



*She had to choose between him
or her dream..*

Kiss and Cry

Meadow Murphy

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**By
Meadow Murphy**

[Obooko Edition](#)

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Chapter 1

I finish drying my blades and cover them before shoving my figure skates into my bag. The change room is deserted now, because it's taken me this long just to get ready to leave. Minutes before the Zamboni took to the ice, I fell on my umpteenth attempt at a triple axel. I've been working on that jump for over a year now, and I still can't get it. Competitors two years younger than myself can land it, and they even make it look easy, so why can't I do it? My parents are getting frustrated watching my multiple attempts, they don't even come to the rink anymore.

As I get up from the bench, I feel this new pulling sensation in my hamstrings. I hobble out of the change room towards the front doors. Beams of sunlight stream through the lobby, I know if I didn't hurry I'm going to be late for school.

My mom's white Acura is parked by itself at the far end of the parking lot. I curse myself for not foreseeing the possibility of injury and choosing a spot closer to the front doors. I hobble through the parking lot with my skating bag slung over my shoulder, each step is more painful than the last. I reflect bitterly on my skating career and wonder if it is time to pack it in for a more normal life.

My friend Tara has been encouraging me since freshman year of high school to start spending more time with her. She wants to go out, do things, meet more boys. I always give her excuses, hardly able to spare free time for her. Her patience with me is wearing thin, and her dedication to our friendship is sorely being tested frequently.

As my butt clumsily hits the car seat, a sharper pain sears down my calf, I swear to myself things are going to be different. I never want to set foot in another ice arena for as long as I live. I stare out the

windshield to what appears to be a promising day and insert the key into the ignition. The car comes to life and I'm off to school.

I make it to class ambulating in the hallways like a ninety year old arthritic man with just under two minutes to spare. I carefully lower myself onto my assigned chair. Homeroom is only ten minutes long so I know I will have to get up from my chair immediately after making myself comfortable. There's absolutely no reprieve for me today.

The principal comes across the p.a. speaker saying, "Will everyone please stand for the playing of O'Canada and our morning prayer." Using my desk and my chair for support I slowly rise as the static plays with bits of the anthem in the background. *The Catholic School Board really needs to invest in new equipment.* There is a pause and then the principal comes back on to give us his usual long winded morning prayer. Today the focus is on a cure for Ebola.

Adam, a guy who has no idea I exist whispers to me, "Are you okay? You're moving around like you're debilitated or something. What happened to you?" He's, the cutest guy in sophomore class, I only see him for ten minutes each day and the only time he notices me is when I'm lame.

He stands at least six feet tall making him the shortest guy on our schools basketball team. His shaggy dirty blond hair hangs over the most gorgeous set of puppy-dog brown eyes I've ever seen. His facial features look like they are drawn with a ruler, and his beefy body is littered with muscles. He's far from tall and lanky which is what all the other guys look like who are his age and on the basketball team.

Mrs. Uptite our teacher lowers her glasses and glares directly at Adam sending him this nasty look for talking during her attendance. He ignores her just nodding back when his name is called. This buys me a second of time to admire him without the fear of him catching me drooling.

"Skating injury," I whisper back. The loud bell rings signalling for us to proceed to our first period. I ease myself out of my chair and swing my bag over my shoulder not realizing he's watching me. It's too late to

disguise my agony.

"You better get that looked at," he comments.

"Thanks," I grimace stepping forward with my sore leg, a sharp pain shoots down into my knee. Taken by surprise, my knee buckles and I almost collapse, but Adam is there and he catches me.

Oh.My.Lucky.Stars! I'm breathless as I find myself in his arms, the most gorgeous guy in the tenth grade. I so can't wait to tell Tara. He helps me up and lets me lean on him for support. I coach myself to breath, as I immediately try to regain my composure, "You shouldn't be walking on it if you're in that much pain," he wisely comments.

I try massaging my leg, "It wasn't this bad before."

"Can I help you go anywhere?"

"Uh, sure, I have my mother's car," I stammer.

"Will you be able to drive?" He asks, his cute face contorting.

"Sure, I think once I get in the car I'll be fine." That's all the encouragement he seems to need. He takes my bag and places it over his shoulder and then hoists me up into his arms.

Suddenly my day is getting a whole lot better. I wrap my arms around his neck touching his soft hair in the process and then I sniff quietly trying to pick up the subtle scent of his cologne. He looks at me startled, "Did you just smell me?"

Mortified at being caught I turn red with embarrassment and start chuckling. Clearly amused, our eyes lock and I feel a flash of nervousness. For a second it is like in the movies just before the guy kisses the girl, he looks at her lips and then into her eyes before looking back down at her lips again. I swear if we would have been anywhere but here, in the corridor of the school he probably would have kissed me. The mood is instantaneously lost as friends start bumping into us with curious expressions on their faces. Everyone parts ways for us as he continues carrying me. If not for the pain searing down my leg, the ride in his arms would have been way more enjoyable.

"I'm taking you to the hospital," he insists, "in MY car."

"You'll miss school," I argue.

"All the more reason," he grins.

He carries me to his new looking black mustang that is parked only a

couple of cars away from mine. He carefully lowers me down onto the ground so he can get his keys from his pocket.

"I'll drop you off at the emergency department," he suggests.

"The emergency department? You think it's that serious?" I question.

"You can't walk," he points out.

"It's going to take hours," I complain.

He shrugs, "I can afford to miss a day of school."

"I better text my mother," I say pulling out my phone from the side pocket of my purse.

Dalia: Mom R U there?

Mom: Yes

Dalia: I had 2 leave school & go 2 the hospital.

Mom: What happened? R U Ok?

Dalia: It's my R. leg. Fell hard.

Mom: Triple Axel?

Dalia: Ya, Adam (classmate) is taking me there now.

Mom: Why didn't U go sooner?

Dalia: It got worse after I got off the ice.

Mom: I'll meet U there.

Dalia: U don't need 2. I'll text U when I'm done. Adam's with me, I'll B fine.

Mom: I want 2 hear what the doctor says.

Dalia: I'll get them 2 call U

"Is she meeting us there?" asks Adam.

"No, I told her she doesn't have to, I'll call or text her when I know more."

He drives stick and every time he changes gears I'm forced back into my seat.

"I like your car," I compliment.

His lip curls in response. I gently toss my phone back into my bag and try not to look over in his direction until we arrive at the hospital.

Chapter 2

The News

Adam puts his four way flashers on and pulls into the Emergency entrance next to the ambulance bay. A very hot looking volunteer our age or slightly older meets us there and helps me get into the wheelchair he's pushing.

Once I settle in and perch my purse on my lap, Adam reaches for the wheelchair handles to push me into the hospital. The volunteer stops him telling him to park his car, or they will ticket him for leaving it there. Adam relinquishes the handles of the wheelchair and heads back to his car. The volunteer navigates me to the triage desk.

Adam returns to the Emergency department after parking his car. There's only one other person in line waiting to speak to the triage nurse, but the waiting room is full. We are definitely going to be here a long time.

A potbellied nurse with curly blond hair and pudgy red lips says, "Name and health card please."

"Dalia Middleton." I grab the health card from my wallet and hand it to her.

"The reason for your visit today?"

"I hurt my leg while I was skating this morning."

"Right or left?"

"Right."

"On a scale of 1-10, what would you rate the pain? Ten being the most painful thing you've ever felt."

"Nine," I admit.

She looks unimpressed as she wraps a cuff around my arm and places an oximeter onto my finger. She takes a temperature reading as well,

“Your heart rate is up, do you feel pain right now?”

Yes, I do.”

“They will give you something for that once the doctor sees you. Do you have any allergies?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Have you travelled outside of Canada in the last six months?”

“No.”

“Any fever?”

“No.”

“Okay, you can go have a seat, we’ll call you when it’s your turn,” she says.

“Thanks.”

Adam takes the handles of my wheelchair and moves us out of the way. He finds a vacant area for us to sit closely together, his bolted down seat next to my wheelchair. Everyone who isn’t looking at a phone is staring at us for a lack of anything better to do.

I pull my phone out of my purse and find several messages from Tara.

Tara: Where R U?

Tara: U have 2 B @ school I C U’r car here. Looked 4 U.

Tara: Call me!

Dalia: Hi Tara, I’m not @ school.

Tara: 1 min

I glance over at Adam, he’s texting too. He glances back at me, “Are we allowed to use our phones here?”

“I think so, I guess we can unless someone tells us otherwise.” I look back at my screen again.

Tara: Had 2 leave classroom so I wouldn’t get caught texting.

Dalia: I’m @ hospital. Hurt my leg on triple axel this morning.

Tara: How come U’r car is here?

Dalia: Adam took me after homeroom.

Tara: Basketball Adam?

Dalia: Yup

Tara: Yummy! How did U swing that?

Dalia: My leg almost gave out on me in homeroom. He carried me 2 his car, insisted on driving me!

Tara: How chivalrous!

Dalia: U think?

Tara: I know!

Tara: Do U want me 2 come 2 the hospital?

Dalia: It's ok, I'm in good hands.

Tara: Jealous! Do U'r parents know?

Dalia: Texted mom.

Tara: Ok, I'll C U after school. Just 1 > thing.

Dalia: What?

Tara: If U hook up with Adam, I want U 2 set me up with Carter.

Dalia: Adam's not in2 me! He's just happy not 2 B @ school!

Tara: He brought U 2 the H.

Dalia: It got him out of class! Text me later.

The vertically and horizontally challenged plump nurse calls my name out surprisingly soon. I must have been right up there on her triage list. Adam slips his phone into his front pocket and grabs the chair following the nurse into our assigned curtained cubicle, "A nurse practitioner will be in here to see you shortly." The nurse goes back to her post leaving me alone with Adam who assists me to get from the wheelchair to the stretcher.

I play level 167 of Candy Crush while Adam continues texting. It's my only addiction, sometimes I advance the time on my phone just to play extra rounds. On my fourth attempt at round 167, I'm getting antsy and no further ahead so I turn it off. I study Adam instead, he continues to text.

Soon after, the curtain moves and a lady wearing a tight white lab coat and knee high boots with a stethoscope hanging around her neck comes into the cubicle, "Hi, my name is Meadow Ward and I'm a nurse practitioner, you are?"

"Dalia Middleton."

"What brings you in today Dalia?" She asks.

"I hurt my leg this morning on a jump while skating."

"Which leg?"

"Right."

"Where you taking off or landing when you hurt it?"

"Landing."

"Do you remember if you were twisted as you landed or were you straight?"

I take a second to think, "I'm not sure, it happened so quickly."

The nurse practitioner stands at the foot of the bed, "I'm going to do some range of motion exercises with you. Tell me if any of them cause pain." She picks up my leg and starts moving it around. There is hardly anything she can do, that doesn't hurt.

She appears dismayed writing feverishly. When she finishes, she informs me of her plan, "I'm going to send you for x-rays to look for a fracture. If they come back clean I still want you to go for an M.R.I as an out-patient."

Adam interjects, "Can't you do it while we're here?"

Meadow slices him a look, "And you are?"

Adam responds sheepishly, "A friend."

She looks at me, I confirm his status by nodding, "M.R.I's have long wait lists. It can take several weeks. The hospital will send you a letter with your appointment time. You can't skate until we get the results back"

"Can you explain everything to my mother? If I tell her she won't believe me."

"Sure," She agrees.

I give the NP my mother's phone number and she disappears behind the curtain.

Hearing the Nurse practitioner talk to my mother over the telephone, suddenly makes everything very real, and the situation hits home. I might lose my ability to make my own decisions regarding my skating career, which is a bitter pill to swallow.

It strikes me that I may miss the final competition before Worlds

which I've worked so hard to qualify for. Tears start building in the corners of my eyes, threatening to make their way down my cheeks. I find myself wishing that mom is here, she understands the impact this injury is having on me. Adam puts his phone away and at a loss for what to say, he remains silent.

The curtain pulls back and the volunteer our age appears pushing a wheelchair. Surprised to find me crying he says, "I'm here to bring you to x-ray. Do you need some time?"

"No thanks," I say avoiding eye contact.

Adam assists me into the wheelchair and then the volunteer releases the lock and takes me to x-ray. I'm away long enough to get a chance to recompose myself before returning to Adam.

The curtain pulls back for a final time, it's the nurse practitioner. A blast of nerves hits me when I see her smile at me hesitantly, "Dalia, I have some good news. The radiologist doesn't see a fracture on your X-ray. I spoke to your mother, and until you're MRI results are back, I don't want you back on the ice."

"We need to know the extent of your injury, so we know what we're dealing with. I'm so sorry but you're not going to be competing this year. I will manage your pain, and refer you to a well known sports doctor who deals with these kinds of injuries all the time. You need to use crutches until we have your M.R.I results so you don't bare weight on your bad leg. I'm sorry Dalia." She hands me papers and says I'm free to go after I dropped by the fracture clinic to pick up a pair of crutches.

I text mom:

Dalia: No fracture. Not allowed 2 skate until after M.R.I

Mom: I know. How R U getting home? Do U want me 2 pick U up?

Dalia: No, Adam will take me.

Mom: Who's Adam?

Dalia: A friend.

Mom: Better B. No boys while U R Skating! They're a distraction.

Dalia: I'm not skating.

Mom: 4 now.

Mom gets me more upset. I turn my phone off while Adam escorts me home from the hospital.

Chapter 3

Later That Day

It's just after two when we pull up into my driveway.

We live in a modest two storey house that has a desolate looking tree in the front yard. My father works two jobs just so we can live here and pay for my skating.

Adam shifts his black mustang into park and turns her off, "Are you going to be okay?" he asks concerned. With a heavy heart I shrug, not even having the energy to respond. "Give me your phone," he orders. I reach down into my bag and pass it to him. He starts typing onto the screen. "Call me if you need to talk. I texted myself, so I have your number too."

Adam pops the trunk and removes the crutches from the back of his car handing them to me. I lean into them clumsily and work my way slowly up the steep driveway, I'm horrible at it. The few steps I do take hurt my armpits. Adam attempts to hold back his snicker at the sight of me using my crutches, but I hear it. Humiliated, tears are threatening to build in the corner of my eyes again, I reprimand myself for my self-pitying attitude.

When I make it to the door, I lean the crutches against it so I can start digging for my key. The top crutch begins to fall, but Adam leans over catching it. His body is really close to mine, and I lose my breath for a second. Our faces are merely a few inches apart and I see him glance down at my lips and then back into my eyes. I will him to kiss me and he advances forward as though he's going to, but he stops.

My fingers feel the keys in my purse and I'm tempted to feign not having found them to buy more time, but I don't, I pull them out and unlock the door. He pushes it open for me so I can make my way in with

the crutches. I hobble and swing to the couch and lay the crutches down on the carpet, before making myself comfortable on the sofa.

Adam glances around the living room, "Are we alone?"

"Yep, we are for now anyway. My parents don't get back until after dinner time. Are you hungry?" I ask.

"Starving," he admits. "I'll get take-out, while you rest. What do you want?"

"I don't care. I'll have whatever you're in the mood for."

"Okay, I'll be back in a few."

Thirty minutes roll slowly by before Adam taps lightly on the front door, "Come in!" I call out. He lets himself in carrying two bags of McDonalds. My bag has a large fries, big mac, and a quarter pounder. "You can't be serious, I must have some of your food," I grin. "You expect me to eat all this?"

"That food is all yours. I have the exact same in my bag. You told me to get you whatever I was in the mood for, and that's what I'm eating. The drinks are still in the car, I'll be right back." He returns with two chocolate milkshakes.

I'm taking up most of the sofa so Adam sits adjacent to me on the love seat. We eat every morsel of food and then start sipping our shakes staring passively at Ellen Degeneres on television, lost in our own thoughts.

He nervously starts picking at imaginary lint on his jeans. "You were really working on a triple axel when you hurt yourself?" His eyes shine with admiration as he waits for my answer.

"Yes."

"That's so hot," he comments quietly. I can feel the intensity of his eyes boring into me. A tingle of excitement courses through my body.

"Do you have a boyfriend?" he asks. His eyes intense, as he stares into mine.

"No, I don't date," I say casually. "My parents think dating is a distraction. Mom says there's plenty of time for me to do that after I finish skating."

"That's too bad," he says under his breath, "but you're not skating right

now are you? You'll be off the ice for several weeks."

"That's true," I confirm.

His finger touches my chin, lifting my face to his, "So you've never had a boyfriend?"

"Never," I admit, fearing my answer will turn him off me.

"Never kissed?"

"Never," I reassure. I start thinking that he likes that I've never had a boyfriend or been kissed before.

His eyes lock onto mine and he starts inching his face towards mine angling it perfectly for my first kiss when I slip in my question, "Do you have a girlfriend?" I venture. He pauses causing me suspicion.

"Truth?" he asks.

"Please." Even though, I'm dreading it now.

"I do, I don't want to lie to you."

My shoulder's drops in disappointment, the despair from the days events are accumulating and this is the icing on the cake, I just feel like I'm being swallowed if you can feel that way, "Then you should probably leave, she's going to be wondering where you are."

The look of disappointment on his face speaks volumes, "Ya, you're right. I better go."

"Thanks for taking me to the hospital," I say. He gets up taking the empty bags with him and leaves my house. It's the closest I ever came to getting a first kiss, but no matter how badly I wanted it, I will never want it to be with someone else's boyfriend.

Chapter 4

That Night

I fell asleep in front of the television and wake up to the six o'clock news and my mother bursting through the door. She flies past me on her way to the kitchen to start dinner for dad who will be home any minute. "We'll talk about what happened to you today when your father gets home so you don't have to repeat everything. Are you hungry? Where's that boy that took you to the hospital?"

"No, and I thought you were waiting for dad before we talk." I half expect mom to come back with a sarcastic remark but she doesn't.

I pick up my cell phone and start texting Tara while I wait for dinner.

Dalia: U there?

Tara: Ya, R U ok?

Dalia: So far, I don't have a fracture, but I still need an M.R.I 2 look 4 injury.

Tara: Does that mean U can't skate?

Dalia: Ya, I might have torn or dislocated something.

Tara: So U can't compete next month?

Dalia: No.

Tara: Sucks ass! Is Adam still with U?

Dalia: No he went home about an hour ago, We almost kissed.

Tara: Get the fXXX out! What happened? Tell me everything!

Dalia: He stayed with me @ the hospital & then he drove me home. We ate. He asked me if I had a boyfriend. I said no. He asked me if I was ever kissed. I said no. Then he looked like he was going 2 kiss me but like the stupid ass that I am I asked him if he had a girlfriend. He confessed saying, 'yes'. So I told him he better leave. His girlfriend

might B wondering where he is.

Tara: Oh Dalia, I'm so sorry.

Dalia: Not as sorry as I am. Part of me wishes I hadn't asked him.

Tara: Better 2 know, than find out later.

Dalia: I guess. He was seriously impressed when I told him I was working on my triple axel. He said, 'That's so hot!'

Tara: O.M.G! Dead Romantic! You're skating is amazing! Do U want me 2 come over 2Night?

Dalia: Sure, if U don't mind listening 2 my parents bitch @ the dinner table!

Tara: Great, I'm on my way.

I called out to mom, "Tara's coming over!"

"Sure," mom called back. "It always fine."

Tara has her own spot at our dinner table, she is over that often. It's the only time I'm able to spend with her outside of school hours, that my parents don't give me a hard time about.

Tara is a complete dick magnet at school. Guys are falling all over themselves trying to get dates and bootie calls with her. It would sicken me if she wasn't my best friend. We laugh about how guys make idiots of themselves for her. What matters to me is that no matter how much attention she receives from them, she doesn't have the EGO that goes along with being a dick magnet. Tara is very modest and sincere.

My parents like her too for the most part. When she isn't here, they are always criticizing her interest in boys rather than doing something substantial with her life (with the exception of school).

She is my lunar opposite, and I love her for that. I live vicariously through her adventures with boys that I'm not allowed to have. With Tara, you are better off asking, who hasn't she dated or kissed, because the list is shorter than asking her who she has.

I 'm still lying on the couch when dad comes home letting Tara in. He tosses a paper bag full of pain medication on my lap before pecking my forehead and making his way over to the dinner table. Tara has the decency my father doesn't to hand me my crutches before passing me,

pulling out my chair for me, before taking her own. She never ceases to surprise me, that's why she's my best friend.

Normally I help mom setting the dinner table, but I'm temporarily released from those duties. I'm starting to find out that there are some perks to being injured. Later that same evening when I took my new pain medicine, I started to see little green aliens that look like Kazoo from the Flintstones all over my house. Tara told me not to mention the aliens to mom or she'll make me stop taking them, and they do dull the pain.

Mom serves us before beginning the conversation, "Okay, tell us what happened."

"You already know," I snip.

"Details," dad insists.

I roll my eyes and start playing with the food on my dish. The McDonald's spoiled my appetite, "It was the end of the session so I was tired. I shouldn't have tried the triple axel but I did anyway. I threw my leg forward and felt a sharp pain on take-off. It hurt so bad I lost my breath. I used the boards to get off the ice and even managed to get to school. In homeroom my leg became harder to move. Adam, a guy who sits next to me caught me just before it gave out from under me. He insisted on taking me to the hospital."

"I know the nurse practitioner spoke to me, but tell your dad, what happened at the hospital," Mom says.

"They took x-rays to determine if I have fracture. I'm cleared, but not of torn ligaments or dislocations. The nurse practitioner said I'll need an M.R.I to clear me from any bone or joint problems. She says if I skate before the M.R.I, I risk the chance of worsening my injury and permanently ending my skating career."

Mom gives dad a look, "You should tell Dalia what we decided."

"What YOU'VE decided," he corrects. "Why do you always leave me with the dirty work?"

Mom continues where dad didn't want to go. She places her elbows on the dinner table which in my household is a big no no and says, "Dalia, I'm sorry to be so harsh but you're not getting any younger and you should already HAVE your triple axel. The girls in Europe are

landing them at the ripe age of 14.”

“Your mother is right,” dad agrees. “Even if you didn’t injure yourself today, you can’t hold a candle to those other girls. Skating as a single skater in your case is a waste of time,” dad finishes. *Wow there is no sparing feelings in this household, and it looks rehearsed.*

Mom continues where he left off, “So we’ve decided, that you’re only hope of winning an Olympic gold medal is if you go into pairs skating.”

I’m dumbfounded and angry at their cruelty. I haven’t even begun to accept the harsh reality that I’m losing an entire skating season, and they have the audacity to tell me I’m not good enough to continue as a single skater injured or not, well that was just fucking great!

I slam my fork down on the table and look to Tara for support. She gives me an ‘I’ve got this wink,’ and says to my parents, “Dalia needs a partner if she’s going to skate in pairs. That can’t be an easy find.” *That was the best she could come up with?*

Mom grins, “As a matter of fact, that’s been taken care of.”

“How so?” I ask.

“I heard from one of the other mothers at the arena that Ryan Kennedy is looking for a partner for months now, so I called his mother.”

“What happened to his last partner?” Tara injects.

Mom shoots her an irritated look, “Rumour has it that she got a concussion after hitting her head against the ice during a death spiral or something. All I really know is the last partner he had quit. I’m not sure how much truth is in that story. You know how the mothers like to sit and gossip. They’ve got absolutely nothing better to do.”

Mom turns to me, “I’m not going to risk offending Mrs. Kennedy by asking her what really happened, it could ruin your chances of ever finding a partner.”

“Do I get to make any decisions regarding my own future?”

“Not when your mother and I are paying,” dad threatens.

Frustrated more than feeling sad or angry, I imagine knocking all the dishes off the table and throwing a tantrum, but like always, I restrain myself. My parents never once mentioned the idea of pair skating in the past, which leads me to believe they are serious about it now.

Tara says, "Mr. Middleton, since Dalia isn't going to be skating for several weeks, I assume it's okay for her to come to the Halloween dance with me?"

Her question is followed by a tense silence. Tara successfully puts dad on the spot when he answers, "Sure she can, Tara."

I stand from the table and Tara follows suit. Mom eyes me cautiously, "You better rest that leg of yours. We are going to introduce you to Ryan later next week. I'll call his mother and push it back. She's not going to be too impressed when she finds out you're injured. This is going to set your practices back by weeks!"

"You planned all of this BEFORE I was hurt didn't you?" I accuse.

"Well, obviously," mom answers. "This took a lot of planning. The only things we haven't decided yet, are who's going to coach you guys and which arena you'll train at."

"You've already hit your plateau as a single skater Dalia, this is you're only chance of winning the Olympics," dad encourages.

"Are you sure it's not 'your dream?'" I question.

I start hobbling away with Tara following closely behind. We escape to the sanctuary of my room, throwing ourselves onto my bed. I reach for my iPod and put on Mirrors by Justin Timberlake, so my parents can't hear our conversation over the smooth rhythm Justin always makes. It isn't cool to like him, he is *tres passé*, so we keep him our dirty little secret.

"A pair skater?" I say dramatically.

"A pair skater," Tara mimics.

"I don't think I want to be a pair skater," I think out loud.

"How come? Does it scare you?" she asks.

"I just never considered it before," I reason.

"It's not like you have a choice in the matter. You might as well take a shot at it, unless you choose to quit. Are you at the point of wanting to quit?"

"I'm contemplating it," I confess.

"What's stopping you?"

"Nothing, I don't know. I was considering it after the fall but I attributed it to frustration."

"Your parents might be right," Tara says cautiously. "It will take you months to get back to where you are now. This injury is going to make you miss a years worth of competitions and you're going to be a year older before you can even compete again."

"If you go into pairs," she continues, "people's expectations for you will lessen in the first year. You will get to skate with a GUY, which means you might actually be able to lay your virginal hands on some hot blooded male."

"Who might be gay," I add.

"Or who might not," she argues.

"I don't want to think about it, let me tell you about Adam," I change the subject. "When I went to the hospital, I wasn't thinking about my future, I was enjoying just being with Adam, until I found out he had a girlfriend that is. You have no idea how disappointed I was to find out he was taken. It's the first time a seriously cute guy ever showed any interest in me."

"It won't be the last," Tara Reassures. "You're never around guys for them to have a chance to show interest in you. Now that you can't skate, maybe you WILL meet someone, the halloween dance is just around the corner! Your parents have no excuse to keep you from going."

"Do you think Adam will be there?"

"Everyone who is anyone will be there. It's the first dance of the year! The big question is, will Harper be with him?"

"Who's Harper? Sounds like an instrument."

"No, it's Adam's snobby girlfriend. I've seen them snogging together in the hallways on more than one occasion. Just the other day, I overheard her talking to Sierra in the bathroom. She was complaining to her about how he never makes time for her anymore. He's always too busy with his basketball practice or schoolwork. I give it two weeks and they'll be broken up. I've seen the way she drools over Carter."

"Who's Carter?"

"He's Adam's best friend."

"Is he cute?" I ask.

"I'd suck his cock cute." *So Rude!*

"Oh then he has to be cute," I say sarcastically.

“Adam almost kissed me,” I reminisce. “I shouldn’t have asked if he had a girlfriend,” I comment bitterly.

“No, its good that you did,” argues Tara. “You don’t need your first kiss to be with a two timing asshole. It’s nice that he was honest with you. It says something for his character.”

Chapter 5

One Day Later

Tara drives me to school which is a good thing, I don't think I should be driving if I'm still seeing little green aliens after taking my pain pills.

She arrives at my house twenty minutes before we're expected to be in homeroom. She waits for me to hobble and swing to her car and then she floors the gas pedal all the way, tailgating anything and everything in front of her. The ride is so nerve wrecking, I find myself reaching for the break pedal on my side of the car trying to break for her. Even the aliens are scared!

She drops me off at the front of the school, saving me from unnecessary walking. We say we'll meet back up for lunch. I start feeling anxious knowing I get to see Adam again.

Mrs. Uptite isn't in homeroom yet, my classmates can be heard all the way down the corridor. My eyes collide with Adams before locking on. Butterfly wings tickle my insides the way they do before big competitions. I remind myself he has a girlfriend and break our stare, I work my way towards my desk concentrating on each step.

As I take my seat, I can feel his intense stare burning right through me. Instinctively drawn to face him, I nod a greeting, suddenly too shy to use words. I don't want him thinking I'm ignoring him after all the help he gave me yesterday, it's quite the opposite. I find myself not wanting to stop looking at him. Reprieve from the tension occurs when Mrs. Uptite comes barreling in later than usual. She catches sight of my crutches and motions for me to stay seated during the Anthem and prayer. The aliens are sitting too.

Attendance seems to fly by and the buzzer for first period goes off. I remind myself that he is taken, T. A. K. E. N because I curse that

homeroom is over so quickly and we have to part ways, with such sorrow I add. I glance one last time at him before turning to leave. He is looking at something on his phone. Maybe HE is trying to spend more time in here because I'm here. I hobble out of the classroom first, proud of myself for resisting any and all temptation to spend every last second with him.

Tara and Sierra waited for me at lunch. I take the chair opposite Tara and start eating from her tray. She rolls her eyes, "If you want me to get you food, all you have to do is ASK!"

I laugh, "Thanks, I'll have the same as you." She fakes being annoyed.

Sierra smiles, "I wouldn't be able to use crutches and carry a tray! Who does she think you are?" Sierra is a cheerleader at our school. She has wavy blond hair that she always wears in braids and the most innocent blue eyes I'd ever seen. She is five foot nothing so she is always the one being thrown in the air during they're cheerleading routines.

"Exactly!" I agree, "Who does she think I am?"

Carter, my exact definition of tall and lanky sneaks up on Sierra covering her eyes. I didn't see what Tara finds attractive in him. I guess I have to know the guy to get it. Tara frequently comments 'I would suck his dick' just to explain how cute he is, but being Sierra's friend, it's totally uncool.

Carter doesn't do anything for me with the exception of his smile, that's nice. His blond hair and green eyes barely distract me from the blemishes the size of moon craters on his face. He gives the word acne a whole new meaning. I can only find one good reason to suck his dick, and that is to stop myself from looking at his face.

She reaches behind her feeling him up and says, "Carter!" He kisses her before helping himself to the chair next to her. I look over to see where Tara is in line, and that's when I start tripping out. ADAM is walking towards us carrying his tray of food. He helps himself to a seat directly across from me, nodding shyly once in my direction before addressing his best friend who is sitting next to him, "Carter."

Tara is heading back to our table, and I catch the wink she sent me

from across the cafeteria. She lays the tray in front of me and then rejoins us. I sit quietly and listen to the play-by-play details of Carter and Adam's last basketball game against Bishop Strachan High School. I catch myself wanting to look at Adam, but I stop myself on more than one occasion.

Whenever I weaken and sneak a peek, I catch him always looking back at me. Once I found him staring passed me and I sensed someone standing behind me. My eyes shifted to Tara who looks at me and says, "Hi Harper."

I turned around to find this beautiful girl standing behind me. Her auburn hair is smooth and silky, catching the light at almost every angle, a shoe in for hair commercials. Her eyes, aren't as perfect because right now they are black with anger. She is holding her books to her chest and tapping her foot impatiently on the ground, "Adam, outside now!" she orders turning around and storming away.

Carter looks at Adam, "When are you going to stop taking shit from her? 'Adam, outside now,'" he mimics.

Adam doesn't budge. His eyes search mine like he's looking for an answer, "You better go," I encourage. He collects his books angrily and goes after her.

Chapter 6

One Month Later

Mom insists on coming with me to my M.R.I. appointment. I go to the office to pick up my pass and wait for her at the front door. I stare at the cars parked in the parking lot, when someone accidentally brushes passed me.

It's Adam.

I stop breathing for a second when I see him, "I'mmm ss sorry," I stutter out an apology. Unable to recover from sounding like a complete imbecile I shift my gaze back out the door praying for mom to come sooner rather than later.

"No problem," he replies coolly. "Are you going to the M.R.I. today?"

Like Oh.My.God! He remembers. I am definitely in love! Maybe he's in love with me? We're in love! Okay so I'm jumping the gun, but there's nothing wrong with dreaming or at least hoping. I wouldn't be the kind of skater I am today if I didn't have dreams and hopes, although I'm injured right now. I have to act cool, way more cool than I feel. I have no time to talk myself down, he's waiting for an answer. Harper. Harper. Harper.

"No, I did that already. Mom is taking me to the doctor to find out my results." I say calmly.

"Good luck," he says in a low sexy voice that makes me quiver. I don't see aliens anymore because I'm not taking the pills for pain, but if I did see them, they would be doing a happy dance for me.

"Thanks, there's my ride," I say coolly. I take an extra second to balance on my crutches ensuring no further embarrassment then necessary. I have become quite the professional using them.

He rushes to hold the door open for me when we simultaneously

notice Harper coming up the school stairs. She scowls at Adam before croaking under her breath for both of us to hear, "Do you like her?" Only thing is it isn't a question, it's more of a statement. She walks into the school as if she hasn't made the comment and leaves this sense of discord between Adam and myself.

Speechless, I apologize, "Sorry, I didn't mean to upset her."

He looks at me and all I can focus on are those pillow like lips reassuring me, "You have nothing to be sorry about." He walks next to me all the way to my mother's car and opens the front door for me. I sit down and then place the crutches into the back seat. Unable and unwilling to look into his eyes. "Thanks," I say before he steps away from the car so I can close my door. I can feel him watching us as we drive off.

Mom turns the radio down, "Is that the boy that brought you to the hospital?"

"Ya, his name is Adam."

"He's cute," she comments. "I can tell you like him, and that's NOT going to happen. You're not allowed to date boys when you're committed to your figure skating. I've seen it too many times, girls start skipping skating sessions, then they pick up bad habits like smoking. Do you remember that amazing little jumper, Tanya?"

"Ya, Whatever happened to her?"

"She had to quit because some guy got her pregnant. The girls who date never finish competing. They quit, or injure themselves. I don't want you to be like them."

"I won't be," I promise.

My phone chirps while we were in the waiting room. I pull it out thinking it is Tara, glancing at the secretary, "Is it okay to have this on?"

She smiles back at me, "It's no problem dear, thanks for asking."

Mom scowls, "I'm not on mine right now!"

"Nobody just texted you," I snap.

Adam: I just wanted 2 wish U good luck again.

Oh.My.God! He's texting me. I text Tara:

Dalia: ADAM JUST TEXTED ME!

Tara: Fuck Off! What did he say?

Dalia: He wished me luck @ the doctor's office.

Tara: What did U write back?

Dalia: I didn't.

Tara: Why not? Write him back!

Dalia: Ok.

I flip over to him:

Dalia: Thanks.

Adam: Can I C U after U'r appointment?

Dalia: Sure!

Adam: Text when U'r done.

Dalia: Ok.

Then I go back to Tara:

Dalia: He wants 2 C me after my appointment!

Tara: Fuck Off!

Dalia: Vulgar!

Tara: & jealous!

Dalia: Don't be jealous, Harper.. I have 2 go in now, TTYL.

Dr. Rankin is our family doctor who has to be in his late fifties early sixties. He has buzzed grey hair and a stocky build, but gives a whole new meaning to the word compassion.

Once we're in his office, the appointment takes just over twenty minutes from start to finish. He diagnoses me with a torn hamstring muscle and says that judging by the story, I must have injured it on the take-off of the jump, the action of throwing my leg forward into the air.

Doctor Rankin insists I start physiotherapy immediately and stay off the ice for two more weeks.

“Two more weeks!” I complain. I miss so much now, and I think for sure Dr. Rankin is going to give me the green light. I hardly feel any pain when he is maneuvering my leg into various positions.

He finishes off the appointment by warning me, “This can be the end of your career. We’ll have to see how it goes.” I never thought I would hear those words come from his mouth. It’s upsetting to hear, but I don’t want to fall apart in front of him and my mother. I keep myself together and stay quiet the entire way home. When we pull into our driveway, I fish my phone out of my purse and slowly go up the stairs. I text Tara first:

Dalia: I have a pulled hamstring. My competitive skating might B over.

Tara: Keep U’r chin up! No way that’ll stop U.

Dalia: Adam wants 2 C me. I’ll tell U how it goes.

Tara: Text Me!

I flip to my old text with Adam:

Dalia: I’m home.

Adam: I’m picking U up.

Dalia: Sure, text when U’r in the driveway.

Adam: K.

I know this won’t going to go over well, I call downstairs, “Mom, I’m going out with Adam, AS FRIENDS.”

Mom doesn’t answer back for a minute, “This is going to stop when you start skating again.”

I take my long brown hair and pull it back into a tight ponytail. My blue eyes appear baggy, so I try desperately to conceal them with concealer but I have no luck. I finish myself off with lip gloss and perfume, wanting to get outside before mom has a chance to embarrass me. My phone chirps when I’m already half way down the stairs. I call out, “Bye mom!” and grab my things closing the door behind me.

He presses the button and his door locks click to open. I let myself

into his car and fasten my seat belt before I get a chance to admire him. He is wearing an expensive looking black leather jacket with lots of zippers on it and blue jeans. The smell of his cologne makes its way to my side of the car and I swoon. His shaggy dirty blond hair was recently taken down to near stubble in length with the exception of the top which is left dangling down into his face. His new look is edgy, but I think I preferred it before.

I shake my head a bit thinking Harper, Harper, what the hell am I doing with him? Why does he want to see me? Why did I make it so easy for him? "What's up?"

He ignores my question, "Tim Horton's, okay with you?"

"Sure," I answer. It doesn't matter to me where we go, I just like being with him in his cool car, alone.

He joins the drive thru line, "What would you like?"

"Just a medium double double."

When it is our turn he orders, "Two medium double doubles." He parks the car and turns off the motor. "How was your appointment?"

"Not good," I say. I pull back a section of the lid to open my coffee and push it down on the knob. "You cut your hair off," I comment.

"Ya," he snickers. "Harper hates it like this. You're changing the subject," he redirects. "What happened at the appointment?"

"I tore my hamstring. The doctor isn't sure if this will be the end of my career. I have to go for physiotherapy and stay off it for two more weeks. Then my parents want me to try pair skating."

"I'm so sorry," he says sincerely. He turns the key onto accessories and music starts playing in the car. He tears back his lid before taking a drink of his coffee and laying it on the dash. I look into his eyes and ask, "Does Harper know you're with me right now?"

"It's none of her business," he says. Our faces are so close, I can feel his breath on me. "I broke up with her today," he informs me quietly.

"I'm sorry, are you okay?" I don't know whether I should be happy that he wants to see me the same day he breaks up with her or not.

"It was a long time coming, Carter's been bugging me to break up with her for weeks now." He takes another drink of his coffee and starts running his fingers through his hair.

“Do you always do what Carter says?”

“No, I don’t.” He removes the elastic from my hair and starts playing with my ends, sending cold shivers down my spine. He entwines his fingers so they’re knotted up in my hair and then he pulls my face to his, “I want to kiss you so bad right now,” he admits.

“Then do it,” I goad, “but if my mother catches wind of this, she’ll kill me and you!”

“I’m willing to take that chance,” he breathes. His lips slowly, and considerately cover mine. My eyes flutter closed and every part of me feels his kiss. I’m floating. His mouth is warm and welcoming and I can taste the sweetness from his coffee.

He pulls away to look into my eyes, needing to see my reaction. That’s when I pull him back into another kiss. His kisses are becoming demanding. He wants more from me, needs more. His lips pry mine apart and then his tongue caresses mine. I run my fingers through his short stubbly hair and the excitement I feel from him causes me to moan into his mouth as our kisses become more frenzied.

He frees his hands from the entwined hair grabs fistfuls of it now, pulling me closer to him. I can’t breath but it doesn’t matter. I don’t want to give up this feeling, it’s euphoric, like landing a triple axel for the first time. The adrenaline rush is invigorating. It feels like I waited sixteen years for this one moment with the right guy.

His phone chirps, he pulls away to look at the screen. I’m surprised he stops kissing me to do it, “Who is it?” I ask, unable to mask the irritation in my voice.

Adam rolls his eyes, “Harper.” He looks around the parking lot, “She’s watching us.” He turns the key in the ignition and guns his car in reverse. He throws it in drive and flies out of the parking lot.

“How do you know?” I say bracing myself. He’s driving crazy like when Tara had the aliens in her car. He hands me his iPhone and I read the text:

Harper: Didn’t take you long! You’re such an Ass!

“I think you should turn around and talk to her, or at least text her

back,” I suggest. “She has to be really hurt seeing us like that.”

“She’s fucked up for following me,” he argues. “It’s not my problem anymore.”

I start typing into his phone. He looks over at me but can’t do anything because he’s driving too fast. He has one hand on the shifter and the other on the wheel. “What are you doing?”

“I’m texting her back,” I answer.

“What? Don’t do that! She’s going to think it’s from me!”

“Yup, that is the idea,” I tease.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m apologizing on your behalf for hurting her,” I tell him.

“Don’t send that!” He tries snatching the phone from my hands but I’m too quick. “Give me the fucking phone,” he growls angrily.

“Take me home,” I insist. His reaction startles me. His lack of compassion for her makes me shudder. Will he treat me the same way when he’s finished with me? His angry tone after such passionate kisses, is heartbreaking.

He drops his speed to the limit plus ten, and drives the rest of the way to my house in silence. When he puts his car in park I hand him his phone. He looks at the screen, and he sees:

Harper: Didn’t take you long, you’re such an ass!

In the area where you type your text, I had playfully typed, ‘Tricked you!’ but never sent Harper any messages. I get out of his car as quickly as I can and scurry to my front door. When he finally realizes my prank, I’m already in the house.

Chapter 7

One Hour Later

Mom gives up pounding on my bedroom door or asking if I'm all right. The first tears I shed over a guy finally dry up. I pull out my phone:

Dalia: Tara, U won't believe what happened.

Tara: Details.

I put my phone on dictate mode and start talking into it. There is way too much to type.

Dalia: He picked me up after the doctors appointment and we went to Tim Hortons. We stayed in his car. He asked me how it went. I told him that my skating career might be over, I will have to wait and see. The doctor said I had a torn hamstring. Anyway, I was upset and he was really nice to me.

He told me that he broke up with Harper. He kissed me. It was amazing. He said he wanted to be the first guy to ever kiss me. I reminded him of my psycho mom and he said he was willing to take his chances. It was so hot. Then his phone chirped. He said that Harper was watching us in the parking lot. He floored it out of there. I said that he should go back and talk to her and he said no way. Then I pretended to text her on his phone and he went ballistic on me. He told me to give him back his fucking phone. I told him to drive me home. I handed him his phone and all I had typed into it was 'Tricked You!' as a joke. He didn't realize that I hadn't texted her until I was already in the house. He's called five times I blocked his number now.

Tara: What an asshole! U totally shouldn't have played that trick on him though. What do U care how he treats Harper? He's in2 U!

Dalia: Bcause I could B next 2B treated like her. I'm so done with him B4 we even started.

Tara: I think U R overreacting. U don't know their situation.

Dalia: He cut all his hair off just Bcause he know's Harper hates it that way.

Tara: Ew, how did it look?

Dalia: Not as good, but he's still hot.

Tara: He must still have feelings 4 her, albeit -ve 1's 2 do something like that.

Dalia: U know!

Tara: Totally! We have 2 go shopping 4 the Halloween dance.

Dalia: Ok, Come over 4 dinner and then we'll go after.

Tara: Can't, mom wants me 2 eat here tonight. Will pick U up after dinner.

Dalia: Ok. TTYL

Tara: TTYL

I use the excuse that I want to rest my leg before shopping with Tara for a reason to eat in my room. She picks me up shortly after seven and we head to the mall.

Tara and I check out several stores before settling on overpriced Disney costumes from the movie Frozen. She being the best BFF she is, doesn't dare mention Adam's name the entire time we are out. She even manages to make me laugh asking me when am I going to meet Ryan while holding a fairy costume. She is righteously firing out subliminal messages.

I know what I should do, I have to push Adam out of my head and focus on healing and making this alleged partnership with Ryan work.

Chapter 8

Halloween Dance

Tara picks me up a half hour before the dance starts. Her short blond hair is disguised by a wig that's long and brown. Her blue eyes remain unchanged with the exception of the bold colours she used on her lids. Her eye lashes are darkened, emphasizing their beautiful length and her dress colour is a Royal Blue making her look the noble part. Her natural beauty is highlighted in this costume, I hardly recognize her!

She freezes the second I sit in her car, "Oh.My.God, Dalia! You look amazing! Everyone's going to be throwing themselves at your feet tonight!"

"I highly doubt that," I say self-consciously. "My makeup is too light, the long blond wig isn't sitting on me properly, and the light blue dress makes me look chunky."

"You'll see," she grins, "lose the wig, your own hair looks better."

"Seriously?"

"Totally!" I take the wig off and start fishing through my purse for a brush. When I find it I start mindlessly running it through my hair, "Do you think Adam will be there tonight?"

"I thought you're mad at him," she says shortly.

"I am," I admit lamely.

Tara starts squealing and tapping her hand against the steering wheel with excitement, "I have major gossip! Sierra's leaving Carter tonight! Jeremy asked her out, and she's in love with him. Carter isn't going to know what hit him! He's going to be on the market before the end of the night, and I'm going to snatch him up! He's going to be all mine!"

"Can you be any more confident? It might ruin your friendship with Sierra if she sees you with him."

“She’s the one breaking up with him! So our golden rule doesn’t apply in this case.” Tara reminds me. “By the way she says she has something to show me!”

“What?”

“I have no fucking clue! Do you think Carter is going to like the way I look?”

“What guy wouldn’t?” I answer honestly.

She pulls into the parking lot and we play music for twenty minutes so we won’t be the first ones at the dance.

“Do you think Adam is bringing anyone?”

“Harper is out of the picture, so who would he bring? I think he’ll come stag.”

“Are you ready to go in?”

“Never more!” she says enthusiastically.

The cafeteria is dark with the only light being a strobe light in the centre of the ceiling. White strings of cotton-like moss off willows is hanging everywhere. Skeletons with blood and amputated body parts are scattered all over with the exception of on the dance floor. Against three walls are little round tables that seat two with fake candles on them. There is also a loser wall that has a row of chairs for dateless people who want to be asked to dance. That is where I will be the majority of the time. ‘Thriller,’ by Michael Jackson is playing when we walk in. Everything is already in full swing.

“Tara yells into my ear, “Loser wall?”

“No, let’s get a table!”

She grabs my wrist so we won’t get separated and starts leading me to the opposite side of the cafeteria, “Here?”

“Sure,” We take the last vacant table. “Do you see Carter?”

“No, you?”

“No.”

“Do you see Adam?”

“No, you?”

“No,” That’s when ‘Jax’ spots us. Carter is dressed like the guys on

Sons of Anarchy. I kick Tara under the table, "Look at Jax, he's headed in our direction!" Tara's eyes light up. Her wishes are coming true! We watch him stroll in our direction, expecting him to stop in front of her, but he doesn't. He stops in front of me. His hand is stretched out, he is inviting me to dance. I'm floored by his gesture. I look at Tara who coolly gives me a nod of encouragement.

Eric Clapton comes on and suddenly I find myself pressed right up against tall lanky Carter with his arm wrapped tightly around my waist. He whispers in my ear, "You look beautiful tonight." A chill goes up my spine as his breath tickles the sensitive part of my ear.

"Thank you," I say politely.

His hand starts gliding down my back. I don't like where this is going considering Tara is all into him. "Are you forgetting Sierra?" I remind him. He shouldn't need reminding. He replaces his hand back in its original spot, "I just can't get over how beautiful you look," he explains.

I close my eyes, wanting to feel the music when I hear Adam's voice, "Do you want to fuck off now? With friends like you," he complains. Carter stops dancing with me immediately and backs away. The animosity between the two is palpable.

Standing before me is Juice from 'Son's of Anarchy,' shaved head and all. He is wearing his leather jacket and faded blue jeans that sit low on his waist. He looks intimidating even to me. He has fake tatt's on his freshly shaved scalp.

I'm about to walk away but he grabs my wrist authoritatively and says, "Dance with me."

"Let go of my wrist," I demand, trying to free myself from his grasp.

He holds me tighter, "Not until you listen to what I have to say." I try yanking myself free one last time to no avail. His grip around my wrist only tightens.

"Once dance," he insists.

I surrender to him knowing I can't escape him. At least, Carter is free to dance with Tara now. He takes me into his arms and any resolve I muster to stay away from him disappears into thin air.

His voice is deeper and more gravelly than before, "I'm sorry for the other day," he apologizes. His warm breath sends another chill down my

spine. I never knew my ears were so sensitive.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

"It's your breath on my ear, it gives me the shivers," I admit.

"Oh, it does, does it?" he whispers again. This time he takes the tip of my earlobe into his mouth and begins caressing it with his velvety tongue. He looks rebellious and sexy, and it's so hot, I let out a gasp. He continues licking my earlobe and nipping at it as his warm breath surrounds the sensitive area.

"I don't want to see you in anyone's arms but mine," he whispers possessively.

"Are you asking me to go steady with you?" I tease.

"No, I'm telling you," he corrects. He takes hold of my wrist and starts leading me to Tara. When we get to where she's dancing with Jax (Carter) on the dance floor, he says to her, "I'm taking your friend to my car, it's the black mustang in the parking lot."

"Sure," she says winking at me.

We leave the cafeteria, the music can be faintly heard behind us. It is dark out, the parking lot is full. We don't even make it inside his car. He backs me up against it and starts pressing himself against me. His lips begin pressing against mine demandingly. He reaches for the back door, "Get in and lay down," he bosses.

I do as I am told. I lay down on his cold black leather interior and feel the weight of his body as he slowly lowers himself on top of me. I lose my breath as he steals my air, kissing me wildly, reducing me to gasping for breath between his long sensuous kisses.

I run my fingers over his shadow of a mohawk, "What did you do to your hair?" I complain.

"You don't like it?" he asks between kisses.

"It makes you look bad ass," I comment.

He pulls away from me for a second and stares into my eyes. He takes my hand and intentionally glides it over the area of his head that is bald and says to me, "I want you to be like this when I take your virginity," he orders. Shockwaves of excitement course through my body. Suddenly I want my virginity to be his for the taking. I will do

whatever he wants me to.

"Okay," I breathe. "I'll do anything for you," I admit. He slides his hand down my back unzipping my gown lowering it off my shoulders before expertly unclasping my bra, freeing my breasts. The cold air immediately hardens my nipples. He takes my breast in his mouth and starts suckling it. I listen to the noises he makes and close my eyes concentrating on his velvety mouth teasing my nipple. I start grinding against him, panting. My mouth is parched by the time he covers it again with his own, kissing me. My breasts are left out in the open and he starts pinching and tugging at my nipples as he continues kissing me.

He stops suddenly. I didn't know why. Did he see Harper? "Did I do something wrong?" I ask.

He sits up and I notice all the windows are fogged up, "We need to stop while I still can. We should get back," he suggests. He waits for me to dress, helping me with the zipper before we make our way back to the cafeteria.

When we walk into the school, Carter's back is turned to us and Sierra is sitting on a stair. We catch the tail end of his sentence, "It can't be over."

Adam looks at me when he hears Carter's words. "Carter, get the fuck back in the gym," Adam goads.

"Not now man," he says without turning.

"We better leave them. I'm sure they need to talk." I encourage. I take the lead by opening the door while Adam is staring at the couple. I lock onto Tara right away. She is dancing with Jeremy whose hands are all over her. She grins at me and then pulls away from him. It is definitely bathroom time.

She practically skips over to where I'm standing and pulls me away from Adam, "I need to go to the bathroom," she excuses us. We leave Adam and go to the loo far away from the cafeteria but on the same floor for privacy reasons.

Once the door closes behind us I tell her, "Adam kissed me in his mustang!"

"Cool. How was it? You're right about his hair, what the fuck did he do to it? It takes a lot of balls to shave it that ugly."

"It's so ugly it sort of makes him look hotter. I bet you it was Carter's idea. Should I break-up with him until it grows out?"

"Do you still like him, looking like that?"

"Oh ya," I say, "he's so fine!"

"What did you do in the car?"

"We snogged. He took off the top part of my dress, and sucked my boobs! I will tell you, my earlobes are so sensitive! All this time, I've only been using them to listen to people. I didn't know how friggin hot it can be to have someone nibble on them! He said he wanted my snatch to be like the top of his head when he takes my virginity!"

"We can do something about that. Mines already done," comments Tara.

"Sure, I'm in!"

"Sierra's breaking up with Carter right now!" I update.

"Get out, how do you know?"

"We walked passed them on our way back to the cafeteria. Carter was saying, 'it can't be over.' Did she show you what she wanted to show you?"

"Not yet, I haven't seen her."

"Maybe she will look for you after she's finishes breaking up with Carter. Have you seen Harper?"

"Yes," Tara said bitterly. "Skank is dressed like Avril Lavigne, she's hanging off Jeremy like some lovesick puppy. I wanted to hook up with him before I started dating Carter, but it's not working out that way."

"You like Jeremy?"

"I thought you knew."

"More than Carter?"

"I'm not sure, I'll have to try both flavours. I'll tell you which one I like after I've tasted them!"

"You better get back out there and be there for Carter."

"Okay, How's my makeup?"

"Never better, go on!"

When we get back 'Timber' by Pitbull is playing and we run onto the dance floor shaking our booties. We dance a few more times before the last slow song of the night is announced. Adam steals me away from

Tara leading me to an open spot in the corner of the dance floor, Harper is hanging off Jeremy and Tara is in Carter's arms.

'100 Years' comes on from Five for Fighting. He takes me into his arms and I feel safe and protected. You can hardly call what we are doing dancing. We are just standing on the dance floor making out. In my heart of hearts, I know our happiness is short lived. Once I'm back in training, I won't have time to spend with him anymore.

Adam offers to take me home. He drops me off a block from my house, and when I'm safely tucked away in my warm bed, Tara debriefs me via text messages.

Chapter 9

Double Date

“Put that phone down and come eat your breakfast before it gets cold!” orders mom. When skating stops, family meals take off like wildfires. My own injury snares me into these breakfast and dinner meetings my parents use for strategizing my to-be gold medal win at the Olympics. Mom goes on and on about how cute Ryan is and how we are going to become the perfect unbeatable couple. She is astonished that I never met him before at any of the competitions even though we are competing on the same team. She keeps saying, how pleased I will be when I finally meet him.

“Just a second, I’m texting Tara.” The smell of bacon and toast are beginning to make my mouth water. Mom places dad’s dish in front of him, he has a full breakfast with eggs, bacon, toast and orange juice. I text Tara:

Dalia: GG (GG is our short form for gotta go.)

Mom places my dish if you can call it that in front of me. It has the tiniest scoop of eggs I’ve ever seen and a child’s portion of orange juice, “Where’s the rest of it?” I ask sarcastically.

“Your mom and I noticed you’re putting on weight since you’ve been off the ice. We’re reducing your portions until you go back. We don’t want you to become a heifer!”

“Dad you’re so charming!” He is Simon Cowell’s twin in the looks and wit department minus the British accent, money or ear for music.

“We’re just protecting you,” mom sides with dad.

“Now that we know when you’re cleared to skate, we’ve taken it upon

ourselves to arrange a meeting between you and Ryan, him and his mother are coming over next Sunday for Thanksgiving dinner so the two of you can meet. You start practice the following Tuesday 7:00 a.m.”

“Which arena? Who’s going to coach us?”

“His arena, his coach.”

“How unfair!” I complain.

“Both have reputations that precede them,” Dad explains.

Mom starts clearing my dishes away, “How was the dance last night? I didn’t hear Tara’s car drop you off.”

“It was okay,” I answer casually. Adam’s facial expression when he said he wants my virginity flashes in my mind, giving me shivers of excitement.

“Well, you should make the most of it, because after Thanksgiving, your mom is going to have you on lockdown. You will be eating, drinking and sleeping school and skating,” dad warns for the gazillionth time. He is getting a kick out of my pain and suffering.

Mom rolls her eyes like we share a secret from dad or something, “Don’t listen to him Honey, after Thanksgiving, your life is going to be worse than lockdown, it’s going to be more like prison slash boot camp!”

“Great, Bring it on!” I say sarcastically, like it already wasn’t. I can’t leave the house fast enough. Grabbing my jacket and bag, I bid farewell to my wardens and head out. It’s starting to get cold outside and there is frost on the grass but not on the windshields yet. Tara and Sierra are waiting patiently in the driveway to take me to school.

I open the back door and slid onto the leather seat without greeting them. “Your mother and father are hounding you again aren’t they?” Tara asks intuitively. She glances at me in the rearview mirror before running her fingers through her hair trying to comb through it.

“Their incessant,” I complain. “I would like to get up once in the morning and NOT hear about Ryan. I hate him, and I haven’t even met him yet. As far as my parents are concerned he walks on water.”

“When are you meeting Ryan? Adam doesn’t mind you skating with a guy?” Sierra’s mischievous smile is hard to miss.

“My parents invited Ryan over for Thanksgiving. As far as Adam is concerned, I think he’s okay with me skating pairs. I told him. I assume

he realizes it's with a guy. I think he's just too confident to care. What bothers me is that I just found out I'm switching to Ryan's club and changing coaches to HIS coach. He doesn't have to endure any changes, I'm the one getting uprooted. It's totally not fair!"

"How did he swing that? I'd be complaining if I were you." Tara advises.

"I did, like it did anything. Again, the guy walks on water."

A phone chirps and nobody knows who's it was. We all go digging through our bags to see who's it was, it turns out to be mine.

Adam: Tonight, Let's double with Carter & Tara.

Dalia: Sounds great. Can we invite Jeremy & Sierra?

Adam: Sure! Fucking guy doesn't stop talking about her.

Dalia: Great, Where do U want 2 meet?

Adam: I'll pick U up?

Dalia: My wardens won't be impressed? Starbucks.

Adam: Wardens?

Dalia: Mom & dad

Adam: Ok Starbucks it is, 7?

Dalia: Sure.

The mood lightens in the car significantly after we are all ensured a date.

We arrive at Starbucks before the guys. The lineup is literally out the door, so we grab a table and wait for it to dissipate.

Sierra is dressed to kill in a black mini dress just barely covering her red g-string underwear. I had the misfortune of catching an eyeful when she was reaching in the backseat for her purse. I was tempted to give her a wedgy but fear my fingers would slide into places unknown and wisely decided against it.

Tara on the other hand looks more demure. Her dress lands centre thigh after she tugs it down an inch or two. It will stay like that until she does something like take a step or breath, and then it rides right back up again. Her underwear has about three square inches more fabric than Sierra's thong, if she is lucky.

My skirt lands comfortably just above my knee. Unbeknownst to the girls, I chose to go commando. Having underwear on all the time makes me feel like I'm suffocating. The odd time, I just like letting my skin breathe and this is one of those times, needless to say I'm very careful not to pull a Sierra.

I hear the growl of the mustang before it catches my eye, behind it is a silver Honda Civic.

Adam the sole occupant of his car, gets out and hits the key fob so the doors lock automatically and the alarm engages. He's wearing a baseball cap with a black hoodie overtop. His low riding jeans that usually expose his six pack is hidden by the length of the hoodie depriving me of a picturesque visual. His six o'clock shadow gives him a rough, edgy, bad boy look. I'm all over his look, yum!

Carter and Jeremy get out of the other car and follow him in. I'm taken by Adam's look, barely noticing the other two, "They're here!" I say excitedly.

The line magically disappears and Adam walks straight to the counter and motions subtly with his finger, for me to join him. I jumped from my chair and scurry to his side, "Do you want anything?" he asks in a gravelly voice quietly in my ear.

The five-foot nothing girl with the Lennon glasses, short hair, and tall attitude is impatiently waiting for our order, "Can I help you?"

I look into Adam's hooded eyes, "I just want you," I flirt. Adam aware that the bitch with attitude is waiting, gingerly covers my lips with his own in a greeting that gives steamy a whole new definition. He doesn't give a damn who's looking or waiting. He's taking his time with me, and it is so hot.

He finishes his kiss and pulls away only slightly, "No, seriously, do you want anything?"

"Chai Latte," I answer quietly to him.

He turns to the girl, "A tall Caramel Machiatto and a Chai Latte."

She takes her marker and starts writing on our cups, "Name?" she snaps.

"Dalia," I speak up, noticing his instant dislike for her.

He pays her for the drinks and leaves me to wait for them while he

greet the girls and takes a seat at the table. He clearly wants me to serve him. I'm playing his game, so I grab the drinks placing lids and sleeves on both and place them before him sub-servant like, "Here you go sir."

I was about to take my vacant chair when he silently pats his knee motioning for me to sit on his lap. I do what he beckons me to do and he start kissing me wildly in front of Tara and Sierra like they aren't there. He's making a point of claiming me in front of my closest friends with his demanding kisses pulling the nape of my neck closer to him, as he kisses me harder. He obviously not concerned about the scene we're making.

"Oh Please!" Tara giggles, "Get a room!" He releases his firm hold on me so I can catch my breath.

Carter and Jeremy join the table, "Save it for the movie theatre," Carter suggests.

"What movie are we going to see?" Sierra asks Carter.

"Whatever his heinous wants," Carter says looking pointedly at Adam.

Adam looks at me, "What movie do you want to see?"

"Fifty Shades," I vote quickly. I've wanted to see it since it came out even though the reviews were terrible. I never had the time. Now, I finally do.

"If my lady want's Fifty, then that's what she's getting," I know Adam's comment has a double entendre.

"Do we have to see a chick flick?" whines Jeremy.

"You might learn something," Carter mocks.

"Don't worry, I know an old theatre in Oakville where we won't be seen. Hasn't been updated since the eighties," Adam reassures.

We don't wait to finish our drinks before starting to drive over to the theatre. Adam and I drive in the Mustang, everyone else takes the Honda. He starts the car and fidgets with his dvd player until the song of his choice came on, "Do It To Me," by David Usher. There's absolutely no mistaking the sexual innuendo of the song, "You look beautiful tonight," he says in a deep voice.

I blush listening to the song and feeling his hungry eyes burn holes right through me. I'm getting all hot and bothered even though he hasn't

laid a finger on me since we got in the car. "You look ridiculously hot tonight," I return the compliment. His eyes never leave the road as he receives the admiration humbly only displaying a small smile.

Adam isn't kidding about knowing a theatre that hasn't been renovated since the eighties. It's located in an industrial section of Oakville. The movie ticket prices are cheap because that is their only way of luring people in. There were only four movies playing, the other three I have never heard of before.

We go to the small concession stand and order a popcorn and drink. We plan on sharing. There are no other movie goers there until the rest of our friends turn up.

We wait for everyone to order their goodies before venturing into our theatre. The seats are old and rickety, when we push them down to sit they squeak. The sticky uncarpeted floor is almost flat ensuring few people have a good view. We are the only ones in the entire theatre, which means we have our choice of seats.

"Take the back," suggests Adam. I lead him to the centred seats at the back of the theatre.

"Is this good?" I ask him.

"Perfect," he answers. He sits down, and Carter sits next to him, "What are you doing Fag?"

Insulted, Carter replies, "What the fuck are you calling me fag for?"

Adam answers him impatiently, "We have the entire fucking theatre to ourselves, and you sit right next to me. Why the fuck do you think I'm calling you fag for? Now move!"

As couples they get up and disperse themselves in the theatre. I can't help but giggle at Carter and Adam, even Tara and Sierra are laughing at how the friends bicker.

The theatre gets dark and the traditional red velvet curtain starts parting ways. We must have watched five or so trailers before the movie begins. Adam rests his arm on the back of my seat and his bicep pushes against the nape of my neck. It isn't until two, maybe three minutes into the movie that his hand guides my face to his and his demanding kisses begin.

I lay the popcorn down on the seat next to me, never pulling away to

do so. His hands begin probing the curves of my body. I slide my hands into his hoodie and pulled his head closer to me feverishly. He tugs at my blouse untucking it for access to my breasts. He slides his hand in cupping my breast and then pulls the strap down releasing it. He caresses my nipple with his fingertips making me moan into him. He stops kissing me and drops his head down so that he can take my breast in his mouth. I can only see the top of his hoodie as I feel his warm tongue gliding rapidly over me. He sucks it into his mouth and my breath catches as I squeal in delight completely involuntarily. He does the same with the other until it's my turn and he waits for me to please him.

I want to satisfy him. Showing him I'm all his, I unzip his pants freeing him. I strok him first slowly and then pick up speed until he is no longer able to contain himself. His pleasure oozes out all over him and my hand. His eyes slowly open and he finds me licking his liquid pleasure from my fingers, which really turns him on. I use the napkins from the concession stand to clean him up before I go to the ladies room, to wash off the remaining film from my hands.

Chapter 10

Meeting Ryan

Thanksgiving finally rolls in at our house, the fog is lifting with every passing minute. Soon, I will finally be able to visualize this Ryan guy. It is hard for me to make myself believe that I'm going to learn to skate with another person. The sheer prospect of meeting a complete stranger that I have to learn to trust throwing me into the air and lifting me over his head with one arm might I add, while skating on a hard surface is completely daunting.

I'm in no rush to get out of bed because once my mother hears my footsteps from downstairs, she'll force me to clean before our dinner guests arrive.

My phone is flashing blue on the charger telling me there is activity I haven't seen yet. I press the menu button and two emails, three texts and four upgrades are waiting to be approved. To me, there is nothing more annoying than having to download upgrades on applications I never use. It's the providers way of ensuring phone upgrades every two years, a conspiracy at best.

I ignore the upgrades knowing it will slow down my phone making it take longer to get through my texts and emails, and chose to look at my emails first.

Email (1):

To: Dalia Middleton

From: The Toronto Skating Club

CC: Mr.& Mrs. Middleton

Thank you for joining the Toronto Skating Club! Attached is your new schedule for the fall and winter ice skating sessions. We hope you enjoy your membership!

Email (2):

To: Dalia Middleton
From: Mr. Hicks
CC: Mr.& Mrs. Middleton,

I would like to extend my warmest welcome to you as your new coach, Mr. Hicks. You can call me Mr.Hicks.

Should you have any concerns or need to discuss training sessions, please feel free to call the Toronto Skating Club's main number and ask for the skating office. I look forward to working you hard.

Your's truly,
Mr. Hicks.

My nerves increase, with every word in both emails. Holy shit this is becoming real! What did I get myself get into? I can't skate as a pair! I'm going to smash into a thousand tiny pieces all over the ice! I've always enjoyed watching pairs on television and at competitions, but I never wanted to BE one. I attempt to shake off my increasing apprehension and the butterflies that are making their way up my esophagus ad-nausiem by focussing on my new texts.

Adam: Can U sneak out next Saturday?

Dalia: Sure. I'll tell my parent's I'm with Tara.

Adam: I'll pick you @ 12 where I always drop U off.

Dalia: Sounds like a plan! What R we doing?

Adam: It's a surprise.

Dalia: Love surprises! Tell me pls!

Adam: U have 2 wait. TTYL.

Second text:

Tara: O.M.G. I can't believe U meet U'r new partner 2day! R U nervous? U'r going 2 tell me everything right?

Dalia: I can't believe it either! Of course I'm nervous, but I'm not NERVOUS. I will tell U everything the 2nd they leave.

Tara: ?

Dalia: I don't care whether Ryan likes me or not. I already hate having to hear about him ALL the time, & having 2 skate at HIS rink with HIS coach. It's hardly fair if U ask me. I'm > nervous about the idea of me hating pairs or having 2 quit skating because it's not working out more than about meeting him.

Tara: Those R legitimate concerns. U coming over 4 Thanksgiving dinner @ my house Monday since U'rs is Sun?

Dalia: No, I made pluck with Adam next Saturday.

Tara: ?

Dalia: Plans (stupid auto correct) Can I use U as an excuse? He has something plucked.

Dalia: Planned

Tara: Shut off U'r auto correct & try dictating in2 U'r phone!

Dalia: Sure is this setter?

Dalia: For the love of God, bee!

Tara: I know what U mean. Stick with figure skating.

Dalia: TTYL

Tara: TTYL

Third Text:

9052756409: U can always have me if U get sick of him!

Dalia: Who is this?

9052756409: Carter.

Dalia: Does he Know U R texting me?

Carter: Nope, stole U'R # from Adam's phone.

Dalia: & U'R texting me Bcause?

Carter: (mope face icon :-()), Tara's not responding 2 my texts. Is she mad @ me?

Dalia: Nope we've been texting each other, she'll respond, just give her a minute.

I went back to Tara:

Dalia: R U There?

Tara: Yup, what-sup?

Dalia: Carter's been trying 2 text U.

Tara: Why is he texting U?

Dalia: He stole my # off Adam's phone. He wants 2 know why U R'nt texting back.

Tara: I don't want him 2 think I'm easy, U know, the thrill of the chase. Let him stew. Tell him I'm out.

Dalia: I can't, I just told him we've been texting each other.

Tara: Ok, just tell him U didn't get thru 2 me. I must have turned my phone off.

Dalia: Ok, TTYL.

Tara: Bye

I went back to Carter:

Dalia: She's not answering me either, sorry.

Carter: No probs, 'laters babe.'

~~~

I don't go to the door when the bell rings. The last thing I want, is to appear anxious. I hair-spray my curly brown locks for the fourth or fifth time until I'm absolutely sure every strand won't budge. Tara is always teasing me about my spray usage. If she ever finds out my hairdo attracts bee's in the summer, she'll never let me hear the end of it. I tone it down whenever she's around.

My carefully selected outfit is a beige camisole with a black form fitting jacket overtop and my holiest faded denim blue jeans. I can't even



wear underwear with these pants because the tear under my ass is so high you will see them. The only thing I can wear with my favourite jeans is a thong and I hate wearing them, it's a wedge issue.

I spend the most time on perfecting my face. I create a soft smokey look to my eyes. My lips are coloured a stunning shade of red with a frosty pink colour in the centre giving the illusion of a pout. I lightly gloss them to complete the art piece.

Idiotically, thinking Adam will like seeing me done up, I take a selfie and send it to him before turning my phone off and joining the others. I don't have the foresight to think it will cause jealousy, countless calls from Adam wondering why I'm so dressed up just to meet a skating partner.

I deliberately focus on the stairs rather than the front door. Their stares are cast directly on me, it's palpable. I nod a polite greeting to whom I assumed was Mrs. Kennedy offering her my hand, "Nice to meet you Mrs. Kennedy." She is my height and a very handsome looking lady with short brown hair and hazel eyes.

"The pleasure is mine," she reciprocates.

I am morbidly curious, dying to know what Ryan looks like. I hide it in my slow gestures, turning my head down and towards him, letting my eyes drift, up, up, really fucking high up. Usually height isn't the first thing I notice or care about, but when I'm supposed to be lifted overtop his head while he's figure skating, it's damn important. The guy is too fucking tall! He has to be a good four inches taller than Adam. If I have to guess, 6'3! Skates add two more inches, all the higher to fall from. So now I'm picturing myself being held up by one hand six and a half feet above the ice while the guy who apparently walks on water skates across the rink. Ya, that isn't happening.

Another obstacle involuntarily makes my eyes linger, his shoulders. Some crazy person must have shoved boulders under his skin because there is no way those are his actual muscles! I catch myself staring at his deltoids, and trapezius wanting to let my eyes coast back downwards hoping to catch a glimpse of his pectorals, and oh my God how I would love to see his gluteus maximus. I inhale slowly forcing my eyes back on their journey upwards. I abhor my own behaviour, knowing I'm

treating him like the piece of meat that he is, grilled to perfection, and smoking hot.

My eyes behold his, frozen in locked position, the most intense melted dark chocolate eyes I've ever seen. They match his wispy longish brown hair perfectly. This is the guy whom I hate? Now I have to rethink it!

Adam, Adam I chant in my head. I have to remember Adam. Ryan's looks alone are the last thing I expect, but I'm sure he has to be cocky, selfish, arrogant or something. Talking myself down isn't working.

I amaze myself at how shallow I'm being. I'm stunned stupid at the sight of him. I shake it off and hold out my hand to greet him, "Hi I'm Dalia, nice to meet you." He scoops my hand gently into his, never for a second breaking eye contact with me. Unmistakeable chemistry is filling the air. My parents and Mrs. Kennedy smiled knowingly at each other, so far, so good.

Mom has the table decorated really elegantly. She has her best China out and the centerpiece is the golden brown turkey, cooked to perfection.

"This is lovely," Mrs. Kennedy compliments.

"Thank you," my mother answers shyly. She's acting really weird. I notice how hard she's trying to create a good first impression. Mom NEVER USES her fine china. It is a dead giveaway.

Ryan and his mother sit on one side of the table and I sit facing him. My parents sit at opposite ends.

We quietly and politely pass the dishes around until everyone has a little bit of everything on their plates before discussions begin.

Mrs. Kennedy addresses me first, "So dear, I hear from your mother that you had a bad fall a few weeks back?"

"Yes, I did, but I'm better now."

"I'm so glad to hear it."

"Are you dating anyone in school, dear?"

"No, she's not," dad answers firmly. I know why it matters to my parents but why does it matter to Ryan's mom? Why don't my parents ask if HE was dating anyone or is there an unspoken double standard I'm unaware of?

Ryan doesn't contribute to the conversation. He is apparently the

strong, silent, observant type. The rest of the conversation is between our parents. I become an observant type too.

I learned that Ryan's mother divorced her husband when he continued to complain about her obsession with Ryan's skating. Ryan's been coached by Mr. Hicks for seven years, and I'm his second partner. The first one quit because she wasn't able to handle the pressure of the competitions. She would fall apart during their performances causing Ryan to lose medal contention.

By the time we get to dessert (mom gives me the evil eye when I reach for one) and aperitif's it's nearing eleven. I manage to be excused shortly thereafter practically running up the stairs to start texting Tara.

When I look at my phone for the first time in four hours there are messages from Adam waiting for me, but I'm too excited to talk to Tara to bother checking them. They can wait until later when I can savour every word he wrote me:

**Dalia:** I met him!

**Tara:** What did U wear?

**Dalia:** My holy jeans & camisole with the black jacket my mother gave me.

**Tara:** Face and makeup?

**Dalia:** Picture, perfect!

**Tara:** What did he look like?

**Dalia:** A greek god's body with intense dark chocolate brown eyes & wispy brown hair. He's the > beautiful guy I've ever seen.

**Tara:** Fuck off!

**Dalia:** Serious!

**Tara:** Do U like him?

**Dalia:** No, I hate him.

**Tara:** Why?

**Dalia:** His club, his coach, double standard.

**Tara:** ?

**Dalia:** The first question from Mrs. Kennedy after asking about my injury was, 'R U dating any1 Honey?'

**Tara:** Seriously?

**Dalia:** Yes, & do U think my parent's asked HIM if HE is dating any1? N. O.

**Tara:** What did U say?

**Dalia:** What do U think I said? No, I don't have time to date!

**Tara:** So R U going 2 break up with Adam?

**Dalia:** Why the hell should I? As far as I know, Ryan might B dating someone & nobody seems to mind. Why shouldn't I be afforded the same courtesy?

**Tara:** Amen 2 that sister, if U'r parent's ask what we did tomorrow, what should I say?

**Dalia:** Just say we hung out @ Sierra's.

**Tara:** What R U & Adam doing?

**Dalia:** I don't know, he wants 2 surprise me.

**Tara:** Well, Don't get caught!

## Chapter 11

### First Day of Training

I wake up before my alarm goes off. The clock displays 5:58 a.m. My first day of training on foreign ice, with a foreign coach, after a major injury. I can't begin to describe the anxiety festering in me, I'm definitely on edge (Pardon the pun!).

The house is quiet and the morning light is peaking through my blinds. I stretch out in my cozy warm bed before getting up to shower. I chose to use tepid water rather than hot, fearing my muscles will relax too much in the hot water. I know I'm going to be spaghetti legs today, and I refuse to worsen my condition.

Wrapped in a towel, I pad over to my closet to pick a skating dress I'm going to wear to the arena. I pick my favourite one made with black lace on the upper body, dropping down really low in the back. The skirt is also slightly longer in the back, it's elegant. I cover the majority of the dress with my good luck hoody that I bring to all my competitions and practices. It's my security blanket.

The keys to mom's car are left for me on the front table, which tells me she isn't coming to our first practice. Nice, I think sarcastically, this again. Just as I open the front door mom calls out, "Are you ready Honey? I'll take you."

Well, wonders never cease, mom comes clipping down the stairs fully clothed with the exception of her Christian Grey slippers. The paraphernalia they sold after the release of the first movie was too much! "I've already got the keys," I tell her.

She is following me out the door, "Mom, Your slippers!" I remind her.

She looks down at her feet, "Oops! Thanks." She walks over to the

closet and changes into her shoes shrugging on her fall jacket before continuing out of the house.

Mom takes the keys from me and we get into my dad's beat up, shit box, really embarrassing to be seen in, backfiring, fifteen year old Honda Civic. Great first impression to anyone who might be in the parking lot of the new arena we were going to, "Can't we take the other car?"

"Sorry Honey, this one has gas in it. We don't have time to take the other car." I get into the passenger side while mom attempts to turn over the ignition.

Row row row row, nothing.

Row row row row, nothing.

Row - Hum.

Mom grins, "See, Honda's never let you down! Domestic cars spend more time getting fixed than they drive on the road. Remember that when you go buy your first car Honey!"

My first car, is going to be a Mustang. I fell in love with them ever since I rode in Adam's. I don't bother informing her though. Once she starts on one of her tangents, there's no stopping her. We drive to the new arena in silence. It's a good twenty-five minutes from my house. When we arrive she says, "I'll drop you off here."

"You're not coming in?" I ask.

"No, Ryan's mother offered for Ryan to drive you to school after all the practices. She switching him to your school when I informed her of its high ratings against all the other schools in Toronto. We figure if the two of you are doing the same curriculum than you can study together at competitions. It's all set up. See, you're not the only one who's going to have to learn to adapt to something new, he is too. See you later dear!"

I close the door and she's already pulling away from the curb. With my bag flung over my shoulder, I walk into the unfamiliar doors of the arena with trepidation.

Once I pass the doors there is a vacant desk to my left and a well lit lounge to my right overlooking a darkened empty curling rink. The lounge extends to the next area I approach which is the rink I will be skating in. The couches are occupied teaching while the parents sit and

watch their children skate. I know I will rarely see my mine there. The Zamboni is already making its way on the ice, so I know I have to hurry if I don't want to be late.

My eyes finally land on a sign pointing out the direction of the change rooms. I briskly walk down the stairs to find the senior woman's locker room and quickly put on my skates. By the time I get back into the lounge the skaters are taking to the ice.

I step into the arena and as quickly as the cold air hits my face, so does the realization that I miss being here, on the ice. My eyes well up with tears of relief that this part of my life isn't over, my love for figure skating isn't lost. The chilled air from the rink fills my lungs and I immediately feel exhilarated.

Ryan stops in front of me with one foot spraying snow towards the low boards just as I'm about to step onto the ice. Like any girl my age, I am undeniably drawn to his rugged good looks. He has presence on and off the ice. His six o'clock shadow is worn 24/7. He is wearing a black hoodie and matching workout pants normally seen in a gym. When his dark eyes lock onto the tear making its way down my cheek, his eyes darken transforming his expression into one of concern, "Are you okay?"

Embarrassed he noticed, I quickly swipe it away, "Ya, Just happy to be back on the ice. It's been six weeks, but it feels like a lifetime."

"Don't worry," he reassures. "We both know its your first day back after an injury. Coach Hicks won't expect you to do triple axels until tomorrow, maybe the day after. He's going to take it easy with you," he jokes. "Seriously though, you should start warming up, he'll be out on the ice in a few minutes."

Ryan skates off to warm up. I watch him as a few of his long strides cover the entire ice. His strength and speed are beautiful to watch. I fear I wouldn't be able to keep up with him. Cautiously, I place my foot on the ice, with the other one following. I slip them back and forth a few times limbering up my ankles.

I start stroking around the ice, first slowly and then picking up speed. Everyone on the ice is staring at me with curiosity because I'm new to them, Ryan's new partner, someone they will be skating with on a regular basis. I know the same thing would have happened if he came to

my arena.

My established comfort is slowly returning. After four forwards and two backwards laps around the ice, Ryan motions for me to join him at the edge, "Mr. Hicks, this is Dalia, Dalia, Coach Hicks." I immediately recognize him from competitions after seeing his face. He is about half a foot shorter than Ryan, and unmistakably gay, no gaydar needed. His students LOVE everything about him with the exception of his temper for which his reputation precedes him.

"Pleased to meet you," I greet.

"The pleasure's mine," he smiles. "Now I want to see how you look together on the ice. Ryan stroke around with her, remember in competition you are never to be further than six feet apart from each other, so get comfortable being in each others space. Ryan make sure you take on her pace not YOURS. When you're out in the real world and I mean especially competitions, I want you guys holding hands and looking like a couple. Its imperative you sell yourselves if you want to be successful. You want all of Canada behind you and people like couples with chemistry! Got it?"

"Sure Mr. Hicks," he pulls off his hoodie leaving only a tight Wife-beater T-shirt covering his chest.

I gasped with shock seeing him standing practically naked before me, "That's what you skate in?" I blurt.

He looks at me a surprised by my moxie, "Yes, I get hot," he explains. Oh.My.God. He doesn't have to tell me that. I think I'm beginning to get hot myself. I feel flush warm cheeks.

Coach Hicks jokes, "Can you blame me for being Gay Honey?" I have to chuckle at his comment. Now it's Ryan's turn to get embarrassed, he turns away. The rest of the session is exactly the way Ryan says it will be, easy. When we are getting off the ice and covering our blades with our guards Ryan asks me, "I take it your mother told you I'm registering at your school?"

"Yes, she did."

"So then you know I'll be driving you."

"I do, if it works for you?"

"It works for me, just fine," he answers.



When I get to the locker room and start unlacing my skates, I reflect on the practice session. I can tell that Coach Hicks and Ryan are being careful at working me in slowly, not wanting to cause any re-injury, or any deconditioning, which is very comforting.

The Zamboni takes to the ice forty-five minutes before we are expected to be in homeroom. The issue is it takes approximately twenty-five minutes just to get to school from here, so everything is rushed. We meet at the parking lot almost simultaneously.

He opens the main doors and leads me to his black Mercedes sports car, "Wow," I compliment.

"Mom won it in the divorce settlement," he explains. "It doesn't replace my dad, or make him leaving okay."

"I'm sure it doesn't," I empathize. "He cheated on her?"

"More than once, he blames mom for neglecting him because of my skating. Nothing is ever HIS fault."

I buckle myself in and remain quiet most of the way to school.

We arrive to find the parking lot free from people because we are running so late, "Do you have your schedule yet?"

"No."

"I'll take you to the office, but I'll have to leave your there or I'll be late for homeroom."

"Sure, thanks."

Instinctively, I grabbed his hand like we did on the ice, and I walk him up the cement stairs into the school, showing him where the office is and then I ditch him to make my way to homeroom.

## Chapter 12

### Angry Adam

The anthem is just beginning to play as I rush to my desk. Adam isn't there which is weird because he's always there. I pull my phone out to

text him and see if he's okay when I spot the texts from him I'd forgotten to open. I click on his name and begin reading:

6:45 p.m.

**Adam:** U look beautiful, why R U so dressed up 4 a person U never met B4?

6:46 p.m.

**Adam:** Call me after he's left.

11:18 p.m.

**Adam:** Did he leave?

12:01 a.m.

**Adam:** Why Rn't U calling me?

9:00 a.m.

**Adam:** Meet me in my car after homeroom.

I can't breath. He must have seen me get out of Ryan's car. My heart is racing in panic mode.

Ryan and I were holding hands going up the stairs.

Coach Hicks told us to!

We did it here!

Why did we do it here?

I reached for HIS hand.

I tell myself to take a deep breath. Mrs. Uptite is going through attendance like she has time to spare.

I don't think homeroom has ever taken this long before.

It's taking a long time.

Too long.

The bell rings.

Homeroom suddenly feels like it ended too quickly. I collect all my stuff and scramble to the parking lot not caring if I'm going to be late or even attend the next class.

My eyes scan the parking lot.

I notice Adam's Mustang parked immediately NEXT to Ryan's black Mercedes.

Breath Dalia breath! How do I let myself get into these messes?

Adam stands outside of his car staring at me. He's dressed in his usual hat with a hoodie covering most of his face and jeans.

He's smoking., he's smoking a cigarette. He never smokes. I don't ever think I've seen him smoke before, Is this what he does when he's angry? Petrified to approach him but knowing I have to, my legs are getting heavier with each step.

He is jumping to the wrong conclusions. Maybe I'm jumping to the wrong conclusions. I don't know for sure that he sees me. I have no idea why he wants to talk. I didn't think I was, jumping to conclusions that is. He most definitely sees me.

## Chapter 13

### The Car

He takes a long drag of the cigarette before flicking it and unlocking the car doors. I know I only have seconds to collect myself and get it together. He doesn't look at me or talk, just silence.

I wait for him to say something but he doesn't. I start staring at the clock on his dash. I will wait five minutes for him to break the ice (pardon the pun) and if he doesn't than I will. My face is getting hot with upset.

I know he is waiting for me to start, "Hi." Oh.My.God. How lame! It couldn't have been more lame! I look passed him at the Mercedes praying we will quickly finish whatever we are doing here, in case Ryan comes out. I lied to Ryan about having a boyfriend! It isn't like I had a choice. I was put on the spot with Mrs. Kennedy AND my parents being there!

"Hi?" he mimics in an exaggerated tone.

"I take it buddy who drove you here this morning is your new 'partner?'"

"Uhm, Yep, that is Ryan. He's going to be going to our school," I giggle nervously.

"You can't be serious?"

"Dead serious, he's registering today."

"Do you want to tell me why you were holding hands with your sports partner off the ice? Actually, why were you even in his fucking car?"

I sense major jealousy.

"Mom, made all the arrangements. He's going to be taking me to school from the arena everyday. If you want to date me, you're going to

have to get used to the fact, that I'll be spending a lot of time with him."

"I'll pick you up from the arena."

"You can't! What will I tell my mother?"

"You held his fucking hand," he seethes.

"Yes, I did. Coach Hicks wants us to look like we're a couple when we're in the public eye. He says that couples with chemistry tend to get higher marks. If you're worried about him Adam, rest assured, I don't even LIKE him."

"If that's the case then why did you dress up for him? Do you want him to like you?"

"Of course not, for all I know he might be gay! We always dress up for Holidays at our house," I explain to him.

"So is he gay?"

"I hazard to guess, but unlikely." *If he is, it would be a severe blow to womankind.*

"Why didn't you call me after your company left?"

"I forgot. I was texting back and forth to Tara, and then after that I fell asleep. I didn't even have my phone on."

"Does he know you have a boyfriend?"

Catecholamines are now racing through my bloodstream. I begin hitting fight or flight mode. Either way I answer this question, I'm screwed. I chose to placate Adam until I have enough time to come clean with Ryan, "Yes, of course he knows."

"He better know, because if you're not telling me truth, I'll make sure he finds out," Adam threatens. "I'll walk you to class."

## Chapter 14

### Later That Day

We missed second period altogether, so he takes me to my third period class a bit early. We wait silently together in the hallway and then he pushes me up against a locker and we kiss passionately, his tongue mimicking penetration as it slides in and out of my mouth. He presses me harder against the locker showing me just how badly he wants me before whispering into my ear, "I need time to rethink our relationship." He pushes off the locker away from me, leaving me wanting more and shocking me simultaneously. I'm a hot mess.

"Are you breaking up with me?" I ask dumbfounded.

"I don't know if I can share you the way you're expecting me to," he confesses. The bell rings and the halls fill, Adam turns on his heel and walks away, not looking back. The steady stream of students make him drift away from me quickly. I abandon the classroom trying to catch him locking my eyes onto him as the distance between us grows. I start knocking into other students as I try frantically to catch up with him, they give me dirty looks and slow me down but I'm determined. I see him leave the front doors of the school and by the time I get out there he's pulling onto the street.

Tears of frustration surge down my cheeks. I whip my phone out and text Tara:

**Dalia:** 911 Adam :-(

**Tara:** Where R U?

**Dalia:** Bathroom close 2 the office

**Tara:** Ok 1 min

I go back into the school and wait for Tara in the washrooms near the front entrance. I splash cold water on my face when she comes in. I'm hoping I can hide the fact that I just finished crying but she notices immediately, "What happened? Are you okay?"

"Adam might be breaking up with me," I blurt.

Her brows furrow, "You've only been together three minutes! What the heck happened?"

"God, where do I start? Okay, just before Ryan and his mother came over for Thanksgiving I took a selfie and sent it to Ryan. Then I turned my phone off because we had company."

"Ya, so? How did you look?"

"Good, that's why I sent it. Do you want to hear the story or not?" I question her irritated by her interruption.

Tara ignores my irritation, "He got mad at you for sending a selfie?"

"No, he's peeved because he thought I dressed up for Ryan, a guy I didn't know. He thought I was trying to attract him, and when he tried contacting me he couldn't."

Tara smiles, "Where you trying to attract Ryan?"

"No! Of course not."

"So tell him. He won't break up with you over a lousy selfie," Tara argues.

"There's more than that," I continue. "When I went skating with Ryan, our new coach Mr. Hicks said that he wants us to get 'comfortable' with each other and whenever we are together in the public eye, we're supposed to look like a couple. It's all about creating 'chemistry.'"

Seeing where this is leading Tara assumes, "He saw the two of you together!"

"Worse than that," I elaborate. "He saw us getting out of Ryan's Mercedes together, holding hands. I initiated it!"

"You didn't! What's he doing with a Mercedes? Why's he going to our school? I can bump into this gorgeous guy anytime?" Tara asks shocked.

"Anytime, I was only doing what Coach Hicks instructed us to do. His father gave him the Mercedes in the divorce settlement. He's coming

to our school, so we have the same curriculum and we can study together when we're at competitions. Mom has it all planned out and she never told me. I just found out. I was showing him how to get to the office and then I ditched him to go to homeroom."

"Are you sure you only did it because Coach Hicks told you to!" She mocks. "I totally can't wait to meet this Ryan guy!"

"Yes, I already told you I hate the guy. He just doesn't know it yet."

"So then what happened?"

"So when I arrived in homeroom and didn't find Adam there I was going to call him. That's when I found all these texts from him that I forgot to read. He told me to meet him at his car. He was furious. Read them." I hand Tara my phone.

"Okay, so you go into Adam's car and then what happened? He must have been super jealous seeing you with gorgeous Ryan in a Mercedes no less,"

"I tried explaining to him what Coach Hicks expects us to act like a couple, and that I'm not into Ryan even a little bit."

"Did he believe you?"

"Nope."

"Girl, Even I don't believe you!" Tara teases.

"Seriously, What do I do now?"

"It's obvious," Tara states simply, "serious ASS KISSING! You have to make him feel like he's everything to you, or just hope that he comes around."

"I guess I'll be puckering up. Can you bring me home tonight?"

"Sure, I have to go back to class now. You should too, tell the teacher you were sick or something."

"I don't feel like it."

"You better go."

"All right. See you out in the parking lot after school."

"Sure," Tara pushes the door open and I follow her out. I go back to class, but I don't absorb anything that day, I'm too caught up in what happened with Adam.

"Dinner is ready!" Mom calls up the stairs. I take my earbuds out and



place them on the night stand next to my bed. I check my phone again hoping I will have a text message or email from Adam but it is junk emails and no texts except for one from Sierra asking how my day went.

I don't want to answer the text, because I will have to get into the entire story all over again, and I'm just not up for it.

I walk downstairs and take my spot at the dining room table. Mom and dad go all out making taco's with extra hot salsa sauce and sour cream, which they know are my favourite. I load four taco's up and start chowing down on them when I feel expectant stares penetrate me from both sides.

Mom's excitement to hear the days events starts bubbling over, "Well, how did it go?"

"How did what go?" I ask knowing perfectly well what she was really asking. "It felt good to be back on the ice mom."

She smiles at dad with her, 'see I told you so' look. "What did you guys practice today?"

"Coach Hicks wanted us to get comfortable with each other, so we did a lot of stroking and footwork."

"Do you like him?" Dad asks.

"Who? Coach Hicks or Ryan."

"Both."

"Ya, they're okay. Coach Hicks wants us to act like a couple when we're in public, 'build up chemistry.' He says couples do better when the public senses it."

"Parter or no partner, you know our rule Honey, no boyfriends." Dad interjects.

Mom turns to dad, "If coach Hicks wants them to act like a couple then that's what they're going to have to do. He knows how to foster Olympic champions. Have faith." She focusses her attention back onto me, "How did Ryan look on the ice?"

If Tara had been the one to ask me I would have said: '*fuckable*.' Seeing it's my parents, I answer "With or without clothes on?"

Dad's eyebrows arch, "Exactly what do you mean?" I notice my dad's knuckles turning white while he's gripping his fork. He waits for me to answer.

“He skates in a wife beater T-shirt and exercise pants.”

“I’m going to have to come to your practice,” mom giggles.

“I hardly think his attire is appropriate for a crowded ice arena,” I comment.

Later that night, I lay in bed disheartened that Adam hasn’t called. The lights in my room are now off and I’m staring dispiritedly in the direction of where my phone is charging, hoping it will flash. My parents have already retired to their room and the house is darkened and still.

The phone flashes and vibrates against the dresser. I scramble quietly from under my comforter to check it. It was a text from Adam.

**Adam:** I’m on U’r Street waiting.

**Dalia:** Ok

I cover my gown with my robe and slip into my slippers before silently tiptoeing down the stairs. The hardest thing to do is soundlessly open the front door. Patiently I work the lock knowing even the slightest noise will give me away. Once I’m through the door, I close it just as carefully. The cold air goes right through me as I shiver turning to look for Adams car.

I dash to it while he stretches to open the door for me. I slip in and his dark eyes lock with mine. He doesn’t say anything to me at first. His expression is intense. He rests the warm palms of his hands against my cheeks and he pulls me in for a kiss. His lips do light brush strokes against mine until he fists his hands into my hair and pulls me in for a kiss that claims me, “You are mine,” he says with conviction, “only mine.”

He continues kissing me sliding his one hand to the nape of my neck while the other hand slowly glides down my gown until it rests on me. I’d never been touched there before, but now Adam’s hand is there touching me, and I’m receptive to it feeling hot all over. He starts exploring me and when he’s ready, he penetrates me with his finger. I moan into his mouth while his kisses are building passion. Their

Meadow Murphy

momentum makes my body quiver. I'm truly his.

## Chapter 15

### The Next Day

Shortly before I leave for practice I receive a text from **Ryan**:

**Ryan:** Do U want me 2 drive U in?

**Dalia:** Sure :-)

**Ryan:** B there in 10

I rush around my room collecting everything I need for the day. Mom pokes her head out of their bedroom, "I'll be ready in a minute."

"No need," I stop her in her tracks, "Ryan's taking me."

"That's wonderful Honey, I hope you have a good session."

"Thanks," I say dismissively, "bye!" By the time I'm downstairs, Ryan's Mercedes is pulling into the driveway.

I open the car door letting myself in, "Good morning," I greet.

"Good morning," he greets me. He has this raw sexual appeal to me that I try to ignore, but every time I see him, he just blows me away.

He places his arm on the back of my chair while he turns his body to reverse out of my driveway. I don't move.

He shifts into drive and returns his arm to the back of my headrest like we are a couple or something, honestly the audacity of him!

I freeze on the spot making sure I don't lean back into his hand, waiting for him to move it. He doesn't. This creepy electric feeling fills the car. His hand intentionally touches my hair. "What are you doing?" I ask.

"Driving," he answers sarcastically.

"You're touching my hair."

"It soft," he compliments.

“We’re not on the ice, or in the public eye. You can’t just cop a feel,” I admonish.

“Touching your hair isn’t ‘copping a feel’” he says sarcastically. “If I wanted to cop a feel I will do more than just grab a lock of your hair.”

“What will you do?” I ask curiously.

“Grab you and force you to kiss. The coach told us to get familiar with each other.”

“He didn’t mean that way,” I argue.

An unsettling warm feeling starts coursing through my body. Not only does he not release the lock of my hair he’s holding between his fingers, he starts playing with it, twisting it around his fingertips. I pull away from him making the strand slip from his grasp and he rebelliously grabs more. His affect on me isn’t anything I can control, I find myself getting all hot and bothered by him.

I stare straight out the windshield ignoring him, but I’m not really, because I love the feel of having my hair played with and I don’t know it until now. I close my eyes for a second to savour it not knowing he is looking at me, but he is, and he can tell I love it. We drive the rest of the way in silence. He never releases my hair, its like he is proving a point.

Ryan parks the car and carries both our bags into the rink only stopping when we arrive at the senior ladies change room. He places my bag over my shoulder, and then opens the door for me saying, “I’ll see you on the ice.” He turns without looking back.

I’m out on the ice first stroking around when I feel his presence beside me. He wraps his arm around my waist, when we heard Coach Hicks call out, “That’s it you two, start warming up!”

I can smell Ryan’s cologne mixing in with the scent of cold familiar ice rink, together they are intoxicating. I convince myself it’s just the rink scent that I like.

When we finish warming up, Coach Hicks waves us back, “I want you guys to do side by side double axels, and I don’t want you any farther from each other than six feet.” It is the same jump I injured myself on, only with one less revolution in the air.

I look warily into Ryan’s eyes as we skate away from Coach Hicks. He mouths to me, “We’ve got this,” as he takes my hand and we pick up

speed, he releases me a second before we step into our side-by-side double axels, throwing my free leg up into the air and beginning rotations tightly, it feels right. We land perfectly side by side. I release a deep sigh of relief as I grin ear to ear with excitement. I did it!

We skate back to Coach Hicks, Ryan pulling off his hoodie as we arrive, "Good job, but next time I want you guys closer to each other. Try it again." We repeat the jump but this time Ryan is much more naked and we are a foot closer. "Much Better! I want you guys to practice that at this afternoons skating session, when I'm not here."

"Sure," Ryan reassures.

Coach Hicks takes a drink of his coffee while we wait for him to tell us what he wants us to do next. "Ryan, I want you to bring her into a right inside edge death spiral."

I have seen them done before in competitions so I sort of knew the positions my body is expected to contort into. Ryan nods as he takes my hand preparing for the spin. He assumes a pivot position and holds me with his right hand spinning me in large circles as I start lowering my body parallel with the ice. "Lower, lower, lower," Coach Hicks instructs.

We practice that five or six more times, the entire time our coach is yelling at me to go lower. Ryan is encouraging me to follow Coach Hicks instructions, but he isn't the one being put into the compromising position. If I fall or he lets go of me, it will be my head on that hard ice surface not his.

"You're going to have to work on that, you're still too high," Coach Hicks says. The sound of the Zamboni's motor turns over and the music stops. Our session is done. "Good job today," Coach Hicks congratulates us. We rush to our dressing rooms to shower and change for school.

When we got back into the car, Ryan's arm goes back on my headrest as he backs out of his spot, but this time he doesn't leave it there. I turn his stereo on and we listen to the traffic and weather on 680 News before Ryan turns it off, "I need you to know something," Ryan says.

"What's that?" I ask.

His expression grows serious and his dark chocolate eyes lock on mine, he grabs my hand firmly, "I won't let anything happen to you when we're together, you can trust me completely. You HAVE to trust

me, with lifts, throws, everything.”

“It’s not something that comes easily for me. I’ve never had to trust anyone so blindly before, but I’ll try.” I promise.

Ryan pulls into the school parking lot and parks right next to Adam’s Mustang, AGAIN. This time I notice him in the car, waiting. My heart begins crashing into my ribcage at phenomenal rates of speed. The confrontation is inevitably going to happen since I haven’t built up the nerve or found the time to come clean with Ryan, but I don’t want it to happen now. I have to prevent this!

We all get out of the car at the same time. Ryan comes to my side and places his arm over my shoulders. His muscle is pushing into the back of my neck, and this time it feels uncomfortable but I don’t move. Deadlocked, Adam stares us down expecting for something to happen. I assumed he is waiting for Ryan to remove his arm, but he doesn’t.

Adam looks at me, “You told me HE knows.”

“You are?” Ryan asks Adam.

“Dalia’s BOYFRIEND!” Adam informs him.

Ryan turns to me, “You told us you don’t have one. You gave me your word before we agreed to this.”

“Who’s us?” presses Adam.

“None of your fucking business,” Ryan snaps.

“I didn’t get a chance to tell you,” I try explaining to Ryan. “Why do you care if I have a boyfriend anyway? It doesn’t bother me if you have a girlfriend,” I argue.

“It bothers me because I’ve trained my entire life for a chance to compete at this level, and I’m not wasting my time with someone who doesn’t want it as badly as I do. There’s no room for divided loyalties in this partnership. It has to mean everything to you the way it does to me or it’s not going to work. So it’s either him or me.”

“That’s not fair,” I balk.

Ryan removes his arm from my shoulders and walks away not looking back.

“I warned you,” Adam reminds me. He places his arm around my shoulders and escorts me to homeroom.

## Chapter 16

### Contemplating

I don't go in to homeroom, I can't. I have to find Ryan and talk to him. He is being irrational. I stop dead in my tracks in the doorframe of our classroom. Adam complains, "What are you doing? Why aren't you coming in?"

I look into his eyes, "I have to find Ryan and explain to him how irrational he's being, our relationship depends on it." I leave Adam to run from classroom to classroom while the static with the national anthem plays on the overhead speakers until I find him.

I wait for the bell to ring and I grab his arm as he's leaving the classroom. "Ryan!" I say holding onto his arm as firmly as I can. He doesn't look surprised or happy to see me, "We need to talk."

"I'm going to class," he grunts.

"Skip it just this once, we need to discuss my situation."

He grabs me by both arms below the shoulders and practically shakes me, "It's not just your situation anymore, whatever you do affects US. It's our situation. I don't SKIP classes or want to hear why you should date this guy, that's your decision. Date him, do what you want, but don't bring me down with you. I want grades I can be proud of and a chance to stand on an Olympic podium for my country, Canada. You might want to ask yourself what you want, what's important to you. Now, If you'll excuse me, I've got a class to go to."

Tara rounds the corner on the way to her next class when she nearly bumps into us. She sees Ryan, his hands grasping my arms and hesitates not knowing if I need her help or not, "Unhand my friend," she orders half joking but mostly serious.

He releases my arms muttering, "Gladly," before walking away.



“Ryan?” she gushes.

“The one and only,” I answer unhappily.

“What an Orgasm!”

“You don’t stand a chance,” I tell her. “He doesn’t waste his time with girls.”

“Fuck, don’t tell me HE’S GAY? What a travesty!”

“No, he’s focussed on his goals; which are good grades and winning an Olympic medal for Canada.”

“So what’s wrong with that?”

“He doesn’t want me dating Adam.”

“Hm yum, he’s an Alpha Orgasm, they’re the best kind,” she says giddily. “Maybe he likes you! Weren’t you going to break up with Adam when you went back to skating anyway?”

“No! I’m falling for him.”

“Get the fuck out! What the fuck do you see in him? Ryan’s WAY better looking. Did Adam pop your cherry or something? There’s something you’re not telling me,” She eyes me suspiciously.

“No, there isn’t! Seriously what should I do?”

“Well, what was Ryan saying to you when I interrupted?”

“He gave me an ultimatum. I have to choose between skating with him or being Adam’s girlfriend. He doesn’t think I can have ‘divided loyalties,’. He says my decisions don’t just affect me anymore, they impact both of us.”

“It’s a no brainer, Dalia. Ryan isn’t giving you a choice. You need to break up with Adam. You have too much riding on this partnership. He fucked up his hair anyway. You’ll get over him,” she minimizes. Deep down I know she’s right. I don’t have a choice this is a no brainer.

I pull my phone out and text Adam. Tara reads what I’m typing:

**Dalia:** Can we talk?

**Adam:** When?

**Dalia:** After school.

**Adam:** Sure, Meet me @ my car. I’ll drive U home.

“Are you breaking up with him tonight?” she asks.

“Why prolong the inevitable?” I answer.

“You’re making the right choice,” she reassures. “You are such a talented skater, it would be horrible if all those years are wasted.”

“Tara, I swear, I hate Ryan more now, than I ever did. It will be a miracle if I don’t kill him before we ever make it to the Podium.”

“You don’t hate him, you’re just upset. You better get your ass to class. You have way too much drama floating around you lately!”

“Whatever!”

After my last class, I meet Adam at his Mustang. He’s there, already waiting for me. The Mercedes is gone. I open the passenger door and get in. Adam puts the key in the ignition and starts driving. He doesn’t stop until he pulls into a park by the lake.

Adam turns his car off and lights a cigarette. He opens the window and takes a long drag before exhaling the smoke. Cold air begins filling the car mixing with the fumes of his cigarette. It’s starting to snow big snowflakes. I watch them for a minute before returning my attention back to him. “This is when you break up with me,” he says bitterly. My silence is his answer. He takes a few more puffs before safely putting it out.

“I’m sorry Adam.” I pull him over to me by the scruff of his neck and I press my lips hard against his. My kisses are hungry, hungry for him. “This is so hard for me,” I confess between them.

He pulls away for a second and looks into my eyes, “Then don’t do it,” he pleads. His eyes are searching mine and showing a hint of fresh tears. It breaks my heart seeing him weak.

“I have to,” I whisper.

Adam is my rock during one of the lowest times in my life. My relationship with him made the idea of me never skating again a little more bearable, and this is my way of repaying him. He deserves more from me.

“Let’s take this into the backseat,” I suggest.

He doesn’t answer me, instead he starts up his car and begins driving in the direction of his house. There are no cars in the driveway so we

park and head up to his room, "My parents won't be home until late," he informs me.

We close the door to his room and he backs me against his bed until I can feel it behind my legs. "I never wanted our first time together to be our last," he says miserably. Tears start running down my cheeks as he makes love to me, for the first and last time.

## Chapter 17

### Misery Loves Company

I kept my part of our pinkie promise:

**Dalia:** Tara R U there?

**Tara:** Of course, my phone is surgically attached 2 my ear! Why R'nt U skating?

**Dalia:** I haven't seen Ryan since he gave me the ultimatum.

**Tara:** Did U break up with Adam?

**Dalia:** Yes.

**Tara:** How did it go?

**Dalia:** Devastated.

**Tara:** Him or U?

**Dalia:** Both, I need 2 talk.

**Tara:** Sure but Sierra's over, she's having troubles with Jeremy.

**Dalia:** I'll come over.

I leave my house hastily calling out that I'm going over to Tara's not even explaining why I'm not training tonight. Dad is the only one home and with a little luck he won't remember my schedule anyway. I don't know where mom is, I assume shopping. I close the door behind me to find Tara's car parked in the driveway, and my mother pulls in.

Mom gets out of her car and holds her hand up, "Not so fast Dalia! Would you like to explain to me this little secret you've been keeping from me about a boyfriend at school? Mrs. Kennedy is in a right state."

"I can't, not right now mom, Tara's waiting for me. We have a project coming due tomorrow." I get into the passenger side backseat slamming the door behind me and quickly ordered Tara to, "Drive!"

She starts the car and backs out immediately, "I take it your mom knows something?"

"She found out I have a boyfriend."

Tara did an exaggerated whistle, "Oh boy, the shit's going to hit the fan when you get home."

"My whole fucking world is caving in," I complain melodramatically.

"Mine too," Sierra chimes in.

"What's going on with you and Jeremy?" I ask.

"What's not going on? Lets just say he wants to try everything and everyone!"

"She caught him kissing Harper at the mall," Tara elaborates anticlimactically.

"Tara's kept me up to speed about Ryan and Adam. Wow, You've gone from nothing to getting it on!"

"You don't know the half of it Sierra," I comment. "Tara, I change my mind, I don't want to go back to your place, I need comfort food."

"Agreed!" say Sierra.

"Memphis Barbecue in Winona?"

"Perfect!"

We chose a small table for four instead of their long benches and sit close to the kitchen. We order the most amazing shakes with fries smothered in: sour cream, green onions and cheddar cheese.

"It's been so long since we've talked Sierra, I'm sorry." I was forever apologizing to my BFF's for the lack of attention I pay them.

"Oh you don't have worry about it," she reassures. "I know your back skating now."

"Thanks, When did you catch Harper kissing Jeremy?"

"Like an hour ago, I can't believe it, I'm still in shock."

"What did you do?"

"The only thing I could think of doing at the time!"

She has me on the edge of my seat, "Which is?"

"I filmed them and posted it on Facebook."

"Get out! So then what happened?"

"All my friends begin clicking 'Like,'" she whales.

Tara shakes her head disapprovingly, "You had to have known that was going to happen! You made Jeremy look like a stud on social media."

"And Harper a slut," I add. "He's not worth it Sierra, you're too good for him," I say honestly.

Our fries and shakes come to the table.

"What happened with you?" Sierra asks.

"Adam knew about my pair skating but I guess he didn't think he had anything to worry about until he saw Ryan."

Sierra looked at Tara to elaborate, "He's so unimaginably gorgeous, I've nicknamed him Orgasm!"

"Oh my," Sierra responds.

Tara continues, "He's the new guy in school. You must have noticed him by now!"

"The guy with the wispy longish hair and dark dreamy eyes? That's YOUR parter? You just want to touch his body it's so perfect? Oh Fuck! Some people have all the luck!"

Tara shakes her head again, "She hasn't been that lucky, first of all he doesn't do relationships because he's too busy with school and skating and second of all when he found out about Adam he forced her to break up with him."

"He can't do that! Nobody can force you to break up with someone." Sierra turns to me.

"He can and he did," I tell her. "He doesn't want my personal life affecting our skating career. He threatened to stop skating with me if I continue seeing him." I look over at Tara, "He must have told his mother who spoke to mine because when you guys picked me up, she was furious and said she knew about me having a boyfriend. I definitely didn't tell her."

Now Tara and Sierra are gripped to the edges of their seats, "So then what happened."

"I broke up with Adam in his car and then we went back to his place."

Tara nudged me, "And?"

"I gave him my virginity on a silver platter." Tara chokes on her milkshake and Sierra gasps.

“Oh.My.God! You’re first devirgination was break-up sex?” Tara exclaims before clarifying, “So you are you broken up?”

“Yes, but ever since my first kiss, I had to have him.”

“That’s so sad,” Sierra says.

“That’s horrible,” Tara agrees. My eyes fill with tears but I refuse to let one drop.

“Did you use protection?” Sierra asks.

“No, I wasn’t planning on doing it with him,” I explain.

“Does Ryan know what you did?” Tara asks.

“Not yet, I hate him so much for what he forced me to do, I don’t even want to look at him right now.” That is when the floodgates holding back my tears finally burst open. I completely lose my appetite.

“You should tell Ryan,” Sierra advises. “He needs to know exactly how big a sacrifice you made for him and your partnership.”

## Chapter 18

### Telling Ryan

I try to sneak in but mom and dad are both waiting for me. Dad is playing solitaire on his iPad and mom is pacing the floors, "Would you like to explain now?" She snaps at me.

"Explain what?" I ask. I thought I saw smoke coming from mom's ears at that point.

"Let's start with this boy I heard about that you are dating at school."

"You mean Adam, he is the nice guy that took me to the hospital when I hurt myself."

"We told you that you're not allowed to get involved with boys. When did you start dating him?"

"He's not a boy he's a guy and after I got injured."

"Why didn't you tell us about this 'GUY'?" Mom mocks.

"I did, I told you he took me to the hospital. You even saw him at your car. You commented on him being cute."

"You know what I mean," mom says irritated.

"Because I knew you would react this way."

"I'm acting like this because you aren't straight with us. You lied to everyone!"

"It was just a little bit of fun while I was laid up, I didn't expect things to get serious between me and Adam."

"They're serious?" Dad starts suddenly getting interested.

"Not anymore, Ryan gave me an ultimatum and forced me to break up with Adam today."

"Well, at least he has his head on straight," mom comments.

"I just want to go to bed now, can I go?"

"Sure Honey, you did the right thing," dad says supportively.



“No, it’s more like Ryan forced her to do the right thing. Don’t give her credit where it’s not due,” mom says to dad. “Nothing responsible is done on her part.” Mom has that all encompassing look of disappointment on her face that only she gets. I turn to leave them to get ready for bed. When I’m tucked in I put on Timberlake and cry myself to sleep.

## Chapter 19

### The Next Morning

My alarm rings and I zombi through my morning routine feeling hollow inside. I haven't asked mom to take me to the arena and I don't see Ryan's car outside. I text him:

**Dalia:** Hi, We need 2 talk.

**Ryan:** I'll come get U.

I looked out the living room window until I see the headlights of his Mercedes in the driveway. I leave the house quietly and get into his idling car. He turned it off, waiting for me to say something, when I don't he faces me. The air is thick with tension. I return his intense gaze. His hair is messy and he's wearing his wife beater T-shirt with just a sweater overtop. It looks like he just rolled out of bed and this is the worst he could look. His worst is amazing but with the mood I'm in, it is easy to ignore.

"I pick the podium, I pick you, Ryan."

He reaches for me pulling me into a hug, "You won't be sorry," he speaks into my hair. "When did you tell him?"

"Yesterday, before we made love," I confide to him. "It was my first time." My voice cracks and I break down sobbing into his broad shoulder.

He holds my shaking body for some time and when I quiet down he whispers, "Did I hear that right?"

"Yes," I admit.

He pulls away from me grasping both my arms like he did in school, "TELL ME YOU WERE PROTECTED," he demands.

“Un.”

He releases me and then punches his dashboard really hard, leaving a crack in it and suddenly he isn't able to look at me anymore, “Get out of my fucking car.”

“Don’t be mad,” I say timidly, “Adam deserves so much more than getting mixed up with this,” I justify. “There’s no way I’ll get pregnant after ONE time.”

“Get out!” he continues.

That’s when it strikes me, it’s more than our skating. His anger is stemming from raw jealousy.

## Chapter 20

### Tension

Depression gets the better of me and I spend the entire day locked in my bedroom sleeping and crying it out. I miss school, skating practice, I don't eat, or even touch my phone. I completely isolate myself from my family, friends and all social media.

I know my parents were worried. They beg and plead for me to come out. They lay trays of food out for me that go untouched the entire day. Later, I find out that they went as far as sending me text messages in attempts to communicate with me. Nothing worked.

The following morning, I don't feel any better, in fact I feel worse. Physically I feel weak from not having eaten the day before, my stomach is becoming nauseated and I'm beginning to have periods of dizziness every time I get out of bed to go to the bathroom.

Emotionally I'm an even bigger mess. I long to be back in Adam's arms, to feel his hands all over my body, to rekindle that undeniable passion we had in the final hours of our relationship.

My dislike towards Ryan intensifies with every passing hour. He literally scares the bejesus out of me with his temper in the Mercedes and makes no attempt to contact me or apologize for his unwarranted reaction.

I can't remember anyone ever yelling at me the way he did. He is bossy and I hardly know him. I have the right to be happy without him or my parents dictating how I'm supposed to live my life. When he gave me that ultimatum I sacrificed all my personal happiness for the benefit of 'us,' and he hardly showed a morsel of gratitude.

The next day is more of the same with the exception that I broke down once to eat, and I accidentally caught sight of my sorry self in the

mirror. The image staring back at me was a puffy, forlorn face that made me retch with self-hate.

It wasn't until the third day that I resolved to go through the motions of my daily routine even if my heart is shattered to bits over the first love of my life, Adam. I dress in my favourite dress and sweater before checking my face in the mirror, haggard I think. I use my much needed cover-up to hide the bags of depression that settle under my eyes and spritz myself up with my prettiest perfume before checking the kitchen for food and hallway for keys.

A lunch is made for me to bring to school. I'm not sure if it was made on day one, two, or three but I take it. I also grab a banana for breakfast even though my stomach hasn't completely settled from day two yet. The dizzy spells for the most part are gone.

The keys to dad's car are in the hallway and I'm grateful at his thoughtfulness. He shows more empathy towards me throughout this entire situation than mom ever has. I arrive on time to the arena walking quickly through the lounges. I feel people watching me but I ignore their stares. I change in the locker room and make it out to the ice surface just as the Zamboni is leaving. I don't see Ryan and I feel a mixed bag of emotions, primarily relief and disappointment that he isn't there.

I begin stroking slower than usual around the ice. I have a mild headache and my stomach isn't feeling normal yet. I don't have my usual level of energy to burn. I hear Ryan's edges breaking the ice and feel his presence behind me before I see him. He slips his arm comfortably around my waist and I look up at him to see him smiling back at me, "I was waiting for you to come back to me, I was worried."

He stops us from skating any further and hugs me right there in front of everyone. The mixed signals and the sheer audacity of his actions infuriate me. I attempt to pull away from his hug which is ridiculous, because he is way too strong for me and says, "You showed it when you called, oh wait you didn't. Well, at least you apologized for your vile temper, oh wait you didn't do that either." I add sarcastically.

Ryan argues, "What do you expect me to do? You keep making these stupid decisions that risk everything we've ever worked for. Go back to single skating if you're going to be a narcissistic asshole!"

I slap him hard across the face and try harder to break free from his grasp. With little effort on Ryan's part he keeps me there. All the other skaters stop what they are doing and are watching us. His cheek is red from the assault and for a second I fear he will retaliate, but he doesn't.

Coach Hicks witnesses everything before yelling at us to come over, "Ryan, Dalia!" Ryan releases his hold of me and we both skate to him. His face is red with anger and his voice stern, "If the two of you have issues, you settle them OFF the ice. If I see either of you raise a hand against the other, you can find yourselves a new coach. Are we clear?"

"Yes, sir," we say in unison.

"Get off the ice and don't come back until you can act professionally," he seethes.

We get off the ice and go to our separate change rooms. Ryan is finished before me because I see him waiting at the front doors. I walk passed him wordlessly. He follows me out, "I'll drive you to school."

"I've got my dad's car here," I inform him.

"Get in my car," he orders. I follow him to his car. Upset I reach for the handle and my headache goes from something mild to this profound throbbing. My body turns hot and a huge wave of nausea hits me. I feel my legs give.

## Chapter 21

### Ryan

I was on the other side of the car, there was no way I could have reached her in time. She collapsed, I let her fall.

*Damn it! I let her fall!*

Panic mode sets in I run over to the other side of my car to find her fragile body laying on the ground with a small pool of blood collecting around her head. "Wake-up," I say to her as I begin shaking her but her eyes don't open. I move her upper body so I can cradle her in my arms, blood is starting to go everywhere. My car door is still open on her side and I reach into my pocket grabbing my phone, I dial 911.

When the ambulance comes the first attendant looks at me and says to his partner, "He moved her."

*Why did I move her? They always say never to move the victim unless they are in danger. They taught me that. I did it anyway. I just didn't want her to be lying on that cold hard ground. I told her I would never let her get hurt and that's exactly what I did. She is hurt.*

The first attendant is reaching in the back of the ambulance for the stretcher and the second one looks at me, "Can you tell us what happened?" He is lifting her off me while he waits for me to speak and scramble out from underneath her. They are going to place her on their stretcher. I don't want to let go of her. I have to let go of her. It is the hardest thing I ever did, but I force myself to let go of her.

I'm afraid that when I open my mouth to talk to the paramedics my voice will crack or worse I will lose my shit, but I manage to put words together, "I don't know, we were getting in the car and when I looked over, she wasn't there. Her head must have hit something sharp on my car door, she's bleeding." They grab white cling wrap from their truck

and the first attendant holds her head steady while the other one wraps it in efforts to stop or slow the bleeding down before bracing her head in case she has any neck injury.

The first attendant begins doing her vital signs. He feels for her pulse and then starts taking her blood pressure. The other one records everything on a pad he keeps in his pocket, "BP 74/44, Heart rate 50, respirations 10, 02 Sat 88. We'll start an infusion of normal saline now and put her on 100% when she's in the truck." The second attendant wraps a blue band around her arm and then inserts an intravenous catheter into it. The second attendant primes the line attaching a bag of normal saline to her. Then they transfer her onto the stretcher covering her and buckling her in, "Can I come with you?" I plead.

The attendant looks at me, "Sure you can, or you can follow us to The General." They slide her into the back of the truck and one of the attendants jumps in with her and places an oxygen mask over her face.

*Pull yourself together, she's in good hands now, I tell myself.* "Ok, I'll follow." They put her into the ambulance. I close the car door on her side and then get into my car.

I try dialling her house to tell her parents what happened but there is no answer so I leave a message. I call my mother and give her a quick rendition of what happened so she can try to get in touch with Dalia's mom while I stay with her at the hospital. I force myself to drive calmly even though I just want to floor it the entire way.

When I get there, they have her in the examining room. They are in the midst of transferring her onto a stretcher when I catch a glimpse of her eyes opening, "She's awake!" I exclaim.

They finish the transfer and a nurse attaches a portable blood pressure machine to her arm to take her vitals again. The ambulance drivers are reporting the events that took place in the field to the nurse as she makes her notes. I looked at the machine attached to Dalia and her pulse has increased to 80 and her blood pressure was now 82/50. "My head," she complains.

A doctor casually strolls in wearing the name badge, 'Dr. Tate'. He is an older gentleman who appears friendly and calm, "What do we have here?"



The nurse looks at the attendants, "Thanks, you guys can go now." She dismisses them and they nod leaving the curtained examining room. "We have a 16 year old girl who was getting into a car when she collapsed losing consciousness. She has some sort of bleed going on in the back of her head but I haven't had a chance to look at it yet."

"Order a c.t. of the head to rule out a bleed, complete blood count, electrolytes, and," he pauses looking up at me, "is there a chance she might be pregnant?" I nod, "And a human chorionic gonadotropin level." He gives me a look before explaining, "That's a pregnancy test boy."

The nurse continues, "Initial vitals were: BP 74/44, Heart rate 50, respirations 10, O<sub>2</sub> Sat 88. The attendants stabilized her head and put her on 100% non-rebreather, started a bolus of normal saline and now her vitals are: blood pressure 82/50, heart rate 80, O<sub>2</sub> saturation 100% on a 100% non-rebreather with a respiration rate of 12. She came too when we transferred her onto the stretcher."

"Let's take a look at her head," he instructs the nurse. Dalia's eyes open again as the doctor starts examining her. "Hi sweetheart, do you know where you are?"

"In the hospital," she seems unsure.

"Do you remember what happened?" he asks.

"I was getting into a car." She was trying to remember more of what happened but it doesn't seem to come to her.

"Yes, that's right and you had a bit of a fall. Can you tell me what day it is?"

"Thursday."

"Month?" he asks.

"November."

"The last thing you ate?"

"A banana."

The doctor continues, "Memory is intact. Place her on telemetry to rule out any kind of dysrhythmia." The nurse holds her head up as he unwraps the bandage and looks at it, "She'll need stitches. Shave around the site. Have the suture kit and 1% lidocaine ready, I'll be back in a few minutes!" The nurse leaves to collect the supplies as Dalia lays there silently. When she comes back, the nurse begins to shave around the

area that's bleeding. Tears begin rolling down her cheeks at the sound of the loud razor cutting off her hair.

## Chapter 22

### Dalia

The nurse throws a few handfuls of long strands of my hair into the garbage. Ryan sits silently by my side watching the entire time, his thumb swiping away my tears.

The nurse then proceeds to draw blood which she sends to the lab and starts removing my dress. Ryan quickly gets up to leave and the nurse gives him a curious look and then shrugs. She must have assumed he's seen me before, and doesn't know why he's leaving the room. When the heart monitor is placed on my chest, she calls out, "You can come back now."

Ryan and the doctor come back into the room and the doctor starts aspirating with a syringe the lidocaine from the vile with a needle. He explains everything he's going to do before doing it. "I'm going to freeze you locally with this injection which will sting, but then it shouldn't hurt when I start suturing. It looks like you're going to need about seven stitches. They are dissolvable so you won't have to get them removed."

I close my eyes and take the painful needle into my open wound stoically. The doctor and nurse start talking about a movie they both watched called *The Ledge* while they work on closing me. I glanced up at Ryan, "Does mom know?"

He shakes his head, "I tried calling her but there was no answer so I left a message, I have my mother working on that."

Another lady in scrubs comes into the room, "They called her down for c.t. now."

The doctor looks up, "I need a few more minutes."

"Okay," she says, "I'll tell them."

"Has someone inserted a 20 gage i.v. into her? They're going to want

to use contrast.”

“Yes,” my nurse answers.

True to the doctor’s word, he finishes a few minutes later and then raises the railing of my stretcher. The nurse and Ryan start rolling me to my c.t. scan. Ryan is asked to wait outside while the c.t. technician and the nurse transfer me from their stretcher to the c.t. machine. I lay still for several minutes while the test is being performed and then they transfer me back onto my stretcher. The nurse rolls me out into the hallway and then we go back to my curtained examining room.

The nurse locks the stretcher in place and leaves me alone with Ryan. “Are you okay?” he asks. I nod yes. “Do you want me to call anyone?” I nod no. I just don’t have it in me to speak to him. “I just came up with a nickname for you now,” Ryan says lightly.

I look at him waiting to hear it.

“Patch!” he teases.

“It’s better than your nickname,” I say a little spitefully.

“I have a nickname?”

“Tara, and Sierra came up with it.”

He rakes his fingers through his wisps, “What is it?”

“I’m not telling you,” I taunt.

“Tell me!”

“No!”

“Tell me,” he persists softly.

“Alpha Orgasm!” I giggle.

His nose crinkles up and his eyes widen a little, “Why?”

“Tara thinks your bossy but cute,” I explain knowing full well she is going to kill me when she finds out I told him.

His hand covers mine and we stay companionably silent until the doctor returns, “Kids, You’ll be happy to know that you’re not pregnant. Your electrolytes are out of balance and we’d like to correct them overnight and monitor your heart. I am admitting you for observation. If you’re okay, you’ll be able to go home tomorrow.”

They wheel me into a room on a medical floor. I continue to have a drip going into my arm and the telemetry pack from the Emergency Department is replaced with a different heart monitor that can monitor

me on my new floor.

## Chapter 23

### Admitted

Ryan sits on a chair close to my bed.

I gaze at his hand which is still covering mine making me feel safe and secure, "I owe you an apology," I admit.

His tender gaze locks onto mine, "There's no need."

"There's every need," I argue.

"I'm so sorry for losing it at the arena this morning and slapping you."

"Don't be," he says quietly, "just get better."

Our eyes don't budge from one another.

Loads of electricity pulse through my body.

Oh my, I'm starting to like him.

The serious look in his eyes alone is pivotal in our relationship, immediately I know it's mutual. Everything is LESS coherent and yet way more real.

We don't need words, these new feelings have a life of their own.

## Chapter 24

### Parents

I'm sitting up in bed having my dinner and Ryan is eating a sandwich from Tim's next to me, when Mrs. Kennedy comes knocking on the door, "Oh dear, what happened?"

"She fainted and cut her head open mom, Doctor Tate said she was dehydrated."

"Let me see," she says.

I moved my head for her to see my stitches and she gasps, "Oh My God!"

"So are they keeping her?" She asks.

"Just overnight. Did you get a hold of her parents?"

"Ya, They're coming."

Mom and dad knock on the door only minutes later.

"Come in," I call.

They peek their heads into the door and see that there are no more chairs in my room. Mom and dad say, "We're going to get more chairs."

They disappeared back into the hallway assumedly looking for more chairs. They came back with two, "We stole them," dad says mischievously! *Leave it to him!*

Mrs Kennedy informs mom, "She's fine, they're just keeping her in for observation. She fainted and cut her head open on Ryan's car. Take a look! The doctor who saw her said she was dehydrated."

Mom looks at my head, "Oh.My.God!"

Dad gets up and looks too but he doesn't have that same grossed out, horrified look that the moms have. "How do you feel Honey?" Dad asks.

He gave me a kiss on the forehead before sitting back down on his stolen chair.

“Better, thanks.”

Mrs. Kennedy looks at Ryan, “Do you want to tell me what happened on the ice this morning? Coach Hicks called, he told me you guys were fighting and she slapped you in the face.”

“That about covers it,” Ryan said evasively. “It won’t happen again.”

“I should hope not,” she says indignantly. “Mr. Hicks told me that if he see’s one more outburst like that on the ice, you guys can find another coach.”

Mom looks shocked, “This is the first I heard of this! What were you two doing fighting on the ice?”

“It was stupid,” Ryan sloughed it off. “I deserved the slap.”

“No, you didn’t,” I told Ryan.

“That’s my girl,” dad says proudly, “feisty!”

The hospital announces the end of visiting hours, everyone stands with the exception of Ryan. Mrs. Kennedy glances at him, “I’ll see you at home?”

Ryan runs his fingers through his hair, “No, I want to stay with Dalia, make sure she’s all right. The nurses said I can.”

Mrs. Kennedy looks at my mother for approval, “That’s fine with me,” she reassures. They kissed me on the forehead just as they are about to leave when I stop mom, “Can you tell Tara and Sierra what happened.”

“Sure Honey, Give your phone to me and I’ll do it when I get home.”

The room gets quiet after they all leave and we are tired. I squish over to one side of my bed making room for Ryan. I open the covers for him to join me.

“I was so scared for you, Patch” he confesses, as I rest my head in his arm.

“Its over now, Alpha,” I reassure. We savour our quiet time together, drifting off to sleep our breathing becomes synchronous.



## Chapter 25

### Valentines Preparations

Once Coach Hicks hears all our sordid details through the arena's grapevine of gossip, he's ruthless towards our training, never allowing for any personal issues to make it onto the ice again.

Ryan and I discuss our schedules in the car on more than one occasion and we theorized that there is a conspiracy against us orchestrated by none other than: Coach Hicks, our parents and teachers of course. Together they ensure that if we aren't sweating it out on the ice then our faces are buried deep in books. They think they have us under their thumbs, and they do, except for tomorrow night!

It's four months after my discharge from hospital and four months of doing nothing but what is expected from us by everyone else. I'm bound and determined to have a little bit of fun on the side, no matter what the cost. My co-conspirators are none other than Tara and Sierra, Ryan is merely an accessory to the crime.

He knows how badly I want to go to the Valentine's Day Dance and doesn't even bother asking me to be his date, he assumes we are just going to keep up our charade as a couple but I'm going to show him! I'm not a force to be reckoned with or taken for granted!

The morning before the dance, dad's playing on his iPad Candy Crush Saga, I introduced him to the game a few weeks back and he became severely addicted to it ever since. So he has the black round candy ball and he's deciding which direction he wants to move it, when I sweep in for the kill, "Dad can I go to a Valentine's Day Dance tomorrow night at the school? Ryan is going."

"I'll have to ask your mother, when is it again?"

"Tomorrow night," I repeat patiently.

"I'll text her," he offers.

I know she is at work, that's why I chose now to ask him. He is more vulnerable, an easier target, the one with the biggest soft spot for me. So he pulls his phone out from his front pants pocket and starts typing out a text to mom. She says yes immediately which surprises me. "You can go, but NO boys!" he tells me. I jump up and down squealing with excitement.

"Okay, I need money daddy!" I remind him.

"For what?"

"A new dress and hair of course!" He reaches in his wallet and pulls out a hundred dollar bill, I reach over him and take the rest making him essentially cash broke. When the money is secured in my greedy little hands, I book us our appointments for tomorrow with three different stylists.

I text Ryan first:

**Dalia:** Alpha O?

**Ryan:** Patch?

**Dalia:** I got the ok 4 the dance. I'm going shopping 2day, & 2morrow so I won't B skating.

**Ryan:** Great, we need the break. C U there :-)

**Dalia:** TTYL

**Ryan:** TTYL

Then I text Sierra and Tara in a group text:

**Dalia:** I booked the hair appts did U guys get the \$ U need 4 the makeovers?

**Tara:** Yup, we're good 2 go. Meet @ the mall 4 6?

**Dalia:** Will B there, same meeting spot?

**Sierra:** Of Course!

**Dalia:** TTYL

**Sierra:** TTYL

**Tara:** TTYL

We go to ALL the dress stores in the mall before I find THE dress for me. It's an x-rated little number that leaves nothing at all to the imagination. I already plan to put a frock overtop and remove it when we get to the dance so my parents won't see what I'm really wearing. I will just tell them I spent all the money on my hair.

That night I'm so excited for the dance it's hard to settle down and sleep but I force myself because I want to look my best.

## Chapter 26

### The Valentines Dance

The next day we attend all our classes and then after school, we climb into Tara's car and head to the top salon in Toronto. They are waiting for us.

The salon is elegantly furnished with solid wood floors and old red barber chairs in an older area of Toronto. They offer us coffee or hot chocolate but we don't take them up on their offer, we are all too nervous about what they are going to do to us.

The stylists have various levels of experience and the higher the level the more you pay for your hair. I chose the highest level.

We give them three hours and the liberties to do whatever they want to us. The hairdressers give us the choice whether we want to watch or be surprised, I chose to be surprised, Tara and Sierra watch.

The stylists warn them that they already had beautiful haircuts so they would just be tweaking it. Tara and Sierra glow with their compliments.

My hairdresser looks perplexed, "You on the other hand need a lot of work!" It take her the full three hours and when she is done Tara and Sierra are gob smacked at the profound changes. We had no time to sit there and ogle each other, there is a dance to go to.

We rush out of the salon, into Tara's car and straight to the dance without a moment to spare. We grab our bags of clothing from the back seat and get dressed and paint our faces in the school's bathrooms.

When I'm done I step away from the mirror, unable to recognize myself. I still have the patch but with my new platinum blond colour it is much less noticeable. The dress looks so red or my hair looks so white it

is hard to tell but it's a shocking change. I love it!

We walked in like a modern version of 'Charlie's Angels'. Pitbull's 'Fireball' is playing nice and loud and the dance floor is packed to capacity. Sierra complains, "I hate Pitbull," but we ignore her and go running onto the floor to join the fun.

"Where's the guys?" Tara shouts in my ear.

"Who know's!" I scream back.

The music slows and I feel a tap on my shoulder. I fully expect it to be Ryan but when I turn, it's Adam. His hair has grown, and he's wearing a white shirt that glows under the lights making him appear as though he has a dark tan. He wears dark dress pants which isn't normal for him because he's always wearing jeans. I'm completely enamoured, "May I have this dance," he asks.

"Of course," I breathe. He opens his arms for me and I snuggle into them. "I missed you," I confess in his ear. He pulls away from me ever so slightly staring into my eyes before he takes liberties and kisses me softly on my lips. Then he takes me into a full on kiss which is demanding, capturing my attention and making me soar into the clouds.

He pulls away to tell me, "You look amazing, I missed you more than you'll ever know. Can we go somewhere and talk?"

"I'd like that," I agree. We kiss the entire song with the exception of when we have to catch our own breath. When it ends we start leaving when I notice Ryan's figure barricading the door. I freeze on the spot. Ryan is wearing all black which makes his eyes look darker, more intense. His hair is freshly cut and his wisps are gone. He earns his nickname Tara has created tonight, because he's more than gorgeous.

Adam looks in the direction I'm looking in and complains, "You've got to be kidding. Do you guys have something going on between you?"

"Nothing Adam, I swear."

Pissed off at the situation he grabs me by the back of the neck and pulls me into this wild open mouthed kiss knowing full well Ryan is watching the entire time. He presses his body firmly into mine pulling me in by my waist. He's staking his claim and I'm enjoying every second of it even though I don't feel its necessary. It's obvious to me Ryan isn't

interested or he would have tried something on me a long time ago. We spend enough time together. He's had tons of chances. "Let me deal with him," I suggest to Adam.

"If you don't, I'll be more than happy to," he warns.

I approached Ryan who suddenly grabs my arm and snatches me out from the dance. I start struggling to get away from him but it is absolutely ridiculous. He's a sixteen year old hercules. Seconds later the door opens behind us and Adam calls out, "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"I want to talk to her," Ryan answers.

"Why don't you ASK her if she wants to go with you instead of grabbing her barbarically?" demands Adam.

Ryan looks down at me, his eyebrow's furrow and his stare intensifies, "You made a choice," he reminds me.

"Ya, you don't have to remind me, tonight isn't about the choice I made, it's about me having a little bit of fun, so if you'll excuse us, Adam wants to talk to me in private." Ryan's jaw clenches but he lets me pass, and Adam starts following me out of the school.

"The asshole likes you," Adam says loud enough for Ryan to hear.

"Don't fuck him," Ryan says loud enough for both of us to hear.

"You told him about us?" Adam says under his breath still loud enough for Ryan to hear.

"I have nothing to hide, they were asking questions at the hospital," I explain.

"Hospital?" Adam sounds distraught.

"I fainted from dehydration after we broke up. I wasn't taking care of myself." I explain.

"I don't want to talk in front of your asshole partner," Adam complains, again loud enough for Ryan to hear.

"Then lets go to your car," I agree.

Ryan storms off slamming the door behind him.

It's freezing outside so Adam opens the door for me and he runs around to the other side. He puts his key into the ignition and turns the heater on. I'm shivering. He starts rubbing my arms trying to warm me

up, unconcerned about himself.

"Ryan made me choose between a skating career with him or you. He forced me to pick. I've been skating since I was four years old."

"I get that," Adam says. "It doesn't make anything easier. I still lost you."

"It was hard on me too," I confide.

"Have you done anything with him or anyone else since me?" asks Adam.

"Nothing, He doesn't care about me the way you do, he just cares that I risked getting pregnant and ruining our skating careers."

I fed him back his own question expecting the same response, "Have you done anything with anyone since me?" He hesitates, which gives me my answer. A flash of anger courses through my body. Instantly I reason that I couldn't have meant that much to him if he can be with someone else so soon after I gave him my virginity. I'm furious. I reach for the door handle, and he grabs my wrist to stop me but unlike Ryan he has a pansy assed grip of my wrist and I get away. I run crying back to the cafeteria in search of Tara.

Ryan captures me in the midst of my search. He grabs my wrist and like usual I try pulling away when I shouldn't even bother, "Let me go!" I insist. He sees my tears, blood shot eyes, everything he needs to see before scooping me up kicking and screaming. Nobody tries stopping him!

He opens his car door and starts forcing me inside. Aware of his strength I do what he wants and wait for him to get in.

"What did he do?" Ryan growls.

"He asked me if I've been with anyone since him, I told him I haven't and I asked him the same question, and he didn't answer. He's been with someone since we broke up."

"That surprises you?" Ryan asks incredulously.

He reaches into the back seat and throws me a sweater, "Put this on. I can't believe your parents let you out dressed like that." He starts the car throwing it into reverse angrily.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"I'm taking you home."

“That’s great, I haven’t even had any fun. What about Tara and Sierra? They’re going to be worried.”

“Do you have your phone?”

“No, It’s in Tara’s car.”

“Text them with mine.” He drives while I text. I don’t expect to hear back from them. They are probably still having fun at the dance. I on the other hand am in tears being dragged home against my will. Ever since I met Adam and Ryan I’ve been a complete mess. I’m swearing off guys, forever!

He pulls up in my driveway a privilege from my parents that no other guy has managed. With his car idling, he stares at me.

“Pictures last longer,” I say sarcastically.

“They also don’t talk back,” he cracks. I rush out of his car, and this time he doesn’t stop me.



## Chapter 27

### Later That Same Night

I get home so early from the dance that mom and dad hear the front door open and instinctively come running. Mom arrives in the foyer first hardly able to contain her curiosity, “Your home early, what happened?” Nothing like mom and the way she cuts to the chase. Tact isn’t her forte.

I kick my shoes off and hang Ryan’s sweater in the closet, “I don’t really want to talk about it right now,” I say hoping this will put an end to their questions.

“Give us a hint Honey, I don’t want to hear your mother speculate in bed all night. You know how she drones on with her imaginary ‘scenario’s’!”

Mom slices dad an evil eye before turning to me, “I can’t believe your hair,” she says awe stricken.

“Do you like it?”

“It looks lovely Honey,” dad says without waiting for mom’s input. He would say the same thing if I had come home with a mohawk, he is just good old supportive dad. The easiest person in the world to get along with and love. Why isn’t that enough for me?

“Thanks dad! I love it too!”

“It’s ridiculous!” mom disagrees. “The cut is nice, but you can’t maintain that colour! We’ll dye it back before the competitions start.”

“I’m keeping it,” I say stubbornly.

“What happened at the dance?” dad redirects.

“We arrived fashionably late, and I bumped into Adam with whom I was more than happy to spend a little bit of time with. If you want to know why, I was seeking closure and I THOUGHT Adam was too.”

“Anyway, Ryan saw us talking and he got all in our faces, grabbing

me and pulling me out of the dance against my will. Adam came running out to protect me from him.”

Mom starts giggling, “Like Ryan would ever treat you like that,” she continues. “That boy doesn’t have a rude bone in his body.”

“Little do you know,” I say dismissively. “Eventually Ryan let me talk to Adam, and I found out that I was just a notch on his dating pole, I was so upset. Ryan noticed and forced me to go home.”

“I told you to stay away from that boy,” mom warns. “You’re going to upset Ryan.”

“And we can’t have that,” I say sarcastically.

“She doesn’t need to hear that tonight,” dad tells mom.

“Can I go upstairs now? I’ve got skating in the morning.”

“Sure, Honey,” dad says dismissing me.

I don’t have my phone with me. I can’t text Tara and Sierra about what happened. Forlorn, I have no choice but dress in my pyjama’s and go to bed. I lay awake thinking about how easily Adam sought comfort with another girl, while I still mourn our nonexistent relationship.

The next morning Ryan picks me up to take me skating and we drive in silence the entire way to the arena. I don’t dare look at him. I feel his eyes land on me from time to time, but I don’t acknowledge it. His cologne fills the air the way it always does, but I refuse to swoon over him like all the other girls at school or pay him a compliment.

When we arrive at the arena EVERYBODY says we look amazing together. Shying away, I say I better hurry to get ready for practice, leaving Ryan with the regular onlookers in the lounge. I quickly depart to change.

Ryan and Coach Hicks are talking rink side. Coach Hicks motions for me to come over and join them. He is staring at me speechless for a second before he forces himself to go on, “As you are well aware competition season is well underway and I’m sure you’ve noticed we haven’t entered you in any this season. I’ve chosen to present you to the public in the new competition year which will give us enough time to work on lifts and throws.”

“We will focus on our throws until the club pool is open and then you

can work on your lifts. I intend to have you ready for competition beginning November of this year. Any questions?" We both shake our heads no and wait for further instruction. "Go warm up," he orders.

I don't take Ryan's hand. I stretch both legs and then begin stroking around on my own. I start with an axel and then begin working my way through my double rotation jumps. As I progress, I go on to my triple rotation jumps excluding the one I injured myself on, the triple axel.

Ryan's arm slides around my waist after I stop to take a drink from the fountain, "Are you ready?" he asks me. He doesn't know I'm in the zone, but Coach Hicks does.

"No," I say.

Coach Hicks instructs Ryan, "Leave her." A lot of skaters clear a pathway for me, some stand rink side watching. Ryan is one of them. "She has to do this," Coach says to Ryan with his eyes glued to me.

Determined to do this, I stroke the length of the ice, building up the speed and courage I needed to land the jump. I pause gliding backwards for a fraction of a second and then I step forward with my left leg while throwing my right leg fearlessly into the air as my body begins rotating on it's axis three and a half revolutions before landing backwards on my right outside edge. I did it! Adrenaline is pumping through my veins and I feel exhilarated. Everyone in the rink claps for me knowing I just conquered the jump that injured me. Coach Hicks comes running out onto the ice to hug me, but it's Ryan who gets their first.

That night, I have something good to tell my parents.

## Chapter 28

### Lifts

The month of June is the only month of the year that Ryan and I have no ice time. We train off ice in the gym and work in the pool on our lifts. Lifts in the pool is a much more anticipated time for me, not so much for Ryan who has done this before.

The pool at the club is reserved privately for us. When I ask Coach Hicks why its private, he says, 'I don't want you landing on someone's head while they're swimming.' His comment snowballs my cowardice of being carried over Ryan's head on the ice into a complete state of panic.

Tara loans me her brand new bathing suit for my first day of training in the pool. Ryan and I leave from school to meet Coach Hicks there. I have one thing going against me and one thing going for me: Going for me is that my monthly friend has already come and gone, so there is no chance of anything like that happening in the pool. Going against me is that I didn't check the bag to see what Tara loaned me. If I had, I never would have borrowed it.

In the senior ladies locker room I pulled out the skimpiest black bikini I've ever seen in my life. It makes Victoria Secret lingerie look conservative. Hicks and Ryan are expecting me. My car isn't here, so there's no chance of running home and grabbing something different. I'm mortified.

I tear my clothes off racing to change into the strings Tara loaned me to beat them out to the pool area so they won't see me get into the water. With any luck, most of what we are going to be doing today will be submerged. I can only hope anyway.

I dash out onto the club's deck to find both men are present and waiting for me. Ryan is wearing a dark pair of bathing shorts that go

down to his knee's. His eyes pierce mine as they collide with each other. His perfect jawline tightens when he sees me. My eyes reach his chest and six pack and they want to hover their but I resist temptation, too self-conscious to stay out of the water for another second.

I scurry towards the steps into the shallow end of the pool and walk quickly down them ignoring the frigid temperature. I act calm as my body reacts to the drastic temperature change betraying me. My nipples harden, I glance in Ryan's direction to see if he's noticed, his eyes are fixed on them. I cover my breasts with my arm and dive deeper into the water submerging my head. Ryan follows me in.

The coach distracts both of us with the instructions of our first lift. It takes us multiple attempts before achieving the balance and trust needed for him to bring me up over his head.

When we do, I feel this rush of adrenaline wash over me again, just like when I landed my triple axel, and I glance down at him in all my glory of conquering a fear and that's when I notice, IT, the great white lurking beneath the water in those innocent swimming trunks.

He saw me, see IT.

"Put me down!" I shriek kicking and screaming, throwing his balance off, he recovers and slowly slides me down his body until I'm standing on my own feet pressed up against him.

Coach Hicks grins knowingly before turning his back to us saying, "Resolve your issues!" Hicks walks off and I turn to Ryan, "What was that?" I insist.

He tightens his grip on me and says in a lowered voice, "I think you know."

"Since when?" I ask.

"Since the day I laid eyes on you," he admits. "That damned bikini is making it hard for me to ignore."

His hand rests on the back of my neck and he guides my face to his. He kisses my forehead, and then my cheeks, my chin, and then finally my lips. His lips guide mine to open for him and then he fills me with his tongue, kissing me fully. I feel my heart flutter and a warmth that doesn't make sense in cold water.

He pulls my hips in to his and I can feel IT pressing hard against me

and I want to beg him to take me right there and then, but my pride and most of all my body are continuously betraying me by shivering, forcing us to get out of the pool and end our moment.

## Chapter 29

### Breaking the Rules

I shower and dress in the change room before whipping out my phone. I have to text Tara:

**Dalia:** What the fuck did U loan me?

**Tara:** My bikini! Isn't it gorgeous!

**Dalia:** Where's the material?

**Tara:** Oh, that is sold separately, lol! Sierra bought 1 2!

**Dalia:** \$?

**Tara:** \$150.00

**Dalia:** U were so ripped off!

**Tara:** How did it go?

**Dalia:** Great, on the last lift I looked down, Alpha's great white was lurking beneath the depths!

**Tara:** Oh my, U gave him a hard on? What did U do?

**Dalia:** Screamed 4 him 2 put me down!

**Tara:** & did he?

**Dalia:** He slid me down his body & then he kissed me. I would have been mad but it was so hot. He's so sexy.

**Tara:** Sounds hot, did U kiss him back?

**Dalia:** 2 right! What do I do now? He's waiting 4 me. I don't even know if I can face him!

**Tara:** Apologize

**Dalia:** No! HE kissed ME.

**Tara:** Did U kiss him back?

**Dalia:** Ya

**Tara:** Then apologize! How was it?

**Dalia:** I'm shaking.

**Tara:** Don't make him wait 4 U. Don't 4get we're getting 2gether 2 celebrate the last day of school @ my house.

**Dalia:** Looking 4ward 2 it.. :-)

He is waiting for me at the door in only his T-shirt and pants that barely cover his six pack. I take a deep breath and follow him out to his Mercedes. We sit in his car in utter silence until he breaks it by saying, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that."

"So that's never going to happen again?" I ask, really wishing it will.

"Never," he reiterates.

"Promise?"

"Promise," he reassures.

I climb over the gearshift and confidently slide onto his lap so I'm facing him. All this time I wanted to touch his wisps and now he's cut off. I want to run my fingers through what's left, so I do. His eyes darken, but he doesn't stop me or say anything. I'm being a naughty girl!

His short hair feels so soft, I keep my fingers in his hair. His eyes close when I start making long strokes up and down his scalp. I lean forward into him so my clitoris is rubbing him in the right spot. Suddenly my soft seat hardens, IT becomes solid. I like teasing him. If it's never going to happen again, I want to enjoy this moment now.

He closes his eyelids savouring my massage leaning his head heavily into my fingers. I glide my fingertips down his neck wanting to touch every square inch of his body. When they reach his shoulders they linger there, until my mouth takes over for my fingers. I bend down to kiss the beautiful muscles that I trust to toss me into the air or hold me high.

His breathing quickens and he starts pushing up creating more friction between us, "I'm not going to be able to stop myself Patch. You're not safe," he warns.

"I don't want to be safe," I encourage him. I push against him moaning loudly when a very sensitive part of ME rubs IT. This excites him and it makes me want to do more. I slide down while he moves his steering wheel for me and then I free IT. I take him into my mouth while his fingers fist into my hair and I pleasure him until he's satiated.



With his fingers caught in my hair, he pulls my head up and takes me into this all encompassing kiss. I find myself needing the same kind of relief that I just gave him for myself.

He comes to my mercy and removes my panties before impaling me with one of his fingers. He slides it in and out trying to alleviate my needs but I'm too wet for him and it isn't enough, so he uses a second finger and my breath catches. He plays with me until I'm screaming, my body begins shaking and I come around his fingers.

We kiss each other passionately and then I ask, "Never again?"

"No, never again," he resolves.

"Promise?"

"Promise."

He drives me home while I tried to recover from our lustful excursion. Justin Bieber's song 'Never Say Never,' comes on the radio and I have to chuckle at the irony.

## Chapter 30

### Last Day of School

Knowing I'm not going to have to sit next to Adam in homeroom for the next few months is a huge relief. I refuse to look in his direction after finding out how easily he turned to another girl after me. Rumour has it, he broke up with her and chose to be alone for a while, because apparently he only has eyes for me. I think he's just a player.

Mrs. Uptite seems to let loose on our last day of classes and marks everyone present even if they aren't. The bell sounds and we all rush to leave.

We meet up for our last lunch together to finalize the plans for tonight. Sierra and Jeremy save us a table in the centre of the cafeteria. They are discussing something quite heatedly when I approach the table, suddenly conversation stops, fishy. They must be experiencing more problems since the Harper fiasco.

"What's going on?" I probe.

Sierra looks up at me, "Jeremy invited Ryan tonight and Tara told me Carter invited Adam."

I shrug, "Don't worry about it, I'm not with either of them so it doesn't matter. The more people at the party the merrier."

Her eyebrows shoot up, "Are you sure about that?"

"Positive," I reassure her.

"Ryan hates Adam," Jeremy comments.

"I'm sure Adam hates Ryan," I add.

"Speaking of Ryan," Sierra says looking past me.

Ryan chooses the vacant chair next to Jeremy. He takes the seat and spins it around so the back is pushed up against the table.

Sierra leans in to Ryan, "You ARE coming tonight aren't you Ryan?"

"Wouldn't miss it, what time does it start?"

"Show up around six," Sierra instructs. "Do you have the address?"

"No," Ryan glances at me, "Text me Tara's address," he orders me.

"Sure," I agree.

"The food will be ready for seven."

"Here's the list and the money," Jeremy hands the alcohol list to Ryan.

"Great, I'll pick it up after school. You want to tag along Dalia?"

"I can't, mom wants to dye my roots."

"I'll do it Sierra offers, come over to my place."

"Are you sure?"

"Wouldn't offer if I didn't want to do it!"

"Okay."

Carter and Tara join us at the table choosing the seats next to me. She looks at Jeremy, "Did you give Ryan the alcohol list?"

Sierra answers, "Ya he did. Is the pool going to be ready in time?"

"Totally! What's a pool party without the pool?" Tara squeals.

"Just a party," I respond smiling.

Carter looks over at Ryan, "You know I invited Adam."

"Jeremy told me."

"I don't want anything to happen between the two of you," Tara warns. "My parents will never let me have a party again if there's any fighting."

Tara looks at me, "Do you still have the tinted water bottles to hide the alcohol in?"

"Ya, I can drop them by your house Ryan before Sierra and I go to Tara's."

Ryan glances back at me, "No need, Jeremy and I will pick you ladies up at Sierra's house so we can transfer the alcohol into the water bottles and we'll all go together to Tara's."

"Sounds great," Tara says happily. "It sounds like its all planned!"

"Too right!" I agree.

The bell rings and we all go our separate ways.

I text mom:

**Dalia:** Don't 4get Tara's annual party is 2night. I'm going 2 Sierra's, she offered 2 do my hair.

**Mom:** Have fun Honey!

**Dalia:** Can U drop the dye off on your way 2 work?

**Mom:** Sure, I can B there in 1/2 hour.

**Dalia:** Thx, I'll B waiting 4 U.

**Mom:** OK

Sierra lives in a modern loft downtown Toronto, so we take the Toronto TTC to get to her house after school. Her mother's name is Aria and she works in real estate so her hours are all over the place. Aria was in love with this guy Nick in her early thirties and was about to marry him when he jilted her at the alter for her best friend Chanel. I hear the story every time Sierra's mother gets blathered. Sierra is Nick's illegitimate kid. He never found out about her and if Aria has her way, he never will. Sierra has no interest in seeking her father, after her mother worked so hard to support her and give her a good life. She is happy.

As expected, we have the place to ourselves. Mom drops off the dye surprising me with a box of my original colour. We run upstairs and Sierra throws me an old t-shirt before she starts mixing the dye. I put the shirt on and sit on the chair she put in the bathroom for me.

"Say good-bye to your platinum!"

"Bye!" Then the process begins, layer by layer she applies the dye to cover the blond that my mother helped me maintain for several months.

When Sierra is finished applying the colour, the box says we have an hour to wait so we go downstairs and raid the refrigerator. I take a cheese string and yogurt before perching myself on her yellow shag rug to watch television while we wait. We watch Judge Judy until my hair is ready for rinsing.

Sierra sits me back in the chair and combs my hair before brandishing the scissors, "You're not!" I say to her. "It just grew back!"

"Let's just try bangs! I'll keep them long," she suggests.

Not waiting for an answer she takes liberties with MY hair and starts

brushing some forward and begins cutting a straight line across my eyes while she tells me, "I'm breaking up with Jeremy tonight." I watch helplessly as the long locks fall onto my lap. When she finishes her horizontal line, she steps back to admire her handiwork before smiling and says, "That's done!"

She proceeds to the back and collects all my hair, "5 off?"

"Fuck off! Cut five off your own hair!"

"Tara wears hers short!"

"That's Tara."

"Three off? It will land two inches below your chin."

"Two, and that's it!"

"Cool, I love cutting hair."

"When are you breaking up with him, in the end or beginning of the party?"

"Beginning, gives me a chance to land someone else! That's what I want to talk to you about."

I cringe when I see her two is really three and that is with wet hair, "Go on."

"Would it bother you if I hook up with Adam? He's single right now."

"You don't have to ask, of course it's okay. That ship sailed." *I know it shouldn't bother me but it does. For some reason I can never imagine him with anyone but me.*

When she finishes with me I lay on her bed playing with my hair while waiting for her to shower. She dresses in her bathing suit with a black floral print summer dress thrown over. Sierra looks amazing. We text the guys telling them we are ready and then waited for them to come.

Ryan's car pulls up twenty minutes later. Jeremy jumps into the back to be with Sierra and I take the front with Ryan. We drive to my house and they wait for me in the car while I quickly run in and change out of my school clothes and throw on my bathing suit with a blue summer dress. I go into the kitchen and grab the water bottles than bee-line it back to Ryan's car before my parents get home, "Okay good to go!"

Ryan studies me before placing his hand on the headrest and

reversing out of my driveway. I wait for him to compliment me or make a wisecrack, but he does neither. I lose myself in his dark eyes wanting another chance to kiss him again with that six o'clock shadow he's sporting. I need to find an excuse to run my fingers through his hair one more time. Damn it, I have to remind myself 'never again'. I have to put what happened between us behind me.

We make it to Tara's in record time. She lives in a white modern house with a wrap around balcony on the top floor overlooking the pool. The furnishings are Arctic cold. White leather Natuzzi sofa's, white marble floors, with hints of grey accent pieces all over. The bedrooms have leather headboards with white diamond tuck. The furnishings appear crisp and clean.

We arrive right at 6:30 p.m. as the pizza is being delivered. We call up, "Tara! The pizza's here!" She comes running downstairs two at a time in just her bikini with a wrap around skirt. Her parents are on vacation in Florida for four weeks, so I'm planning on spending the first two weeks with her, and Sierra will spend the last two. We are going to be partying the entire time!

She grabs her little purse on the table in front of the door and hands the pizza guy the money. He fishes four boxes out of his pizza warmer and hands them to her before leaving. She carries them into her kitchen and lays them out on the island opening them for us to help ourselves.

Tara and I find ourselves alone in the kitchen, once the guys have hoarded eighty percent of the pizza. They start walking around checking out the pool. Tara is looking at my hair, "I like the brown better! You let Sierra cut it?"

"You know her, once she gets her mind set on something there's no stopping her, do you like it?"

"Love it! It's sexy!"

"Thanks, Did Sierra tell you she's breaking up with Jeremy?" I inform her.

"Oh please, tell me not tonight!"

"Tonight."

"At the beginning or end of my party?"

"She wants to do it at the beginning, she asked me if it would bother

me if she hooks up with Adam.”

“What did you say?”

“Of course it won’t bother me. That ship sailed.”

“It bothers you.”

“Hell ya. I gave him my virginity. I don’t want any girl to be with him, it doesn’t matter who it is, but it’s worse if it’s a friend.”

Ryan comes from around the corner, “Still obsessing over asshole?”

“Would you like a drink?” asks Tara.

“Something strong,” he requests.

She pours him orange juice and gives him the bottle of vodka, “Help yourself.”

“Thanks,” he says. He takes the bottle and is very generous with it. He throws in ice chips and leaves us alone.

“I sense tension,” Tara says intuitively.

“After the pool we sort of got physical in the car.”

“That’s a good thing isn’t it?”

“No, he said it can never happen again.”

“What did you guys do?”

“We just got each other off.” I start pouring myself a screwdriver too.

“How was it?”

“The Bomb!”

“So why don’t you guys want to do it again?”

“He doesn’t want to screw up our partnership. He’s very serious about wanting to win Gold.”

“I get that, he’s so Alpha! If you have chemistry though, why not take it to another level.”

“He thinks it will negatively impact our partnership. He doesn’t want to take any chances.”

“So tonight?”

“I’m staying stag! Men are trouble. How about you and Carter, is everything all right? I haven’t had any emergency texts from you.”

“It’s getting boring. I plan on finishing with him too.”

“When?”

“Tonight! I don’t want to be tied down if all my friends are single. I want to have a good summer too! Do you think it will look tacky if we

both break up with them on the same night?"

"Ya, Hold off a few days. You don't want to piss him off too much in case you want to get back together with him after the summer is over."

"Good point Dalia, I don't know what I'd ever do without you."

"Let's find Sierra and see if she's still going to do it."

"Too right."



## Chapter 31

### One Drink Later

It's starting to get dark out, and the air is hot and humid for June. Sierra and Jeremy are nowhere to be found but Tara's parents bedroom door is locked and we can hear raised voices so we close the sliding door and join everyone poolside.

We turn on the patio lanterns and Adam is acting as party DJ. He plays soothing music, making for quite a romantic setting. Periodically I notice him looking over at me, no matter where I'm standing, but I chose to ignore it.

I'm on my second drink and feeling pretty fine as I socialize with acquaintances I met through Tara. Tara is busy sending mixed signals cozying up with Carter even though she has full intentions of breaking up with him over the next day or two. I don't think she's being fair about it considering his days are numbered.

After sometime, I decide to sit down next to Ryan who is parked on a lawn chair by the pool. I take a big sip of my screwdriver in attempt to increase my courage before asking, "You didn't say anything about my hair, do you like it?" He sits up and reaches towards me touching it. I peer into his chocolate eyes and a chill runs down my spine making me shiver. His eyes darken.

He takes hold of my wrist and brings me into Tara's house sweeping me off my feet at the base of her stairs and carrying me up choosing the first bedroom he finds. He places me gently down on the bed but doesn't join me. He smells of alcohol mixed with cologne, and I like it. "I want this damn it, I want to make love to you over and over again, day after day until IT doesn't work anymore or you can't walk and then I want to take you in other ways. That's what I want. But what I want and what I

should do are two different things. This isn't in our equation."

"Why not?" I argue. "It's what we both want!"

"You're making this harder for me!" He complains.

"Am I?" I tease. "How about if I remove my dress for you?"

"Stop," he says sternly. I toss it towards his feet.

"No," I continue sliding out of my bathing suit. Now I lay before him naked.

"Take me," I tempt him. This is so Adam and Eve, because of the way he's staring at me and my sinfulness. Resisting all temptation he deserts me in the bedroom. I lay in bed shocked that he just left me, staring at the ceiling for several minutes before I hear the front door slam. What's his problem? I get dressed and race to the front of the house to make sure he doesn't get in his car. He left by foot and I'm relieved.

I join everyone back at the pool. Sierra is talking to Adam and Tara is locked onto Carter for dear life. I decide to go for a swim and dive into the deep end doing a few laps before getting out. I wasn't in there for more than half an hour, forty minutes at most. The heated water is refreshing against the humid air.

When I get out I reach for my towel that is laying on the fence and look around the pool. Ryan isn't back.

I go in search for him. I check inside, outside, all over of the house. There is no sign of Ryan, so I start walking down a deserted street with the exception of one parked car that appears to have steamy windows off in the distance. My heart sinks, as I briskly approach, fearing my suspicion will be substantiated. There's no mistaking his chocolate brown hair and muscular body being intimate with somebody else, the car is bouncing.

## Chapter 32

### Sleeping Over

I freeze when I see what appears to be his face in the rear window. He's keeping a look out to make sure he isn't caught.

He sees me see him. He's caught.

I turn in the opposite direction and run as fast as I can until my legs won't carry me any further and then I find a soft patch of grass and collapse to my knees where I broke down and cry.

Later, I don't know how much later, there is a car driving really slowly down the street. It slows more when its parallel to me, then it stops. Tara comes running to me, "Oh my God, We've been so worried!"

I don't want to move. She calls over to the car, "I need help." The car is thrown into park and Adam gets out of the back seat and comes over to us. He picks me up and carries me to the car. I cry into his shoulder.

Tara gets back into the front seat and turns to me, "What happened?"

I can hardly speak, "Ryan was with.." I weep until I can't do it anymore. I really like Ryan and I feel humiliated that I made a fool out of myself in the bedroom and he just picked up another girl and did things with her that I wanted to do with him. Adam holds me the entire time, and then when I finish he carries me to her parents bedroom and places me in their bed.

Tara says to Adam, "I can't stay with her, there's still too many people downstairs. Can you stay with her until I get rid of everyone?"

"Sure," he reassures her.

"Make sure Ryan doesn't come in," Tara warns.

"You can count on that," he says assuredly. She turns to leave locking us in the bedroom.

He climbs into bed with me and strokes my hair while I suffer from

embarrassing sobbing hiccups that I can't stop. I calm down significantly when we hear a knock on the bedroom door. Ryan's drunken voice calls out, "Dalia?"

I cower into Adam not wanting to see Ryan, "She's not here," he says.

"Open the fucking door Adam, I know she's in there with you!"

"Tara told me to guard her from you. You better back the fuck off!"

"She's MY partner," he claims angrily.

"Maybe you should have considered her feelings before you left the party to fuck another girl," he says spitefully.

We hear footsteps and then Jeremy's voice, "Come on Rye, you better sleep this off. Go home before you do more damage. We called you a cab, it's here."

"Jer, I'm not drunk. You of all people have got to believe me."

"Okay, I believe you, but Dalia doesn't want to see you just like Sierra doesn't want to see me." Jeremy says.

"Why doesn't Sierra want to see you?" Ryan asks.

"Bitch broke up with me tonight. Can you believe it? What a shitty fucking night!" Jeremy complains. Their voices along with their footsteps slowly disappear and Adam stays with me until Tara can take his place. When he left, I fell fast asleep.

The next morning I find Tara's arms wrapped around me. I try to shrug out of her grasp but she tightens it, "You're not getting out of this bed until you tell me what happened last night." I flash back to what happened and dread and regret wash over me. What was I thinking stripping down for Ryan like that and freaking out when I saw him with a girl? My head is pounding from the after affects of the vodka. I drank way too much and my stomach is churning.

"I joined Alpha at the pool and he gave me this look like he wanted me or something. We went upstairs and he admitted it. He wanted me the way I wanted him. He looked awesome last night you have to agree with me? So I beckoned him, stripped down naked and everything. You could tell he was torn about what to do. Instead of joining me on the bed though, he stood at the foot of it and said that sleeping together isn't part

of our equation and that I'm making everything harder for him."

"Where you?"

"Yes, totally, because I wanted him. I got undressed and was willing him to take me for himself. He just stood there floored. I all but threw myself at him."

"So then what happened?"

"He stormed off and I felt like a jackass. So I went back to the party and decided to go for a swim. I felt completely humiliated. When I got out of the pool I went looking for him. I found him in a car that wasn't his banging some chick. When I was positive it was him I went running in the opposite direction until I couldn't run anymore and that's when you found me. It was so hard to see Tara. He started pounding on your parent's bedroom door, trying to talk to me. I heard him tell Jeremy in the hallway that he wasn't drunk, and I believe him. He knew what he was doing when he was with that girl, and that makes it worse."

"He's an asshole, and you shouldn't have gotten that drunk!" Tara comments angrily. "By the way, Sierra broke up with Jeremy for sure last night," Tara informs me.

"I know, I heard him talking in the hallway to Ryan."

"Did she stay over?"

"Ya."

"Did she get together with Adam?"

"No, I had a talk with her, told her our golden rule. She never knew."

## Chapter 33

### Two Weeks at Tara's

Tara gets out of bed and pulls my phone from its charger, throwing it towards me before heading to the shower. The light is flashing blue so I press the button and see: three phone messages, no emails and ten texts.

Phone message 1:

"It's Ryan, we need to talk. Call me."

Phone message 2:

"Dalia, Please, can you give me a call. I need to explain what happened. Last night meant nothing."

Phone message 3:

"You're going to have to talk to me sooner or later. It will be easier if it's sooner. Call me."

I hazard to guess what the texts were going to say. I saw eight from him and two from my mother.

Mom

7:00 PM

U're dad & I must have missed U. We packed a bag 4 U & left it @ the door so U have clothes 2 wear @ Tara's.

Mom

7:02 PM

I left \$\$\$\$ 4 U in the side pocket of the bag, 2 use on food so Tara's parents don't have 2 pay 4 all U'r food. Have fun!

Ryan

11:30 PM

Where R U. U have 2 let me explain!

Ryan 11:32 PM

It's not what U think!

Ryan 11:35 PM

Just tell me where U R?

Ryan 12:01 AM

U're in the room with that asshole Rn't U?

Ryan 12:02 AM

Text me. Do U even have U'r Phone?

Ryan 12:15

I'm waiting 4 U in my car, come out!

Ryan 12:20

I'm going 2 leave.

Ryan 12:30

I'm leaving.

We congregate in kitchen where we decide on cereal and toast for breakfast, "My parents packed me a bag."

Sierra volunteers, "I'll drive you home to get it."

"Thanks. How did Jeremy take the breakup last night? I heard him talking to Ryan about it."

"Oh? What did you hear?" She asks.

"He was encouraging Ryan to stop pounding on the door and leave me alone. He said, 'Sierra doesn't want to see me and Dalia doesn't want to see you right now.'" I look over at Tara, "That's when Ryan also admitted to Jeremy that he wasn't drunk. So he knew full well what he was doing last night with that girl."

Sierra looks at me, "What happened with both of you guys? When I finished breaking up with Jeremy you were gone and Tara, Adam, and Carter were out looking for you."

I sigh, "Ryan and I were sitting by the pool feeling it. He took me upstairs and I thought for sure we were going to get hot on each other. Then he started saying how getting together in bed isn't in the cards. So I tried luring him in and he stormed off. I went looking for him later and found him banging some other chick in a car down the street."

"Oh my," Sierra says under her breath, "that's rough. It took him less than an hour to find a girl who was willing to spread her legs for him."

"These are his messages," I played back his answering messages and put it on speaker so the girls can hear and then I pass the phone around so they can read his texts.

"Don't weaken on this," Sierra advises. "If he's such a nice guy he would have considered your feelings."

"I quite agree," Tara sides with Sierra.

I finish my bowl of cereal and started washing the dish, "What happened with you and Jer?"

"I told him that I need a change, I won't mind getting together once in



a while for bootie calls, but I'm not interested in anything serious anymore."

"Did you say, 'Bootie Calls?'" Tara asks.

"Yes, he is quite prudish about the idea and took it offensively saying I was making him feel cheap."

"Did you have break-up sex?"

"Of course we did, and we didn't make any messes don't worry." Sierra answers wistfully. If sex was that good everyday I wouldn't have broken up with him.

"Isn't that always the case?" Tara jokes.

"Come on Dalia, I'll drive you to get your bag. Do you want to come Tara?"

"Sure."

We all hop into Tara's car and drive to my place to get my packed bag. A phone chirps and as per usual, none of us know who's it is, so we all search. I pulled mine out, "Not mine, surprise surprise!"

"Not mine," Sierra adds.

"Oh.My.God!" Tara comments under her breath.

"What?" Sierra asks.

"Carter just fucking broke up with ME!"

"You're kidding, by Email?" I ask.

"No, worse, TEXT!" Tara exclaims.

Sierra reaches for the phone, "Let me see." She reads it aloud:

**Carter:** It's been a slice (especially last night), but I want to be single for a while. You understand? Lets just be friends. Signed, feeling smothered.

"How crass," I comment, "oh well, you were planning on breaking up with him anyway weren't you?"

"The asshole beat me to it," Tara seethes.

Sierra giggles, "Now you don't have to worry about it. You said he bored you anyway. I'm staying friends with Jeremy, who know's Carter might turn out to be a great friend. Boyfriends are overrated."

The following four weeks we live like total recluses. We make no

unnecessary contact with the outside world, shy away from social media. If we aren't by Tara's pool we are watching movies at Sierra's house. We swear off guys completely and get reacquainted with each other.

## Chapter 34

### Intense Training for Competition

I dread the day I'm expected back on the ice, not because I don't want to skate, but because I will have to face HIM.

Mom and dad are taking me in this morning, because Coach Hicks wants to meet with them to discuss the competition season. Dad is dressed in his best suit for work, the smell of his cologne fills his car. Mom is gussied up in a dress suit she only wears on special occasions.

We pull in, and I notice Ryan's car is already there. We stroll through the lounge to find Ryan's mother (Sara) and Ryan waiting for us on the Sofa. Coach Hicks is coming out of the skating office walking in our direction. He stretches out his hand to greet my father, "Welcome to our club Mr. Middleton, my name is Coach Hicks."

"The pleasure is mine," he says. I manage to avoid eye contact with Ryan by focussing on Coach Hicks and my parents.

Hicks starts leading us towards the club's dining room area overlooking the rink. I've seen it before but never dined there.

"I ordered the kids a light breakfast so they won't miss their entire practice, we can stay up here and enjoy the rest of our meal while they skate," Sara (Ryan's mom) informs my parents.

"That's lovely," mom says.

There's a private table set up for us next to the window giving us a perfect view of the ice. There are two extra chairs at the table, "Who are the two extra chairs for?" I ask.

Coach Hicks nods to Ryan, "Do you want to tell her?"

I looked into his dark eyes for the first time since the party and my heart gives out on me all over again. The embarrassment and hurt comes flooding back to me and I'm unable to maintain eye contact with him, I

just pray Coach Hicks doesn't pick up on it. The memory of him in the car with someone else is embossed like a stain.

"We thought you would want to have breakfast with Tara and Sierra on your birthday and give them a private performance before your debut in the competitive world."

"Oh My!" I look at mom, "I thought you guys forgot! Mom you told Ryan when my birthday is?"

"Tara told me," Ryan admits. "Please don't be mad at me for arranging all of this."

That's when Tara and Sierra show up in the dining room of the club. I go running over to give them each a hug and a kiss squealing with delight. This is huge! We come back to the table and that's when dad says, "We're so proud of you Honey, Happy Birthday."

The waitress places a full breakfast in front of Ryan and a carrot muffin, apple slice, and orange juice in front of me. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out who ordered the food.

"Dad and I are taking you out tonight. You can indulge then," mom reassures. She smiles at Mrs. Kennedy, "I have to keep her weight down or your son won't be able to lift her," she chuckles.

Mrs. Kennedy giggles at mom's comment while the waitress is placing food in front of everyone. Ryan and I eat quickly while Coach Hicks and our parents discuss the competition schedule. Tara and Sierra chat about how excited they are to see Ryan and I skate.

Mom slices me an evil eye, with just one glance signalling me to stop eating and go put on my skates, Ryan follows. By the time we get onto the ice, the practice session is in full swing. I haven't said a word to him since we left the table and I'm still not able to look into his eyes. I know my emotions are completely irrational.

I slip my hand in his and I go through the motions of warming up with him but there is palpable tension between us and I'm sure the only people who know are: me, Ryan and probably Coach Hicks. We stroke around and stretch for a few minutes and then he stops me and glares into my eyes. I cast mine away from his penetrating gaze and he lifts my chin to face him again, "Coach Hick's wants me to lift you."

My heart races, "But we didn't practice!"

“You never return my calls,” he counters. “You’re going to have to trust me. You did it in the pool.”

“Once! I did it in the pool once!”

“Then pretend that’s where we are. Coach Hicks chose to bring everyone upstairs so they could see you in your glory. We can do this, but you have to trust me.”

He releases my chin and takes hold of my hand. He guides me. We build up speed skating backwards, I placed my right foot into Ryan’s hand and his other hand grabs my waist. He hoists me into the air above his head with my left leg extended in the spiral position and this huge rush of adrenaline encompassing me, I smiled with tears of happiness as I see my parents expressions on their faces while I’m soaring in the air, I can tell they are proud of me.

Ryan lowers me to the ground and slows down enough so we can hug each other. Tears of happiness spring from my eyes. It is by far the best moment of my life, because it is shared with everyone I love, in particular my father, who is without a shadow of doubt, my biggest fan.

## Chapter 35

### Competition

It's our first competition of the season and after much duress our parents finally agree to trust us to go alone to Lake Placid. There only comfort is knowing Coach Hicks will be chaperoning starting late Saturday afternoon. Our parent's schedules are all over the place and nothing works out for them.

Tara and Sierra are so jealous when they find out I'm spending two nights with Alpha O. alone. I remind them that he's a.k.a. Alpha Snooze in the love department and they have absolutely nothing to be jealous about.

We meet at his car after school. Tara and Sierra are already standing there waiting with him. Tara holds her arms out to me, "We want to wish you good luck before you leave!"

She wraps them around me and then Sierra says, "Me too!"

The three of us stand there hugging and then Ryan interrupts, "We better get going Dal, do you have everything?"

"Yup, we loaded it into the car this morning," I say into Sierra's hair.

We release each other blowing kisses into the air saying our good-byes before Tara and Sierra start walking towards Tara's car. "Don't do anything we wouldn't do!" Tara calls out.

"That leaves us pretty much open to anything," Ryan teases.

Tara pretends to be insulted before getting into her car. Ryan hits his key fob and the doors unlock so we can get in, "Did your mom make the hotel reservations?" I ask.

"Yup, Ramada Inn, late check in, we're set. Do you want to stop and get food now or later?"

"I'm famished, now please!"

"Where?"

"You pick," I say. I'm up for anything at this point as long as I get food.

I reach for the radio and turn on my favourite station. 'Frozen' is playing, "Maybe we should skate to Frozen for a show program when we win the Olympics! It might lead to an immediate contract with 'Disney on Ice.'"

"You sound confident we're going to win," he appears pleased.

"Just think about it, I still have the Elsa dress and if you grow your hair and dye it you can be Kristoff! Or, If you leave your hair the way it is, you could be Olaf!"

"So you saying I look like Olaf?"

"Maybe," I purr. The golden arch catches my attention and I start swatting his arm, "Pull over, pull over!"

"What?"

"McD's! Mom never lets me eat there!"

"Drive thru or eat in?"

"Drive thru."

He pulls into the line, "What do you want?"

"I'll have one, no make that two Big Mac's, a chocolate milkshake, and a large fries!"

He smirks, "Seriously, you want all that?"

"Seriously, all that!"

"In front of me?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Its sheer gluttony! Girls get salads with strips of chicken overtop."

"I'm not 'girls' and this is McDonalds! I'll pay for yours"

"No, I've got it."

"Please let me, I haven't given you gas money."

"I won't argue with you, you might stop talking to me again!"

"There's good reason for that, as a matter of fact, you're lucky I'm talking to you right now after what you did at the party."

"I'm calling you out on double standards, didn't you fuck Adam," he defends himself.

"He was my boyfriend at the time, you didn't even know her."

“So why do you care?”

“Whatever, I don’t! You can get that chick pregnant and YOU will be sacrificing our partnership. It goes both ways.” I said in self defence. The argument is deadlocked, no point in carrying it on.

The speaker interrupts us, ‘Can I take your order?’

Ryan talks into it, “3 Big Macs, 2 Medium chocolate shakes, two large fries please.”

“Do you want to supersize it sir?”

“Sure, except the Milkshakes,”

“Drive up!”

The lady shows up in the window, “24.99 Please.”

Ryan hands her the twenty-five dollars I give him, and then he turns back to me.

There is an uncomfortable silence in the car, “The girl in the car meant NOTHING TO ME,” he admits.

“That makes me feel so much better,” I say sarcastically. “You get mad at me for jeopardizing our partnership and you turn around and do the exact same thing,” I repeat.

“She can’t get ME pregnant and we weren’t UN-protected,” he grins.

He looks so cute when he smiles like that. I focus on the food to distract me, “T.M.I! I don’t care what you do, okay?”

“You do care or you wouldn’t have stopped talking to me for a month!”

“WHATEVER! I’m over it.”

His voice gets serious, “Are you?” he asks. I can feel his eyes looking at me. I can’t return his stare because we both knew, I’m not.



## Chapter 36

### The Hotel

We check in to our tenth floor suite overlooking tranquil Lake Placid. Our room is quaint with two small maple chairs and a small table in-between overlooking the water. Our queen sized beds had tacky baby blue comforters with floral vector patterns, and a 42 inch l.e.d. t.v. is mounted to the wall that is state of the art eight years ago. The bathroom is small, a tub doubling as a shower, but we could have been staying in a cardboard box and would still be happy JUST because we are temporarily parentless!

Ryan and I begin taking our costumes out from their zipped hanger bags and unpack our clothes into the dresser provided to us.

“Which bed do you want?” I ask.

“Whichever one you’re in.” he says.

“Oh my, that will be a conflict of interest, definitely not in our ‘equation,’” I tease.

I take a gloriously long shower using their little complimentary soaps before I return in my pyjamas. He is on the bed closest to the door, so I walk past him to take the window bed. With phone in hand, I’m determined to placate my social media withdrawal from the long road trip. Ryan rolls his eyes at the sight of me and disappears into the bathroom. I text mom first:

**Dalia:** Mom, We’re here. Tell dad I said hi. We R going 2 bed soon. Tired from the drive. Xoxo.

**Mom:** Glad U made it there safely. Text 2morrow. xoxo

I text Sierra and Tara together:

**Dalia:** We made it!

**Sierra:** That's great!

**Tara:** Cool! Good luck!

**Sierra:** Ya, Good luck!

**Dalia:** Thanks! Going 2 bed now. Will text U after the short program.

He comes out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped loosely around his waist. I pretend not to notice but my eyes are drawn to him and I catch him looking back at me through the mirror.

I cleared my throat, "You should text your mom and Jer telling them we got here okay."

"You text them," he orders, gently tossing his phone in my direction. I let his phone land on the ugly yet plush comforter before picking it up.

"Should I tell them it's me?"

"Let them think its me," he advises. "It's easier than explaining."

It feels weird texting under Ryan's i.d. but they will be wondering if we arrived okay, and clearly he can't be bothered telling them.

I start texting his mother first just as he drops his towel on the floor standing naked with his back turned to me. I can see EVERYTHING in his reflection, "Shy?" I tease. I force my eyes down to continue texting, not wanting him to know he's captured my full attention.

"Separate beds?" He asks.

"Separate," I confirm stubbornly.

Hesitating he remains naked for one more way too brief fraction of a second before putting on a pair of pyjamas. I sort of have to remind myself to breath, in out, in out. I type quickly not wanting to miss another second of looking at his body:

**Ryan:** Hi mom, we R here safe. I will text U 2morrow after the short program.

**Sara:** Good luck!

**Ryan:** Thanks mom. Goodnight.

**Sara:** Goodnight Dear.

Then I text **Jer:**

**Ryan:** We're in Placid now.

**Jer:** Did you bang her yet?

**Ryan:** No should I?

**Jer:** Fuck ya, She's hot!

All of a sudden I don't want to text for him anymore. He's on the bed next to me now, but it isn't fun, texting pretending to be him is upsetting.

"Were you planning on 'banging' me Ryan?" I ask offensively, tossing his phone onto the foot of my bed. He retrieves it and lays next to me bending the pillow so he's sitting more upright before reading the text. He turns his phone off and places it on the night table beside him.

He looks at me vehemently and says, "I would never 'bang' you. Jeremy is just being an ass. I can't control what HE writes."

My eyes lock with Ryan's, "It's obvious this isn't the first time you've talked this way about me to him. What else have you said?"

"You don't want to know," he belittles it. His voice gets quieter and he sounds embarrassed. He secretiveness has me wanting to know more.

"Tell me" I push. The longer he takes to answer the worse my imagination becomes. I respect him, but obviously it isn't mutual or his friend wouldn't have addressed him that way. Clearly I mean nothing to him like that girl in the car that he 'banged'. When he doesn't answer, I turned off the light and roll away from him, on my side. I tear rolls down my cheek, but he doesn't get a chance to see it because I won't let him see weakness, when what I'm really feeling is anger.

The mattress moves and his pillow moves but I can't see what he's doing. Then he is pressed hard against me talking into my hair, "I told him I'm in love with you." I close my eyes to absorb what he said and then I ask him to repeat it. He whispers in my ear, "I'm in love with you, Dalia" sending the most intense chill down my spine.

He pulls my left shoulder down so I lay flat in the bed and then he rolls over top of me. Its dark in the room so I can't see him but his face is

really close to mine because I can feel his breath. The weight of his body pushes me deeper into the mattress and then he says for a third time, "I'm in love with you." I wish I can look into his eyes but his voice makes me feel what he is saying all over. It is something I've wanted to hear from him all along, and I was never aware of it.

His mouth finds mine and his lips press softly and slowly against me. His hands cradle my face and that's when he finds my secret tear. I feel his hesitation, as he wipes my face and tells me not to cry. His kisses become more demanding, his tongue explores me at his pace. His stubble scratches my cheeks as we kiss, but I like it. I place my hands on his jawline feeling it tighten and move with every kiss as he consumes me.

I pulled away from him for a second and say, "Ryan, you better go to bed before this goes too far. This isn't in our equation, I'm trying to make this easier on you." I say completely shocked over my own will power.

He pulls away from me and sort of hovers over me in the dark, "You're kicking me out of bed?" he asks in disbelief.

"One of us has to be strong, we're competing tomorrow." (That really pissed him off.) I feel the comforter move and the bed lift and the washroom door slam closed.

He comes back into the room after a few minutes and goes to his own bed to sleep. I feel warm inside and I keep hearing him over and over again in my head, 'I'm in love with you.' It's the happiest I ever felt before going to sleep.

He's in love with me!

## Chapter 37

### Competition Day 1

I peek out to find the rink full of spectators. I'm dressed in my black competition dress covered in rhinestones. My makeup is dramatic and beautiful so it can be seen from a distance.

Coach Hicks comes up to me wearing his usual jacket and a coaches pass hanging around his neck. He grabs me and takes me to Ryan's change room minutes before we are called out onto the ice. He wishes us good luck hugging us and giving us a quick pep talk while leaving his arm around my shoulders.

Hicks says to Ryan and I, "You're competing against seven other couples. If you make it into the top two, you're one step closer to that Olympic podium, so make this count! You either make it this year, or you're going to have to wait four more years and anything can happen in those four years. Remember, stay in the zone."

Ryan's look of determination and concentration can be felt just standing next to him. We begin limbering up separately by stretching our arms and legs as much as possible off the ice so our warm up time on the ice isn't wasted on simple maneuvers.

We're called out onto the rink with three other couples. Ryan's arm slides around my waist and we begin warm up. It's quiet in the arena with the exception of the sound of our blades breaking through the ice with each step and the fans calling out their favourite couples names. People are clapping when difficult elements are successfully landed.

Ryan and I focus on our most difficult throw jumps and lifts. We hear someone call out our names and we both glance in the same direction to find Tara, Sierra, and Jer watching us from the stands. We wave at them and then the announcer warns, "Last minute of warm-up."

We skate over to Coach Hicks, "I want you to do side by side triple toe's and then take it easy for the remainder of the minute, you're the first to compete so you need to rest." We do what he tells us, and when I look over at Ryan I notice he hasn't landed cleanly. We skate back to Coach Hicks and he tells Ryan, "You were leaning."

The announcer says, "Warm up is over." The skaters leave the ice leaving me and Ryan alone. "Our first competitors coming from the Toronto Skating Club is Ryan Kennedy and Dalia Middleton!" Everyone is clapping and we can hear Jeremy, Tara, and Sierra call out, "Yay Ryan and Dalia!" We take our spot on the ice and wait for our music to start. I looked into Ryan's eyes and he says to me, "We've got this," just before our program starts.

We made one mistake, Ryan screwed up his landing on the side by side triple toe, over-rotating it on his landing foot like he did in practice. The crowd made a disappointed noise when it happened but applauded warmly when we were done. We knew that one mistake in the short program was enough to cost us the championship at this competition. We immediately hope for silver.

We skate off to the kiss and cry waiting for our marks while the little boys and girls called sweepers go onto the ice to collect flowers and stuffed animals that spectators throw down for us.

Ryan's forehead is covered in sweat and he is breathing heavily. Coach Hicks meets us at the Kiss and Cry and we sit together in anticipation for our judgment. I smile and wave at the cameras and Ryan follows suit but his anger over his own mistake is visible on his face. Our marks are announced and then the focus turns onto the next couple.

We split up to change back into our normal clothes and meet outside my change room. Coach Hicks looks at Ryan, "Put it behind you and focus on tomorrow. Dalia, great job! Off to my massage now! See you kids in the morning!"

"What does he need a massage for?" I ask sarcastically. "We are the ones who skated!" Ryan doesn't laugh at my joke or say anything to me. He is too busy beating himself up. "Let's go find Jer and them. We can invite them back to our room for a few hours," I suggest. His eyes are broody with disappointment. "Ryan, seriously, you have to put that

mistake behind you or it will affect how you skate tomorrow.”

“Text them to meet us where we’re staying, it will be easier than finding them here,” he says under his breath.

“Sure,” I agree. I text Tara knowing they are together:

**Dalia:** We R staying @ the Ramada Inn 10th floor. Ryan said U can come over 4 a couple of hours. Did U guys get a room?

**Tara:** Ya, Holiday Inn :-( We should have asked U B4 we booked. Rn’t U going to wait 4 the results 2 B posted?

**Dalia:** No, Ryan wants 2 leave. He’s pissed @ that landing.

**Tara:** We’ll wait 4 them & then come right over so U can rest 4 tomorrow.

I look up from my phone.

“Are you done?” he asks.

I turn it off and throw it in the side pocket of my skating bag, “Ya, I can text my parents when we get back to our room.”

He takes my bag and slings it over his shoulder with his own, and holds my free hand while we walk to the car together. It is getting cold and dark outside when we leave the arena. He opens the doors to his car and once we are inside he presses the button for the engine to turn over and cranks the heat.

He looks so disappointed in himself, all I want to do is make him feel better. I place my hand over his and say to him softly, “We’ve got this.” We drive back in silence and I notice he never removes his hand from mine.

I pull my phone from my bag when we get into the room and it is flashing blue. There is a text from Tara:

**Tara:** U got 2nd! C U soon, leaving now!

I hand Ryan my phone for him to read.

“We still have a chance,” I encourage. “Tomorrow we’ll kick ass!” His mood seems a little brighter after that. I take the phone book out from our little maple desk and look up pizza places. Tara, Sierra, and

Jeremy arrive when our food does.

We give each other big hugs in the hallway, and I say, "I'm so happy you guys came! Are you staying for the long programs?"

Tara is still in my arms when she answers, "We wouldn't miss it!"

The smell of scrumptious pizza fills our hotel room while everyone hangs their jackets up so we have more room to sit. Tara and I sit on my bed, Ryan is on his own and Jeremy and Sierra take chairs.

I tear open the paper bag and lay the drinks we ordered on one side of our dresser, the rest of it is taken up by the pizza's.

"What made you guys decide to come and why didn't tell us?" I ask.

Tara grins, "It was Jer's idea, we wanted to surprise you!"

"I'm glad you did," I gush.

Ryan looked at Jeremy, "Nice text ass wipe!"

"The banging one? You let her READ it?"

"What text?" Tara asks.

"Oh, Jer asked Ryan if he 'banged me' yet," I explain.

Sierra's jaw drops and she gapes at Jeremy, "You didn't!"

Tara looks at me curiously, "Did he, 'bang' you?"

"No! Of course not!" I answer.

"What do you mean of course not?" Ryan asks indignantly. "Don't you want to?"

"Of course I do!"

Tara smirks, "She so does!"

I answer cautiously, "Eventually."

Tara clarifies, "Like, not right now but sometime in the near future."

"How near is near?" Ryan asks, "Why can't it be sooner rather than later?"

"With us here?" Sierra teases. Nobody acknowledged her joke.

"The equation Ryan, it's not in our equation right now," I explain.

"Damn it, stop using my line against me," Ryan says angrily.

"I'm not! I just think we should wait. We have to keep our priorities straight and right now it's competitions. Everything else is on hold." I look at Tara, "He's in love with me!" We squeal all giddy and everyone is looking at us. Sierra is unusually quiet.

Jeremy looks disgustedly at Ryan, "Dude! You told her? Take your



nuts out of her skating bag!”

“They’re not in it!” Sierra says overemotionally. Her eyes are unmistakably fixed on Ryan.

I look at Tara after Sierra’s reaction, “What’s up with her?”

Tara looks at Sierra, “She has something to tell you.”

We all turned to her, Jeremy gets up abruptly and says, “I left something in the car.”

He deserts her, us, in the hotel room while Sierra breaks her news to me and Ryan, “I’m pregnant,” she blurts.

“Is it Jer’s,” Ryan asks. I glance at him surprised by his question. Does he think Sierra is promiscuous?

“Of course it’s his,” Tara snaps defensively.

“Does your mother know?” I ask Sierra.

Sierra is tearing up, “Not yet. We haven’t decided what we’re going to do about it.”

“You have to keep it,” I advocate. “We’ll all help you. What does Jeremy say?”

“You don’t have time to help her,” Ryan interrupts sounding irritated by my offer.

“First he asked me if it was his and when I told him it was, he said staying together isn’t the answer. I broke up with him for a reason, and a baby can’t be our ‘glue’”.

Tara looks at me explaining for Sierra, “He doesn’t love her anymore, he thinks the baby is going to ruin both of their lives. He says they’re too young, and he’s been pushing her to have an abortion. Ryan, you have to talk to him.”

“Jeremy made it clear to me that SHE broke up with HIM. I’m not getting involved, this should be between Jeremy and Sierra.”

Sierra’s phone chirps. She looks at her screen for quite sometime before looking up, “He’s mad Tara, he says we shouldn’t have said anything until their competition is over. He’s waiting for us in the car.”

“You better go,” I say. “We’ll talk later.” We hug good-bye and I give her a reassuring pat on the back before she leaves Ryan and myself alone.

I strip out of my competition dress and hang it up right away so it doesn't wrinkle. Then I remove my nylons and underwear before looking at my reflection. I see Ryan looking back at me.

"Shy?" he teases.

Eyeing him flirtatiously I answer, "No more than you are!" I slip a nightgown on not bothering with underwear before sliding in-between my sheets. He folds his pillow in half and joins me on my bed leaning against it. Ryan starts texting his mother while I text mine:

**Dalia:** Mom, we came in 2nd going in2 the long program.

**Mom:** How did U skate?

**Dalia:** We did really well except Ryan over-rotated his triple toe, so it wasn't a perfect program.

**Mom:** U better skate well tomorrow. Only the top 2 can go on. Get some rest.

**Dalia:** I will. Tara & Sierra showed up.

**Mom:** That's nice dear! Don't let them stay U need 2 sleep if U're going 2 skate well 2morrow.

**Dalia:** I will. Love U & dad.

**Mom:** We Love U 2. I'll tell him.

I wanted to text Tara to see if everything was okay before going to bed:

**Dalia:** R U @ the hotel now?

**Tara:** Ya

**Dalia:** What happened after U left?

**Tara:** He complained all the way back to the hotel about how their dirty laundry was being aired in public and that the decision is theirs to make and nobody elses.

**Dalia:** He has a point.

**Tara:** Ya, I guess. But we R her friends. She's lying next 2 me crying right now.

**Dalia:** That's so sad:- ( Does she want 2 keep the baby?

**Tara:** She isn't sure. She wants to tell her mom 1st B4 she decides.

**Dalia:** She should tell her asap.

**Tara:** When we get back.

**Dalia:** Does she want us with her?

**Tara:** I'll ask her when she calms down a bit.

**Dalia:** Give her a hug 4 me.

**Tara:** Will do. Good luck 2morrow!

**Dalia:** Thx! Will I C U after the competition?

**Tara:** I think we R leaving right away. C. U. Monday @ school.

**Dalia:** Cool! xoxo

**Tara:** xoxo

The next day we skate a perfect program placing us respectably in second position allowing us to continue through to the next competition.

## Chapter 38

### The Only Choice

We can't talk Sierra out of it and her mother is on Jeremy's side as far as abortion is concerned. Now Sierra is insisting that she isn't ready to have a baby much less HIS baby, and is refusing to carry to term. She claims that she hates Jeremy for the way he treated her after finding out that she is pregnant.

Tara and I google abortions and advise Sierra that a clinic is the way to go. We find out that she doesn't even need a referral from a physician or a parents consent. She does have the consent part though. The clinic ensures her privacy. Luckily for Sierra abortions are covered by OHIP.

The lines of communication deaden between Sierra and Jeremy with the exception of one text telling him she decided to terminate the pregnancy but not telling him when or where. The clinic we contact is able to accommodate her immediately.

I feign being sick to Ryan and Coach Hicks so I can take the day off skating and support Sierra in her time of need, after all, Jeremy encouraged her to do this in the first place.

Tara picks me up first, and then Sierra. We pull into a local park and call in absences for each other to the school pretending to be our parents so we can have the day off without the school calling us.

Once our calls are finished, we turn our phones off and drive in silence to the clinic.

That is our biggest mistake.

We never should have turned our phones off, it gives us away.

Sierra isn't allowed to eat or drink anything for several hours before the abortion and since Sierra is early on in her pregnancy, she is able to have the least invasive procedure.

The clinic is easy to find, located in an old office building. Tara parks and we walk up together. Sierra registers like a normal doctor's office, anyone would attend a doctor's appointment. She hands the receptionist her OHIP card and fills out information on a clipboard and hands it back to the lady before rejoining us.

Her name is called shortly after and Sierra requests to have us come into the room with her. The lady nods and the three of us proceed to follow her into a small examining room with ultrasound equipment, an examining table, two chairs and a box of kleenex. With a heavy heart the reality of what Sierra was being encouraged to do strikes me as we enter the room. I turn to her and mouth, "You don't have to do this."

The lady who escorts us into the room says, "Sierra, please put this gown on with the opening on your back. The doctor and nurse will be with you shortly." When the lady closes the door behind her Sierra immediately strips out of her clothes and put on the gown she was given before taking a seat on the table leaving the chairs open for Tara and myself.

The doctor and nurse that attend to Sierra are both female. They ask her questions and discuss future methods of birth control before proceeding with determining the gestation period through ultrasound. Once that is done, they are able to confirm that she can have the least invasive procedure and chose the safest method for Sierra.

The procedure only takes minutes before Sierra is brought into another room to recover.

Her pregnancy is terminated.

We leave the clinic and parked across the street is Ryan's black Mercedes.

Ryan and Jeremy are watching us.

"Oh.My.God, they found us," Tara says spotting them. They get out of their car and start crossing the street, walking towards us.

"Did either of you tell them?" Sierra whispers to us frantically.

"No!" We say in unison.

When they reach where we are standing, Jeremy studies Sierra, "We

need to talk.”

“I have nothing to say to you,” she whimpers weakly.

“We’re taking her home,” Tara informs him coldly. “She needs to rest.”

We start walking towards Tara’s car when Ryan calls out, “Where do you think you’re going?” to me.

I clear my throat, “Home with Sierra and Tara,” I say lightly.

“Like hell you are,” Ryan seethes. “You’re coming with me.” He grabs my wrist and literally drags me back to his car. “Get in!” he orders. He is scary but hot at the same time. I get in without fussing knowing from experience I don’t have the strength to pull away from him, or outrun him. I’m willing to take whatever is coming my way because I like ALPHA male and I know I was naughty by not being honest with him and telling him what I was really up to.

He presses the button to start his car, and pulls out of the spot before I even have my seatbelt on. “Do you want to explain to my why you lied about being sick?”

“Sierra needed me.”

“For what?” he asks angrily.

“Support.” He slams on his breaks, “She didn’t!”

“Of course she did. Jeremy encouraged it.” He pulls out his phone and texts Jeremy right in front of me:

**Ryan:** She terminated the pregnancy. Sorry Jer.

“He changed his fucking mind. We were on our way to tell her!”

“He shouldn’t have let her get that far, nothing would have happened if he wasn’t such an asshole to begin with.”

“He was upset. He needed time to come to terms with it.”

“Well, now he has tons of time,” I say spitefully. “She killed their baby because that’s what he wanted and she couldn’t do parenthood alone. Now take me back to Sierra’s, because my friend needs me.”

## Chapter 39

### Merry Christmas

In only our first year of skating together, Ryan and I are still in contention for making it to the Olympics. Never in Canadian pairs history has a pair that only skated together one year ever achieved this! Word of us is spreading like wildfire in the skating community and we are now making headlines in local papers with each win.

We have a one week break during Christmas and New Years before we compete two more times, each competition three weeks apart. If we survive both, then we make it. Our dreams of skating on Olympic ice will become a reality.

Mom is singing Christmas carols in the kitchen while making her usual Christmas dinner. The smell of turkey and cranberry sauce is permeating through the air. Dad is glued to his new 90 inch LED television mom had delivered for him while he was at work. I am exploring my brand new Apple Air that has every bell and whistle I can think of. Suffice it to say, we are all content.

It's been ages since I checked FB so I decide to divert a potential social media withdrawal and check out what is going on. Ryan is requesting to add me as a friend so I accept. I start scrolling down the wall when an instant message pops up from **Adam:**

**Adam:** Hi! Friends? (He selected a yellow face waving white flag and places it next to his message)

**Dalia:** Sure! Why not?

**Adam:** I never C U on FB

**Dalia:** I'm > in2 texting!:-) I'm only on FB once in a while.

**Adam:** Check R. side of screen, I invited U 2 New Years Party.

**Dalia:** Cool, will try 2 make it.

I see the invite and click on it out of curiosity to see who accepted, declined or clicked maybe. He looks like he's going to have a good turnout. I go back to his dialog box after.

**Adam:** How's U'r friend?

**Dalia:** Which 1?

**Adam:** Sierra, Jeremy told me about what happened between them.

**Dalia:** She's had a rough year.

**Adam:** It hasn't been roses 4 Jeremy either. I'm surprised he's still talking to Ryan!

**Dalia:** Really? Why wouldn't he B talking 2 Ryan?

**Adam:** Nobody told U?

**Dalia:** I wouldn't be asking if I knew!

**Adam:** I shouldn't be the 1 2 tell U..

**Dalia:** U have me curious now, I won't say anything.

**Adam:** The baby Sierra aborted couldn't have been Jeremy's.

**Dalia:** Get the Fuck Out! I'm her best friend, she would have told me if she was cheating on Jer

**Adam:** She wasn't cheating on HIM,

**Dalia:** ?

**Adam:** It was conceived with R.Y.A.N.

**Dalia:** No! She wouldn't.. He wouldn't.. That can't B!

**Adam:** I'm sorry D., U should know the truth about U'r best friends. If U want U can talk 2 Jeremy, I'm sure he'd B > than happy 2 tell U what really happened. Text me when U'r ready. I'll take U to him.

I sat back in my chair dumbfounded. There is NO WAY this can be true. Adam probably fabricated this to get back with me or something.

Mom calls up, "Dinner is ready!"

I compose myself and slowly walk downstairs doing the math. According to her ultrasound results she had to have gotten pregnant late August. Jeremy and Sierra broke up in June because it was when I had my break from skating in the summer.



*Why was I so stupid? Did I think she had an immaculate conception? It never dawned on me to ask her whether she got back with Jeremy or found someone else? I begged her to reconsider the abortion. He was angry that she terminated the baby, and that I got involved. I needed to get the truth out of Jeremy because if Tara knew, she wasn't telling me. She was keeping their dirty secret.*

I join mom and dad at the dinner table, but I'm not there.

I check my phone after dinner, it's flashing blue. It's a text from Ryan:

**Ryan:** U'r friends with Adam on FB?

I ignored his text and text Adam:

**Dalia:** I'm ready, I need 2 C Jeremy.

**Adam:** I'll pick U up in 10

I wait in the living room waiting to see headlights. The black mustang pulls up and I slip out quickly before my parents can stop me. I jump into his car closing the door and putting my seatbelt on before texting mom so she wouldn't worry:

**Dalia:** Mom, had 2 run out 4 a bit with a friend. B back soon.

Adam pulls into Jeremy's and I change seats getting into the back while we wait for him to come out.

Jeremy gets into the car and lights a cigarette, "Sorry dude, I've been dying for a cigarette all night," he turns back to look at me. "My parents don't know I smoke," he explains. Jeremy spins back to face Adam after catching a glimpse of me, "You fucking told her didn't you?"

"Shouldn't she know?" he defends himself.

"Ya, that's the only reason you told her," he says sarcastically. "It's not because you want to get back with her or anything. You're going to have to step to the back of the line in that long fucking queue she has

waiting for her.”

Adam looks at me in the rearview, “Just tell her.”

“Alone,” Insists Jeremy, “come let’s talk Dalia.” We get out of the car and he takes my hand, “Sierra broke up with me in early June. She dropped the bomb that she was pregnant in the end of summer. She swore the baby was mine. At first I insisted she terminate the pregnancy, but Ryan talked me out of it. I wasn’t suspicious of Ryan at that point, I just thought he was against abortions or something. We tried calling you, Tara, and Sierra and all of your phones were off, so we knew what you guys were doing. That’s when we started googling abortion clinics and then frantically went racing around trying to find you guys. Luckily, we recognized Tara’s car on our second stop.”

*I remembered Ryan in the hotel asking Sierra, ‘Is it’s Jer’s?’ Now I realize, he was trying to determine if it was HIS!*

“While we were waiting for you guys to come out, I did the math. The likelihood of me being the father was slim, because she probably would have been showing already. I told Ryan in the car that I didn’t think it was mine. He texted me confirming that she had the abortion. He must have realized in the car that it was his. Ryan had already dragged you away from us but when I got Sierra alone, I got her to admit that she was only seven weeks into the pregnancy. I demanded to know who the father was and she was so tight lipped on telling me who she was with I instinctively knew it had to be someone really close to me. Who could be closer, than my best friend. When I guessed Ryan, the look in her eyes told me everything.”

“So if that’s true, than why are you still friends with Ryan?”

“You know that saying about keeping your enemies close?”

“Did you confront him?”

“He doesn’t know I know.”

“Why not?”

“I thought I would let him stew in the fact that she aborted his baby for a while.”

I’m numb and it isn’t from the temperature outside. He holds me close for a little while before walking me back to the car. He opens the front door and says to Adam, “Take care of her.”

Meadow Murphy

He drives me home, on Christmas Day.

## Chapter 40

### Keeping it Together

It was the hardest thing I ever had to do, but somehow I manage to wall myself off from my personal life and focus on the task at hand, skating. Ryan has been attributing my silence and distance from him to nerves and I never correct him because that's what saves me.

Our practices are a mess, but we manage to skate clean programs making it all the way to the Olympics. Everyone is still buzzing about us. We are the new Canadian sweethearts that are expected to take gold this year. Dad and mom are glowing with pride when I get home from the final competition, they insist on taking us out for a celebratory dinner. We chose to go four days before we are to compete in the Olympics. Unbeknownst to me Ryan is invited.

We wait for Ryan to come over to our house so we can all take one car. Ryan parks his Mercedes in our driveway and we pile into dad's shitbox Honda. Normally I feel embarrassed but if it doesn't bother my father, then why should it bother me? I feel absolutely no need to impress Ryan after Jeremy and I spoke. I'm going to have it out with him after we finish competing. I don't want to sacrifice all that we worked for over Ryan's indiscretions.

Ryan is dressed dead sexy in a suit and tie. I find myself breathlessly attracted to him. Ryan gets into our car and dad looks in his rearview mirror suggesting, "I'd want to try a new restaurant called Compagnolo. It was a coffee shop I always stopped at before going to work and now it's an Italian restaurant receiving rave reviews."

"Sounds good to me, thanks for inviting me Mr. Middleton," Ryan says appreciatively.

Dad looks in the rearview at him, "Glad to have you with us! Call me

Alex, son!" dad suggests proudly. In Ryan's and my book there is no higher compliment than that. Too bad Ryan is undeserving of it at best. "Sweetheart, you're okay with that too?"

"Sure," mom says.

"Is it okay with you Honey?"

"Sounds great dad."

It's just after six when we walk into the quaint restaurant that is full with the exception of two empty tables.

The hostess approaches us asking, "How many?"

Dad looks at us, "Table for four please."

She grabs the menus and starts leading us to one of the two empty tables, "This way please." She chooses one, and lays out our menus before we take our seats. "A waitress will be with you shortly," she says as she walks away.

Dad takes a sip of his water, and then loosened his tie, "I'm not feeling well," he complains. His forehead begins beading up and his eyes roll back. He starts leaning in his chair like he is going to fall when Ryan catches him and lowers him to the ground. Mom gives this haunting scream that can be heard outside of the restaurant and then a person from another table calls out, "Someone call 911!"

People at every table are reaching for their phones. Ryan gets off his chair and kneels down next to dad. He shakes dad and then rubs the middle of his chest asking, "Alex can you hear me?" He doesn't answer and then Ryan feels for a pulse on his neck. I'm fastened to my chair in sheer terror watching. I have a front row seat to my biggest nightmare. When Ryan can't feel a pulse he begins chest compressions.

Ryan yells, "Mr. Middleton! Alex!" just before the ambulance attendants come bursting through the door, his face is red and he is crying now. I've never seen Ryan cry until tonight. My world is crumbling as my pillar of strength is lying on the floor before me motionless.

The ambulance attendants address mom, "Mrs, can you tell us what happened?" Ryan continues the c.p.r. while the attendants are preparing their equipment and waiting for mom's story.

“We sat down to have dinner, and he complained he wasn’t feeling well. He loosened his tie and took a sip of water. His eyes rolled back and then he collapsed right here. Ryan started CPR.”

There is no time to be concerned about daddy’s dignity, they tear his shirt from his chest, placing two large pads on him. The first attendant says everyone stand back, and a shock is administered. My dad’s lifeless body lifts in response but there is still no heart beat. The second attendant continues c.p.r. and they checked for his pulse again, when they don’t find it, they give him a second shock. They stop after three. They look at mom when they finish and say, “We’re so sorry.”

“That’s it?” I scream. “You’re stopping?” I turn to Ryan desperately, “Ryan do something! They’re not doing anything to save him! You have to save him. Please!” I kneel down next to daddy grabbing his collar, “Don’t leave me, you promised you’d never leave me. You’re my rock! You have to watch me compete, the Olympics is just a few days away, it’s our dream!” I turn to mom, “I need him so much! There’s so much he has to see! Who will give me away if I ever get married? My kids won’t have a grandfather,” then I collapse as the glue that holds my heart together disintegrates, my heart is broken now.

Mom and Ryan are shocked into profound silence appearing pale as ghosts. I can’t imagine my own appearance and I don’t care. I lay my head on daddy’s warm chest, wishing it to rise and fall, for it to be wrong, an awful mistake, or a dream. I pinch myself but nothing happens, nothing changes.

The restaurant is evacuated which is fitting under the circumstances.

Ryan calls his mother out of a meeting, but when he tries talking to her, his words don’t come. He’s crying too hard, so the ambulance attendant takes his phone and finishes the conversation for him. He tells Sara what happened and gave her directions to the restaurant.

The ambulance attendant asks my mom to see dad’s health card and they copied daddy’s information. They reassure her that she doesn’t have to come to the hospital unless she wants pills for herself. They tell her where they are taking him, and advised her to give a funeral home of her choice a call in the morning. The owner of the restaurant waits with us until Ryan’s mom arrives.

Sara arrives at the restaurant and she immediately fills with tears when she sees me draped over dad's chest on the floor, "Come on, you guys can stay with us. We'll get your car later Ryan." Sara puts her arm around mom and guides her out of the restaurant. Ryan physically has to remove me from dad carrying me as I weep hysterically.

When we get to Ryan's house, Sara opens the door and asks, "Can I get anyone anything?" Everyone shakes their heads and then she offers for my mother to sleep with her. Mom agrees to it and they leave me alone with Ryan.

Ryan carries me to his bedroom, placing me on the edge of his queen bed with a slow and steady stream of tears running down my face that hasn't let up since the restaurant.

He removes all of my clothing with the exception of my underwear and he digs through his dresser finding a normal T-shirt that he helps me get into. He lays me under his covers and begins to walk away when I manage to say, "Don't go," in a weak and shaky voice.

He removes his clothes with the exception of his underwear and gets into bed with me. He holds me against his chest, and whispers, "I'm so sorry."

His eyes are red and tears continue running down his cheeks, the way mine are. He lifts my chin and kisses me slowly and deliberately. His fingers slide down my body and into my panties where he begins kneading me, preparing me for himself. He mounts me as I cry into his chest, heart felt compassion flows between us.

## Chapter 41

### The Funeral

The sun peaks through Ryan's sheer, waking me up. For a fraction of a second, yesterday never happened. When that fraction is over, the memory of yesterday comes flooding back and it feels fresh all over again. All my mornings start off this way now.

Mom calls the funeral home the day after dad dies. Ryan and his mother make the rest of the arrangements for us.

The funeral is scheduled to happen in the early afternoon and then Ryan and I go immediately to Pearson International to catch our flight for the Olympics.

I march into mom and dad's bedroom where I feel dad all around me and find mom lying in the dark, weeping into her pillow. I make my mind up and I'm determined to forfeit the competition and stay home with her, she needs me.

I sit next to her on the bed and say, "Mom, I can't go through with it. I need to be here with you."

With her head still buried in her pillow she says, "Your father wanted you to make it to the Olympics more than anything in the world, you HAVE to go, for your father." I know she is right, but everything hurts so much.

"Are you coming with us mom, please?"

"I can't, forgive me Honey."

"There's nothing to forgive mom. We have to get ready to say bye to him now."

"I don't want to say good-bye," she shakes. Fresh tears literally pour down her face.

"Be strong mom, you can do this, for him," I encourage. She rolls off



her bed and trudges to their bathroom which still has his cologne, aftershave and razors scattered all over the countertop from when he was getting ready to go out for dinner. Mom doesn't move any of his mess, but works around it. It's the last things he touched before he left last night, so they are sacred. She hates it when he doesn't put his things away in the drawers. They always bickered about it, and now I would do anything just to hear them bicker again.

I throw suitcase together and hang my dresses in the hanger bags before getting into the shower and dressing in all black. Dad loves me in black so I'm going to wear my black rhinestone dress for him for both programs. I know he will be happy to see it on me. He has to see it on me, wouldn't he?

Ryan and Sara said they will meet us at the Simple Alternative funeral home. They are very accommodating to us under such duress. A chauffeured limousine picks us up, there is a bouquet of roses wishing condolences laid in the limousine from Jeremy and Adam.

When we get their, we close the doors. Daddy always told me to never say what happens behind closed doors, but in this case, it is worth the exception. My mother and I can't bring ourselves to talk, it is just too hard. Sara starts it for us by telling everyone how cordial and supportive he was. Adam and Jeremy sit at the back with Sierra and Tara. Ryan spoke about how he called him son and the look of pride in my dad's eyes when he saw the lift for the first time. Ryan looked at the open coffin and tells dad, that our performance this weekend is for him, and that he'll take care of me for him. Tara and Sierra say words about how he was like a father to them. I'm glad my father never found out what disappointing friends they are. He deserves better than them.

The limousine takes us to the gravesite. Ryan, Jeremy, Adam, and three of dad's friends from work volunteer to be pallbearers. Media are standing at the gates respecting their distance, but just their presence and maggot like behaviour bothers me.

I have to believe that he is somewhere else rather than in a dark hole all by himself. His spirit has to be in heaven or wherever it goes, somewhere warm and bright, where love flies freely in the air, not here, just not here.

Words are said and then we begin to go our separate ways. Ryan takes my hand and leads me to his Mercedes. That's when the paparazzi tries to shove their microphones and camera's into our faces. Ryan fights them off like Sir. Galahad and drives us to the airport, ensuring my luggage is transferred from the limousine to his Mercedes.

We board our plane and the flight attendants and captain do their usual spiel. When the plane finishes its takeoff I decide its time for him to know I know, "I know," I tell him before looking away.

Two words pack a powerful punch, nothing more needs to be said. It is the last time I look at him. I have no will to cast my eyes in his direction, I either looked out the window or close them.

Ryan gets our baggage while I hide from reporters. He comes to get me when the car is ready to take us to the hotel. When we get to the hotel we checked in, only ever leaving if we have to go on the ice. I don't have an appetite but I know I have to eat for energy, so Ryan will order in healthy food that I will pick at.

Its time for us to compete so I dress in my black rhinestone dress for Daddy and we go to the arena. Coach Hicks is supportive but even he is at a loss, "Do your best," he says in a broken voice hugging me with tears in his eyes. Seeing HIM with tears in his eyes is hard, really hard.

We skate a clean short program so our work is half done. The crowd has to be aware because even though our performance is clean it wasn't perfect and they give us a standing ovation.

Ryan brings me back to our room where I pick at more food before taking a shower and going to sleep. He doesn't wake me until its time to leave again, this time it is for our final performance.

We stand on the ice facing each other before our program starts. He mouths, 'This is for your dad,'. I nod solemnly back to him.

The music begins and we are in the zone, every move we make is better than anything we ever done in practice. Our moves are concise showing beauty, strength, and agility, everything my father ever stood for.

We complete four and a half minutes flawlessly skating our personal

best. The music stops and everyone jumps to their feet including the judges. I crumble to the ground in an anguish only my father would have understood because he isn't here to see us. Ryan picks me up off the ice and carries me to the Kiss and Cry where Coach Hicks is waiting for us in tears.

We win.

Cameraman and photographers are taking pictures of us from all angles while reporters from every country line up to talk to the Canadian couple that suffered an unspeakable tragedy before heroically winning an Olympic gold medal.

To be continued...Kiss and Cry Part 2



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