

Always and Forever

1

ALIN

I sat on my chair taking notes as Mr. Crauser explained the details of the upcoming science project. "I want everybody to participate enthusiastically as a team and not just make your partner do all the work and as this will be added to your academic career please be punctual about it and do not miss the date of submission which will be exactly one month from today. We will discuss about the pairing up process in the next class. See you all." The bells for lunch break rings and Mr. Crause exits the class.

I stretched my back and started organizing my things when my eyes fell on the boy making his way inside the class. His blonde dyed hair looked beautiful in the sunlight screening through the window and his face literally dazzled. He walked towards the girl in the second row who stood in her seat with hands wide open to welcome him. Once near her he pulled her in for a kiss resulting in a few high pitched cheers from the background. His left hand grabbed her butt and their mouth devoured each other. Seeing this something happened inside me and I shuddered. I pulled the hood of my sweatshirt over my head and grabbing my bag got out of the class towards the cafeteria.

Being a nerd, sitting alone in the cafeteria during the lunch was pretty common for me. Another reason of me having no friends was that I really don't want to grab attention of anyone here neither do I want them to be in trouble. Yeah, anyone who will be friends with me will be in trouble as I was one of the studious, weird students of



FREE
eBooks



WHOEVER
WHENEVER
WHEREVER
YOU ARE

INSTANTLY DOWNLOAD THESE MASSIVE BOOK BUNDLES

CLICK ANY BELOW TO ENJOY NOW

3 AUDIOBOOK COLLECTIONS

Classic AudioBooks Vol 1 ■ Classic AudioBooks Vol 2 ■ Classic AudioBooks Kids

6 BOOK COLLECTIONS

Sci-Fi ■ Romance ■ Mystery ■ Academic ■ Classics ■ Business

the society. So, they maintain their distance from me and I have come to really appreciate that.

The cafeteria was bustling as usual. Kids are busy chatting, eating, throwing food on each other, gossiping, making fun of someone, etc. You can see categories of people at each table. The table to my right was acquired by a group of studious kids who were probably busy discussing about something educational. Once in a while they threw glances at me. I don't really know what those looks meant but they might be somewhere in the line of pity that I have no friends or sympathy that I was sitting alone. The table right in front of them contained the gossip girls who were hushing and giggling at every 10 seconds. They look at someone passing by and burst into fits of laughter. I never really understood these kinds of people. Don't they have anything else to do other than snickering at others, as if their own lives were so perfect? The table in front of me was taken by the group of famous kids. Seated there were Kevin Sanders, the football team captain, Natalie Kim, the cheerleading team captain, Ariana Greene, the college principal's daughter, Joe Peters, the handsome guitarist and He.

I knew him. Sebian White, that was what his name was but people knew him as Ian White, the fresh new face of the modelling world. He has not very long ago started his modelling career but is already at the heights of it. I mean why he won't be when he lacked nothing. He had a pretty face, perfect slender body and also the attitude of a dickhead, the best combination ever. He lives nearby my house with his grandmother, Mrs. Reece. I have met her a few times and she is a lovely lady. I have heard that his father is a big businessman in the city and have sent him here to take care of his grandmother while continuing his college.

You might be wondering how I had so much information about everyone when I was just a back bench nerd. Well, you see, Strastown is not a very big place and everybody knows everybody else here. I have been living here for 21 years of my life now and am pretty familiar with everyone in this town, not because I am an extrovert but because I am good at noticing things around me. I took another bite of my lunch when I felt someone's eyes on me. I looked up and almost choked on my food. Sebian White's eyes were directed straight at me and my spoon fell back on the plate when he slowly smirked at me.

2

SEBIAN

I kissed her, I kissed her hard. I don't do this because I love her, you can't really love a girl like Natalie anyways. I do this just to take my mind off of all other nonsense things around me. My father thinks that I should focus on my studies right now instead of modelling so, here I am in this place which starts and ends at a hand's length and have nothing decent what so ever to do during my stay here. After the death of my grandfather and then my mother, my grandma has started to stay ill these days. I didn't visit here very frequently before but in her last days my grandma wanted me to spend some time with her.

I don't like it here though. In the city I had a busy life, fans every here and there but unlike here they were a little more civilized who remained in their boundaries but here it is crazy. These people were seeing somebody in the real life for the first time and hence I get no time to breathe. The best example of that are the kids studying here and to narrow it, Natalie. From the day one that I have joined here she has been stuck to me like a gum. How much hard I tried to ignore

her I couldn't. So, I gave up and instead made her an object of my entertainment. Along with her she brought a few others and now I am also a part of the group of famous kids in this college.

Mostly because of these reasons I don't attend college frequently. I like staying at home with grandma and helping her around. The time that I get free I paint or listen to music or finish up my college homework. However I may come as I can assure you that I am actually good in studies, the reason that I don't get into trouble even if I bunk classes.

Me and Natalie walk into the cafeteria for lunch and were greeted by the other three at our usual table. We all get seated with our lunch trays and I can't avoid noticing the hushed talks, the giggles and eye movements pointed at us in the background. I am used to these now so I dig into my lunch instead. Natalie is irritating me today, she is being too clingy and I feel suffocated. She is sitting beside me with her left hand hooked into my right and her chin rested on my shoulder. I felt her breath on my face which annoyed me.

"What happened Nat? You look so dull today," Ariana asked, looking genuinely worried about Natalie. Natalie instantly removed her chin off of my shoulder as if she was waiting for someone to ask her about her mood. "What do I do Ana? I don't think I will ever get that scholarship I want." She said sulkily, letting out an exasperating sigh. "Why do you say that Nat? You are academically doing well already, with a little more effort you'll be able to get it," she said with an assuring smile. "You think that will happen as long as Miss Nerd is in the race," she pointed at the person sitting at our front table with a subtle movement of her brows. "I really did not expect this peasant to continue her studies. I thought she will just drop it and help her father with earning money for her brother's studies but she's just not

letting it go. Is she doing this just to mess with me?" I can feel the anger emanating from her in the form of shiver of her body.

Before she loses herself and creates a scene here I thought of calming her. "Why are you worrying about that Nat? I can give you private tuitions if you want" I teased her getting my face near the nook of her neck. She giggled, her anger dissipating a little and said, "Will you baby? That would make me happy but you know what would make me more happy- it's if you can do something about that girl instead," she shamelessly pointed her finger at the lone figure sitting with her head down having her lunch. "It's not like I am bad at studies, I am just bad than her. If she is out of my way I can easily grab the scholarship," she sighed and pushed me lightly.

I glanced at Joe who was looking at me with a silly smile on his face. He knows my hardships; in fact he is the only one in the group I actually can say is my friend. I averted my eyes from him and looked at the girl who was the topic of our conversation. No, I don't see anything special in her. She wore a grey sweatshirt that was covering her like a turtle with only her head moving in and out to take in the food. She was eating at an unbelievable speed, looked like she just wanted to get out of here. After a few seconds she suddenly got her head up and looked at me. I barely noticed her dark green eyes when she suddenly choked on her food. This made me smile at her and within a fragment of second her spoon fell out of her hand on to her tray. Wait! What was happening here? Was she scared of me or was it something else. Hmm... This seems interesting. A sudden surge of excitement ran through my body and a plan started formulating in my head. I think I might have a way for letting Nat get what she wants and in the meanwhile it will be fun for me too.

WRITER'S THANKS

Hello and welcome to everyone who took out a little time from their busy schedule to come here and give my book a try. I would like to heartily thank all of you guys for doing that. This small gesture of yours means a lot to me. It gives me the motivation to keep on writing and making myself better with every attempt.

This is my first book, actually my first book I had the guts to post for people to read. I have ideas in my head and I write them but I never solidly believed in them and so they remained as ideas in my diary. Hopefully this time I will do justice to them and myself by getting them out there to the world.

I enjoy writing. It's an amazing outlet for all the emotions that walk through me all day long, every day. Through my stories I hope to create a small world of dreams where everybody can find themselves to fit as someone, some characters they can relate themselves as.

I would really love to hear from you guys, what you think about my writing while you read the story. If you have any suggestions about the story's development and any complaints or appreciation about my writing, feel free to let me know and I will make sure to work on them to the best of my capability.

Thank you all once again. Now go and enjoy the next part of the story.

3

ALIN

His dark brown eyes were fixated on me and that smile grew even more evil. I wanted to get up and run out of here but my body froze. My mind was working at the speed of light but my body did not oblige. I closed my eyes and took deep breaths slowly trying to move the fingers of my hands. Why was he looking at me? He never looked at me before. I don't think he ever even noticed my presence, then why now? I sat there with all this thoughts running in my head and my throat still itched due to the food I chocked. After a few calming breaths I finally was able to move my body. Thus, I took my plate and grabbed my bag and was out of the cafeteria in a dash.

The rest of the day was pretty usual but I was worried that I might bump into Sebian anytime which didn't happen. Thank God, he is not the type who attends classes very often because right now I do not want to face him. Actually, I don't think I want to face him anytime at all. I knew he was trouble. I attended the rest of the classes but nothing was going inside my head, looks like I got badly panicked. The bell rang; I sighed and got out of the class.

I didn't have to go home early today as I had my part time job at the town's daily services store. We have only this store at our town where people find their daily groceries, vegetables and other household needs. It's not very big but it does provide most of the essential items. I have been working here since I started college. The owner Poppy was a single lady. Her husband and son both died in a car accident about six years ago. She manages the store and lives here on the above floor. Poppy takes care of the billing at the reception desk. Me and Gina work inside the store guiding the customers through different sections and then there is Keith. He is the errand boy and takes care of providing us the supplies and taking them to other places if orders are placed.

I entered the store and greeted Poppy with a smile while rushed to the backroom to get changed and start on today's work. I came out wearing a blue shirt with 'Poppy's Mart' labelled on its chest pocket in white. "If that is all then you can go to the front desk for your bill sir", I heard Gina speaking to someone. The man went away with a basket in his hand and Gina turned around to see me. "You always look better with that hood out of your head," she told with a smile. She was three years older than me but was an amazing friend. She always loved my hair. She says she likes my soft brown curls; they suit me unlike her dark black straight hair which she preferred to tie in a high pony. She worked full shift here and always dropped me at home on her way back.

I wanted to talk to her for a few more minutes but as this was the peak time of the day for business, customers started pouring in. After an hour and half of busy work, Gina went off for her break and I was left alone to help the customers. It was almost 7 in the evening when the shop started to get a little empty. The people came in randomly every 15 minutes or so. There was still an hour left for me to get off work though. "Come on girls, it's already 8, you should head back home now," Miss Poppy reminded us. She does that daily. She is very concerned about our security and lets us go home while the roads were still busy.

I changed and hopped into Gina's car. After about a 20 minutes ride we reached in front of my house. "Good night Gina, be safe," I closed the door of the car. "Good night honey," she told and drove off. I rang the bell and my mother opened the door. "Welcome back Aly. How was your day?" she asked with a smile heading to the kitchen. "It was okay, usual." "Get changed honey, dinner will be ready soon." I headed upstairs to my room and took a quick shower, got changed and came down to join everyone for dinner. My father and younger

brother Ronin were already at the table. "How was your day kiddo?" my father asked with a tense less expression. "It was good daddy." I high-fived my brother and rubbed his hair. "What did you do today champ?" "Just studies," he replied nonchalantly. He was 18 already but unlike other kids was very serious about his studies and career. He understands the importance of it.

After a peaceful family dinner and helping my mother with the dishes I went to my room and since I had no home work to finish I lied on my bed. I grabbed my phone and typed 'SEBIAN WHITE' initiating the search. Images and fan clubs started popping up on the screen. Sebian this, Sebin that, people just worshipped him. I went through the images of him and remembered those dark brown eyes which bored into mine at lunch. I felt my breath hitching and without being able to take anymore kept my phone aside and closed my eyes. I calmed myself down and with steady breaths fell asleep.

4

SEBIAN

I am trying to reach college a little early today. "Bye grandma" I shout on my way out grabbing a sandwich from the plate while she was busy in the kitchen. Kevin and Natalie are busy due to the upcoming football game so, today I just have to pick Joe on my way. I started the car and drove towards Joe's home, calling him and letting him know that I will be there soon. In about 3 minutes I was in front of his house honking and after about 8 to 9 more minutes Joe came out with a disapproving look on his face and dishevelled hair. "What happened to you dude? Why are you so early today?" "Nothing, just wanted to be at college early for a change." I winked at him.

We both settled and headed towards the college. I didn't drive fast as reaching earlier at college was not my motive; it was that I didn't want to miss someone on the road. I knew she walked to college, I have seen her a few times. I knew that if I started a little earlier there was a huge chance that I will bump into her on the way, hence, all this. Joe looked at me "brother shouldn't you drive a little faster if you want to reach college on time? This speed will not let you get anywhere." I kept my eyes on the road scanning it while I replied to him, "Driving faster might cause accident, so... No." He just rolled his eyes and gave up on talking with me.

After about another half kilometre drive I found what i was looking for. A figure with grey sweatshirt covering its head with the hoodie. Yep, I found the turtle. With a big sly smile on my face, I turned the car to her side and slowed down. Before Joe could utter anything I honked the horn but she thought maybe I was trying to make her get out of the way but when I kept on with the horn she abruptly turned her head and her eyes slowly noticed us. She couldn't keep up the eye contact though and kept on looking back and forth at the same place. Shock was written all over her face and not knowing what to do she stopped there and put her head down, her pupils were deliberately shaking.

I can't help but smile at her dumbness. "Come on in, we can drop you in college." She still did not dare to look at me straight but fiddled with her sweatshirt. Really though, what was her problem? Being shy was something I can understand but can't she just open her mouth and tell 'yes' or 'no' or can't she at least look at me. "We study in the same college, actually in the same class. I am pretty sure you have seen us before. I can assure you that we are not dangerous, you can trust us." I tried again, the smile still intact on my face. "No,

thank you. I can walk.” She finally spat and pulling the straps of her bag started walking again.

My smile faltered and my expression turned dark. I wanted to get out of the car and talk sense into her but Joe interrupted. “Dude, what was that all about? Why did you want her to come with us? Is this the reason you wanted to go early today, to mess with her?” Joe kept on blabbering. “Mess with her? When did I ever mess with her dude? I just asked her to come with us because she was walking and we had empty seats. If Kevin and Nat were here I wouldn’t even had bothered.” Joe seemed like he understood and with a sigh told, “Still, It was not necessary you know.” “Yeah, my fault, I know.” Giving her a last glance I drove the car with one thing going inside my mind- this is not the end, I will get back to her.

You should have seen her face when she entered the class and saw me and Joe sitting together on chairs behind which she was supposed to sit. Our eyes met for a fraction of second and before I could notice anything else other than her fair complexion and dark green eyes she hurriedly walked to her seat. The classes started and the whole time I could feel her nervous breath behind me but I didn’t get the reason for it. Was she that scared of me? Of course I didn’t have a reputation of a good or friendly person but I have never hurt anyone. This might be the first time I have even thought of doing something to someone and it was nothing that would harm her, I was doing this just to help Natalie.

The lunch break was fully occupied by Kevin and Natalie. They were acting as if they were the busiest person in the world these days. Post lunch class was science where we were going to be partnered today. I really hoped that I would be partnered with her, which would make my plan real easier to execute but no, I got partnered

with Damon and she got paired with Ruth. Damon was a block head; I knew he wouldn't change partners if I tell him. Looks like I need to have a word with Ruth instead.

5

ALIN

No, I will not be able to sleep tonight. Lying on my bed I was busy going through the scene of today morning in my mind. I would have never, not even in my dreams expected that Sebian White, the Sebian White will ever ask me to hop into his car for a ride to the college. What was he thinking talking to me like that? Wasn't he one of those famous, arrogant types who don't give a damn about anyone else but themselves? Then why would he talk to me, the kind whom anybody would want to avoid in their right mind? Don't tell me he is starting to change his personality now, being good and all.

Morning came on me in a flash. I tossed and turned the whole night and as was about to close my eyes, my alarm went off. Now I just feel dizzy and tumbled from here to there. "Why are you not eating breakfast Aly?" seeing me in taking only crumbs and pieces, my mother asked out of concern. "Nothing mom, I am not very hungry today," I assured her. Ready to go to the college, I was standing at my door with a silly fear rising up inside me. What if I bump into him again today? I slapped myself internally and gave out a nervous laugh. Yeah, like that would happen. I opened the door and with a high held head got on the road.

'Phew.' I made it to the college without any unexpected obstacles on the way. Like really what were the chances that Sebian White will make the same mistake two times, right? For right now I don't have to worry about him and my headache due to not sleeping properly

yesterday is subsiding slowly. I walk into the class and there was no sign of him. Great! Looks like he is back to his habit of missing classes.

At lunch break also I didn't see any of Sebian's friends or him. Looks like they were all busy cheering for their friend and spending time with his girl friend instead. As the cafeteria was not very crowded, I happily finished my lunch, taking my time. After lunch I did not have any class so I wanted to go through the science project with Ruth but she was nowhere to be found. So, I went to the library and grabbing some books started on the project. Hmm... Feels like I have to do all the work by myself.

After about an hour when I was fully engrossed in my topic, I felt a slight nudge on my shoulder. Turning back I saw a girl standing there. "Mr. Crauser asked you to go and meet him in his office," she told me and went off. I got up and after returning back all the books went towards Mr. Crauser's office. I knocked and went inside. "Take a seat Miss Jones, Mr. Crauser directed me, adjusting his glasses and keeping the book he was reading aside.

"Miss Grams came to me today regarding her pairing up with you for the science project," he started talking with often jovial tone which seemed a little concerned today. "She told me that if she has to be your partner she will have problem with staying in contact with you other than the college hours as both your houses are pretty far from each other. I already had this thought pass by me but since I expected myself to do most of the work, I didn't care much about it. "It's okay sir, she doesn't have to come to my house, I can go to her place instead, it will be easier for her and other than that we will work here at the college in our free time." Mr. Crauser took off his specs and with a smile told, "That's great Miss Jones but as Miss Grams was okay with changing her partner, I did that for her and for

you as well. I have paired you up with Mr. Sebian White. I heard he lives near your house and as he is good with his studies I don't think you will have any problem with that either. I have already notified him regarding the changes so now you can do the further discussions about the project with him. That is all, you may leave now."

He told me to leave but can I move, No, I literally can't. My body has stopped functioning and I remained glued to the chair. I forced myself and hanging my bag pack on my shoulder almost ran out of the room. Once outside I started trembling and felt moisture gathering up in my eyes. Why was this happening to me? My headache started resurfacing. Somehow controlling myself I came out of the college. I just want to go home and after a good shower I wanted to sleep and then maybe I will get up to realize that this was all a dream. Rubbing my eyes I suddenly noticed a car standing a few feet away from me, it felt pretty familiar. I raised my head and as my view cleared my heart started thudding in my chest. Sebian stood there, outside the car with his hands crossed at his chest. He saw me and held one of his hands up waving at me. "Hi there, partner," he yelled while the familiar evil grin returned to his face.

6

SEBIAN

Here she comes. I raised my right hand and waved at her. "Hi there, partner," I spoke with a raised tone so that it's audible to her. I just love how her expression changes from anything to dread the moment she sees me. My grin widened at her reaction, her steps slowed down and again she was at a loss as to what she should do. "I have been assigned as your project partner, I am pretty sure Mr. Crauser has already told you that." As expected no answer from her.

She stopped for a second as if she was discussing whether to stay and answer my question or walk away.

She decided against answering me and taking a turn started walking away. I sighed. This girl is just too much. I got in my car and started driving. I drove near her and shouted, "Come on in. I know you live nearby my house, I can drop you and you don't need to walk." Still no answer, she just kept on walking briskly. That's it; I just can't take it anymore. That day because of Joe I couldn't but today I am going to make sure she talks with me.

I stopped my car and got out of it, ran after her and stood in front of her, blocking her way. She crashed onto me and stopped but never looked up. This image has become so familiar to me in these few days. "Hey, listen to me, seeing that we are teamed up for the project I think we will need to talk to each other, right?" There was nothing close to sarcasm in my tone, I was being pure angry and rude here. I hope she gets that.

She remained silent in the same position. Wow, this girl is really something, isn't she? I got hold of both her shoulders and shook them. "Look at me when I am talking to you. Get your head up and look at me, tell me that you understood what I am talking about." Slowly, very slowly her head rose up. She looked at me and nodded. I noticed her, this time actually noticed her. A few strands of her brown curls were peeking out of her hood. I never imagined her having curls. I reckoned that like anyone categorised into introvert she will be having messy black hair which might be tied but I was definitely not expecting this.

Her eyes looked a little puffy and glassy. Was she crying because I spoke harshly? "Come on now, get into the car, I will drop you home." I started walking towards my car and looked back to see her

following me with wobbly steps like a kid. I smiled. I drove and she sat uncomfortably beside me. I can't be choosy right now you know, this is at least a start and I really do not want to scare her off.

"So, I heard your name is Alin, is that right?" she nodded. "I am Sebian, you know me right?" another nod came from her. Hmm... This conversation is going pretty smoothly, better than I expected actually. I ask and she nods and this process repeats, great! After about 15 minutes I parked my car in front of my grandma's house. "You can go to your house from here, right?" I pointed towards her house; she nodded again and got out of the car. "And if you have anything to talk with me, you know where to find me," I pointed towards the house at my left with a smile. With a last glance towards me she walked away.

"I saw Alin with you today, were you dropping her home?" my grandma said with a smile tugging on her wrinkly face. "She's just a friend grandma" I smiled back at her. "I know, I know, I am just glad that you are making new friends." "Yeah." I couldn't speak anymore after that and just finished my dinner instead.

I sat on the bed in my room listening to music. My phone was in my hand and I was going through random stuff in it but my mind was busy thinking about what my grandma told during dinner. 'Friend', was Alin really a friend of mine. I don't think I have ever considered that. I wanted to be closer to her so that I can mess up her project and that will stop her from getting the scholarship, that's it.

My phone rang, it was Natalie. "Hi baby. You're going to pick me up tomorrow, right?" like I had any other choice, won't you chew my ear up if I don't. "Of course, I will." "Thank you baby, bye" The call was disconnected. I really don't want to think about anything right now. If I have to spend tomorrow with Natalie then I better get some

sleep and replenish my energy. Turning off the lights I lied down and fell asleep but I do remember seeing a pair of beautiful green eyes at some point of the night in my dreams.

7

ALIN

I closed the door behind me and without even listening to what my mother was saying went upstairs into my room. Once inside in the safety of my loneliness, I let myself go weak and with a thud sat on the floor. What the hell just happened? Sebian dropped me home, not only that, now I have to see him regularly for a whole month. I know it's not mine or his fault that any of this was happening but it does not mean that I will go unnoticed by anyone, everyone. No one will say anything to him but they will start picking on me, especially Natalie. She will never tolerate that her boyfriend talk with someone like, she is going to make my life hell. Thinking about all the upcoming consequences gave me a headache and because my legs felt like jelly, I couldn't get up anymore. So, I kept seated on the floor for a long time.

"Is everything okay in college Aly?" my mother asked and that brought me out of my thoughts. "Yeah, everything's good." "Then why are you not eating anything kiddo?" it was my father this time. "Nothing daddy, I was just thinking about a project that I have to complete in a month, that's it." "You don't have to worry about anything kiddo, I know you'll do great so don't take stress." I smiled and got back to finishing my dinner.

I sat in my room working on my homework. After this I am thinking about working on the project and dividing the parts between me and Sebian so that we can finish it without having to meet each other

very often. I am pretty sure he does not like to talk to me either but has no choice about it. Of course, he wouldn't want to ruin his reputation in front of his friends or anybody else for that matter by talking to me. It was well after midnight when I completed dividing the topics for both of us. I will give him the chart tomorrow and then we won't have any reason to meet.

I was feeling fresh and a little happy this morning. I have found the way to stay away from Sebian and still work together on this project. On my way I saw his car pass by me containing the usual crew of his friends. Good, now that his girlfriend is back he won't have time for me anyways. I breathed a sigh of relief and entered the college gate with the enthusiasm of a kid about to get a sweet treat.

I wanted to give him the documents in the class but he was absent again. Why doesn't he come and sit in the class if he comes to the college? If nothing else he can at least spend more time with his girlfriend. Anyways, the least he shows up the better for me. I saw him during lunch at their usual table but I have a problem now. It was okay if I passed him the papers while in class or any non-crowded place or with least number of people but here at the cafeteria everybody was present and I didn't had the guts to get up and go talk to him while everyone was watching. It will be a disaster and I will become an outcast in seconds. Finally my fear got hold of me and I remained seated there with my lunch while the five of them got up and went out of the cafeteria.

This is not good, not good at all. What am I supposed to do now? Where do I find him to give the documents? I should have gathered my courage and did it earlier when he was in the cafeteria. Idiot! I started to get depressed. Tomorrow I will try and give it to him during lunch. No, tomorrow I definitely will give it to him.

I got out of the college thinking about all this when I saw him in his car. This was my chance. I can give it to him now when none of his friends were around. I went to his car and held out my hand holding the papers towards him. "Here," his face turned towards me. His brown eyes looking at me through the blonde bangs had confusion in them. He took the papers from my hand asking, "What's this?" "I have segregated the topics and divided them among both of us. We can work on them separately and then join them together before the submission. You might be busy so this way we can finish up the work and not bother each other much." He seemed to think over it a bit and then spoke, "I am not that busy, we can meet up and work together. You can come to my place or I can go to yours, it's not a problem. Actually, you can come now, we can start working."

This was not going how I wanted it to. "I can't come right now; I have some work to do. You go home and see the topics; if there is any problem we can discuss it later." Saying this and leaving him in a puzzled state I rapidly turned and went on the route heading to Poppy's Mart. I hope no one saw me talking with him or I will be in news tomorrow.

8

SEBIAN

I dropped all my friends one by one and reached home. I grabbed the papers given by Alin and got out of the car. This girl is deliberately trying to stay away from me. I went inside the house and was greeted by my grandma. "You know Sebian, I was thinking of making your favourite pie for dessert today. How would you like that?" I smiled at her question. "I would like that very much grandma." "But you see I am missing a few ingredients for the recipe." I sighed, "So?" "So, I want you to be a good boy and drive to the mart and bring me

those ingredients so that you can enjoy a great dessert.” “Tell me where the mart is and give me the list of ingredients.” She smiled and went inside to fetch pen and paper.

After driving for about 20 minutes I reached in front of a store where a sign board reading ‘Poppy’s Mart’ blinked in blue lights. I parked my car and went inside the store. A lady was sitting at the front counter. She gave me a genuine smile and asked, “Is this your first time here?” I nodded my head in a ‘yes’. “No worries, one of my girls can help you with the items you want,” she told in a jovial tone. I liked her. She didn’t seem very old and her short figure with neck length black hair and a beautiful smile on her face made her look so friendly and approachable.

“Alin honey, can you come here and help the customer find what he is looking for, it’s his first time here.” Alin! Did I hear it right? The girl in question comes out with a bright smile on her face and was about to say something but her expression slowly changed when she saw me. Yep, that’s definitely the Alin I know but somehow she looks like a whole different person. For once she was out of that shell of hers and with that gone off of her she looked kind of cute. She had an average height and her body which I could never configure before was actually slender. For the first time I was able to see her face clearly. She had a small, fair, blemish free round face. Her hair was actually brown soft curls which were left free and fell at the mid of her back. Her dark green eyes looked dense and her lips were parted in shock of seeing me, I guess.

“Take him and help him Alin,” the happy lady told. I smiled at Alin as she hesitated a bit before going inside. I followed her as she went on aisle to aisle telling me about the products available. She can’t run away from here so instead she made sure to maintain her distance

from me and to never directly look at me. This time I was not irritated by her behaviour but was rather fascinated. I took two long strands and went and stood right beside her. This made her stumble a bit but I caught her hand and steadied her.

“So, this was the work you were referring to when you handed me the papers at the college.” She nodded slowly. “You come here daily?” she shook her head to a ‘no’. “Four days a week for four hours.” “Oh... and do you work somewhere else the other days?” she again shook her head. “So, have you decided what you want to buy sir?” she spoke in a professional tone. I took out the list and gathered up all the ingredients I needed. “So, why did you give me those papers? Don’t you want to work with me? Look, I am not a good student like you and will need help in completing the project, so I think it would be nice if we sit together and work.”

She was about to say something when her phone rang and I was accompanied by another girl who also seemed to be an employee here. With my basket in my hand I started looking at other things around, waiting for Alin to be free but suddenly I heard a loud ‘WHAT’ coming from her mouth. I, along with the other girl went to her. The expression on her face was somewhat of panic. “I am coming, I am coming right now” she kept on saying on the phone and with a shaky gesture ran towards the entry of the store.

“Miss Poppy I need to go. My father has been into an accident at the diner, I need to go, now!” she was almost about to cry. She looked at the girl standing near me. “I will not be able to leave here but you can take my car, can you drive?” Tears started falling down from her eyes as she shook her head. “Tell me where you have to go, I can take you there” I told her. “Yeah honey, go with him,” the old lady

spoke. Alin nodded and after I made the payment we both sat in my car. Alin showed me the way and we drove towards the diner.

9

ALIN

My whole body was shaking after the phone call. It was from uncle Len. He works with my father at the diner where he said was an accident in which my father was injured. I didn't wait for him to tell me about the details and just notified him that I was coming there. My father was never so careless to cause any kind of accident in the kitchen, then what the hell happened?

With all these crazy thoughts going inside my head, I kept on giving directions to Sebian. He drove as fast as he can without causing any trouble. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as he took left and right turns. I don't even know why he was doing this. He didn't have to help me; he could have just finished his shopping and left the mart. I don't know what I would have done then though, ran to the diner maybe but it was none of his concern.

We finally reached in front of Lessi's and I ran inside. My father was sitting on a chair with a few bruises on his face and his right palm was profusely bleeding. He was moaning in pain but when he saw me an assuring smile spreaded on his face. "What happened daddy?" I went near him and crouched down. I held his face and inspected it, looked like someone had hit him hard. "It's nothing kiddo, I am fine," he tried to widen his smile through the pain. Seeing him in this condition I couldn't stop my tears from falling. "A group of people came, they were drunk and made a mess of this place," uncle Len said.

I averted my eyes and looked around to notice tumbled chairs, a few broken plates and other things on the floor. Uncle Len had a cut on his forehead too. "We tried to stop them but they started hitting us," he spoke again. I looked at my father again. "Come on daddy; let's get you to the hospital." "No kiddo, it's not that serious, let's just go home" my father insisted. "Yeah, take him home and let him rest. He will be better in no time." Uncle Len said, patting on my father's shoulder with a big smile. "You also come with us, uncle Len." "I can't Aly. I have to clean up here first and then I will leave. You take Rob and go." "Then let us help you with the cleaning and then all of us can leave together." Sebian, who was silently standing behind me all this time finally spoke. "Yeah, let's do that. Dad, you wait here for a bit, we will finish up soon and then go home together."

It was already dark outside by the time we were done at the diner. "Okay, all done, let's head back now." Sebian told while he exhaustedly sat on a chair drinking water from a bottle. Looking at him now I am thinking, how did things come to this? Sebian came here with me and was now helping me out with the diner. If I was not witnessing this myself, I wouldn't have believed it. Suddenly he looked at me and seeing me looking at him gave me a smile. It was neither sly nor evil but a genuine, reassuring one conveying that everything is alright. I felt a different kind of calmness inside me after looking at him.

After dropping uncle Len when we were on the way to our home, my father tried to make small talks with Sebian. "So you say you're staying here with Mrs. Reece, son." "Yes sir." Sebian answered. "How come I've never seen you then? Mrs. Reece and we have been neighbours for ages and I've never seen you!" "He recently moved here dad, so maybe you didn't noticed him." I interfered, seeing that Sebian was running out of answers.

I knew Sebian was being uncomfortable by my father's questions but he still answered them politely. I have to make a note to say sorry to him about all that had happened today. Maybe he is not as bad as I thought he would be. Just because I don't like the people he hangs out with doesn't mean he was like them as well. All this time whenever he talked with me, it was never unreasonable.

He parked his car in front of my house instead of his. He got out and came to help my father out of the car. We both supported my father to climb the stairs to the door and then my mother helped to take him inside. I remained there at the door beside Sebian. "Thank you," I told him with a smile. He smiled back. "It's okay. Just make sure to help me out with the project. Also, can I have your number, so that I can know in advance when you will be ditching me?" he teased me. We exchanged numbers and after telling me 'Bye' with a smile on his face, he left.

10

SEBIAN

Should I call her or should I not? I know she will be in class right now and might not pick up but if she picks up what do I tell her? Should I ask her about the project? Maybe I should wait and call her during the lunch break, that would be appropriate. She will have no excuse then to not pick up the call. Lying comfortably on the bed in my room, I came to this decision. I have been thinking about her since yesterday after I left her house. I don't understand why this was happening to me, maybe because I spent more than just mere seconds with her. Yeah, that's probably it.

"Hello?" "Yeah... Hii. Sebian here." "Yeah, I know. Tell." She sounded a little restless. "Are you busy? I can call you after the college or do

you have to go to the mart today?" I started blabbering. "No, no, listen. I am not in the college; I am actually at the diner." "Ah... okay." "I came here instead of my father. I can't cook but I can help with other things here, so..." "Shall I come there then?" "What? Why?" "I can help as well. Also, I can cook. I will be there in 30 minutes." I cut the call and got ready to leave.

In about 25 minutes I reached there. I saw Alin going from table to table taking orders. I went in. "Hi." She smiled at me. She wore a red casual shirt and black jeans; her hair was tied in a bun. She was busy jotting down something on a note. "Get me to the kitchen, I can help in cooking." "It's not needed Sebian. Uncle Len is there, he will take care of it. You sit here and order something." She was done with writing down the orders and gestured me to sit. "I am not here for ordering. I came here to help so let me." I told, maybe a little loudly because her face seemed a little red. "Let me help. Tell me what I can do." I calmed down. She stopped for a minute and then spoke, "You wanted to help with cooking, right?" I nodded. "Come then." "Uncle Len, my friend here says he can assist you." "Really... that's great! We are understaffed today, so I will appreciate all the help. Uncle Len looked at me and told. "Okay then," she handed me an apron. "Keep up, I will be back with more orders," she told and went out.

By the time I was done in the kitchen my hands and legs were aching like hell. No, my whole body was in pain. I was used to occasionally making one or two dishes for the family for dinner but standing for hours and cooking was definitely not my cup of tea but since I volunteered I can't complain now, can I? Alin kept coming with more orders and taking them out and occasionally asked if I was doing okay, to which I just replied her to not worry about me. Now, when it's finally all over I can't seem to move my body anymore.

“So, it’s done for today. Will you be here tomorrow as well boy?” Uncle Len asked me. What? Tomorrow? No, I don’t want to ever do this again. “Oh, we have college to go too uncle.” Suddenly Alin came inside the kitchen. “And after that we also have a project to work on so we both can’t be here tomorrow.” I sighed in relief. “I have called Ricky and Rosa, they will be here tomorrow, so don’t worry.” “Well then, that will do. Now you both should leave, I will close here and then go.” “See you, uncle Len” Alin spoke. “Bye” I told as well and taking off the apron came out of the kitchen.

We were driving back when Alin suddenly spoke, “Shouldn’t you be thanking me that I saved you from another time in the diner’s kitchen?” “Well, you didn’t need to. I would have loved to come and help.” “Really... then I should give a call to uncle Len and let him know that you are free to come and work again tomorrow. He will be so glad to hear it.” Saying this she took out her phone. “No, don’t.” I grabbed her hand stopping her from making the call. “Thank you for saving me back there. Don’t call him.” Hearing my words she kept her phone back in her pocket and laughed loudly. I forgot about the road and kept on looking at her. Her laugh sounded so free. A sense of happiness and something else rose inside me. I have never felt this way with any of the people I have been with. I felt a connection with her.

11

ALIN

I was lying down on my bed reading a book when my phone beeped beside me. I kept my book aside and got my phone. The name ‘SEBIAN’ blinked on the screen. Are we on the status where we can text each other? Since we exchanged our numbers, I guess we can.

‘Hi there. You’re not asleep, right?’

‘No, tell.’

‘We are meeting tomorrow??’

‘Yeah. When are you free?’

‘In college, after college. You tell.’

‘I’ll call you. Good night.’

‘Good night.’

I am going to work with Sebian for the science project. I, the weird, nerd girl of the town have Sebian White as my partner. As insane as it sounds, it is true. I can’t believe it myself either. The person I wanted to run away from the most is now the one I have to work along. It’s just for a month though after that I am sure none of this will continue. Was I feeling sad about it? Well, isn’t it a human tendency to feel bad during goodbyes, I am no different.

He is again missing classes today. I know he will be there in cafeteria during lunch but I don’t want to talk to him there. I know I am being a scaredy cat but you won’t understand how it feels when people start picking on you. I have seen what happens and definitely don’t want to go through it. If I see him in the cafeteria then I will text him to meet me outside.

I didn’t see him or any of his friends in the cafeteria so I just went and sat there with my lunch tray. I was about to get up and go when the group of five entered the cafeteria. I was going to sit back and take out my phone to text Sebian but suddenly I saw a silhouette in front of me. I lifted my head and when I saw the person standing there, horror flashed inside me. “Hi” Sebian said as he dragged a chair out. What was he doing? Was he going to sit here? “I was

looking for you in the class” he smiled. At that moment I just closed my eyes. I didn’t have it in me. I can’t talk to him here. I got up and left from there. Behind me I could feel the prickly looks and hear hushed tones.

I locked myself inside the bathroom. What do I do now? Oh God, the cafeteria went so silent when he came and talked with me.

Everybody was looking at us. Why did he have to do that? Idiot! I started panting, I started panicking. I need to get out of here. I have to leave. Somehow I gathered my courage and unlocked the door to get out of the toilet. I didn’t even walk two steps when someone grabbed my wrist. I turned abruptly with a squeak, Sebian had caught me. Was he waiting here for me to come out? How did he even know I was here? Before I could tell anything or do something he started dragging me with him, out of the college. The whole hallway was filled with students looking at both of us. I didn’t dare to look at them. I just wanted to disappear right now, vanish into thin air so that no one can see me. Sebian didn’t seem bothered at all. He kept on walking and stopped when we reached near his car. He opened the door and gestured me to get in which I obliged. I can see his friends standing near the gate looking at us. Natalie seemed ready to pounce on me right now if she can. I didn’t want to leave here with him in front of everyone but that was my only way to escape so, I sat in the car with head down when Sebian got in and drove us out of there.

“Why did you do that?” I asked him on the way. “You tell me, why did you do that? I went there to talk to you and you just got up and left. Why Alin?” He sounded angry. “I didn’t do it to hurt your ego or anything okay. I didn’t want anybody to see us together. I didn’t want trouble for both of us, for me.” I replied him. “What trouble Alin? We had a reason to talk to each other and what is it to anyone

who you talk to or not, nobody cares.” “Yes, nobody cares who I talk to but they do care who you talk to. Nobody will tell you anything because you are a God in their eyes but I am nothing. They will step on me and it hurts.” I started crying and somehow I didn’t want to stop. I wanted to tell him that he is the trouble for me and I want us to stop talking to each other but I can’t bring myself to say that and I don’t know why.

12

SEBIAN

Is she trying to tell me that I am the one because of who she is going to be in trouble? But I never caused her any kind of trouble, not yet anyways. I never bullied her nor did I want to be a reason for anyone to. Her face was fully drenched in tears, I hate making someone cry. I stopped my car at the side of the road. “Hey, don’t cry Alin.” I took my hands near her face but she just jerked back and covered her face with her hands. The invisible wall was back between us. The wall that I tried so hard to break and was almost successful in doing, thanks to the recent event was back up. She was scared of me, again.

I parked the car in front of my gate; Alin got out of the car and started walking towards her house. “Hey, I know you’re not in the mood but we have a project to work on, remember? I shouted behind her. She turned and looked at me. “Come on! My house is not that far from yours, you can go anytime you want but we really need to start working.” Seeing that I was being reasonable, she contemplated a bit and then turned around and walked towards me and with a smile I led her inside.

“Hello grandma.” “Welcome back. Oh, you brought Alin with you.” Hello, Mrs Reece” Alin greeted her. “Hi dear. It’s so long that I

haven't seen you. What happened to your eyes? Looks like you were... crying. Oh dear God! Sebian did you make her cry?!" she asked in an angry voice. "No, Mrs Reece, Sebian didn't do anything. I got the flu actually." "Then you should rest dear." "Actually we are partner for a project that's due to submit soon, so we have to work to finish it up." "Well then, Sebian take her to your room. Go dear; I will bring you a cup of tea for the cold." "Thank you Mrs Reece." Alin told and looked at me. "Ye- Yeah, come on." We went upstairs to my room. "Your room is pretty neat, I didn't expect that." She said seeming surprised. She seemed to have calmed down now. "And how did you expected my room to be?" I questioned her. She looked at me and without any hesitation said, "Messy." I rolled my eyes.

After about an hour of studying I was bored. "Don't you get bored sitting like this continuously for ages?" "We have not sat like this for ages but only for an hour." She told, taking another sip of the tea. "Did you finish reading the topic I gave you to?" "Yeah yeah." "Then note down the important points from there and then we have to describe them." "No, we will take a break." I closed my books and hers as well. I want to ask you a lot of questions. She tried to retrieve the books but I stopped her. "Okay, what do you want to know?"

"Who do you have in your family?" she looked at me questioningly. "Me, my father, mother and a younger brother." "How long have you been working in the mart for?" "Since the first year of the college." "Why do you like to hide inside that sweatshirt of yours? I even saved you as turtle in my phone." She smiled, "That's because I like to stay out of sight." "Okay... That diner is owned by your father, right?" she nodded. "Who's Lessi?" "Aren't you a curious one?" she said. "She was my father's girlfriend." "Oh!" "And now she is my mother." "Ah... of course." "Now shall we get back to studies?" "One last question. What do you want to do after college? What's your

dream?" She thought for a moment and then with a smile replied, "I want to become a teacher. I want to go places and teach kids who can't due to certain circumstances. Studying opens up so many opportunities and is also fun; I want to let them know that. That's why I am trying hard for the scholarship, so I can get a good spot and get a degree in education and after that I can live my dream." I couldn't say anything. I just sat there resting my chin on the table and kept looking at her. She has so good thoughts and I was going to mess this all up for her. I instantly felt guilty. "So, shall we start again?" she extended her hands and grabbed the books. I nodded and we resumed.

Another hour went by and a yawn escaped my mouth. "You are tired?" "Not me, but my brain is." "Alright then, we can stop here and then start again tomorrow." She packed up and I accompanied her down. "Bye Mrs Reece." "Alin dear, you guys are done? Stay for dinner then." "I am a little tired today Mrs Reece, some other day." "Okay dear. Sebian, go leave her and come." My grandma told me. "It's okay Mrs Reece, I can go." "Bye." She waved at me and went out of the door, closing it behind her. "Such a sweet girl, isn't she son?" My grandma smiled at me. "Yeah very sweet," I mumbled. I got back to my room to get my phone and saw two missed calls from Natalie. I sat on my bed and with a sigh called her back.

13

ALIN

Finally, the day of submission is tomorrow and I have just returned from Sebian's house. We have almost finished up; just a few finishing touches are left. Sebian told me he will finish up his part and directly bring them to college tomorrow, so I am sitting here working on mine. I have seen a lot of changes in these few days, some in others,

some in myself. After that incident in college, the kids talked but it didn't bother me much because Sebian was always there with me. He takes me to and from college now that none of his friends accompany him. He attends classes regularly and also sits with me for lunch. People's looks and talks did not bother me because he being with me gives me the courage to face everyone. I can't fathom what would have happened to me if he was not with me.

Sebian was supposed to take me to college but because of working late yesterday he ended up sleeping. He called me in the morning to tell me that he will meet me in the college during lunch. I sighed. His laziness is unbeatable you know. On my way to the college I kept on thinking about how to cope up with the situation today when Sebian will not be there with me but then again I think I can manage. It's been weeks and now everyone must be used to it, right?

I reached at college and without looking at anyone walked directly towards my class. I was astonished at the reaction of everyone. They didn't give me a glance for more than a minute. No hooting, no teasing, nothing. Everything is back to normal I guess. I sat in the class with a smile. What was I thinking all this time? Of course, people have better things to do than gossiping. Sebian was right; they don't care who I talk to or what I do. I was a nobody in their eyes and I like it that way.

As the bell rang I hurried to the cafeteria. Sitting there I waited for Sebian. When he didn't show up for a long time I tried calling him but he wasn't picking up either. The project was supposed to be submitted today by the end of the college hours and there was still time for that. Maybe he was driving or maybe he is still sleeping. Oh God, this boy! When calling him didn't work, I just texted him once

and got up to leave. My eyes fell on Natalie when I was leaving the cafeteria. Did I just see her snickering at me? But why?

I stood in front of Mr. Crauser's office, fidgeting in nervousness. There was only about 15 minutes left for the college to get over and Sebastian was not here yet. Where did he go? I was so scared right now. "Hey Alin" Natalie told as she came out of Mr. Crauser's office. "Your partner is not here yet?" I didn't want to talk with her so I turned my face away. "Don't wait for him darling, he is not coming," she spoke again. I still didn't look at her. "Trust me darling, he told me. Want to hear it?" she took out her phone and started pressing some buttons. What was this girl up to?

"You called Natalie?" Sebastian's voice came out. Did she just call him? "Yeah, I did. What was that in college today Sebastian?" Natalie's voice. No, she didn't call him, this was a recorded call. "What about it?" Sebastian spoke again. "Why did you go and talk with that weirdo?" "Natalie, we are paired up for the science project, I needed to talk to her about that, that's it." "Oh really? Then you could have just talked to her there, why did you drag her out of the college?" "She was not ready to talk to me there in front of everyone, so I took her out." "Oh don't you fool me Sebastian. I've already asked Ruth about it. she told me that you told her to change partners with Damon, why was that?" "Stop spitting nonsense Natalie. Don't you understand that I did all of this for you?" "What? For me?" "Yes, for you, didn't you tell that you wanted the scholarship? Didn't you tell that she is the only one in your way?" I stood there, listening to all of this. "What are you going to do now?" "What else, I am going to ditch her on the submission day." The conversation was over. "I am telling you Alin, he is not coming. Don't waste your time waiting here." She kept her phone back and with a smile on her face, left.

This was all a lie, right? Natalie was lying to me. Of course, he will come. I know he will or at least I hope he will. Would he really do that? He knows how important this is for me, would he still do that? No, no, he will come, let's wait a bit more. All these positive thoughts of mine came shattering when I heard the bells ring, indicating that college was over for today. Over, it's all over now.

14

SEBIAN

I and my father sat here in front of the operation theatre in the hospital where my grandmother was going through an operation. The doctors said that this was a case of paralysis due to high blood pressure but because she was old, the operation is going to be risky. There were chances that grandma would wake up, there were chances that she would not and she may also go into coma. After marrying off her daughter to my father, my grandma considered him as her own son and my father also loved her dearly because he had no parents of his own. Seeing her in this condition is breaking him. I have never seen him like this, so weak.

Today morning when she collapsed suddenly, I didn't have any idea of what I should do. With shivering hands I called my dad and he directed me to get her to the city. Once I reached there he took care of getting her into the hospital and making sure she gets the best treatment. My mind was completely blank during all this process. It was already very late when I remembered about the project that I had to submit. My phone's battery was dead so I couldn't call Alin either and there was no way I could return now.

The operation was over and she was stable but we'll not know it for sure till morning. "Dad, go home. I'll stay here with grandma. She's in

observation anyways; we will be able to meet her in the morning only. You go have some rest.” My dad shook his head, “I am staying here Ian, you take the keys and go home.” He handed me the keys. “But dad...” “Don’t son. I am staying here and that’s final. You go to the apartment and come back in the morning.” His voice sounded hoarse and tired which made me to oblige with him. “Okay dad, take care. I will be back in the morning.” I got up and left the hospital.

In the apartment I looked for a charger for my phone. Once I found it I connected it and turned my phone on. Numerous missed calls and texts from Alin telling me to come fast to college popped up and there was one text from Natalie. I opened the text and when I read it anger rose inside me. I called Natalie. “Hi baby.” “What’s that text about Natalie?” “Oh that one... I told weirdo about everything you told me about ditching her. You should have seen her face when you didn’t come to the college today. Serves her right! Anyways, where are you?” I was too angry to even talk with her so I just cut the call and tried to Alin. The ring kept on going but she never picked up. I should have called her in the morning and told her everything. This should have never happened. God knows what Natalie has told her. Thinking about Alin right now makes me want to hit myself. Why in the world did I get a stupid idea like ruining her in my head? She was right; I was the one who has caused her all the troubles. I will have to make all this right somehow.

The next day when I reached the hospital, my dad was sitting in the same position how I left him. “Did the doctors say anything dad?” “They have not yet come to check on her, I am waiting for them as well.” I sat beside him on the bench. After sometime the doctor entered my grandma’s room. When he came out the expressions on his face were not very good. “I am sorry Mr. White but she has gone to coma. Her condition is stable but we don’t know when she will

wake up.” “Will she ever wake up doctor? What are the chances?” My dad’s gasping was clearly audible in his voice. “We are trying our best Mr. White. Sometimes one or two weeks are enough for the patient to wake up but it might even take more time. So all we can do is pray and wait.” The doctor left and we went inside grandma’s ward. She looked so peaceful even when her body was going through so much pain. Seeing her in this condition, dad couldn’t take it and cried like a little kid sitting beside her and I couldn’t stop my tears either.

“Go back to Strastown Ian, there is no use in staying here,” my father told after we came out of grandma’s ward. “I can stay here dad...” “and do what? I can take care of her. Staying here will only hamper your studies and I don’t want that. Go back and continue the college. I will call you if there is any change in her condition.” I can’t argue to that, he was right. “Okay dad, take care of yourself and keep me informed.” He nodded. He stayed in the hospital while I left for Strastown.

While driving I kept on thinking about how to face Alin and tell her about everything. In between all this chaos, I remembered that I have not eaten anything since yesterday. I thought of making a stop at Lessi’s. Alin will most probably be there and I can meet and apologize to her. I also have to talk to Mr. Crauser regarding the project. I am sure he will accept it after knowing my problem otherwise my father can speak with him. Thinking about this I sped up the car towards the diner and hoped that Alin would still listen to me.

15

ALIN

“Aly honey, come down for breakfast” my mother knocked on my door. “You didn’t have dinner yesterday either. Come down and eat something.” She paused for a moment. “Is everything okay honey?” “Yeah mom, everything is fine.” “Okay honey.” She hesitated a bit but then went downstairs. I was still lying on my bed and didn’t feel like doing anything. Sebian’s voice that I heard yesterday from Natalie kept on revolving in my head. He really did it, didn’t he? I was a fool for thinking that someone like Sebian will change. Thinking about what he has done brought tears to my eyes. A sense of betrayal increased the anger inside me. I sat up, wiped my tears and got ready to go down for breakfast.

“Shall I go to the diner with you daddy?” Since today was a day off for college and I had nothing better to do, I wanted to go and help my father in the diner. He was okay now but still a little weak. “I am fine kiddo, you don’t have to worry. It’s your day off so take some rest.” He smiled and I nodded. I noticed that everybody is acting strange around me. My mother and father were using some kind of sign language to talk without letting me know and Ronin seemed much quieter than other days. Seeing me like this was making them worried as well. In my heart I promised myself that I won’t cry, not because of Sebian nor anything else. I will talk with Mr. Crauser about the project. I will not make my parents worried. I will do better and try for the best and I will never meet Sebian again in my life.

The whole day was boring. I helped my mother a bit in the household works and would have continued helping her but all the questions from her made my head ache and I didn’t want to answer her. She just kept on asking me what was wrong, the absolute topic I didn’t want to talk about right now. So, I excused myself saying that I have studies to do and came to my room. After some time I thought of going to Ronin but then thought that he might be busy and not like

my intrusion. He may also start asking about me exactly like mom and I was running away from that at this time. So instead I stayed in my room and searched for what to do to pass time.

I played the rubik's cube a bit and did some puzzles in my phone but after that got bored again and grabbed an academic book and started reading it. After all I still have the finals to pass and have to work hard on it if I still want a chance at the scholarship. Tears threatened to come back to my eyes again. I got up and went to the window, I can see Mrs. Reece's house. It didn't seem to have any movement at all. Maybe he is out somewhere with his friends, showing off bragging about how he messed with a fool like me and succeeded. I so want to go to him and ask why he did this to me but then I am scared that if I see him I will go weak and forgive him. I have all good memories of him. In front of me all he ever behaved was good. I really thought he had good inside him and the sad thing is I still think like that and that's why I am scared of seeing him. So, I will not see him again. I moved away from the window and returned back to my book.

Evening came late than always. I was helping my mom to prepare dinner when the bell rang. I went to open the door knowing that it was my dad. When I opened the door my dad entered and behind him standing was Sebian. He looked at me. I stood there without any movement. Why was he here? He slowly tried to smile. Look at the audacity of this boy. After all he has done he still comes here and dares to smile at me. I was about to speak something when my father's voice was heard, "Come in son." I gave him way and he entered inside. I locked the door and followed him in.

"Hi there, you are..." my mother asked. "He is a friend of Aly. He came to help in the diner and also came that day to leave me at

home, you have seen him,” my father said reminding her. “Oh, yeah” my mother said, thinking about it for a while. “Of course, I remember him. Thank you for your help that day...” “Sebian ma’am” Sebian spoke. “Oh yes, Sebian. I am Lessi, nice to meet you. Come sit. Dinner is almost ready, join us.” “No ma’am, it’s okay.” “Of course, he will have dinner with us.” My father spoke again. “Didn’t you say that Mrs. Reece is in the city, then you can definitely have dinner here.

“Why did you bring him here dad?” I finally asked. My father looked at my surprisingly raised tone. “Well he came to the diner for some food and told me that he has something to talk to you about. So, I brought him here. This way he can talk to you and also have dinner with us.” My mother brought the dishes out and kept them on the dining table. Ronin came and sat for dinner as well. “Come sit Aly, we can talk while eating” my mother spoke sternly to which I sighed and obliged.

16

SEBIAN

She sat across me at the dining table but I did not dare to look at her. I can feel the anger emanating from her, she was very angry. I don’t blame her though, the things I did are not worth any kind of sympathy. I just want to tell her that I am sorry about all she has to go through because of me. I don’t know what she has heard and thinks about me but that’s not all true. I want her as a friend, always have wanted but now I don’t know if she will even talk to me. I kept my head down and ate the dinner fully aware of her eyes glaring at me.

“So, you are friend of Aly, really?” Alin’s mother spoke breaking the silence to which I was very thankful because this dinner was getting very awkward for me. “Yes ma’am, we’re in the same class.” I looked at Alin, she was just looking at me with blank eyes. I’ve never seen her like this. She was shy and reluctant but never like this. Her green eyes always showed happiness, dreams, satisfaction, none of which can be seen right now and I was the reason for this.

“How did you both became friends?” I turned my head and looked at Alin’s mother. “I mean, Aly is not very talkative and is very shy. I am pretty sure she is not the one who came to you first and started talking. So, did you speak with her first?” I was about to answer but Alin interrupted, “Mom, why are you asking him that? I am sure he doesn’t want to answer all your questions. We are not really friends and our meeting was just coincidental.” “We got teamed up for a science project.” I smiled and told her mother. “Which was a disaster,” Alin spoke again. “Why? What happened?” Alin’s mother asked. Alin looked at me, anger and betrayal flashing in her eyes. Along with Alin her mother, father and brother stopped eating dinner and looked at me with questioning eyes.

How do I tell them? I know what I thought of doing with her was unforgivable but whatever happened is not what she is thinking. “Tell them Sebian, what happened?” Alin’s voice stopped the train of my thoughts. “I- I couldn’t go to the college on the day of submission and hence couldn’t submit my part of the project.” “And ruined my part too. The project was a team effort; I was not going to be evaluated individually. Now that half of the thing was missing, none of us is going to get marks.” She spoke in a loud voice, loud enough that it poked deep inside my heart. It was not her words that hurt me but her voice. She sounded almost choked up. I looked at her and felt the moisture in my own eyes. “You can drop the act Sebian, I

have already heard everything from Natalie. Did you have fun doing it? ruining my career, my dreams.” “That’s not what happened” I spoke in a shivering voice. “Then tell us what happened Sebian.” Alin’s mother asked with a genuine concern in her voice.

“That day while I was getting ready for college, my grandma, she suddenly fainted. I didn’t know what to do?” my voice shook but I continued. “I called my father and he told me to bring her to the city. Calling you totally slipped out of my mind” I looked at Alin. “After I reached there, everything went so fast. She was admitted in the hospital, the operation, everything. She is still in there, in coma.” I have started crying now. “I tried calling you after reaching there but you wouldn’t pick up. How was I suppose to tell you anything.” This time when I looked at her, I can see her expressions softening a bit. “I knew you wouldn’t listen to me but I still wanted to tell you everything and that’s why I wanted to meet you. I didn’t mean to ditch you Alin, it just happened.”

I didn’t want to sit here crying in front of everyone and make a mess. “I am sorry” I uttered and got up to leave when my phone rang, it was my dad. He asked me if I reached alright and told that there was no progress in grandma’s condition. I told him to take care of himself and keeping the phone in my pocket walked towards the main door to leave.

I can feel the gaze of the whole family behind me. Alin probably didn’t believe me otherwise she would have said something. I opened the door and got out on the road finally relieved that I have told her everything but the feeling of losing her was killing me from the inside. Maybe my interception into her life was because of something stupid but somewhere on the way I started liking, everything about her but now it’s too late. I heard footsteps behind

me but was too lost in my thoughts to bother. It took me a few moments to realize that someone was calling my name and a few more moments to turn and see Alin standing there.

17

ALIN

After Sebian left, my father who was sitting silently for so long suddenly spoke, "I don't think that boy was lying Aly. Even I have heard that Mrs. Reece is out of town right now. Nobody knows why but she is." Was Sebian really telling the truth then? Only one way to know. I excused myself from the dinner and went after him. Outside I saw him walking towards his house. "Sebian" I called, he didn't stop. "Sebian" I called again and ran after him. He still didn't answer. When I called him the once more he abruptly stopped and turned. Under the street light I can see his face that has lost its glaze and his eyes were red from crying. I should have asked him before blaming him as responsible for everything. Believing Natalie was a mistake.

"Is Mrs. Reece okay now?" I asked in a low tone. He shook his head to a 'no'. "I am sorry, I am sorry" he told and walked fast towards me. He crashed onto me and captured me in a tight embrace. Putting his forehead on my shoulder he cried, his body shaking uncontrollably. "It's okay, everything's going to be okay" I held him back and patted him. After staying like that for some time he finally calmed down and lifted his head up. His face was wet and fully swollen now. I wiped the tears from his face and told, "I am sorry. I shouldn't have believed Natalie but it was your voice so I just did. I am sorry." "No, Alin, I did tell that," he said with regret in his eyes. "Alin, I would like to confess something to you" I nodded. "Alin, it's true. First when I started to talk with you it was with the intention to ruin your project. You see, Natalie wanted the scholarship and you were her

competitor so I changed as your partner by talking to Ruth and all but as I started talking to you and knowing you more I couldn't do it. I like you Alin. I had never thought of not coming if not because of my grandma. Forgive me." I trust him, he was not lying. I smiled and nodded. "You don't worry, I will talk to Mr. Crauser, I am sure he will understand" he told in a hurry. "Yeah, it will be fine, I know it will be." Now, after a long time I saw a smile appearing on his face. He was still sniffing but that liveliness is back in him, he will be fine. He lifted his head up and pulling me closer kissed my forehead. "You take care and don't worry, tomorrow in the college I will talk to Mr. Crauser" he told again. I nodded. "Get some sleep, I will see you in the morning," he told and waving a 'bye' went inside his house with a smile and I returned back to mine.

There was not a lot of work to be done downstairs so I went to my room. I felt really light hearted. Inside me I had a feeling that everything will be alright. More than anything, the fact that Sebian would never betray me was something very soothing. I went and stood near the window watching the house he was in. The light of his room was turned on and after a few minutes went off. "Good night" I mumbled and then came and lied down on my bed when my phone vibrated.

"Hey..." It was Sebian.

"Hey... do you want to tell something?"

"No. Just... good night"

"Good night Sebian."

A sudden painful headache pierced through me. This is not the first time I was experiencing this, it was happening very frequently to me these days, maybe because I am taking too much stress. After a few

minutes the pain subsided and as usual I forgot about it. Now that I don't have a lot to worry about I hope the headache never returns.

I tried reading a bit and a few other things but I guess I was not tired enough to sleep. I opened my phone and in the browser searched for Sebian. His handsome face popped up and I kept on staring at it for longer than I should have. Sebian White, how my life has gone through tremendous changes these few days after meeting him. I had a lot of questions, curiosity and opinions about him when I saw him from far before but after knowing him I can tell that you should never judge a book by its cover; he is a classic example of that.

I have hope that everything will be alright and faith that come what may Sebian will always be with me and that's all I need. The only question that I have right now is that after what happened today are I and Sebian still just friends or a little more than that. I guess I have to wait and time will tell. Thinking about this I kept my phone aside and closed my eyes waiting for sleep to gradually come over me.

18

SEBIAN

The next few days went very slowly but everything seems to be falling back at its place. I have started to spend more and more time with Alin now, which I liked a lot. Other than her job at the mart she spends the rest of the time of her day with me. We go to the college together, have classes together, lunch together, come back and have study sessions at my house. Her parents didn't mind and in fact have told me to have dinner and breakfast at their house until my grandma returns. Among my previous friends Joe is the only one who talks with me often. After I confronted Mr. Crauser regarding my absence he considered it and since both I and Alin are good in

studies he let us both submit and marked our late submission with a little deduction that will not cause much of a difference. This led to the end of mine and Natalie's relation. Good riddance!!

Today was nothing different, after college we were at my house to study. These days Alin is getting used to let go of her sweat shirt, at least when she is with me. The more I spend time with her, the more I fall for her, everyday. This realization has hit me a few days back and I didn't want to avoid it. Every time we were together instead of focusing on the work at hand I keep on looking at her, like right now. She was busy studying something and I should be too but I was rather busy admiring her. How she looked so cute pouting when she was focusing on something or how she bites her lips and plays with the pen in her hand when she was trying to solve something. Thinking about this a goofy smile spreaded on my face to which Alin responded with a "What" and I shook my head. I am sure someday soon all these feelings inside me are going to be uncontrollable and I am going to confess to her. I am just hoping that she would say 'yes'.

My phone rang beside me, it was my dad. He calls me daily around this time when he goes to the hospital after work. Today also there was no news of any progress in grandma's condition. Alin was enthusiastically looking at me while I was talking to my father. When I kept the phone and gave out an exasperated sigh, she understood that there was nothing new. She patted my head and said, "It's alright. She's going to be fine and back soon, don't worry." That was all the encouragement I needed to get me back into the good mood. "Let's go have dinner." She packed up and we left for her house to have dinner.

I have gotten closer to her family as well. Mrs. Jones lets me help her in the kitchen. When she came to know that I can cook, she was

ecstatic about it and lets me help her with cooking dishes on the weekends. I feel more like a family member here rather than just Alin's friend. I and Ronin have become best buddies. His family didn't even had any idea that he was interested in music before he suddenly played a beautiful song with my guitar. Alin always says she is envious of me as Ronin is closer to me than her. It's like he is my own brother.

"For dessert today we have apple pie. I heard that it's a favourite of Sebian" Mrs. Jones said cheerfully. "Yes, it is." Not being able to wait anymore I dipped my fork into the slice of the pie on my plate. Putting it into my mouth a moan escaped me, it was delicious. After dinner Alin helped Mrs. Jones with the dishes and I sat with Mr. Jones watching TV. "So, what have you thought of doing after college Sebian?" he asked. "Why would you ask that Rob." Mrs. Jones said from the kitchen. "He is already famous as a model in this age, I am sure he is going to continue that. Right, Sebian?" "I don't know." I said hesitatingly. "For now my father just wants me to focus on my studies so I haven't thought of anything else." "Of course, son. These decisions are to be taken after giving a lot of thought. Take your time and think about it." I smiled and nodded.

"It's time to say good night Sebian. Go and sleep, we have college tomorrow. Alin told while wiping her hands in the towel. I got up and said good night to everybody and left with Alin. She walks me till my house every day after dinner. "So, don't you want to know what I want to do after college?" I asked her while walking. "There is still time Sebian and you have a lot of possibilities in front of you so I am not worried." Oh how do I control my heart when she speaks so sweetly? I don't think I can hold myself longer. "Alin?" I called her when we reached at my door. "Hmm?" "Will you go out with me this Saturday?" She looked at me with a stunned expression for a minute

before answering. "Okay... let me know the time, I'll be ready."
Without waiting anymore she turned and left with hurried steps and I couldn't help but smile.

19

ALIN

What do I wear? What do I wear? This one? No... too frilly. This one? No... too formal. I didn't know that I don't own anything that I can wear and go outside with friends. Was that a friendly invitation though, from Sebian? I looked at the mirror. Oh God! I was blushing so hard. Covering my face up with my hands I backtracked from my wardrobe and with a plop sat on my bed. Wasn't this a date? Or did he just called me to hang out with him, but wasn't that a date? maybe not for him. I mean he is used to go out with his friends before and this might be just that. I should think about it logically. He is a model and I am just an ordinary girl. My happy mood started faltering. If this was the case I guess there was no use in getting ready with such hype. I thought of calling my mother to help but it's not like she was teasing me less anyways. So, I just stick with the classic black jeans and a green full sleeved top with good old sneakers. There, I am all ready. I don't know what he has planned for the day but I think this will do. It's almost time, he will be here any minute now.

I got all ready and went downstairs and sat on the couch waiting for Sebian. My mother was working in the kitchen and the side glances she threw at me with those hidden smirks were making me burn with embarrassment. Sebian needs to come fast, before I change my mind. After about 5 minutes I heard the doorbell ring and when I got up to open the door, my mother beat me to it. She invited Sebian in with her brightest smile. "So, you are going to take her out?" she

knows but still asks him in a teasing voice. "Yes ma'am" he replied back. She looked at me "Okay, go but be back by, you know the time." "Of course mom." "Don't worry Mrs. Jones, I will bring her back by time" Sebian spoke. "Oh... aren't you a sweet one. Now go have fun" my mother literally pushed us both out of the house and closed the door. Wow!

He opens the door of the car and holds it for me. After I am seated he closes the door and comes around to sit on the driver's seat. "You look nice" he gave me a smile. Of course, I don't. With his hair colour changed back to black his face was literally bright as a sunny day. He wore a white striped shirt whose sleeves were folded till his elbow. This made him look like a king of some country and I looked like a peasant of that country but it's not like I can tell that to him so I just replied with a simple "thank you." There was an awkward silence between us and it was getting dense every minute. "So, where are we going?" I asked. "That's a secret" he answered me. I wasn't expecting that. Was this really a friendly meet like I was thinking about? Guess I have to wait to know.

After about an hour and half of driving I noticed that we were out of Strastown and were in the city. We didn't talk much in the way and just listened to music. Sebian was now wearing a yellow sun glass that added to his beauty. Suddenly something stuck me. If we were in the city where people know him as a model, then is he not in big trouble to be seen with me. It's going to harm his reputation, right? Then why did he bring me here? I was about to ask him this but as if he read my face, he asked "You look worried Alin, what happened?" "Nothing. I just..." "Don't worry; I am not going to kidnap you or anything. We are going to meet my father for lunch, that's it." I gave a nervous laugh. This is so not the friendly hang out I was thinking about.

We were sitting in a posh restaurant for lunch, me, Sebian and his father. Sebian looked so much like his father. His eyes were dark like Sebian's and a few grey hairs peeked between his black ones.

Sebian's father asked him about me and I was introduced as a friend of his which somehow made me sad internally. He was glad that I lived near Mrs. Reece and knew her. He also thanked me for helping Sebian with his studies. After our lunch when we walked outside Sebian told me to wait in the car and stayed behind to talk with his dad. After about 5 minutes he came and we drove out of there.

Our next stop was shopping. Sebian fooled me into it by saying that he has something to buy but all we did was buy things for me, luxury bags and fancy accessories. When we got out of the store I had three bags full of commodities that I don't think I would ever need. Since we were running late we decided for a light dinner nearby. I swear I heard a few snaps inside the restaurant we were having dinner.

People were taking pictures of us but Sebian was not bothered in the least and focused his full attention on me. By the time we reached home I was exhausted. "Today was fun" I told Sebian while getting out of the car. "You liked it?" I nodded and he walked with me towards my house. "Okay then, I will see you tomorrow at breakfast" I told and turned around when he stopped me. "Alin, I brought this for you. Hope you like this too." He handed me a small box and walked back towards his car.

20

SEBIAN

I got inside the house and locking the door stood there for a minute. My heart was frantically beating in my chest and I was gasping. 'Hope you like it' Idiot! I slapped myself. What would she be thinking about

it? Did she see it or not? Will it all be over between us then? I should have been there when she opened it. I can't help getting scared that I might end up losing her. With wiggly steps I went to my room and crashed on my bed. I sigh... what have I done??

The whole night I was restless and I didn't want to go to Alin's house for breakfast now. It's Sunday and I typically spend all day there on Sundays but today I just can't get myself out of here, I am so nervous. My phone beeped a text from Alin.

"Are you coming today or are you tired? Mom was asking."

"Yeah, I am coming."

I forced myself out of the bed and got ready to leave. Once I was out of my house, I slowly walked towards Alin's house. I was so nervous that I thought I might faint on the road. I rang the bell and Mrs. Jones opened it. "You are late today. I thought you wouldn't come. Come on in. Everybody is in the backyard." She smiled and let me in. I went to the backyard where there was table set on with the breakfast. I looked for Alin but she was nowhere to be found. It's what I feared, isn't it? She doesn't want to see me anymore. Heartbreak is what I felt at that moment. I was about to turn around and leave when I heard Mrs. Jones voice behind me, "Looking for Alin?" I turned around and met her eyes. "She is in her room. She told that she is not feeling well. Do you want to go and meet her?" I wanted to but I didn't know if she wanted to meet me or not. Was she really not feeling well or was she trying to avoid me? All these thoughts were going inside my head, nevertheless I nodded my head. Mrs. Jones took me upstairs and knocked on her room's door. "Sebian is here to see you Aly, open up." "Yes mom" Alin opened the door. Frizzy hair, red eyes, she looked like she didn't sleep at all. "Okay then, you guys talk." Mrs. Jones left me there and went down.

I followed Alin inside the room. She went and sat on the bed while I stood there looking around. Her room was as I had expected. Clean, organized and shelves full of books, she really loves reading, doesn't she? "What happened to you? Did you catch flu after coming back yesterday?" I went and sat near her. "No, this is not because of the flu. I am having a headache." "You look like this because of a headache?" I asked in a shocked tone while tucking a strand of her curls behind her ear. She didn't jerk of but stared at me intently. "Yeah, I have had this headache attack me few times recently but it was worse yesterday night." "You sure it's not because of something I did" I asked warily. "It maybe because I kept tugging you around everywhere without any rest or something else?" I was trying to be very careful with my words here but was she getting the hint?

I started looking here and there when she spoke, "I know what you are talking about." She took out the box that I gave her from the side drawer. My eyes went wide looking at it. "Did you open it?" I asked in a nervous tone. "I did but I want you to tell me what this means. Should I think of this as a gift from a friend, but then this is something I can't accept. Or is it..." In a flash I took the box from her and was down on my knees. "I love you Alin" I blurted out. "I wanted to say that to you from some time now but I was scared that you wouldn't want to see me anymore." I said all that in one breath and started gasping. When I lifted my head to look at her, she seemed rather calm than what I had thought. "And here I thought you'll never say it" she was smiling. "What? What do you mean?" I was surprised beyond words here. "I mean, I love you too Sebian." She took the box from my hand and opened it revealing the sapphire pendant inside. "Now would you please" she sided her hair so that I can tie it and I did just that.

I took both her hands into mine and spoke, "its official then?" "Yes it is" she replied. I looked into her eyes and they showed love in them. I kissed her forehead. "You take rest; I will bring your breakfast here." "Actually I am feeling a lot better now. You go down, I will be right there." I smiled and left her room. I joined everybody in the backyard. Today was the happiest day of my life and I hope that somehow this lasts forever. I sat there gaining funny glances from others because of my idiotic smile but I was not minding it a bit.

21

ALIN

It's almost three months now that I and Sebian are together and somehow everybody knows about us, at the mart, the college, the diner, my home, everywhere. Even when we walk on the road people look at us and give that small, sweet smile which makes me feel really good. In all this, the only part that I don't like is the college. Some kids give us funny looks and even if Sebian does not care much, it bothers me a lot. I also don't like the fact that Sebian has lost his friends because of me. He says that he is happy to be in my world but I am not convinced and feel guilty. In college or outside, mostly Joe is the one who talks to Sebian sometimes and even to me. He is actually a good person, which I didn't expect because he was in that group. He also comes home sometimes with Sebian and teaches Ronin the guitar.

My family members are the biggest supporters of our relationship. Sometimes I think they love Sebian more than me and even if I am jealous of this I still like it. One day I asked Sebian if his father is going to be okay with this relationship of ours and he said that his father already knew. It was him who brought that necklace for me after Sebian told him about me. Oh God! You won't believe how

embarrassed I felt when I heard this. We frequently visit the city to see Mrs. Reece in the hospital like yesterday and the good news is that she has already got up now. She has a little trouble in moving her mouth to talk but otherwise she is fine. The doctors said that she can be discharged within a week and even though Sebian's father insists on keeping her there with him, she just wants to come back to Strastown.

"What are you thinking?" Sebian asked, looking up at me and closing the book he was reading. He looked kind of cute with those specs that he has started wearing recently. "I was thinking of making coffee for me, do you want some?" he rapidly nodded his head. I went downstairs to the kitchen to get the coffee. My parents were out and Ronin was in his room, so I and Sebian are having our study session here today. I got two cups of coffee in my hand and went to my room and saw Sebian standing near the window. "So, you saw me secretly from here?" he turned with a goofy smile on his face. "Yeah, I did sometimes." I replied while keeping his cup of coffee on the desk. "And did you like what you saw?" "Turning on and off of lights? Yeah, that's pretty normal you know, nothing to like about it." I told stifling a giggle and had a sip of my coffee. He started walking towards me. "You are telling me you saw nothing else other than the lights switching on and off?" He had a mischievous smile on his face. The coffee almost spilled when he caught my hand and pulled me towards him. "Nothing else other than the lights, huh?" His hands were around my waist and my face was against his neck. I looked up at his face; his eyes were shining with happiness. For a moment nothing mattered to me, no time, no place. I tip toed and pecked his lips. When I broke away and looked back at him, the smile was still intact on his face but his eyes showed that he wanted more. I didn't have to wait long before his lips came down and claiming mine with

a gentle touch which slowly deepened. My mouth opened up giving the permission to him to go deeper. I felt his breath on my face. All of this was happening in such a fast pace that made my heart beat faster in excitement. Taking the cup from my hand and keeping it on the desk, he started guiding me towards the bed. His lips were all over mine, his tongue sliding in and out of my mouth. I tried to control myself but somehow small moans escaped me. My legs hit the bed and this made us break apart, leaving us gasping. He hovered above me for some moment before he came down and claiming me again. He kissed me like there was no next time. His lips slowly left mine and moved down towards my neck. Before I could make any kind of judgement about it I felt his hands going under my shirt. Instead of any words coming out of my mouth I responded with a loud moan. His lips were still focused on my neck when his hand came back up and started unbuttoning my shirt. When I suddenly felt his breath on my cleavage I noticed that my upper body was fully exposed to him. When his hand lightly grazed over my bra, a shrieking pain aroused in my head followed by a numbness. I felt my eyes tearing up as I closed them tightly. I don't know if this is how bliss felt but I wanted him to keep on doing what he was and not stop just yet.

"Aly, honey, we are back. Are you and Sebian in your room?" I heard my mother's footsteps headed upstairs. Sebian jerked away from me, his face pale with fear. When he saw I didn't move, he started to button up my shirt and then got up and went to sit on the chair picking up the coffee cup from the desk. When my mother opened up the door, I was just glad that at least one of us was thinking straight.

SEBIAN

With a loud thud I closed the door of my room. 'Oh God! What was I doing?! What would have I done if Mrs. Jones didn't disturb us?! It makes me mad that I lost my self control and led all this. I am very sure Mrs. Jones noticed that something was wrong as I literally ran out of there with a red face when she entered the room. I just hope that she doesn't get to know what that something was. My heart is still beating frantically fast and my face feels hot. I poured a glass of water and gulped it in an attempt to calm myself down. After a few deep breaths I went and lied down on the bed. Tomorrow I have to meet Alin and say sorry to her first otherwise I will not be able to face her. I don't even know what she was feeling right now about what happened. I took my phone out to call her but then decided against it. Let's just deal with it tomorrow. I need time to think about what to tell her.

In the morning I got ready to go to Alin's house for breakfast. I kept on practicing the words of apology till I reached there. Mrs. Jones opened the door with her usual welcoming smile. It looks like she hasn't suspected anything. The other members joined us and we had a nice breakfast. Alin looked rather calm but didn't seem angry with me, that's a good thing. "Aly, can you go with Sebian and pick up some groceries for me" Mrs. Jones said after breakfast. "Sure mom." I started the car and we drove to Poppy's Mart. She didn't like to talk while we drive, just listened to music and chill was what she liked. I knew that so I didn't start any conversation. We reached at the mart and were welcomed by Poppy at the front. "Hey Sebian, how are you?" "I am great Poppy. How are you?" "Just usual. Any news about your grandma?" "Yeah, the doctors say that she can be discharged in a week." "Oh, that's great!" Poppy stopped talking to me and paid attention to the customer standing in front of her.

Today was Saturday so the store was more crowded than on week days. I gave her an understanding smile and went inside where Alin was already picking up the items in the list. "You are alright?" I asked her in a hushed tone, near her ear. "What are you talking about?" she answered without looking at me still busy with the items in the shelves. "About yesterday Alin, are you okay?" I noticed her hands fumbled a little and expression changed to that of embarrassment, her cheeks started turning red. "I am sorry. I am very sorry about what happened yesterday Alin. I didn't mean it to, it just happened. I promise that it will never happen again without your consent. I am sorry, don't be angry with me." I blabbered out. She looked at me blinking her big green eyes. "It's okay Sebian. It's not like you are the only one who was responsible. I mean, it's not like I was trying to stop you either. We both were equally involved in the act and I am not angry at you so stop worrying about that." She smiled "And since we are in a relationship I think things like that are common but let's just make sure we don't get things this out of control the next time." I nodded at her and sighed in relief while she got back to her list.

We got back to her house and I helped Mrs. Jones with cooking. After the lunch I decided to skip on studies today and somehow made Alin agree to watch movie with me. We sat on the couch watching the cartoon movie and laughed to our heart's content. I love to see Alin being so carefree like that. It's not a regular thing so I cherish every moment she acts that way. I think I watched her the whole time rather than the movie and somewhere in the middle just dozed off.

After I don't know how long I felt a nudge on my elbow. "The movie is over; shall we go and study now?" Alin who was sitting beside me asked. We got to her room, grabbed the books and started. I am pretty sure Alin is going to get that scholarship and live her dream,

she works so hard for it. Meanwhile, I still haven't decided what I will do but as long as I get to stay with her I think I will be fine.

A knock on the door made us both look up from our books. "Dinner time" Ronin poked his head and announced. I kept the book aside and yawned. Finally food! I was so excited that I ran past Alin and reached down inhaling the delicious aroma and praising the skills of Mrs. Jones. A loud thudding sound made us look back to see that Alin had fallen and rolled two steps down to the floor. I ran to her along with Ronin and was horrified to see her face all pale. We both tried to shake her calling her name but she won't wake up. At that very moment I had a feeling that this was going to end up badly, very badly.

23

ALIN

I don't know what happened but that pain in my head was back and the next thing I knew was everything went black as I fell down. Now that I have opened my eyes I know that I am in a strange place. This looks like a hospital. Was I that serious that they have to get me to a hospital? I can still feel my head being heavy but it's acceptable. I saw to my right where Sebian was seated in a chair with his eyes closed, holding my hands in his. I gave my hand a little shake and he got up instantly. "Alin, how do you feel now? Are you okay? Does your head still hurts?" he spoke fast. I was about to answer him when I realized that I never told him why I fell down. How did he know it was because of my headache? "You stay, I'll go get the doctor." He ran out of the ward leaving me alone. What was all this? A feel of dreadness crept inside me. Was it something serious, the headache? He entered back inside with a doctor and my family. My mother looked like she has cried a lot and was ready to cry again any

moment now. My father looked devastated and even Ronin looked like he has cried. What exactly has happened? The doctor came closer to me and started to check me using the stethoscope and all. "Are you feeling alright now Alin?" he asked and I nodded slowly. "Did you had a headache before you fainted?" I nodded again. "And how frequently or since when have you started to have these headaches?" I thought for a while and told, "about 4-5 months now but they were not this worse before, just a 5-10 seconds pain and then over. It has gotten worse in these past weeks but I ignored them as usual.

He exhaled a deep breath and seemed lost in thoughts. "Is something wrong doctor?" I asked, worried. "Tumor, you have a tumor in your brain and it is in the last stage." My eyes went wide at his words. "We can still attempt for a surgery but there are a lot of risks. You may go into coma, might lose your memories and the worse is you can die. There is no guarantee that the surgery will be successful." Those words did it for my mother and she started bawling. "And how long can I live without the surgery?" I asked. "At most... a month." That's it. That's all the life I had left, a month. I was feeling difficulty in breathing after hearing those words. "You can take her home now." The doctor looked at my father and said. "Make your decision regarding the surgery Alin and let me know within two days, we can't waste more time." The doctor left and we came back home.

The whole night I couldn't stop my tears and in the morning I was too exhausted to go down for breakfast. Sebian came to my room with breakfast on a plate and sat beside me. "You are going to be alright Alin. I've talked to my dad and he said that he will talk to the doctors about your case. After the surgery you'll be all fine. Don't worry." He looked happy but I can tell that he was dying inside. "I am

not going for the surgery Sebian” I told with a dry smile. His expression changed to that of worry. “Why? That’s the only way Alin. You have to. What are you trying to say here?” “I am trying to say that I don’t want the surgery. I’ll just live my life, the one month I have left and then leave.” He looked like he was about to hit me, like you would do to a child to knock some sense into him. “You are not understanding what you are saying Alin. I know you are scared but you are suggesting suicide here.” His face was red with anger. “I am scared Sebian but not of the surgery or death but of the fact that I will forget everything, everyone, all this we have had when we were together. I am scared of keep on existing and never get up from that bed to see any of you again. That would be pathetic and I will not be able to forgive myself for doing that to me and all of you.” He fell silent and looked at me with all the pain inside him. After sometime he just got up and left. I don’t blame him. I know he was scared far more than I was but he doesn’t have to be. Even after my death I am sure my family will love him the same as they do now, maybe more.

I wiped my tears and started eating my breakfast. I have decided against the surgery and letting my family know about it is going to be chaotic. So, I might as well fill up with energy before I go down to do that. I took my plate and went down and saw the terrified faces of my family members and a Sebian who looked like a soldier who has lost the battle. He has already told them and now they were ready to take it on with me. God, please help me to convince them. With a smile I took a step towards them and knew that this was going to be very hard.

24

SEBIAN

These days my life only revolves around Alin. What she wants to do, what she wants to eat, her regular checkups, everything. Somehow she has convinced us all about not going through the surgery. That time it sounded ridiculous to hear that she would chose death over an uncertain memory loss or coma but when I started to think from her perspective I can tell how hard it is for her to just stay here without any memories about any of us. When she told that was the last wish that she wanted to be full filled, none of us could say no.

After that day all of us take care that she doesn't get stressed at all and not get reminded about her condition but the condolences she gets every day from someone or the other makes it hard for her. I don't understand how every news gets circulated so fast here.

Today is the same as other days. We are all having a happy breakfast now and then will get going to the college. My grandma is discharged and for the time being is with my dad. Alin was so happy when grandma finally got out of the hospital. We went there to meet her and despite her condition, Alin was very excited.

We reached at the college and because I have told everybody to not come to Alin with sympathetic words they made sure they give her a pitiful look instead. This was not helping at all but she has learnt to avoid all these now.

We were in our second class and everything was going on smoothly when Alin suddenly fell off her chair. I was by her side in an instant and carried her out to drive her to the hospital. On the way I called her parents. By the time I reached the hospital, I was in a stage of panic. She was taken to the emergency wars and I waited outside. After some time her parents reached there and we were all waiting when the doctor came out with a hard expression. "You might want

to meet her now, she don't have much time left." My head started spinning. I had forgotten that the one month was almost over.

Her family went to meet her first. I couldn't nervousness out of my body. I started tapping my feet and biting on my nails. I felt like I would go mad. When her family came out of the room their faces made me to almost cry but I controlled myself and went in to meet her. She looked so weak lying here, how didn't I noticed all this time. She had a ventilator which she took out and sat up after seeing me. She opened her arms wide to embrace me I did just that.

She held me tightly. I can feel her heart beating fast against my chest. "I am so scared Sebian. I am so scared that I will not be able to see you again." I know she was scared but I had no way of resolving that for her. She took my face in both her hands. "Let me see your face once." She looked at me with tears in her eyes. "You take care of yourself oaky and don't worry you'll not be alone. I will always be there with you. I love you Sebian." She said that and desperately hugged me and kept her head on my shoulder. Her fast beating heart started calming down while the monitor besides her showing up and down lines with a rhythmic beat showed a straight line with a continuous beep. Embracing her tight, I just knew that she was gone.

EPILOGUE

"Hello, yes grandma. Yeah, I am okay." "Mr. Sebian, Mr. Sebian, come see, the boys are being bad again and disturbing the class." A little girl came and started tugging at my shirt. "I am coming. Okay grandma I'll call you later. Reception is pretty bad here so don't worry if I don't pick up at times." I cut the call and followed the girl. I reached inside the mud walled room. "Boys, I heard that you are

disturbing the class again” I tried to sound stern. “No, Mr. Sebian we weren’t.” I couldn’t help but smile at his straight faced lie. This was the dream Alin wanted to live. Teach the kids who were not very fortunate so that they can make the right choices and make their own paths. I am living her dream now.

It’s already six years now that I have lost her. After her death I was broken and didn’t know what to do but she was right, I was not alone. Everybody came along, my friends, my family and her family and made me realize that I was never different than her. I realized that I wanted to pursue this dream of her. She has never left me. She stays in my heart as the beat, always and forever.



FREE
eBooks



WHOEVER
WHENEVER
WHEREVER
YOU ARE

INSTANTLY DOWNLOAD THESE MASSIVE BOOK BUNDLES

CLICK ANY BELOW TO ENJOY NOW

3 AUDIOBOOK COLLECTIONS

Classic AudioBooks Vol 1 ■ Classic AudioBooks Vol 2 ■ Classic AudioBooks Kids

6 BOOK COLLECTIONS

Sci-Fi ■ Romance ■ Mystery ■ Academic ■ Classics ■ Business