on lasting as long as I can. His tongue dives into my depths and starts swirling around making me lose all sense of control. I start thrusting myself into his face grabbing wildly for any hair long enough to yank, but there is none, I resort to grabbing the sheets; I want to scream but manage to contain that. I tell myself to breath and slow down but then he inserts his fingers into me and touches an area that he’s never touched before causing me to suddenly feel hot flashes and begin pulsing uncontrollably.

I lose all my restraint and the need to call out overwhelms me so I scream with excitement as this huge amount of warm fluid comes bursting from me. Ryan lifts his face and I notice his chin is literally dripping with my juices he has a smile of pride on his lips as this huge sense of relief floods my body.

This has given him enough time to rest and he fills me. I want him to go wild and fuck me hard and fast, but he doesn’t go that route, because he doesn’t like rushing it, instead he tortures me with slow gentle thrusts, in and out, in and out, his entire length filling me each time. After every controlled thrust he said one word:

“I”

“Will”

“Never”

“Stop”

“Loving”

“You.”

He pauses to kiss my parched lips.

“No”

“One”

“Will”

“Ever”

“Love”

“You”

“As”

“Much”

“As”

“I”

“Do.”

“I know,” I say breaking down into tears, “I know,” and then with desperate urgency he finishes inside me fucking me harder than any man possibly could. We come in unison.

I will never forget how he makes me feel or stop yearning to be with him again.

Chapter 36

I wake to the notification sound of a text message going through on my phone. My eyes open and for a fraction of a second everything is normal, until I remember what happened last night and my nightmare becomes real. I check my phone hoping it's Ryan, sadly it's not:

Tara: You ditched the last half of my wedding! I think you owe me a huge explanation.

Dalia: Ryan's filing for legal separation.

My phone rings; it's Tara, "I'm so sorry! What happened?"

"Trust issues."

"Are you talking about what happened in the bathroom at my house?"

"Ya."

"ADAM made moves on you, you didn't start it."

"He's mad that I didn't tell him about it."

"This time, it's not your fault. HE'S overreacting."

"He says I keep going back to Adam. He thinks I have a soft spot for him and he can't trust me to stay away from him. He thinks if we don't have trust, we have nothing."

"I'll have a talk to Jer, he'll sort Ryan out."

I'm quiet because I'm crying. Tara picks up on it, "Don't cry Dal."

"I'm sorry about your wedding, he told mom he was breaking up with me before he told me. He planned this for some time now," I sniff.

"Our flight is leaving soon but I'm worried about you. I'll text Jer and tell him what's going on."

I can barely talk, “Thanks.”

“Bye baby, take care of yourself. I’ll call you when I get back. If it wasn’t our honeymoon I would invite you.”

“I know,” I said thinking getting away is just what I need.

“I’ll call you back,” Tara says quickly before hanging up. I get out of bed and start searching the apartment for a note. There isn’t any. I’m tempted to go take a shower, but I don’t want to wash Ryan off me. The phone rings, it’s Tara again.

“I spoke with Jeremy. He’s on his way. Talk to him, I think he’s going to have a few choice words with Ryan. Remember Dal: First you find out his mom was with your dad, he knew and didn’t tell you! He blames you for what ADAM did in the bathroom. He breaks up with you at MY WEDDING! Let’s not forget about what he did with Sierra and you forgave him! He doesn’t deserve you! STAY STRONG!” she encourages.

Her perspective is correct and should make me feel better but it doesn’t. I’m too upset to think straight.

I go back to bed with nagging hunger pains that I’m scared is going to turn into nausea, and wait for Jeremy to come. Two hours twenty-seven minutes later there is a knock on the door. I sit up feeling like I have weights on my arms and legs, “Coming!”

I open the door and Jeremy stands in the frame looking concerned, “Are you okay?”

“No Jer.”

He embraces me warmly and leads me to the couch, “Tell me what happened.” He sits close to me with his arm around my shoulders. I snuggle into him, telling him everything: my father and Ryan’s mother’s indiscretions, the reasons why he kept it from me. I tell him about what Adam said and did to me in the bathroom and how Ryan was angry that I wasn’t forthcoming about it. Then I conclude with how he won’t speak to me for the last two months and his reasons for filing for separation.

We sat in silence as Jer runs his fingers through my hair, “He still loves you Dal. I’ll talk to him but I don’t know how much it will help. Adam will always be a

threat to him and it sounds like Ryan was only trying to protect you from the truth about your father.”

“What should I do?” I ask feeling beside my self in distress.

Jer pulls his phone out and starts texting someone.

“Who are you texting?” I ask.

“Sierra, I’ll let you read it in the car, pack a bag,” he orders.

“I’m not going to Hawaii with them on their honeymoon!”

“Luke and Tara are expecting you, now pack!”

I go into the bedroom and empty my suitcase filling it with clean clothes and putting the dirty ones in the hamper.

Jeremy calls out, “When’s the last time you ate?”

I actually have to think about it, “Yesterday morning before the wedding.”

Jeremy gets mad, he starts digging through our kitchen slamming cupboard doors and rifling through the fridge. He is cursing profanities under his breath with Ryan’s name sprinkled in and out of them. I carry my bag to the door. Jeremy meets me there with canned spaghetti and juice, “I’ll carry your bag, you eat this.”

Just then, we hear Ryan’s key in the door lock. Jer and I look at each other, before he mutters another curse word. I step away from the door so Ryan has room to walk into the apartment. He sees me then Jer then my bag, “Where are you taking her?” he asks like I’m not even in the room.

“We’ll talk when I get back,” Jeremy answers.

“We’ll talk now,” Ryan growls.

“When I get back,” Jeremy repeats stubbornly.

“Just tell me where you’re taking her,” he turns to me, “Dal, where are you going?”

“You don’t have to worry, I’ll be back for our first show,” I tell him dejectedly. “I’ll be back for our first show.”

“You hurt her,” Jeremy says protectively. He opens the door and grabs my bag looking back at Ryan, “You know she hasn’t eaten anything since yesterday morning? If I let her stay with you, she’ll probably end up in hospital again.”

Ryan’s eyes are tired. Jer places his hand on my lower back and guides me out of the apartment, “Eat,” he orders. We can hear the start of a temper tantrum in the apartment with doors slamming as we wait for the elevator to come. A huge

part of me wishes Jer hadn't come and I was still in the apartment with Ryan, but I know that my urges are self-destructive when Ryan made it clear to me he doesn't want me anymore. No, Hawaii is going to be good for me.

Chapter 37

I please Jeremy by eating the only food he finds for me in our apartment. Then I insist on stopping by the drug store before we go to the airport so I can pick up a sedative to help me sleep: on the flight, during the trip, and on the way back home.

He waits with me four hours in the airport until I manage to secure a seat for the trip to Honolulu. He says when I land there will be a text from Tara telling me the hotel they are staying at and my room number so I can catch a cab from the airport.

True to his word, I turn my phone on after the plane lands and a text pops up from Tara. I hailed a taxi from the airport and go straight to the hotel. It turns out that Tara chose a four star hotel located right on the beach and this place cost mucho deneros! This trip is supposed to help me get over Ryan but ultimately it will force me to spend more time with him just to pay off the costs of the hotel, the irony of it all!

I check into my luxurious suite that comes equipped with a queen sized bed, hot tub and sauna. I pull the curtains open to see my room is facing the ocean. The moon is surrounded by zillions of stars and the temperature is in the high seventies at night. I can't ask for more. It doesn't matter though if I don't have anyone to share it with.

I open my luggage and find a clean pair of pyjamas. Against my will, I sadly shower Ryan's smell off me and there's nothing in my bag that smells of him either. I never feel as pathetic as I do now. I curl up in bed and read the text from Jeremy.

Jeremy: I reiterated U'r side of the story & Tara's right, he overreacted. He listened 2 everything I had 2 say, but he didn't give me any reportable reaction 2U. I think he needs time.

Dalia: Did U tell him where I am?

Jeremy: Yes, he asked.

Dalia: Should I text him?

Jeremy: Let him do the 1st move.

Dalia: What if he doesn't?

Jeremy: His loss, he doesn't deserve U then.

Dalia: Thanks Jer

Jeremy: Try 2 have fun.

Dalia: It's not going to happen. Wish Sierra all the best!

Jeremy: Will do.

Dalia: TTYL & thx.

Jeremy: What R friends 4? TTYL

I turned my phone off and cry myself to sleep. It's over, really really over, time to move on.

The next morning Tara drops by my room and invites me out for breakfast by the pool with her and Luke. We catch up with each other over scrambled eggs and bacon.

When Luke leaves the table to go to the bathroom, Tara tells me not to talk about Ryan in front of him. She says men always stick together and it will get back to Ryan. Tara says we have to come up with a conspiracy plan to help me get over him; we just need privacy from Luke. Luckily, forty-five minutes into our breakfast Luke comes down with a splitting headache and has to return to their room, Tara stays with me so he can get some rest.

Tara says, "I haven't had to get over anyone since Carter, and I was the dumper not the dumpee! I think we should google it!"

"GOOGLE IT? Are you serious?"

"Sure I'm serious; we'll make a list of ten things you need to do to get over him, just like that movie we watched a few years back. You know the one where

that gorgeous girl got dumped by the idiot because his parents forced him to move back to Pakistan? You read the suggestions out loud, and I'll write them down, only the good ones of course, it will be fun," she encourages.

I google, 'How to get over someone you love,' and read two or three articles out loud. She writes feverishly while I read. I think the whole idea is stupid but I play along. Once Tara goes on a tangent, you don't stop her.

She tears the sheet from her book and hands it to me:

How to Get Over Ryan:

1. Go on a trip
2. Don't call him
3. Delete him — end all contact
4. Don't plead to get back together with him
5. Have a rebound relationship
6. Don't let him know you are hurting
7. Stay away from his friends
8. Don't be lonely
9. Flirt with other guys
10. Meet new people

I study her list, "How do I do number three?"

"What's number three?"

"End all contact."

"You're going to have to stop seeing him."

"What about the shows? That's going to pay for this trip, my rent, food, stupid things like that."

"Don't get snippy," Tara warns, "I'm trying to help."

Tara is tapping the pencil to her lips, "Let's start with number one and work our way down."

I smile at Tara, "Go on a trip, check!"

"See! You're progressing," she encourages. "What's number two?"

“Don’t call him.”

She looks at me, still tapping the eraser against her lip, “Okay, whenever you have the urge to call him, call me instead, I’ll talk you down.”

“Are you sure? You’re on your honeymoon,” I remind her.

“You’re my best friend, of course I’m sure. How often are your urges?” she asks.

“Um, every ten minutes or so,” I tease.

“You’re killing me she says jokingly. Okay, what’s next?”

“Number three, delete him and end all contact.”

“Give me your phone,” Tara demands.

“No,” I cradle it protectively in my hands.

“Now,” she orders sternly even for her.

She plays with my phone for a few minutes and then hands it back to me, I search. She removed him from my contacts, all my emails and text messages, even pictures. I look up at her horrified and all she does is shrug her shoulders and say, “It’s to help you. Okay, what’s number four?”

“Don’t plead to get back together.”

“Have you?”

“Multiple times.”

“Stop.”

“Easy for you to say.”

“Number five?”

“Don’t let him know you’re hurting.”

“Easy enough if you’re not seeing him or calling him. Six?”

“Stay away from his friends.”

“That’s like number three, impossible,” I complain. “We have the same friends.”

“I know. What’s the next one?”

“Don’t be lonely.”

“Are you?”

“Every second of every day ever since he stopped talking to me.”

“Even with me here?”

“Definitely, I’m a third wheel on a honeymoon, how much lonelier can anyone get?”

“Point taken. And the next one?”

“Flirt with other guys.”

“That one is easy, right?”

“Yup.”

“What’s the last one?”

“Meet new people.”

“You can do that in Uni.”

“True.”

“Keep the list, live by it. I have to get back to Luke. Remember, call me, not him!” She deserts me. I’m looking forward to the alone time so I can wallow in self-pity.

I’m on my way to the gift shop when my phone alerts me of a text. I hit the main button and swipe the screen. The text is from someone who hasn’t been added to my contact list, it has to be Ryan! I take a deep breath and tap the screen, waiting, fuck! It isn’t him. It’s a phone bill.

My phone is becoming a source of torture for me; every time it alerts me and I check it my hopes are dashed.

I knew what I have to do, I see no other alternative: I sit down by the hotel gift shop and pay my bill, then I delete the data and throw the phone out. There! I open the door to the bin to see that it landed inside an empty take-out food container. Good, I feel better already.

The gift store is really nice. It’s full of souvenirs I think Ryan will love. I contemplate buying him one in case we get back together, just to show him I’m thinking about him. This nasty voice inside of me tells me I’m being ridiculous. I snatch lotion from the counter, my first reason for entering the store, and I force myself to go pay for it and then leave.

I change into my bikini and go to a nice pool I find on the other side of the hotel. This pool is larger than the other one we had breakfast at. Several families are gathered around on lawn chairs and there are two lifeguards watching about fifteen kids in the shallow end. There is a bar connected with the pool so you didn’t have to get out of the water to get a drink.

I reflect back to when Ryan and I first started practicing lifts back at the club's pool. I lather myself in thick, creamy, gooey coconut sunscreen. Its colour and texture reminded me of..Ryan..Damn! Well, the sunscreen's fragrance and the fact that it isn't edible sets it apart.

If Ryan was here, he would lay next to me holding my hand. I feel a tear fester in the corner of my eye. When is this going to get easier? I cover my eyes with dark sunglasses and concentrate on the feel of the sun's heat against my skin. The background voices of the kids playing in the water relax me and I begin drifting off.

Chapter 38

I awaken to Tara's angry voice shaking me by the shoulders, "WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN? I texted, called, AND searched for you!"

I blink feeling groggy, "I've been here. What time is it?"

"Five!"

"Oh, I must have fallen asleep." I rub my eyes underneath the sunglasses.

She looks behind her at Luke, "Call them and tell them we found her."

Luke shakes his head, "You had us so scared." He pulls out his phone and starts calling everyone.

"Who's he calling?" I ask defensively.

"Hotel security for one, they were looking for you too," says Tara. "Why didn't you answer your phone?"

"I threw it out."

"You what?" she asks in disbelief.

"You heard me, I keep looking at it, longingly, it was driving me crazy," I whisper.

"Oh," she says understanding. She covers her lip with her finger telling me not to say anymore. She pulls her phone out and texts I assume Jeremy and Sierra telling them I'm okay.

I look at her smiling, "Why would you text them? They're in Toronto!"

"We were panicking," Tara explains.

It is sweet that they are so worried about me, "I'm sorry you worried. From now on, I'll make sure you know where I am."

"You better," she says, "now, go get dressed, you're coming to dinner with us, we're not taking no for an answer."

I shrug, getting up from my lawn chair, "I wasn't planning on saying no. I'm famished."

She smiles, "I'm glad you're getting your appetite back. Jer said you haven't eaten in twenty-four hours and Ryan didn't even notice."

I lied about being famished to Tara. I still have no appetite, but I don't want her to worry about me even more than she already has. I know I'm ruining her honeymoon. I go back to the room and select an elegant sundress to wear for dinner, Ryan and I picked it out for me at a boutique in Alberta after a show one day.

They are waiting for me at the entrance of the hotel restaurant. Luke is dressed in a white linen shirt and beige shorts with a fanny pack wrapped around his waist. Tara looks the best I've ever seen her with her golden tan and a pretty purple dress. She glows of happiness and I can't help envying her for it.

The two of them spend the entire meal chatting about their frantic search for me. I listen more than speak, picking at my food, happy to be with them rather than alone. The waiter comes by at the end of our meal asking if we want desert and I feel Luke's foot touch my leg in a very sensuous manner, I shake him off and started laughing, "That's MY leg Luke!"

Luke looks shocked and then moves the tablecloth to see under the table for himself, "Oops! Isn't this totally awkward!"

Tara started laughing hard at Luke, making snorting noises.

When I hear her snort I break out into hysterics, laughing so hard that tears come rolling down my cheeks, and that's when my laughter turns to sobs. Looks of worry wash over their faces as I break down in front of them at the dinner table. No matter how hard I try to regain my composure, I'm unable. The next thing I know they were rushing me off in a taxi to the hospital. Luke is on his phone while Tara holds my hand and strokes my arm trying to sooth me. I cry continuously until I'm seen in emerg. The emergency department has no choice but sedate me.

I hear Tara whispering to the doctor, "I don't know how to help her, she's so depressed."

"We can admit her until you fly back to Canada but without coverage you're looking at four hundred a night."

Luke looks up from his phone, "The money won't be an issue. I think she needs the help."

“You need professional help,” Tara explains to me apologetically. “Luke and I don’t know how to help you. We’ll pick you up and take you back to Canada when we go.” Then the sedation kicks in and I didn’t remember anything after that.

The rest of the week is a haze. A nurse will wake me up and help me with my morning care and breakfast, she brings me to a counsellor who forces me to talk about what is ‘troubling’ me, then when I get too upset, the councillor has no choice but re-sedate me and take me back to my room. It’s a vicious cycle. On the third day they noticed my level of dehydration, and hooked me up to an intravenous preventing me from becoming dehydrated.

On the last day they stop the sedation and the nurse helps me shower and dress before Tara and Luke pick me up. I remember waiting for them in a wheelchair at the patient pick-up. Tara gasps when she sees me covering her mouth with her hand. Luke is staring at me like I have three heads.

Tara touches my shoulder gently and then talks to Luke like I’m not even there. “She looks absolutely awful Luke. Oh.my.god. She’s so pail and gaunt looking. We never should have brought her here.”

“It would have happened to her there too. Let’s just take her home,” he encourages.

They walk me to the cab and we head to the airport. Tara slips more sedation under my tongue when we are seated on the plane. She has to shake me out of my sleep when we landed in Toronto.

Chapter 39

We disembarked at Pearson and Tara accompanies me to the bathroom while Luke retrieves our luggage. We are to meet back at the gates.

Tara grabs my arm and leads me to a cluster of people; I assume they are here to welcome her and Luke back from their honeymoon. I see Sierra, Jeremy, Carter, and oh my god MOM and Aunt Rosalind! I run to moms open arms. It feels so good to be in them. Then Sierra, Jer, and Carter encircle us hugging me. They are here to see me. It's the first time since Ryan broke up with me that I didn't wish myself dead.

Mom is speaking over my head to Aunt Rosalind about me like I'm not even there, and I'm not, "She looks horrible, the poor thing. First she loses her father, and then as if that's not enough Ryan breaks up with her over his stupid insecurities. You should hear the story the kids told me Rosi it's enough to piss anyone off. He kept her hanging for months. Look at the black circles around her eyes!"

"She's so slender looking, almost frail," Aunt Rosalind commented in a worried tone.

"Come on kids, let's take her to the car," Mom says leading us to the drop off and pick up area of the airport.

I look at mom, "Where are the two of you staying?"

"Ryan's mother graciously invited us when we found out about your hospitalization in Honolulu. She's been very supportive."

"I guess so," Aunt Rosalind said snidely. "Her son caused it."

If only mom knew what I know about Sara. She would never stay under the same roof.

"How long are you staying?" I ask.

"Until you are better dear. Sara says we can stay as long as we like."

A black Mercedes pulls up to where we are standing. I squint to see who's driving, it's Ryan. My heart pounds through my chest. Rule number six flashes before my eyes, 'Don't let him know you are hurting.' I might as well climb Mount Everest because there's no way I will be able to keep that rule.

Tara, Luke, Carter, Sierra, and Jer give me another hug. Their support is touching. They are the ones getting me through this.

The trunk pops open and Luke puts my suitcase in the back of Ryan's car. Mom helps me into the front seat but makes no motion to get in, "Aren't you coming?"

"No dear, he wants to talk to you alone. Jeremy and Sierra said they will drive us back to Sara's. You go on and work things out."

Mom leans into the car and kisses me good-bye before closing the door. I stare out the window at mom and my friends as Ryan pulls out onto the street. When they were no longer in sight I face forwards and close my eyes. I can feel his presence next to me shutting everything else out. Then I sniff quietly to catch the subtle scent of his cologne. He smells so good. It's like he has the ability to warm the blood flowing through my veins.

I open my eyes, studying his profile, I want to memorize it. His hair is cut shorter than I've ever seen it and his beautiful brown eyes look like they are made of liquid chocolate. His lips appear so plush, they are screaming for my fingers to touch them. With nothing more to lose, I reach out and touch his bottom lip lowering it just enough to wet my fingertips in his mouth, and then I bring them to my mouth and suck. His eyes widen. He pulls over the first chance he can and turns off the car.

Now we are sitting in silence and I look forward because I don't think I can maintain any type of eye contact with him, and he stares at me. I can feel it. I shudder to think what he is thinking about.

He touches a lock of my hair and more to himself than to me he says, "I did this to you?"

"Don't flatter yourself." I say courageously, "Where are you taking me?"

"You need to see your dad."

"I don't, I feel no need at all. He let me down."

“I know,” he says softly running his fingers through my hair. I close my eyes and lean into his hand.

“Luke was keeping you posted on everything that was happening wasn’t he? Every time I saw him texting, it was to you wasn’t it? You told them to bring me with them and to bring me to the hospital didn’t you?” It’s obvious, now.

“Yes, Jeremy too,” he admits.

“Do you have somebody?” I’m petrified of his answer. I curse myself for asking but I have to. I chant, ‘*be brave*,’ to myself.

“No Dal, I don’t.”

“You paid my hospital bill?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“You needed me and I was afraid I wouldn’t get there in time.”

“So I’m your charity case? What did you think I would do? What did you think would happen?”

“I don’t know, Jeremy and Tara were really scared for you, so was I,” he answers honestly.

“I’ll pay you back,” I say bitterly.

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to. I don’t want to owe you anything.”

“You don’t.”

“Why wouldn’t you at least speak to me?” I ask the question that I desperately needed an answer for.

“I was angry. You guys keep going back to each other.”

“So you ignore me for THREE months? You slept with my best friend, got her pregnant and I never treated you that shitty.”

“You were intimate with Adam, you don’t have to sleep with him to betray me.”

“So you treated me like that out of spite, like you were punishing me.” I’m overcome with anger now.

“I guess so.”

I reached up and caress the side of his head. It’s velvety soft even though it looks rough. He closes his eyes and leans into my hand.

“You broke my heart Ry,” I tell him.

“I know, but you broke mine too.”

“I died inside,” I admit, wanting to know the severity of how much I hurt.

“We’ll get through this,” he says touching my chin, giving me the first sign of hope from him. He raises my face as if he’s going to kiss me.

I turn away from him, “A week ago I would have believed you.”

“And now?” he asks.

“I just want the suffering to end.”

“You don’t mean that,” he says.

I start crying. “I do mean it; I can’t survive either loving or losing you again. If we get back together, I will always be afraid of getting hurt, and if we stay apart, I will always feel like I have nothing to live for.”

“That’s not true,” he argues. “You have everything to live for. You’re beautiful, talented, smart, and have a lot of friends and family who love you. I’ll never hurt you like that again, I promise, just give me one more chance,” he pleads, “I’ve had time to think and we can be together again. I love you Dalia.”

“It is an empty shallow promise that you can’t keep.”

“No Dal, seriously, it isn’t.” He brushes his lips against mine and then rests them there. He doesn’t pull away or move. It’s just his lips on mine. Then after a long while his lips wedge mine open for his tongue to explore my mouth. I weakly try to pull away but he grasps my hair at the back of my head and forcefully pushes me closer to him not allowing me to stop kissing him. Had it been a happier moment in our relationship, I probably would enjoy his aggressiveness but I’m too fragile and he’s pushing me over the edge again.

He releases me and I slide back in my seat. Then he reaches over and pulls the seatbelt across my chest locking it in place. He restarts the car and pulls away from the curb.

“Where are we going?” I ask.

“You’ll see. I have a surprise for you,” he says mysteriously.

I looked out the front windshield and recognize the directions, “There’s going to be people there,” I complain. “I don’t want anyone seeing me like this.”

“No, their won’t. It’s booked.” He pulls into the rink we trained at for the Olympics and parks the car. He grabs both our bags from the trunk and waits for me to get out.

The arena is deserted. He brings me to my change room and gives me my bag, “I’ll meet you on the ice.” He turns and leaves. I dig through the bag finding a track suit and a dress. I chose the track suit, and then start putting on my skates. I walked up to ice level and he’s waiting for me in his wife beater t-shirt and Olympic pants.

I shiver feeling cold right down to my bones. The thirty pounds I lost must have been insulation because it’s freezing in here. I inhale the wonderful familiar scent of the rink and then step out onto the ice, sliding my blades back and forth the way I always do.

I miss skating with him.

In a week or two he will get back all his jumps, and spins, but I on the other hand will take much longer to get back everything I lost. I feel wobbly and weak. Three months of no skating, and weight loss has left me in a de-conditioned state. The nail is driven into our coffin. I drop to my knees whimpering silently.

He drops down to his knees, facing me, wiping my tears away with his fingers.

“Ryan, I can’t do this with you, our skating just like our relationship is over.”

“You don’t mean it,” he says. “We can do this. I will get you strong again.”

“No, we can’t,” I say with a strength I never knew I have.

Conclusion to Kiss and Cry Part 3 Coming Soon....



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