



***What Happened in Vegas
Didn't Stay in
In Vegas
Part 2
Meadow Murphy***

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By
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*****Explicit scenes*****

Prologue

“I AM getting married.” I’m arguing with my dad. “How can you possibly think it’s all in my imagination? His sabbatical ends in a year, and then you’ll see. The time is going to fly by. Surely, you can last twelve more months living with me? I spend the majority of my time at Diamond and Georgia’s anyway!”

“You act like there’s nothing worse in the world living with your own daughter. I have to support Danny’s decision and wait for him. He talks about nothing. I can’t tell him, ‘You’re not allowed to go, you have to marry me first,’ besides you and mom married in your thirties!”

Dad slams his fork down on the wobbly table, “Hell yes, there is something wrong with it! Your mother and I married late, but we weren’t living at HOME in our thirties. We are tired of supporting you! What if Danny meets another woman while on his sabbatical? It is possible. Does that mean you won’t look for a place until you secure another man? There are women in Kenya you know, hell he could hook up with a man, it’s not unheard of. You can’t centre your life around anyone’s life-changing decisions, only your own.”

Mom looks at dad, “You can be a little nicer dear. You’re talking to her like she’s done something wrong. You offered for her to stay here while she was going to University.”

Dad rolls his eyes at mom, “Okay Meadow, say your mother and I believe you’re getting married in a year, we will continue planning your wedding for September 3, 2019, while you get busy finding yourself a job. You have your PHD for fuck sakes!”

“Nick!” she warns.

“You don’t need more schooling. There are no more excuses left; we are shoving you out of the nest. It’s time for you to fly. Your mother and I want to live alone, fuck anywhere, walk around naked, you know, do what normal people do. We want to get so holy fucking shit kinky without a door bursting open on us and seeing the shocked look on your face.”

The image dad described is all too vivid. I accidentally walked in on them a week ago and dad had one of my mom’s wrists tied to the stove and the other to the fridge door. He didn’t see me coming and he was swinging his dick around while role playing, pretending it was a ‘double edged sword.’

Mom wasn’t able to cover her naked body because she was bound to our appliances, but she warned him so he could at least cover himself up. It was traumatizing for everyone, especially for me.

Mom's cheeks go pink. She remembers the incident too. I turn to her exasperated, "You don't feel the say way, do you mom?"

She looks me square in the eyes and calmly says, "United we stand on this one Honey, sorry."

All but two of my closest friends are married. I only have another year to wait and then it's my turn. That is the only thing getting me through the next three hundred and sixty-five days.

~Chapter 1~

I raise from the table to get dressed. I can work on my resume at Diamond's. At this point dad is beginning his usual rant, "I don't see why she doesn't want to have her own place for a year before she gets married anyway!"

Mom speaks in a loud whisper, "Don't let her hear you. She'll be living with Danny before you know it. If she spends another year with us, it will give her more time to save money!"

"Ya," Nick complains. "I know, but it pisses me off, that of all the people in the world she can fall in love with, she choses the son of Chase Hart who's had his beady little eyes on you since day one. He liked you since you were a resident at the General. That son-of-a-bitch is living vicariously through his own son Danny; he can't have you so at least his son is going to get your daughter!"

"You are being ridiculous, his little crush on me was so many years ago, get over it. Bradley was the one who was hot for me. We almost never happened because of Bradley. Chase wasn't a threat to you."

"After Meadow goes out, I'm going to fuck your brains out so you forget Bradley and Chase ever existed!"

"I don't know if you'll manage that dear," Chanel teased, "Chase and Bradley are fit men in their late fifties. Neither of them have your dickydo."

"Dickydo?"

"Ya, it's when your stomach hangs out more than your dick does. Honestly Nick, we should splurge on that home gym you were thinking of getting last year."

"How droll!" his voice drips of sarcasm. "You better watch what you say," he warns. "You know how much it turns me on to give that not so tight ass of yours a good spanking now and then."

There is second of silence and a giggle before I hear my father slobbering over my mom. I look back and find them kissing passionately. My dad's hand on her butt and his other hand supports her neck for his larger than life kiss.

Oh my god, no child should make their kids witness half the stuff I've seen, it's not normal. Mom giggles like a schoolgirl after the kiss and then he muffles her again by kissing her. I grab the bannister running up the rest of the stairs quickly and shut the door behind me once I'm in my room.

Leaning my back against the door, I reflect on how my parents are approaching retirement and yet they're still madly in love. Their behaviour embarrasses me and yet I'm jealous at the same time. I can only imagine Danny and me reaching their age and being like them.

When the four of us go out, Danny and I act more mature than they do. Mom and dad are like adolescent teens kissing in restaurants and finding dark corners to grope each other.

They were best friends with benefits and even though they were tied up in other relationships they always managed to gravitate back to each other. Nobody stood a chance interfering with that. The only one who came close was Bradley the twin brother of Chase who runs the hospital.

Dad left Aria at the altar to be with my mom, and she left Chase's brother Bradley to be with dad.

Chase has always been captivated by mom, but since his brother claimed her first, he never had the opportunity to seriously pursue her. He would blatantly hit on her right in front of his own brother and my father, ungluing both of them. I discussed it with mom on more than one occasion, and her response was always the same: 'A little bit of jealousy is good for a relationship, it prevents dad from taking me for granted or straying!'

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My two single friends Georgia and Diamond have a spare room they never used, so if I find a job, then they'll let me move in with them, and I will finally have the freedom I've always wanted. I spend most of my time there anyway, I only come home to sleep.

I buzz up to their apartment and wait for them to answer. When they do, I find them lazing on the black faux leather sofa watching television.

Their eyes don't leave the set, except to look at the clock and make a point of commenting how late I am, "We thought you weren't coming. We left the Apple on do you can work on your Resume."

I spot the computer on the kitchen counter but I don't go to it right away. I'm still upset over what happened at home and want to tell them about it, "I got into an argument with my parents."

Georgia turns to me out of concern, "Over what? I thought you guys are tighter than a lug nut and washer!"

"I thought so too, but that doesn't stop them from throwing me out."

Diamond shrugs her shoulders, "You ARE thirty, its sort of understandable."

Georgia snickers, "Especially after the story you told us last week!"

“You should have seen them getting into it with each other this afternoon. Mom started going on about Chase and Bradley, then dad threatens to spank her. Eww! I can’t there to come here fast enough.”

Georgia winks, “I think that old coot still likes your mom, I saw them together last week leaving his office and he was all smitten with her, very hands on if you know what I mean.”

“You saw mom and Chase together?”

“Yup, and your father nowhere to be found. He was practically groping her.”

Diamond starts laughing, “I can’t imagine YOUR mom ever having an affair with Dr. Hart. Your description of how your parents are when they’re with each other is too hot! It’s hard to believe that your parents being doctors and all that even act the way they do!”

I shoot her a look of disgust, “They’re worse than teenagers! Mom would never cheat on dad though, she was probably just going over wedding ideas with Dr. Hart.”

Georgia interrupts, “So what was the fight all about?”

I walk over to their fridge to see if they have any extra Palm Bays, they know I like them so they usually keep a few on hand for me when I come over.

“Dad said and I quote, ‘You have your PHD for fuck sakes, you find a job.’ They also insinuated that Danny might find another woman on his sabbatical, the engagement is all in my imagination”

Diamond tucks her legs underneath her, “Get me one too, please. They seriously accused you of imagining Danny proposing to you?”

“Pretty much.”

Diamond commented, “They don’t think he’s going to marry you when he gets back or their beef is that they don’t want you living with them so long?”

“All my parents are concerned with is getting me out of their house, yesterday.”

“How did the argument end?” Georgia asks.

“I left to come here and do my resume while dad fucks my mother’s brains out. As far as the wedding is concerned, I guess they will believe it when they see it.”

“Holy horse nuts! Exclaims Georgia. How will you go a whole year without seeing Danny?”

“He promises to sext me each every night.”

“Is that going to be enough?” Diamond asks.

“It will have to be,” I shrug.

I give a drink out to everyone before cracking mine open. I open the Apple and get to work. I have to keep up my part of the bargain. Georgia and Diamond watch a full movie by the time I’m ready to save my resume to memory stick.

Diamond is a family doctor and Georgia and I are two years younger than her with our Nurse Practitioners License (NP's). She secured her NP role on the Cardiac floor at the General and I'm still looking for mine. I've often thought it would be fun to work with Georgia, and now that my resume is complete, it's the first place I'm applying to.

Georgia is the first to get off the couch, "Let's go to the Paddock"

Diamond grabs her phone off the glass coffee table, "Sounds like a plan. Let me text Eric."

Georgia grabs her phone off the charger, "I'll text Liam."

I grab my phone, "I'll text Danny."



## ~Chapter 2~

The Paddock is our local watering hole, close to The General with a big heavy front door and small wooden tables littered throughout. It's cozy, and dark. Pictures are all over the walls and a wide variety of music plays softly in the background.

Diamond goes to the bar to order our drinks while Georgia and I grab a table as far away from everyone as we can get. When Diamond returns with our drinks the boys walk in. They give us a wave and head over to the bar to get their drinks. We pulled over three extra chairs and wait for them to join us.

Diamond resembles a Barbie doll sporting long straight whitish blond hair and beautiful crystal blue eyes. Eric (her Ken Doll) has dirty blond hair and brown eyes. He's muscular for a pretty boy and suites Diamond perfectly, like figurines on a wedding cake.

Georgia is a classic southern beauty. She has wavy red locks and the most beautiful green eyes. Her hourglass shape makes women of all ages envious, and all men stupid, really fucking stupid. Liam is a polar opposite of what you would expect her to be with. He is unusually quiet, has a stalky build and brush cut style hair.

Liam spins his chair around so that the back of it is resting against the table and sits down next to Georgia. He whispers something into her ear that I unfortunately catch, "You should have gotten me my drink for me, you knew I was coming." His lips cover hers, and his fingers are roughly manhandling the little baby hairs on the back of her neck, making her cry out into his mouth. I have to turn away.

Eric takes a drink of his beer and then focuses his attention on Diamond, "Hey Babe!" Then he steals a kiss from her before turning to me to say hi, they are suited much better for each other.

Liam looks around, "Where's Danny?"

Eric shrugs, "He was right behind us."

Danny's my fiancé who works as an internist. He's been driving everyone crazy, incessantly talking about his upcoming sabbatical for months now. Liam and Eric complain that's all he ever talks about, but to his face they just let him ramble on.

Diamond mutters to me under her breath for the hundredth time, “I can’t believe he’s leaving you for an entire year without marrying you! YOU should be his priority, not the tax break he’s going to get for working on sabbatical in Kenya, of all places! I think you should make the relationship open while he’s away, make him sweat, the way your mother does with Nick.”

Eric ignores Diamond, “It’s not just about getting married, get your head out of the clouds Diamond! It’s a learning experience. Danny wants to learn new treatments and apply his knowledge to benefit others. It’s far more important than what you give it credit for.”

Georgia looks over at me, “I think it’s a lovely gesture.”

The big wooden door to the bar opens and Danny strolls in. His symmetrical face with squared off jaw and dark eyes demand attention wherever he goes. His flawless bone structure has a James Dean dontfuckwithme look to him.

The way he carries himself and his striking good looks are arresting to the opposite sex. I always notice woman looking at him and jealousy from their partners whenever he enters a room. It irks me being away from him an entire year when woman find him so attractive. It doesn’t seem fair.

He stands over us, “Can I get anyone anything?”

“No thanks, we just got our drinks,” I answer for everyone. He saunters to the bar and I notice the tight fit of his jeans against the crack of his ass, every step he takes, his jeans wedge in and out of it. I want my hands to be his jeans.

Danny returns to our table with his drink. This time I’m trying not to gawk at the bulge in his pants. I force my eyes up and away but his lock onto mine, “Do you want it now before I sit down or can you wait until we take it outside.” Oh my god, I swear, I must have turned fifty shades of red. Cocky is obviously an understatement. I ignore his comment and turn my attention away from him until my normal skin colour returns.

The conversation as usual rests mainly on Danny’s future sabbatical plans. Georgia is captivated by his altruism, but I think Liam mistakes it for her being captivated with Danny. Liam is staring at her profile as she listens to Danny and I notice him whispering into Georgia’s ear and then suddenly she starts to get up and leave. Georgia claims she’s not feeling well. The two of them leave our table, Liam grabs a firm hold of Georgia’s elbow taking her out of the bar like an errant child.

By the end of my third drink, I decide its time for me to make my exit. I never like losing control over my body, so three drinks is my limit. I stand from the table and announce, “I think I’m going to head out now, I’m getting tired.”

Danny stands up almost immediately after I do, “Can I offer you a ride?”

I smile at his offer, “Thanks, but I’d rather walk if you don’t mind.”

“I’ll walk with you,” he offers.

We open the big wooden door to the Paddock and he follows me out, pinning me against the hard brick wall of the bar and ravaging me with hot demanding kisses. Its cold outside but the heat we generate feels like we are trapped in a furnace. I'm going to miss him. I never loved anyone as much as Danny.

### ~Chapter 3~

The next day I focus on sending out my resume to The General. It is the only hospital I can imagine working in since my parents devoted their entire careers there. I won't restrict my chances though; I intend to apply to other local hospitals in case I don't get my first choice.

My cover letter mentions my interest in working on the Cardiac floor. I love the idea of working alongside Georgia and my mother, but I also big on versatility, cluing them into the fact that I will pretty work anywhere to get my foot in the door.

Mom is a cardiologist, so I'm not sure if they will actually allow me to work alongside her on the same floor. The hospital maintains strict guidelines towards policies that are ethically sound and in the best interests of the patients and its employees.

I received the call for an interview later that afternoon. I feel like I scored big when Ainsley introduced herself to me. She's the same lady that hired both my parents. Mom used to tell me stories about her.

She books me for an interview with herself for the end of the week. She tells me if I'm successful, they will call me early the following week to meet with the CEO who makes the final hiring decisions.

The CEO is Danny's dad, the man who forever holds a burning candle for my mother. As the story has it, his brother Bradley made the moves on mom first so he had the rights to her, but my father's friendship with mom left too large shoes to fill, and even Bradley Hart couldn't measure up.

I know I shouldn't think this way but since the CEO's Danny's dad and I'm marrying Danny, I can't see why he won't give me a job somewhere in the hospital. That's why I haven't been too worried.

The second we hang up the phone I text my parents the good news before heading out to Diamond and Georgia's. The interview is a perfect excuse to go clothes shopping for a new dress.

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We tackle Sherway Gardens before heading out to the Toronto Outlet mall where I purchase the cutest white and black apple print Kate Spade dress with matching purse.

It's the first dress I try on, Diamond and Georgia are staring at me from behind as I stand before the full length mirror. Diamond gasps when she initially sees me in the dress and is the first to compliment, "You look beautiful Meadow. It's gorgeous on you!" I do a little spin to try to get the skirt to go up but it doesn't work and then people start looking at me as I study how the dress looks on me in the mirror, so I stop.

Georgia is smiling, "I love it too, and you look absolutely superlicious in it!"

I smile back at them, while I fidget with my long brown, styleless hair. Diamond reads my thoughts, "You're going to have to wear it up or cut it, your long overdue!"

I cringe at the thought of cutting my hair. Georgia or Diamond just trim it periodically. It's become my security blanket, "I'll put it up in a tight bun!" I offer.

"Come over an hour before your interview and I'll do your hair and makeup. You are so getting this job!" Georgia volunteers.

Diamond laughs, "I don't think she's got much to worry about, considering Danny's father is the one interviewing her. It's just a formality."

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Friday is upon me before I know it. I shower and wear my Kate Spade dress to their apartment so all that is left to do is my hair and makeup.

Georgia has the sole task of beautifying me since Diamond has office today. She wet my long brown hair and then slowly combs through the knot ridden ends. When she is able to, she neatly piles everything on top of my head.

The next ten minutes is spent placing gazillions of bobby pins in it ensuring it will hold. Finally, she glamourizes me with beautiful yet natural makeup highlighting my big brown eyes and my pouty pale pink lips.

When Georgia is satisfied she allows me to look at my reflection in the mirror. I barely recognize myself. I appear like I can attended my own wedding rather than a job interview. Butterflies kick in and I feel like I'm going to hurl. I swallow hard as the taste of bile comes up to my throat.

I hug Georgia good-bye and fetch Snowball my new little white Mercedes mom and dad gave me for achieving my PHD. She is the lowest in her German line-up of vehicles but she still has the emblem so I drive her with pride. Mom insists on German cars, she said they were by far the best and when she went to

school she drove a white Mercedes too and called her Snowball. Dad is always making fun of her for naming her cars.

Snarled in traffic, I make it to the interview in the nick of time. I park in front of the executive building and look at the directory impatiently scanning for Ainsley's name. Once I find it I go directly to her office and the secretary announces my arrival. Ainsley takes me in right away.

Ainsley has short grey curly hair and rosy red cheeks. Her glasses hang on a white beaded rope around her neck. She's wearing a brown dress suit with flats and is 5'2 and that's being generous.

Her office is well organized giving me insight to her personality. I get the impression she's looking for clear, concise answers and that I have to depict organized thinking. Attention to small details seems important, because I'd have to guess she's analytically retentive, not that I'm categorizing her or anything.

We spend the better part of an hour together before she sees me to the door. My butterflies dissipate and I feel quite confident that they will be calling me back early next week.

I go to the Tim Horton's located in the main entrance of the hospital to grab a coffee and mentally review what happened in the interview.

I order my drink and take a chair close to the entrance where I can people gaze. I spot this super muscular porter wheeling this old gentleman out of the hospital. He has long black hair and ocean blue eyes with an intentional six o'clock shadow.

His athletic build is hardly contained in his orderly scrubs, and I find my mind wandering as my brain and sex drive go into overdrive causing me to salivate over this sex god of a man. Studying his build, it appears like he spends a minimum of two to three hours a day pumping iron.

My eyes followed the porter's backside as he walks out the front door. He disappears from my view and my eyes linger there waiting for his return. I don't feel bad for leering at him, I am a woman newly engaged, which doesn't mean I can't window shop, as long as I don't make any purchases, just saying!

I'm not disappointed, only minutes later, he comes back with an empty wheelchair. I take a final glance at him before quickly diverting my attention so he won't catch me staring, but his eye catches mine, he winks a greeting to me and goes on his way.

Now I want the job so badly I can taste it. I imagine walking passed him in the hallway appearing aloof meanwhile a hot flame of passion is burning inside of me at the sight of him.

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I get the call from Ainsley Tuesday, I'm asked to see the CEO (A.K.A soon to be father-in-law) Thursday afternoon.

Over the moon with excitement, I'm forced to buy another dress for the second interview. The second shopping trip is done solo. I chose a navy Burberry dress that kisses my knees and drops down to an open back.

I do the same routine as before but this time its Diamond who puts my makeup on and does my hair. She twisted it and placed it into another high bun, leaving ringlets falling down framing my face and flowing down the back of my neck.

The butterflies in my stomach are out in full force. I'm tempted to hurl again, but I don't have bile rise up in my throat like last time. I make a conscious effort to swallow and head to Snowball for another and hopefully final interview.

I park in front of the executive building and go directly to Ainsley's office. Her door is open and her secretary is missing. She is expecting me because she stands the instant she sees me and scoots me out her door, "We better hurry, Dr. Hart is waiting for you."

I follow her down a long almost majestic looking carpeted hallway to the large set of double doors at the end. There is a gold plaque by the doors at eye level that has written on it:

Dr. Chase Hart F.R.C.P.S.C
CEO

Ainsley opens the double doors for me to enter and announces me to the CEO's secretary, "Sandra, this is Meadow Ward."

She steps away and lets the double doors fall closed behind her leaving me alone with Sandra, "He'll see you now, go right in." I straighten my skirt and square my shoulders before turning the handles to his intimidating office doors.

Perched behind a huge mahogany desk is my extremely handsome to-be-father-in-law with short grey hair dressed to kill in one of the most stylish Hugo Boss suits I had ever seen. If Danny takes care of himself the way Dr. Hart does, I'll be having sex into my nineties!

He points to a chair and I gracefully lower myself to it giving him my best Mona Lisa smile. He offers me his hand, "It's a pleasure to see you in this context Mrs. Ward. You are just as stunning as your mother, who we both know I'm still in love with after all these years." He sighs, "At least my son will get a chance to marry a St. Clare," he says wistfully.

I can't believe how open he is about how much he likes mom. It makes sense now, why this angers dad so much. Dad was always complaining that he all but

fucked my mother with flirtatious gestures right in front of him. He argues the lack of respect for their relationship is deplorable.

“It bothers me to no end, that Danny isn’t marrying you before going on sabbatical. I tried talking sense into him with no avail. How is your mother?”

I nod and blush, “No worries. My mother is wonderful, thanks for asking.”

“Ainsley please remind me, you have your PHD?”

“That’s correct.”

“You should be quite proud!” He gleams.

I feel my cheeks warm to his compliment but I’m unable to maintain eye contact, “I am, thank you.” It is known, that Chase has high expectations for everyone he works with, and even higher for his family. I will have to work hard not disappoint him because he expects more from me than his average employee.

“Will you be keeping your last name?”

“No sir, I plan on using the Hart name with pride.”

He nods approvingly, “Do you have a preference to which area of the hospital you would like to work in?”

Feeling hopeful I blurt, “I’d prefer Cardiology, but I’m willing to start anywhere.”

He appears to be contemplating where I should go or maybe he’s already decided, “I can’t put you in the same department as your mother, it’s a conflict of interest. I’m going to start you off in the Emergency department to help you get some experience and then we can renegotiate further down the line in six months’ time. Would you be interested in starting there?”

Holy shit, I have a job! He’s put me in the hardest busiest place in the hospital but it has to be for a reason. I guess he wants me to learn a broad range of things quickly. “I would love to start there, thank you ever so much!”

“You will start Monday morning 7:30 a.m. You are very welcome, and trust me, the pleasure has been all mine.” He sees me to the door with his hand placed at the small of my back.

I go straight to the coffee shop, order my same coffee, and take my same chair with a huge smile on my face hoping to see that very same porter.

I pull my phone deliberating who to text first: Diamond and Georgia, Danny, or my parents. Mom and dad can wait, and I should tell Danny in person. We never share anything important via text messaging, it’s a pet peeve of Danny’s. I guess one too many girlfriends broke up with him that way! We are more mature than that, sending only small inconsequential texts to each other, stuff like: ‘ Thinking of you,’ or ‘I love you.’ Telling him about a new job is something we feel should be done in person.

We have already planned to meet at The Paddock to toast Danny’s departure. He isn’t big on good-byes, so he chose the local hangout over the airport.

The excitement of the news and the sadness of him leaving will make the evening bittersweet. He won't be around after the first couple of days to talk to me about how my job went; he will be thousands of miles away in another country.

~Chapter 4~

When I arrive at the Paddock, there is an empty place for me between Diamond and Danny. I'm still wearing the same dress I wore to the interview but I freshened up my makeup and freed my hair from the bun. Everyone at the table congratulates me and gives me hugs with the exception of Danny who has his arm around me. He leans into me and gives me a peck on my cheek, "What are they congratulating you about?" He asks.

"You are now looking at The Generals newest Emergency Nurse Practitioner! In six months time should I decide that the Emergency Department isn't the right fit for me, I can try for another department."

He smiles proudly at me, "That's my girl!" He leans in to me and pecks my cheek. The smell of his cologne does wonders to my over imaginative and completely under-active sex life.

Eric asks, "So, you are taking the job?"

Diamond looks at him like he's an idiot, "Of course she is!"

Eric rolls his eyes, "I want to hear it from her!"

Liam snickers, "So you're going to be saving guys I beat the shit out of for looking at Georgia?"

I shrug, "I guess so!"

The conversation drifts and I'm relieved to be out of the limelight. I enjoy my drink and the perfect visual of Danny's profile, the big doors of the Paddock open catching my eye, Mr. Porter Guy comes in. My heart does a tiny flutter dance.

Georgia glances at what catches my attention and she quickly averts her eyes back to our table before Liam catches her, but it's too late. I can't help wondering what she's in for tonight after very obviously looking at another guy. He along with everyone else looks in the same direction my eyes are frozen to.

The conversation at the table stops and everyone's attention with the exception of Liam and Georgia's is focused on what I'm staring at, I break my gaze and turn back to Danny, but it's too late for me to recover. I can tell by his expression, I'm in trouble.

Danny looks at me indignantly and whispers, "Outside now." The angered tone of his voice speaks volumes warning me what I'm in for. Oddly enough, he's drop dead gorgeous when he's seething with anger towards me, dead sexy!

I try to cover in attempts to do damage control, "I just recognized him from the hospital. I didn't mean to stare." I can feel my face turning hot as I stand up to leave the bar. I'm dreading whatever it is he's going to say. Danny kicks his chair back and stands from the table, following me out. Nobody says anything; they all know I'm in shit, rightly so.

I throw my jacket on and walk out of the Paddock's doors into the cold night air. Danny orders me, "My car." I follow him to his black beamer parked in front of the bar. He opens the passenger door for me and then joins me in the front seat. He rolls his window's down and pulls out a cigarette, offering me one. I take it from his pack and lay it in-between my lips waiting for him to light it.

He reaches over lighting mine first and then his own. His voice is harsh, "I don't like how you stared at that guy when you are with me it's rude. Is there something I need to worry about?"

"No more than I have to worry about you," I suggest.

"You're not going to cheat on me if you get all lonely are you?" He asks.

Leaving is his choice not mine so I'm not interested in providing him comfort when I'm the one who needs it more. I spent countless hours begging him not to go, I can't help it if I'm a little bit resentful of his decision. "Then you should have married me before you left, I can't help it if you're feeling insecure right now," I comment bitterly.

"Wow, unfuckingbelievable!" He curses.

"How so?"

"You're ruining our last night."

"I don't think I'm ruining anything. There shouldn't be a last night. There shouldn't be an entire year where I have to live without you!" I say defiantly.

"I thought you were okay with it," his voice softens a touch, and I mean barely.

"It's not like you gave me any choice, so I guess no, I'm not," and then he grabs me roughly by the scruff of the neck and forces my lips open with his own. His mouth is hot yet soft. His tongue forces entry into my mouth. I can't remember ever being kissed like this by him. I try pushing him away and he holds on to me even tighter.

When it comes time to breath, he releases me grinning, like everything is okay, but it isn't. I respect the idea of him doing a sabbatical but at the same time I resent him for not cementing our relationship before he leaves, I'm not important enough for him.

~Chapter 5~

I reach for the door handle to his car and he grabs my wrist stopping me, “Wait, Please not yet. Tell me we’re okay, that you’ll wait for me,” he orders.

More than his hand holding my wrist stops me from leaving his car, it’s the compassion in his voice that keeps me from moving. His words and concern for us begin melting my anger. I turn into an oozing puddle of mush right before him because I’ve got such ambivalent feelings.

My conflicting emotions were getting the better of me, and my resolve is weakening. Tears of self-pity begin welling up again, as his hand lifts my chin causing me to gaze into his eyes, barely whispering I appease him by saying, “I’m by far not okay with your choice for us, but I promise.”

He allows me to open the car door and escorts me back to the table rejoining the others midway through a heated conversation. I think the gist of it is Liam is accusing Georgia of flirting with the bartender and Diamond is trying to protect her by saying it’s his overactive imagination.

The thing about Georgia is she is friendly, and Liam is too insecure. Every time she is nice to somebody he accuses her of flirting, but it was just her way.

Diamond glances over at us and then excuses herself to go to the bathroom. I know she’s expecting me to follow. I get up and follow her. I can feel Danny’s penetrating gaze on me the entire time.

The second the door closes behind us, Diamond’s all over me, “What happened? You look like you’ve been crying?”

I start rinsing my face with cold water, what I really need is a shower, “He wants to know if he has anything to worry about while he’s gone. He wants to make sure I’ll wait for him and not see anyone else.”

Her eyes go big as she touches up her lipstick in the mirror, “What did you say?”

“I said I’m not okay with him leaving like this, but I will wait for him. I told him I didn’t want him to go.”

“Then what happened?”

“He gave me this awesomely passionate kiss. My anger instantly extinguished. I was ready to rip his dick out of those sexy ass jeans of his and suck his cock right there and then in the front seat of his car.”

“Did you?”

“No, He doesn’t deserve it, he’s still leaving me.”

We finish touching up our makeup before rejoining them at the bar. Porter guy appears to be gone but my chair next to Danny is still vacant. We finish our last drink and he whispers in my ear, “I’ll take you home”

It’s a silent ride in the beamer as unpreventable tears run in a steady stream down my cheeks. I stare out the front windshield dreading his departure. He keeps trying to reassure me saying how the time will fly by, but I know otherwise. He parks his car, and kisses me at length before I begin fumbling with the zipper to his jeans. I take his hard cock in my mouth and suck on it until I can feel his satisfaction pour down my throat. I hate myself for pleasuring him.

He leans over me to hit the switch that reclines my seat and begins undressing me. It isn’t cool to have sex in a car but I’ve never rejected any of his advances towards me. I love that he is alpha male with me, so whenever or wherever he wants me, that’s how he’s going to get me. He takes me one last time before leaving me for his sabbatical in Kenya.

~Chapter 6~

Three weeks of orientation and hospital policy meetings and I'm finally left to work on my own. I feel heady with power, given my newfound ability to write orders for the Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurse's. The only problem is that this newfound power comes with a lot of responsibility and accountability. Patients and family members are depending on my judgment and care. As far as I'm concerned, three years of orientation won't be long enough let alone three weeks.

Working in the Emergency department, you just never know what's going to walk through that door next. Behind my confident exterior is a huge bag of nerves. I wear tight black pants and a form fitting white lab coat with a hot pink stethoscope. I kept my hair pulled back off my face.

Another NP named Angela is working with me on this particular night. She's friendly and helpful along with being fantastic at her job. I attribute her exotic appearance to her Philippine background. She remains calm no matter what's thrown her way. I'm sure I'll learn a lot from her.

I throw my fall jacket over top of my white lab coat and scrubs and brave the windy drizzle that's coming down tonight in front of the Emergency Department, I needed a cigarette, it can be minus thirty and I will still go out for one.

There's no smoking on hospital property so I walk across the road and then try to light my cigarette to no avail. A deep voice comes from behind me, "Do you need help with that?" I turn to face the voice and find myself in the company of the ever so handsome porter. After not seeing him for several weeks, he is a sight for my dry and tired eyes.

"Please?"

He takes his almost smoked cigarette and holds the lit tip against the unlit end of mine and starts rolling it back and forth as I inhale to light it. He takes it away once it's lit but doesn't move away from me. He takes a fresh cigarette from his pack and uses his old one to light the new one the way we did with mine. I shake my head at him, "Chain smoking? Tsk Tsk!"

"It's been a rough day," he complains.

“Oh, Sorry to hear that.” I didn’t want to ask, figuring he probably wouldn’t want to confide in a total stranger.

He takes another drag from his cigarette, “Thanks, I haven’t seen you working here before, are you new?”

“Yup.”

He blows the smoke down and away from us, “So how are you finding it?”

“Honestly?”

“Of course.”

“Rough,” I admit.

He smiles at me, “I’m going to the Paddock in half an hour, I need to drown my sorrows, would you care to join me?”

A drink with Uber handsome porter is just what I need to get my mind off Danny’s recent departure. I pull my cell from my pocket to check the time, “I’d love to, but I don’t get off for another hour.”

He smiles and flicks the lit tip off his cigarette and puts the remainder of it back in his half empty pack for later, “You know where I’ll be. Right now, I better get back.”

I smile at him as strands of his black hair blew into his face, “I might take you up on it.”

“I hope you do, it’s no fun drinking alone.” He doesn’t wait for a response; he turns and walks back into the hospital. I follow him from a distance and catch sight of him signing a piece of paper on the bulletin board. When he’s gone and I have a chance, I check to see what he signed. It’s the annual fundraiser taking place in the auditorium for Cancer. The title reads, “Shave for a Cure.”

I look down to the bottom of the list and I see his name, “Ben Colby.” I like his name Ben, and more importantly I like what he stands for, he’s altruistic. I sign my name below his, my hair is getting too long anyway, or maybe I just don’t care because Danny’s going to be gone for a year, either way, the ink’s had time to dry. If I chicken out of cutting my hair or shaving my head, I can at least volunteer to do it to others. It’s for a good cause.

The next fifty-five minutes flies by and I hurry to the Paddock just praying I won’t miss Ben. When I get there, I heave the front door open and find him sitting at the bar, by himself. When he catches sight of me he comments, “I didn’t think you were coming.”

“Why not?”

He shrugs, “You’re a Nurse Practitioner and I’m just a lonely Porter.”

I ignore his comment, “I saw you sign the charity drive form on your way back in to work, you’re exactly the kind of guy I like having a drink with. Character is way more important than career choice.”

He grins, “What’s your name?”

“Meadow Ward.”

“Hmm, your last name sounds familiar; your dad’s a doc?”

“Yup, mom is too, they both work here at the General.”

“How come you didn’t become one?”

“I want a simpler life. I’ve always wanted a family, and being a doctor, you’re never home.” The waitress comes to our table snapping her gum and holding her pad waiting expectantly for me to give her my order.

Ben encourages me, “Get whatever you like.”

“I’ll have whatever you’re having.”

He chuckles with embarrassment, “A Cosmo for the lady.” It’s my turn to laugh, the only other ‘guy’ I know who drinks those are my father.

He shakes my hand, “Nice to meet you Meadow, my name is Ben.”

I smile back at him, “The pleasure is all mine.”

“Speaking of the fundraiser, did you volunteer?”

Grinning at him self-consciously, “I was thinking about donating my hair, but I don’t know if I have the courage. I signed up to do the cutting though.”

He takes a sip of his drink and then commented, “I’m sure they can use all the help they can get. So, how was the last hour of your shift?”

I smile, “Not bad, just a motor vehicle accident, the driver is okay but the passenger is critical. She’s my age, I hope she pulls through.”

“That’s terrible,” he says. He swallows his drink in two sips and signals to the waitress for two more. I don’t want to judge him but he’s drinking rather quickly and earlier I saw him chain smoking, “Do you want to talk about whatever it is that’s bothering you? Maybe I can help. I’m a good listener.”

“Well, Meadow,” his deep sexy voice cracks when his noticeably forlorn blue eyes gaze into mine, “What do you know about Hodgkin’s Lymphoma?”

“Really? You?”

“I just got the biopsy results back today.”

Suddenly I’m conscious of the unexpected pounding I feel in my heart. My chest aches now, “Are you sure there’s no mistake? It’s happened before, maybe the results aren’t yours,” I question.

He shakes his head, “No mistake, I’ve been feeling weird lately and waking up in the night. I lost twenty pounds in the last three months without trying and I can’t seem to build up enough energy to go to the gym. My first appointment is a week Tuesday.”

I blanket his hand with my own. There is nothing I can say to make him feel better. We spend the rest of our time getting shit-faced drunk while telling hospital stories until its time to leave.

He invites me to his apartment a block away from the bar. I only have two alternatives, I can go back to my parents’ house where I’m not wanted or I can

drop by Diamond and Georgia's who are probably out with their boyfriends, and go to bed alone. Neither option seems good, so I pick uber handsome Porter who needs company right now.

We stagger and swayed back to his place. He opens his door with great difficulty and practically falls as his stiff door gives way unexpectedly; I follow close behind giggling at the clumsiness of the whole thing. "It's not much Meadow," he says apologetically. "I'll go get you something to sleep in, you can have my bed."

He walks to his bedroom and opens his dresser. He comes back with a long t-shirt. I thank him asking him where the ladies room is.

He slurs, "End of the hallway." I go to his three piece bathroom and change quickly. I remove my ponytail leaving the elastic on the counter. His shirt is huge on me, making it look like I'm wearing a nightgown.

When I leave the bathroom he looks at me, it's hard to tell what he's thinking or feeling. There is a second of silence between us before he offers to take the couch.

The alcohol dissolves my inhibitions as I come right out and ask him if he wants to sleep with me. I can't say that the thought of what Danny might think never crosses my mind, it does but my anger towards his recent decisions dulls my guilt. I don't want Ben to feel alone on what's probably one of the worst days of his life. My offer is genuine and straight from my heart. It doesn't feel wrong, but I know it is.

His sad eyes glimmer at my offer, "I'd love that." He takes my hand and leads me to his room. We cuddle together under his thick comforter and his body spoons mine, my back to his front.

We feel like we're moulded to fit together. We breathe in unison until we both fell asleep.

~Chapter 7~

His alarm goes off at quarter to seven. Justin Beiber is blaring “Baby” over his radio Ben reaches out slamming the snooze button. His cheeks are flushed, I reach out to touch his skin and it’s burning. “One of my symptoms,” he explains.

“Do you have any Tylenol?”

“Above the stove, don’t worry, I’ll get it.”

I don’t argue with him, I just get up before he has a chance and help myself to the bottle. I search through his cupboards looking for a glass. I find one and fill it with water before going back to him. He takes it graciously popping the pills in his mouth before downing the entire glass of water.

He rubs his eyes and pushes his hair back, “I set the alarm in case you have a shift today.”

“No, I’m off. Do you mind if I take a shower?”

“Help yourself he says stretching, towels are in the linen closet next to the bathroom.” I see myself from a distance in the hallway and I fear what I look like, I’m horrified at my reflection of pale skin and matted hair.

I shower slowly, enjoying the smell of his soap on my body. When I finish I search for a hairbrush and try to make my hair look presentable. I leave the washroom with a towel covering the majority of my body and find him in the kitchen preparing our breakfast.

His breath catches when his eyes land on me, “You need clothes?”

“Please,” I answer, controlling surprisingly promiscuous thoughts from entering my head. He leads me back to his room where he searches for clothing. He finds a t-shirt and a pair of grey track pants that barely stay up on me.

He leaves me in his room to change and calls out, “Your breakfast is on the table, I’m just going to take a quick shower and then I’ll join you.” Starving, I can’t wait to see what he’s prepared.

Our breakfast consists of; hard boiled eggs, bacon, and toast. I wait for him to finish showering before I touch any food. I turn the television on in the next room for background noise but I’m not watching it. Lost in my thoughts over his diagnosis, I know Hodgkin’s Lymphoma is better to get than Non-Hodgkin’s but it all depends on what stage they catch it in and his luck.

He comes back into the kitchen wearing a t-shirt and track pants. His pants dangle on his hips and I catch a glimpse of his six pack, he's much larger than Danny. He notices me gawking even though I try to hide it, I can't help but feel an immediate attraction to him, he's so muscular! He explains, "They're the only clean pair I have right now."

I smile at him like I just took the last candy from the candy bowl, and then look down at my dish, "Breakfast looks great."

He returns my smile, "Thanks. It's not very often I get to cook for someone else. My last girlfriend left me over a year and a half ago for my best friend, so I've been single and pretty fucking bitter ever since."

"Do you talk to either of them anymore?"

"No, I'm better off without them."

"My parents recently passed on so it's been rough. I'm still trying to settle their estate. I don't have any brothers or sisters so you would think it would be clear cut but you involve lawyers and they manage to fuck that up pretty quickly."

"So who do you go to when it all comes crashing down?" I ask with concern. I can't imagine him not having anyone to turn to.

He looks at me, "Funny you ask that, I'm close with a couple of the guys at work. Usually I manage well on my own, but this new diagnosis knocked me off my feet. I haven't told them yet, I was hoping to come to terms with it first. I've become more introverted since I was betrayed by my best friend the way I was."

I reassure him touching his hand, "You have me, now."

"I appreciate that," he says.

He takes a drink of his orange juice and then lays his cup back down on the table, "Tell me more about you. I saw you with a guy at the Paddock the other night, is he your boyfriend?"

"You noticed me?" I barely catch my breath. There's a palpable chemistry between us, it feels like the air in his apartment is changing.

When Georgia or Diamond are around, I'm invisible wallpaper to the opposite sex, yet somehow Ben notices me.

"Of course."

"So that guy?"

"He's my fiance," I inadvertently confess.

"He's okay with you being here?"

"I haven't told him."

"Are you going to?" He starts touching my hand and staring at me with those innocent baby blues. I look at his hand touching mine and then at him. Maybe he's expecting me to pull away, but instead I close my eyes and concentrate on his light magical touch. I knew the act of closing my eyes, makes it more sensual, but that's how I feel.

“He left me to go to Kenya for a year on sabbatical. I told him that it upset me and we should marry before he leaves, but he didn’t agree. I don’t really think he cares too much about what I’m doing right now.”

“I’m sure he does,” he reassures me.

“Maybe, I’m still bitter that he left me, I’ll get over it, I guess.”

He nods his head, “Hard to believe he would leave you behind, not matter what the reason.”

We finish our breakfast and have a quiet moment at the table where neither of us speak. His black hair is still damp from his shower and I’m not sure if I overstayed my welcome or if he likes my company. I’m definitely in no rush to leave, “Ben am I holding you back from doing anything today? Do you need me to leave now?”

He starts collecting the plates and cutlery, “Not unless you need to be somewhere.” He places the dishes in the sink and holds my hand leading me in to the living room. We sit on the couch and he takes the converter and starts surfing channels. I don’t know him, but I can tell he isn’t here with me; he’s lost in his own thoughts of worry.

I snatch the converter from his hand to steal his attention away from the set and his eyes gaze into mine, “Can I go with you Tuesday, to the doctor? I want to be there for you.”

His eyes are warm and inviting, “I’d like that.” He looks at my lips and then back into my eyes. He waits for a reaction, his intentions are clear. He wants to kiss me, and I want him to. He chooses not to. In that moment, I really wanted him to kiss me.

I bring my left foot up underneath me on the couch and I face him. I begin playing with the ends of his hair that touches down past his shoulder blades. I focus my attention on the television when I hear him mumble, “I’m scared of dying Meadow.”

The thought that there’s a possibility of him dying upsets me, “You’re not going to die.”

He looks at me with glossy eyes, “You can’t know that.” He puts his arm around me on the back of his couch and I snuggle into his massive butterfly chest. His confession is honest and sincere, it isn’t said just to get close to me or look for pity. I can tell he’s a strong guy who needs someone to lean on, and I want to be that person.

We stay like that for hours before exchanging phone numbers and I decide it was time to make an appearance at home.

~Chapter 8~

Dad is over the top excited, “Congratulations on the new job! Now you just have to get your own place and then everything is perfect, I know he’ll be back in one year, but why don’t you move in with Diamond and Georgia for a year?”

Mom laughs, “Nick, leave her alone. Meadow, the hall called to confirm your date. You’re definitely booked for, September 3rd, 2019! You should text Danny and let him know.”

Excited I give her a big hug. Then I whip my phone out:

Meadow: Mark off Sept 3rd on u’r calendar.

Diamond: What 4?

Meadow: Mom & dad booked the hall

Georgia: That’s fantastic! Does Danny know?

Meadow: Not yet! I’ll text him. I spent last night @ BEN’s house after my shift. (The porter) (Just as friends of course, he knows about Danny.)

Diamond: Danny better not find out!

Georgia: Did U cheat on Danny with him?

Meadow: No, just talked.

Diamond: About?

Meadow: He’s going thru a lot right now.

Georgia: It’s us, we won’t say anything.

Meadow, I better not, not now anyway. BTW, I volunteered 4 the charity drive.

Georgia: The cancer 1? U’r not!

Meadow: Thinking about it!

Diamond: We’ll sponsor U, its long overdue. Tempted 2 do it myself, while U’R shit-faced.

Meadow: U wouldn’t!

Georgia: She would.

Meadow: U guys R insufferable.

I text Danny:

Meadow: Hi Danny, r u busy?

Danny: No, what's up?

Meadow: Mom got confirmation, the hall is ours.

Danny: That's great! Did we get our date?

Meadow: Sept 3 just like u wanted.

Danny: I can't wait!

Meadow: Either can I.

We didn't text long after that, we were just starting to warm up to each other again. I wanted to mention Ben, how we met and what he's been diagnosed with, but I didn't know of a good way of bringing it up without making him jealous or suspicious, so I left the topic alone for a while.

~Chapter 9~

We met twenty minutes before his appointment outside the Emergency department where we had our first cigarette together. He lit two cigarettes and gave me one without asking.

“Thanks for coming, Meadow, it means a lot.”

“No problem, I would do it for any of my close friends.”

He takes a long drag of his cigarette and then throws it to the ground stepping on it. “The doctor’s office is right next to the oncology clinic.” I take his hand and he leads me towards the clinic which is on the main floor at the far end of the building. The door is labeled:

Dr. C. Smith M.D. F.R.C.P.S.C.

Ben opens it and follows me inside to a baron waiting room. He gives his name and then selects two seats together in the corner. I never let go of his hand, he’s quiet and I assume very nervous.

The secretary says for us to go in. I loosen my grip unsure if he wants the doctor to see us holding hands, I let his hand go, but Ben squeezes it tighter, so I hang on.

The doctor motions for us to take a seat in front of his desk. He looks at Ben and then me. Ben explains, “She’s a friend, she can stay can’t she?”

The doctor nods and then takes Ben’s chart and starts reviewing it silently.

The room is quiet until Dr. Smith looks up at Ben, “Ben, I’m sorry but your biopsy results came back and Reed Sternberg Cells have been isolated. My suspicion of you having Hodgkin’s Lymphoma is confirmed. The results of your c.t. scan and m.r.i place you at a stage 3, which means it has spread. On a positive note, it’s one of the most curable cancers you can have but we are going to have to be aggressive. I will start you with radiation treatments which will be five days a week for three weeks, then high doses of chemotherapy; its better than target therapy in your case. I know it’s a lot to take in, do you have any questions or concerns?”

Ben looks at me and then back at the doctor, “What’s my prognosis? Am I going to die?”

Dr. Smith studies Ben, “80% live past five years which is a fantastic percentage, it all depends on your symptoms, and your general health. You have to stay positive and do exactly what I say. We can beat this.” I like how the doctor doesn’t put the onus just on Ben, he uses the word we. I squeeze Ben’s hand tighter when the doctor says the word ‘we’ letting him know I’m part of this equation.

“Can I ask a question?” I whisper to Ben. He nods and I address Dr. Smith, “Will he lose his hair?”

Dr. Smith nods, “Most definitely. Like I said, I’m going to be aggressive with Ben and using high doses of chemotherapy will definitely cause him to lose his hair.”

Dr. Smith reassures Ben, “It will grow back but the texture and amount may be different. There are government websites that help you cope with the disease, but I want you to begin treatment immediately.”

“I made an appointment for you for tomorrow Wednesday at 3:00 p.m. in the oncology clinic to have a Hickman line inserted. A Hickman line is a central line that remains in your chest under your skin and is used to give medicine and blood products through. It gives us long term access to administer your chemo and is there in case you might need any sort of transfusions.”

“Thursday, we will start your radiation. The radiologists will be putting markings on your skin which you are not to wash off or apply cream to.”

“Your chemo will begin four weeks from Thursday in the Oncology Clinic. You will not be able to work; you should apply immediately for sick leave in human resources. If you need a note just notify my secretary.”

“How will I remember all that?”

“I’ll have my secretary give you a schedule to remind you of what needs to be done. Drop by here before you have your Hickman inserted tomorrow.”

“Thanks Doctor.” Dr. Smith stands up to dismiss us and Ben follows suit. We say our good-byes and Dr. Smith opens the door to take his next patient.

Ben takes my hand and leads me to what is becoming our usual spot where we light two cigarettes. I see a new desperation in his eyes, “Please stay with me again, just one more night. I don’t want to be alone.”

There isn’t anywhere I’d rather be, “Of course.” I excuse myself to go the bathroom before leaving the hospital where I text my parents saying that I’m staying at Diamond and Georgia’s. Then I text Diamond and Georgia to cover for me. Finally, I return to the person who needs me most, Ben.

~Chapter 10~

The ride home is quiet. The sky is full of low lying dark grey clouds that threatens the first snowfall of the year. The late October air has an unusual chill to it goes right to the bone. Ben glances over at me while we were stopped at a red, “Are you all right?”

“I should be asking you that question,” I respond. He gets quiet and lays his hand over mine the rest of the way.

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Ben opens the door to his place and grabs his phone that’s charging on the kitchen counter, “I have to call in to work; I’m scheduled for tonight.”

I sit at the stool and listen as he explains to his boss his diagnosis and the plan of care over the next few weeks. His voice cracks a few times while he was explaining everything but he manages to keep it together. When he hangs up he looks over at me, “She was very understanding. It’s a relief knowing I don’t have to go in to work during the treatments.” He opens his fridge, searching through its contents, “Are you Hungry?”

I shake my head, “Not really, you?”

“No, I’m just tired. I’m tired of being tired. It’s the only thing I feel when I’m not with you. I went to my family doctor four months ago complaining of how tired I’ve been feeling and he did some blood tests, told me to take a multi-vitamin and stop using steroids. He just assumed because of my size, I’m on them.”

“What is your size?” I flirt leading him to bed with zero intentions of doing anything wrong, “By the way, if you don’t feel tired around me than what pray tell do you feel?”

“Horny,” he whispers. I close my eyes and soak up the sexy way he says it. I need a second to compose myself because I’m lonely from Danny leaving me, and I shouldn’t be thinking weird thoughts of Ben, but I get weak moments.

“I’ll keep you company until you fall asleep,” I say ignoring my feelings. I know his emotions must be all over the place and even though I’m getting to know

him, we're virtually strangers. I don't want to take advantage of him when he's in such a vulnerable state.

He innocently asks me, "Do you mind if I sleep naked, I don't get as hot, I'll understand if you want to sleep in another room."

"By all means," I can't hide my huge grin that splashes uncontrollably across my face. "That shouldn't be a problem," I say softly. Danny guilt washes over me, but I push it to the back of my mind convincing myself that I'm doing all this for the greater good. I justify everything by telling myself that if Danny were here, I wouldn't have a chance to flirt. For the first time, I'm glad Danny's on sabbatical so I can help Ben who needs me right now.

I take off all my clothes with the exception of my underwear and bra and jump under the covers waiting for him.

He takes his shirt off and hesitates leaving his jeans on, "Are you sure?"

I shake my head, "They can come off."

He unzips his pants and lowers them to the floor. I tell myself to pretend he's a patient, or a brother, not someone I can possibly be attracted to, but I accidentally let out a gasp when I see he's commando. I hold open the covers and invite him into his own bed as he was, naked.

We assume our spoon-like position, my back to his chest. The only material between us was my bra and bikini underwear. I feel his massive dick getting hard and pressing against me. It turns me on to know he's turned on even if we're not doing anything.

He whispers in my ear, "I'm sorry, it's been a long time since I've laid like this with anyone. It will go away."

He begins taking liberties unclasping my bra and removing it. When I think he's done and ready to cuddle, he starts reaching for my underwear and says, "They're coming off too." More than happy to oblige him, I help slip them off and his warm body presses against mine making me melt.

His hand cups my breast while the other reaches down between my legs and he starts stroking my soft folds from behind. I simmer as his dick grows hard behind me. I close my eyes and focus all my attention on his one finger that is stroking me, hmm it feels so good.

My body is so small compared to his and feels so safe in his muscular arms. I need to be with him, as much as he needs me. I start trying to ignore the feeling of his finger stroking me when I realize how wet I'm becoming.

He is so hot and I don't want to lose control of myself when I'm with him. I'm practically panting out of need for him at this point, I focus on my breathing, trying to make it regular and even.

I jiggle my bum against his hard dick before reaching behind me so I can tug his long black hair. I love the soft feel of it as I fist it, moaning the entire time. He

removes his arm from my breast and uses it to move my hair out of the way so his soft lips can press against my neck. I find myself on such an emotional roller coaster ride with him. Everything going on with us was raw; our emotion, our passion.

“Face me,” he orders. I flip over to face him and his soft demanding lips crash down on mine. He pulls my entire body closer to his, merging us as one. I wrap my legs around him making the juices from my stimulation rub against his thigh.

His tongue thrusts into my mouth, and frolics with mine. My eyes open to find him watching me as we kiss. His face is damp from unnoticed tears. I touched the wet path acknowledging them, “It’s going to be okay,” I reassure, trying hard to believe my own words.

The raw passion I’m feeling for him knows no bounds. He rolls me so I’m on top of him, “I don’t have anything to protect you, us,” he warns. He grabs my ass with both his hands and slowly lowers me onto his hard dick, impaling me, penetrating me all the way to my heart.

My lips part as a moan escapes my chest. I admire his beautiful butterfly torso and his ocean blue eyes and his gorgeous black hair, as he fills me with his full length, I lean back slightly to feel him even more and then I ride him with animalistic desire until he explodes inside of me. What the fuck did I just do?

I leave Ben’s place an hour before he’s due to have his Hickman inserted. I know it’s a very short and relatively simple procedure so I spend my free time making an appearance at home.

I can’t believe I just let that happen. I’m waiting for Danny to marry me, just book the venue, and I stupidly sleep with Ben. What if Dr. Smith knows Danny and says something to him? Should I tell him before he finds out? Why did I just risk my future with a perfect stranger?

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Mom and dad greet me at the door. I’m rather surprised they both have the same time off, it’s rare. Dad hugs me first, “You decided to make an appearance! How are you doing?”

I roll my eyes at dad, “You want me out, and when I go you complain you don’t see me.” I contemplate telling my parents about Ben but I don’t think Ben and I are going anywhere.

Right now Ben is just a friend that I got carried away with. It was a mistake. If Danny finds out, maybe he will forgive me and still marry me. I can’t take back what I did, but I can make sure it never happens again.

Mom grabs my wrist and drags me into the kitchen away from dad, "Come I have some new bridal magazines, I want to show you." When she knows we're not in earshot of him, "Chase said he's going to pay for the majority of your wedding, but don't tell dad! Daddy's worried that Chase is still in love with me and you know his heart is no good."

"Is Chase in love with you mom?" I ask.

"Yes," she giggles like a schoolgirl.

"Can we do this later?" I ask.

She looks back at me horrified, "We only have a year to plan. We still have to choose a caterer and the list goes on!"

"Wedding planner's are not that expensive why don't we just hire one? It's not like you and dad have time to spare for planning it. I have a friend who does it on the side, trust me its money well spent."

"Okay give me her name and number, I'll call her. Do we get to select the dress or does your wedding planner do that too?"

"Did I do something?" I ask not sure why she's sarcastic.

Mom hmp's me. "I want to participate in the planning, I only have one daughter and you're prostituting my fun to a complete stranger."

"You just want to see Chase!" I tease.

"Shh!" Mom shushes.

I'm bursting to share what happened what Ben and I did with mom. If anyone will understand, it will be her. Mom was with daddy when she was supposed to be exclusive with Bradley. She knows what its like to be attracted to two different men. Maybe she'll understand, "What if I told you I might like more than one guy?"

I have mom's undivided attention, "Who? You're marrying Danny! We're not spending all this time and money planning a wedding that's not going to happen!"

"I met this guy who works at the hospital who's just been diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma."

"What stage?" Dad calls out to us. Mom and I are shocked he's listening. Our filters are on.

"Three," I respond.

"Oh, that's too bad," dad says empathetically. He's a respirologist at The General so he's done a lot of consults in Oncology, he knows a lot, and I really trust his opinion.

"Do you think he will make it?" I ask dad. I would do anything to hear his reassurances that my new friend will be okay. I wait with high expectations for the right answer.

Dad pauses for a second, "You said stage three?"

"Ya, so what do you think?" I ask impatiently.

“That’s a pretty advanced stage, I hope for your sake he does, but it doesn’t look good for him.”

I’m sick to my stomach. Mom sees me turn green, “Are you okay, Honey?”

I walk to the shower, “No mom, I need to be with him, I have to support him. I’m going to be his caregiver while he gets his chemo and radiation.” I decide on the fly. “He doesn’t have anyone he’s close to, to lean on.” Ben doesn’t even know it.

Dad calls out as he continues eavesdropping, “That’s fine Honey, you can be there for Ben but NOTHING is stopping the wedding, I don’t give a shit who the groom is. To be honest with you honey, I rather it be this guy Ben then that prick Chase’s son Danny. All I need is for your new father-in-law to be chasing my wife for the rest of my years that sonofabitch!”

I take a shower and pack a small bag with necessities. I want to be with Ben but if the feeling isn’t mutual, I can stay with Georgia and Diamond so I can have time to think about Danny.

I’m ready to leave when I approach mom in the kitchen and ask, “Mom, how do you feel about me being there for my new friend?”

Mom looks at me as if it’s a no-brainer, “Dear, He has stage three cancer that’s metastasized. If you pick Ben over Danny, you’re going to be a single parent and that’s always hard. Don’t do anything stupid, just be the friend you would want to have by your side if you were in his situation.”

“You think he’s going to die,” I say point blank to mom.

“Yes,” she admits.

I have an urge to slap her face as another wave of nausea hits me. Mom’s honesty is painful; I’m unable to keep the contents of my stomach down as I run to the bathroom. It’s obvious mom wants me to marry Chase’s son Danny but dad prefers a guy he’s never met, sick or not sick. He really feels threatened by mom’s old flame.

Dad screams out from the living room, “Widowhood or divorce, either way, the door is locked behind you baby girl!”

Nice, I think sarcastically.

I don’t even say good-bye, I take everything I have and slam the door behind me. I need a heart to heart with Ben.

~Chapter 11~

I drive to Ben's with my parent's worst case scenarios haunting me. My best case scenario is that I help him through this, Danny never finds out what we did and we live happily ever after. I do get why my parents don't want me to get too involved with Ben, there's a good chance I'll get hurt but I can't desert him in his hour of need.

Ben's car is in the parking lot, so I buzz up and he lets me in right away. He shuts the television off and walks into his small galley styled kitchen, "Would you like a drink?"

"Sure, I'll have water, I came to talk. There's something I want to tell you about me."

I can tell he's intrigued handing me a tall glass of water and sits on the couch studying me as he waits for me to start. "First of all, I've can't invite you to my place because I'm still living with my parents and I'm embarrassed about that."

He smiles seemingly okay with it, "We can remedy that."

I continue, "You know that guy you saw me with at the Paddock? I'm supposed to be marrying him on September 3, 2019. I don't know if I'm going to tell him what happened between us or not. The wedding is definitely going to happen though."

He doesn't react. I can't imagine what he's thinking, so I start to leave.

"Wait, Don't go, please," he says.

I stop in my tracks and turn to him. He isn't wearing a shirt and I can't think straight when I see his beautiful scorpion shaped chest of muscles with rectangular bandaging on it from his procedure that he had earlier. It breaks my heart seeing his beautiful chest marred with a cancer treatment device. My parents words hit home and Ben's stark reality becomes mine.

I freeze on the spot hypnotized by him, I slowly lower my bag to the floor and follow him back to his room. He lays down on what has become his side of the bed and stares up at the ceiling. I join him on my side.

Tears burn pathways down my cheeks. I lift myself on one elbow and started slowly caressing the swollen skin around his bandaging, "Let's just take one day at a time," he suggests.

We lay on our sides, he is on the side that hasn't been worked on and we face each other. He plays with the ends of my hair, "I don't think you should tell him what we did, I want you to marry him."

Now my tears are flooding my cheeks and his eyes appear shiny, "How can you say that to me?" I ask angrily.

"Don't make me say it," he warns.

"Say it," I order.

"I need to know you're going to be okay if anything happens to me. I want you to promise me you'll marry him." My heart deflates at his words as he reaches over swiping my tears away with his thumb.

He starts staring at the ceiling again. "I can't make love to you even if I want to, my chest hurts too much," he admits.

"Then let help you get your mind off things," I offer. I reach for the waist band of his track pants and he raises his hips so I can lower them. He's commando again. I slide down onto the bed and I take him into my mouth. He relaxes into me and I please him until I felt his warm cum flow down my throat, "I love you," I blurt.

He roughly grabs a fistful of my hair and pulls my face to his, kissing me passionately. "I love you too," he admits. It's bittersweet music to my ears.

~Chapter 12~

Diamond and Georgia agree to meet me at the Paddock just after seven. Diamond told me Georgia has news to share with us, I suspect it's something about her and Liam. They don't give me any hints, and I can't wait to catch up with them. I fly to the Paddock in Snowball and hit the alarm before I open the grand door to the bar. I'm the first to arrive. I order drinks for Diamond and Georgia and then pick our favourite table.

My pledge form is in my purse, I'm going to approach my friends in public to minimize their wisecracks. Mom and dad promised me \$1000 each, but not without lecture. Mom said, "You better not be cutting off all your hair before the wedding. He's not going to marry you if he sees you with short hair, you won't look good."

"They have wigs," I reply, reassuring her Danny of all people will back me 150% considering he's doing a years worth of charitable work in Kenya. I can't deny her comments don't get to me. Originally, I volunteered hardly thinking about it, but now that Ben has it, and I'm starting to see what he's going through, it hits home. It's such a small gesture in the big picture of things.

I wait twenty minutes before Georgia and Diamond blow in. Diamond apologizes profusely, "We're so sorry! I had to get gas and air in the tires, its all my fault!"

"No problem, I already got your drinks, I'm buttering you up, you know!"

Georgia gives me a suspicious look, "For?"

I pull out the pledge form. Diamond's eyes bulge, "You're not!"

"I am, it's for a good cause."

"You're getting married soon! You can't be bald when you get married."

Diamond points out.

"I won't be bald! Even if I am, I can always use a wig!"

"Can I cut it? I'll donate more money!" Diamond asks eagerly.

Georgia grins, "I'll put your hair in ponytails and hold your hand when you start crying!"

"I'm not going to cry! Fuck, Georgia!"

Georgia pulls out a pen and signs the form donating \$200. She hands her pen to Diamond, "So can I do the chop?" She waits for my answer before writing her donation. I know I have to say yes to get more money and that's what I want.

I roll my eyes imagining her cutting off my hair, maybe I will cry. "Yes," she writes \$1000.

Now I'm shocked, "You really want to cut my hair that badly?"

"You bet! I used to get so jealous of you when all those guys at school stared you down. They only settled on me once they knew they couldn't have you. Now I get to cut it all off!"

"You're such a bitch Diamond. Don't show your true feelings or anything," I tease, "I suit short hair just as much as long!"

"When do I get to do it?" She asks eagerly.

"This Saturday afternoon, it starts at 1:00 p.m."

Georgia looks at me intuitively, "Why are you doing this? Is there something you're not telling us? Does your porter guy?"

I look to them for support and the mood at the table turns serious, "Ya, Ben has cancer."

"No way, I don't believe it, he looks so healthy."

I shake my head, "It's true. I went with him to the doctor. He starts his radiation in a few days and then several rounds of chemo to follow."

Diamond takes a sip of her drink, "What kind of cancer, what stage?"

"He has Hodgkin's Lymphoma stage three."

Diamond gasps in acknowledgment of the seriousness of his condition, "I'm so sorry."

We get quiet including Diamond who is the hard-ass in our group.

Georgia interrupts the moment by changing the subject, "I have news!" We both turn to her waiting to be uplifted, "Liam asked me to marry him!" I jump off my stool in unison with Georgia and squeal with delight hugging her, "Congratulations!" I looked past her shoulder to Diamond's disapproving look, and I mouth back to her 'I know'. Neither of us like him but we were hoping that soon Georgia would figure out what he's really like on her own.

"Did you set a date?" I ask.

Georgia grins, "Liam wants to get married January 14th!"

"So we have a year and three months to help you plan it?"

Georgia giggles, "More like three months from now! You have to book your flight to Acapulco guys, Air Canada is having a seat sale."

"That's so fast," I complain.

Georgia explains, "It's not going to be a big ceremony, just you, Diamond, Liam, Danny, and Eric."

“Danny will be at the wedding?” I ask unaware he even knows they’re getting married.

“Yes, Liam called him this morning, he’s agreed to be his best man. Danny was planning on surprising you in Acapulco, you’re not supposed to know he’s coming.”

Georgia looks concerned and gulps her drink, “What are you going to do? Can you imagine if I didn’t tell you and you brought Ben?”

“I have no choice, I’m going to do what Ben wants me to do. I’m going alone to Acapulco to be with Danny. Maybe then, Ben will see sense.”

Diamond looks shocked, “Tell me you’re not falling in love with Ben?”

“I’m not falling in love with Ben,” I repeat.

Nobody including myself believes me.

“We know you feel Danny should have married you before he left, do you think Danny is in love with you?”

“I question whether he truly loves me everyday he’s gone,” I confide.

We continue discussing the wedding, until its time to leave the bar. I have three months to prepare myself; I knew my future will unravel in Acapulco.

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When I get back to Ben’s he’s waiting for me in bed. It’s nice having someone waiting at home for me, comforting. He props up on his elbow and moves the covers over so I can get in. He is naked, with only the patch dressing on his chest. He’s a sight for my sore, drunk eyes, “Did you get your pledges from your friends?” I ask.

“\$3000, and I admitted my diagnosis to my closest friends, you?”

“\$3200, but I had to promise Georgia does the ponytails and holds my hand, Diamond gets to chop it off.”

He snickers, “I sense an evil friend!”

“You’re telling me!” I whine.

He looks concerned, “You don’t have to do it.” He starts twirling my hair through his fingers. “Your hair is so beautiful.”

“I want to, for you. It’s such a small gesture of support.”

“I already know how you feel about me, just by the way you touch me,” he reassures.

He reaches over and pulls my face to his, kissing me. I push him off gently, “I have something else I want to tell you, I’ve been invited to my friend Georgia’s wedding in Acapulco in three months which will be during your treatments. Liam asked her to marry him.”

Ben’s jaw tightens, “Danny’s going to be there isn’t he?”

“Yes,” I mumble.

## ~Chapter 13~

The big day is upon us and everyone including Ben and I pile into the disorganized and crowded auditorium, the audience, volunteers, and people who pledged are all there.

I didn't realize it's going to be such a spectacle, even the Toronto newspapers and television stations are there to capture the charity fundraiser.

On stage there are four red barber chairs that you only see in the movies. There is extra lighting on the stage, making the temperature in the room climb. It's impossible to see passed the lights.

Each of us pull a number and go up according to when we were called. We are instructed to choose who is working on us; we can take whoever is volunteering unless we bring our own stylists in to do it. When I get to the chair, I have to point Diamond out and have her come up to do it.

They tell us prior to the media introductions to try to work quickly; the professional hairdressers will be working backstage to fix whatever we did on stage. The loose hairs will fall in piles onto the floor and they encourage us to be careful not trip as we walk off stage, they will sweep up as often as they can.

The lights in the auditorium dim and the reporters stand in front of the cameras with the barber chairs behind them introducing the event to their perspective stations.

My nerves are running high as I feel butterflies and dread in the pit of my stomach. I'm not sure what is going to be worse, getting my hair cut off or shearing Ben's.

I'm tempted to run the fuck away from this hospital, or at least erase my name from the list but there is no turning back. I will lose \$3200 that is going to a worthy cause along with a hair donation that will be used towards a wig. Backing out isn't an option, and it definitely isn't cool.

We pick numbers from a top hat to determine the order we go in. I have shit for luck so I expect to pick one through four. I reached into the hat not peaking and I pull out the first slip of paper I feel, it ends up being number six. Ben pulls a three. He's going to make the news; actually WE are since he wants me to do the honours.

He takes the third chair and waits for me to cover him with the cape that is provided for that barber chair. I drape the cape over him and close it tightly around his neck so he wouldn't get itchy. His neck is so thick the cape barely closes. We all wait to be told when to start.

On cue, we can begin and the cameras start rolling. I grab the elastic laid out before Ben and tie his hair up into a ponytail, "Are you ready?" I speak into his ear.

"Just do it," he orders impatiently. I grab the haircutting scissors and slide my fingers through the holes. I hold his ponytail out and looked at him, he nods encouragement and I start cutting his thick ponytail squeezing the scissors as hard as I can to get them to close. They are giving me a hard time so I put smaller amounts of hair between the blades and they begin cutting more efficiently.

Finally, I cut the last bunch of hairs from the ponytail freeing it into my hand. I throw it into the bin that was designated for donations. His was the first of many. His eyes are sad, yet determined.

I plug in the clippers removing the attached blade, "I'm going to shave you close," I say.

"That's a girl" he encourages. I place the blade high on his forehead and glide the metal clippers along his scalp until a full strip of hair falls to the ground and only a hint of stubble is left in its place. I begin to shave a new strip of hair off his head overlapping the already shaved section making sure I don't miss any hair.

The pile of black hair on the floor grows until I'm finished. My hand can still feel the vibration of the clippers after I had turn them off.

I hate being the one to shave his head but at the same time, I'm glad it's me.

He is left with nothing but stubble and he resembles Dwayne Johnson from *Ballers*. It's the first time I realize he has a flawless face. He is just as gorgeous bald as he is with hair, I'm shocked because not many men can pull it off, he conquers it.

I remove the cape and brush the loose hairs away. He rubs his head and goes to the back for them to shave it clean. The next pledge person is waiting to get his chair.

Suddenly feels like it's going faster. My number is called. I'm sick with anticipation. I leave Ben who wishes me luck backstage, to go take a chair. I take the chair next to the one he sat in. I look at the pool of volunteers and find Diamond and Georgia, I waive for them to come over.

Georgia puts my hair in a ponytail making sure the elastic is low so I can have a bob cut. Diamond has a smile that can only be described as the cat that ate the mouse. She grabs the cape that is designated for the barber chair I'm sitting in and wraps it around my neck.

"See!" she says, "Fantasies come true! This haircut is long overdue," She confides. "I'm going to cut your hair short, and there's nothing you can do but

watch!” She grins at me, “Ben fall in love with you once he sees the sacrifice your making for him! You’re going to be thanking me for hacking it off.”

Her comments make the amount of dread I feel increase. I have never seen Diamond act like this before. She is giddy with power. Georgia grabs my hand to support me. I’m blinded by the lights and sweating from being under them for so long.

Georgia lets go of my hand and grabs the brush pulling at knots roughly and ripping through my hair before collecting it into a ponytail. Georgia steps aside grabbing my hand again and Diamond touches my ponytail, “Don’t worry about split ends,” she laughs evilly, she tightens it close to my scalp. I freeze realizing just how short she’s planning on cutting it. A bob won’t be possible if the elastic is pressed up against my head.

Diamond taunts, “I have to get my money’s worth you know!” I hope I’m mistaken and she is joking, but I know by the tightness of the band she isn’t. She paid \$1000 to cut off my hair and that’s exactly what she is going to do, all of it.

Georgia tells her to loosen the band but she ignores her. Diamond picks up the scissors brandishing them before me, tormenting me more by opening and closing them a few times, making the snip snip noise that makes me shiver. When she is done, I feel her loosen the band and then start forcing the blades closed on my security blanket of hair. Loose strands begin hitting my cheek; It’s touching my chin and I breath a sigh of relief. I watch everything unfold as if I’m not in my own body.

Georgia snaps a picture with her iPhone. Diamond’s cut a third of my hair off, and there’s no stopping her, she loves the power. She can see my expression and whispers in my ear, “You’re doing this for Ben, it grows back.”

I look at Diamond’s reflection in the mirror and threaten her, “Payback’s a bitch Diamond!”

She shrugs and continues forcing the scissors through the rest of my hair. She finishes cutting off my donation and holds it up for the audience to see. They applaud, then she throws it in the bucket with the rest of the hair.

I know she’s having fun at my expense but she’s paid a thousand dollars for this high of hers so I’m not mad at her even though I threatened her with payback.

She pulls the cape off and says, “I left it long enough for a chin length bob.”

A hairdresser in the back takes one look at me and says, “Would you like a bob, or do you want me to go shorter? I can do a pixie?”

I shake my head discouraged, “Pixie please” The hairdresser corrects what is left, I start looking like old pictures of mom at the Cardiac Fundraising event just before my dad’s non-wedding day to Aria. History has gone full circle.

Ben waits for me when I step off stage. We drive home in silence as his hand covers mine and he says, “I know what a big sacrifice you did for me today, I’ll never forget it.”

I know I will get used to the length; it’s how he treats me that makes me feel better.

~Chapter 14~

We get back to Ben's place mid afternoon and we're famished. He grabs corning ware from his fridge and microwaves it for us, "I hope you like tuna casserole?"

"I'm starving, right now, I'll eat anything."

"Watch what you say," he warns. "When's the next time you work? It feels like you are spending all your time with me."

"I'm booked for tomorrow day shift and then three night shifts in a row."

He places the casserole dish on the table in-between us and we eat directly from it until we were satisfied. I look at him expectantly, "You don't serve drinks with your food?"

He smiles at my sarcasm, "Sorry, can I get you a drink?"

"Please, something stiff to help me forget what I've had done."

"It looks fucking hot," he comments under his breath. He gets up and reaches in the cabinet pulling down a bottle of Crown Royal whisky, "Will this due?"

"I'll have a double please."

He generously pours three or so ounces into my glass, and stares at me as I drink it. I can feel it burning all the way down. He pours himself a smaller glass and finishes it in one swallow, "Cigarette?"

"Please."

He goes to the front entrance of his apartment and grabs his gold-rimmed Ray Ban sunglasses and two cigarettes from the open pack before escorting me out onto his balcony. It's getting cold outside, but we don't put anything on, we brave it together.

We stand leaning against the railing staring at each other as we smoke our cigarettes. His look is hotter than before, his attitude has changed, more self-assured. He's seriously gorgeous, intimidating, and sexy at the same time, "You look like an angry police officer," I flirt.

He doesn't respond, he starts running his fingers through my hair, exploring it but not making any comments. It's hard to tell what he's thinking.

He has my full attention as he takes a drag from his cigarette and blows it in my direction, intentionally. He walks over to me, and I skittishly back away from



him suddenly feeling like prey to a ravenous animal. There's no question he wants me, and there's no getting away from him.

He traps me like a human cage between himself and his apartment wall, his warm mouth covers mine in a demanding kiss that makes my knees wobbly. His soft lips push hard while his tongue forces entry into my mouth. Ben's hips rub against me, making me tingle with need.

His dick feels hard, it actually hurts when he rubs it against me. I get a hot flush of excitement coursing through my veins when I realize just how bad he has it for me. He never releases me from his kiss until HE needs air. I push his chest away from me and he generously gives me a second to down the rest of my drink before his lips came crashing back down on mine. "I want you naked," he orders.

"Yes, sir," I answer obediently. I bubble with anticipation. There's no having to twist my arm or ask me twice when it comes to him. He steps aside so I could scurry past him and get naked.

He doesn't give me enough time to take my clothes off; he tears what is left from my body in haste and drops them to the floor like discarded waste. He picks me up like I weigh ounces and places me into a position of his choice. He lays me on my back and then spreads my legs apart bending them at the knee's so he can fit in-between.

Completely at his mercy, I close my eyes and open my mouth to him, waiting. I feel his tongue rub briskly against mine before his lips are on mine. I pull his sunglasses off his head and place them on the night table, out of the way. I refocus on our kissing and then I feel his hand clumsily cupping my breast.

He rolls my nipple between his fingers before pinching it really hard and pulling it away from my body causing me to cry out. Then he takes that same breast into his velvety mouth and flicks the tender nipple with his tongue giving me goose bumps all over. He pulls it again with his teeth and nips at it savagely, like he wants to eat it. I scream with each nip. I'm raw, he's animalistic, and it's fucking hot.

I fist the sheets in my hands trying not to scream while under his attack. His mouth finally releases my breast and I have a second to recover while the cool air hits my erect nipple making it throb even more than it already was.

He then reaches for my other nipple and pinches it hard between his two fingers. I yelp from pain as this nipple is more sensitive than the first one.

He takes the sensitive breast into his mouth teasing the nipple with his tongue while he flicks and pinches the first nipple that he's not working on with his fingers. His skill and experience is way out of my league, causing me to scream out frantically in excitement. I have never felt anything like this before. He releases my breasts from his attention. They are red, swollen, erect for him.

“I’m going to taste you now,” he says. He lowers his body so that his face is in line with my pussy. I feel shy and my skin flushes with embarrassment.

I can feel his breath against my folds and then the touch of his lips skimming me. He bends my knees more and spreads my legs farther apart and then there’s a pause where I can feel his breath in between my legs again, “Get busy and stop teasing,” I order.

He sucks my clit and then teases me ever so gently with his tongue. His tongue enters into me and then laps me up like I’m delicious and he can’t get enough of me, making my toes curl.

He slides two fingers into me while he continues licking. I find it hard to catch my breath as he slowly inserts them and then removes them again making me gasp with his manual stimulation. I want more than his fingers in me now, I needed him in me. I’m a stream of juices waiting for his release.

At his mercy and pinned to the bed I can’t do anything but beg him to take me, and make me come, “Please, Ben, Please!”

He stops cold, “Did you want me to make love to you?”

Okay, seriously? Can the man not tell? “Please!” I beg.

“Aren’t my fingers enough for you?” He pushes them forcefully back into me making me gasp. “No,” I answer, “they aren’t enough.”

He opens me more and glides his tongue deeper into me, “Is my tongue not enough for you either?” He plays with my clit as his tongue dives deeper.

It feels so good, I push my hips up so his tongue goes deeper, “No it’s not! Please Ben, Please, make love to me.” He climbs up to me so we’re face to face. His dick is hard and ready. He aims it exactly where I want it to go and he says to me, “Don’t ever sacrifice yourself for anyone but me, promise me.”

“I promise,” I said breathlessly, he thrusts his dick into me, filling me fast and hard. The word promise goes up an octave. His thrusts are deep and relentless; my mouth is dry from breathing and screaming at the top of my lungs. His stomach muscles disappear between my two legs as he thrust ferociously into me. His biceps and triceps are bulging with big thick veins protruding through his skin, His jugular vein is an inch thick, and sweat was beading from his forehead.

“Is this enough for you now, am I enough for you?” he asks. He grabs my hips stabilizing me, increasing his penetration even more.

“Yes, you’re enough for me, too much!” I scream. The force of his thrusts are making smacking noises as our damp skin hits against each other, and then he does a final thrust and empties himself into me, every last drop, satiating my needs, and at the same time increasing them.

~Chapter 15~

He rolls off of me, and we stare vacantly at the ceiling for a few minutes before breaking the silence, “What about Danny?” I ask. I know it’s a terrible time to bring it up, but there is never a good time. We have to address the underlying issues.

He places his hands behind his head, “What about Danny,” he repeats. “The two of you will have the rest of your lives together,” he says resentfully.

“You don’t know that,” I argue. “I can change everything at the drop of a dime.”

Ben looks confused, “What do you mean?”

I pick up my phone and create a text to Danny. I hit send and then hand the phone to Ben.

Meadow: U’ve got something 2 worry about. His name is Ben.

“This will stir things up,” I guarantee.

“What the fuck did you just do?” Ben asks furiously. “You promised me you would stay with him if anything ever happens to me.” His voice softens, “It’s a comfort to me knowing you’ll never be alone.”

“I’m doing what’s right. Don’t you think Danny should know that something’s going on?”

The phone rings, he lets me answer it, it’s Danny, “Meadow, what the fuck did you just text me? Who the fuck is Ben? You said everything was going to be okay, you said that you would wait! What the fuck!”

The line is quiet, and the adrenaline is coursing through my veins making me anxious, my heart is pounding, and my cheeks flush hot, “Let’s not talk about it over the phone, we’ll talk when I see you.”

“You TEXT about another guy and you don’t want to talk about it over the phone?” he spits.

“I’m sorry Danny.” I hang up before he can get a word in and then I turn off my phone making everything go to voicemail.

Ben is angry, “Your self-conscience is cleared but at what expense. You shouldn’t have done that.” His jaw tightens and a tiny vein in his forehead bulges. I can only imagine what Danny is going through in Kenya because of you, shit!

I stare Ben down, “You made me WANT to do it. I’m sick of everyone with the exception of me deciding my future, another thing, don’t ever talk to me like you’re going to die and keeping Danny around to pick up the pieces ever again. Look in the mirror at yourself, you’re larger than life; shaped like a God. You have a fight on your hands so you get in the fucking ring and come out fighting; Reed Sternberg or any other man stupid enough to fight you isn’t going to win. I’d bet my own life on it.”

Tears practically spring from my eyes as I grab my bag, and slam the door behind me. I want to be there so badly for him, and yet I can’t be if he’s just going to feel sorry for himself and roll over and die.

~Chapter 16~

I floor Snowball all the way to the girl's apartment. When I get there, they open the door and the first words out of Diamonds mouth are, "You just had sex with Ben didn't you?" Hearing her wisecrack feels like a bucket of ice cold water being poured all over my rotten mood. I start laughing hysterically until I buckle over in back pain. My eyes tear up and I'm scared I'll pee myself. Neither of them know how to react to my hysterics. What she said wasn't that funny, but its me dealing with a multitude of emotions. My laughter is contagious and they start too.

Leaving them for a second I check myself in the mirror of the bathroom. I forgot my haircut and it startles me. Its like a stranger is looking back at me. I start laughing again. I take a selfie and send it to Danny, I didn't tell him I did this either. I wash up and rejoined the girls whose attention I have definitely captured.

Diamond looks at me and says, "Okay out with it, what happened?"

I remember Ben's anger and a lump gets caught in my throat. I can't catch my breath. "I told mom and dad I was going to stay with Ben, and support him through his treatments, as friends. We made.."

"Love?" Diamond finishes looking confused and maybe jealous, "So then why are you here, instead of with him?"

"After we,"

"Made love," Diamond finishes my sentence.

"I asked him what we should do about Danny, and he says, 'The two of you will have the rest of your lives together'. He sounds so resentful and I don't blame him Diamond. He encourages me to stay with Danny so he can pick up the pieces if Ben dies, it gives him peace of mind. It's not okay for Ben to die, and it's not okay to use Danny as a back-up plan."

Georgia looks confused, "Isn't that nice though? He cares."

"I'm not a China doll, and I don't need someone to tell me what to do with my own future. I'm a mixed bag of emotions but mostly I'm so angry Georgia, you have no idea! I'm angry at Ben for having cancer and thinking he's going to die, I'm angry at Danny for not caring enough to marry me before leaving, it's overwhelming. I feel helpless!"

"So what did you do?" Diamond asked.

"I told Danny he has something to worry about and his name is Ben."

"You didn't!" Georgia's shocked.

"Do you still have the text?" Diamond asks.

I hand her my phone. Diamond reads it and hands it to Georgia. They wait for me to elaborate on my sheer stupidity, "Ben says I did it to relieve my conscience, maybe I did."

"Ben's furious I told him because I ruined his planned future for me. Danny called me minutes after I sent the text."

"I guess so! Did you talk to him?" Georgia asked.

"No, I told him it was too serious to talk about over the phone; Let him stew in it. Maybe, I won't be there waiting for him when he gets back from his sabbatical the way he EXPECTS me to."

Diamond gets up off the couch, "Damn girl, you have a set of nuts on you!" She walks to the fridge and pulls out three Palm Bays.

Georgia looks at me excitedly, "So you're moving in?"

"Do you mind?"

They both cheer me on and escort me to my room.

~~~~~

I'd been with the girls for three weeks before I finally heard my phone chirp from one of the two guys. It was Ben;

Ben: Hi Meadow, where R U?

Meadow: Why?

Ben: We need 2 talk.

Meadow: Where?

Ben: My place, I'll pick U up.

I text my address and then get dressed before going down and waiting for him to pull into our visitor's parking lot. He's here in ten minutes.

He keeps his car idling while I open the passenger side door to his black Jeep Cherokee and sit down buckling my belt. I can't look at him because my resolve will disintegrate and I will melt when I see his eyes.

I stare straight ahead as he throws his car into reverse and starts driving towards his place.

He stops at an unfamiliar park on the way to his building shutting off the truck, "Why can't you look at me?" he asks. I turned to him and exactly what I'm afraid of happening happens, my heart melts. Hot tears pool in the corners of my eyes. "We need to decide where this is going," he says.

“Where is everything going,” I ask very vulnerably. I didn’t realize how much I missed him until now, sitting in the truck with him. I want to hug him. His right arm littered with boulder-like muscles rests on the back of my seat and his left hand was rubbing the top of his head in what appears to be frustration, while he studies at me.

I can’t keep my eyes off his thick muscular neck or his baby blue eyes, he has a perfect face. His jaw was squared off and tightens when he’s upset. His lips are deliciously supple and cover mine perfectly from what I can remember. I want them on mine so badly it hurts.

He starts beading up with perspiration on his forehead and he takes his jacket off. The temperature in the truck was comfortable, this is his illness. I wish I never left him and these last three weeks weren’t spent apart but that’s something I can’t change.

I see a hint of his Hickman line, through his opened buttons, and I realize he doesn’t need the added stress of me on top of everything else he’s going through. He’s beginning to look more tired and worn from his radiation treatments, “We have to discuss everything rationally and make decisions we can stick with. I want to know how you feel.” I ask.

“Sure,” he comments, “I think I’m in love with you. My illness and your engagement feels like a sick joke, even a nightmare. I want to be healthy, and with you, no Danny, no illness.”

I wish for him to kiss me, “I missed you,”

He slowly moves towards me tilting his face so his lips can press softly against mine. I melt like butter to his touch. His hand supports the back of my neck and he kisses me deeper. I run my fingers along the smooth skin on the back of his head as our kisses grow more passionate. He pulls away for a second, his eyes penetrate my soul when says to me, “I can’t fight this without you.”

“I don’t want you to,” I breathe.

“Move back with me,” he pleads in the sexiest way imaginable.

“I’m supposed to be marrying Danny,” I logically reason, but my heart is with Ben right now. As far as I’m concerned I’m already there with him.

“Have you spoken to Danny since you told him about us?” He asked.

“No,” I admit. “He hasn’t called.”

“Don’t you think you should?” Ben suggests.

“Not electronically.”

“So, when? Georgia’s wedding?”

“I guess,” thinking to myself that I’m not even a little bit looking forward to seeing Danny.

“What do we do until then?” He asks.

“We act like Friends,” I suggest.

“Just friends?” He asks.

“Just friends,” I confirm.

He reaches for the ignition and drives me back to the girl’s apartment. He walks me to the door of the building. It was painstakingly obvious that he’s in no rush to leave me as I’m not in any to leave him.

When we reach the door he surprises me by pushing me up against the wall and rubbing his hard desire against me, “I can’t go two months let alone two more minutes without you Meadow.”

My hands caress the back of his head and my leg wraps around him. His kisses are unhurried, making up for lost time, “So much for being friends,” I tease deepening my kiss, “that’s not going to work.” I can’t breathe our kiss is so long, I don’t need to breath, he’s my air, all I need.

I take his hand and slide it up my leg directing him to where I want it. His kisses become aggressive, I know he’s taking me right now, right here.

“You are mine,” he informs me, “fuck Danny,” he unzips his pants and lifts my skirt just enough to expose my needy folds. The chill from the cold air gets me more excited.

I lift my other leg so they’re both wrapped around his waist and then he fills me with his throbbing cock breaking through and going deep inside me. I can’t muffle my moan as he enters.

His skilled movements are quick and smooth, because we are in public and there’s a chance of getting caught which adds to our adventure. He comes in record time spilling his fluids into me and down my naked leg as he lowers me down onto the pavement to stand.

Not finished yet, he orders me, “Face the wall, and bend over.”

Giddy with excitement, I do as I’m told. He dips his finger into his own juices that have oozed from me and rubs them on my vaginal opening.

He pushes himself up against my ass and reached down to play with my pussy from behind. His fingers are magical as he swirls them dampening my clitoris making me moan softly, “You should NEVER go commando around me,” he warns.

He grabs my hips and stabilizes me before thrusting his hard cock back into my sore swollen pussy for a second round. My whole body gets jarred forward as he enters me roughly. I know there was no saying no to him once I get him going, so I suck up the pain and bite my lip trying not to call out.

The fit feels tighter the second time around as he methodical pumping has me begging for more. He begins to thrust faster and faster into me. He’s starting to lose his breath as I continue biting my lip in efforts not to call attention to us. Before he

reaches his second climax, he moves my skirt exposing my ass and sprayed me with his cum, marking me, claiming me as his own.

I start crying, overwhelmed with emotion. There isn't anything I won't do him.

~Chapter 17~

Becker's, the best go-to store for wedding dresses in Toronto short of Klienfelds Bridal located in New York City, is our first stop. Georgia says if we don't find one at Becker's, then she'll drive to Klienfelds the following week and choose something exotic off their rack.

The staff is very accommodating; they listen to Georgia's description of what she sees herself in, and then they bring out a good ten or fifteen dresses. She tries on at least eight or nine of them, but they are either too long, too short, too much lace, not enough. The dress could have been perfect, but Georgia still manages to find fault with all of them. I'm beginning to worry that she is metamorphosing into bridezilla.

The overtly gay sales clerk patiently attends to her every whim in the end rolls his eyes and suggests under his breath, "Go to Klienfelds if you're going to be THAT picky for fuck sakes!" He collects our porcelain tea cups and pastry dishes before stomping off in a huff. I couldn't blame the poor guy for getting frustrated with her.

We waste several hours in Becker's before Georgia's exceedingly high expectations forces us to go elsewhere. The roads are covered snow and it's bitterly cold out. This winter is giving a new definition to a Canadian winter. With only days left to find a dress, Georgia decides she can't put it off any longer, we need to go home to free our schedules for a trip to New York. Klienfelds it is!

We text the men; Ben, Liam, Eric: 'Going 2 New York City 2 find a dress. CU when we get back!' I don't know how Eric or Liam are going to take it, but I know Ben won't mind, he's feeling so shitty at the tail end of his chemo treatments he's tied to his bed with nausea and malaise. There's no point in texting Danny, we're still not talking.

...A few days later

We arrive at La Guardia just after the morning rush hour. We hail a cab and go directly to Klienfelds. Georgia is extremely disappointed when she finds out they

aren't taping 'Say Yes To The Dress', while we are their, but she gets to meet a lot of the crew. She never misses an episode.

When we arrive and they find out we are from Canada, they are beside themselves with friendliness. They take us without an appointment and lead us directly to one of their largest, most comfortable fitting rooms.

Jillian is this lovely flamboyantly pregnant Princess. She assists us with Georgia's hunt. She even goes that extra mile to make Georgia feel special even though the dresses she's pulling off the racks aren't much better than the ones we saw in Toronto. The third dress she tries on is a jackpot. Georgia gets all emotional as if she's on the television show, she's standing on the podium in tears saying it's exactly how she pictures herself when she was a little girl, or maybe she was crying because she was thinking of who she was marrying? I don't ask. She embarrassingly calls out, 'Yes, I'm saying yes to the dress!'

We leave the store, just stepping onto the sidewalk when Diamond looks at us mischievously, "We don't have to fly back yet do we? Why don't we spend the night and go back in the morning? Meadow, Go back into the store and ask Jillian for the name of a good hotel to stay at that's close!"

Georgia looks down at her phone with hesitation, "I don't he's kind of giving me a hard time, I'll try."

"What's he saying?" I ask.

"He wants to know when I'll be back and that I should have asked him first if I could go instead of just leaving him the way we did. Let me just text him back." We take shelter back in the lobby of Kleinfelds while Georgia texts Liam.

Georgia frantically types on her phone, shaking her head, "I can't stay guys, he's demanding I come back now. He's furious. He said I was rude and disrespectful, and if I don't come back, he's not going to marry me."

"It's just a threat, you're the best thing that ever happened to him, he'll get over it," Diamond encourages her to stay.

Georgia smiles, "You're right! I'll deal with him when we get back."

We book a room for two nights.

We arrived at the hotel, and Diamond claims the shower before Georgia or I have a chance. The modern marble shower stall complete with glass door and fancy shower head look inviting after a long day of shopping with Bridezilla. Georgia and I text Liam and Ben.

Meadow: How R U feeling?

Ben: Like a transport hit me & then reversed over me again, U? Having fun?

Meadow: Totally! Georgia found a beautiful dress.

Ben: When will U B back?

Meadow: 2 Nights? Is that OK?

Ben: Of Course! Wish I was with U.

Meadow: Me 2!

We switch phones so we can read each other's texts.

Georgia: Hi Liam

Liam: Come home now.

Georgia: No! I will be back in three days.

The more I get to know Liam the more I wish Georgia realizes that he isn't right for her. Things have changed between Liam, Georgia, and I since I told Danny about Ben. Now Liam thinks I'm this big cheating whore and that I'm a bad influence on Georgia. I am now an enemy to his relationship with her.

We take a nap in the afternoon and dress for the Stone Rose Lounge. We bundle up for the cold New York winter, and decide to walk the few blocks from our hotel to the Time Warner Building where the cocktail lounge is located on the fourth floor.

The place turns out to be boldly decorated boasting of great views of central park, with small tables and booths that were super cozy and candlelit. The lounge is geared to a slightly older, more professional crowd, and the music is played by a hired disc jockey.

When we arrive, there were only a few empty tables left in the centre of the main room. We are seated by the hostess who informs us our waiter 'Pierre' will be by shortly to take our order.

We decide on shrimp cocktails, nacho's and the variety tray of shooters offered on the menu. The tray comes with nine drinks, three different flavours. I take a bite of a nacho and then a shooter. Georgia and Diamond follow suit.

I take a second shooter, and down it just as quickly as the first. Diamond puts her hand up, "Slow down Meadow, we have all night."

I grin because I'm starting to feel really good.

"It's nice just the three of us isn't it? We have to make sure that we do this again even after we're all married," I suggest.

Georgia starts digging round her purse for her phone. I snatch her purse away, "This is our time together, if you're going to get shit for not coming home at least lets make it worth it!"

"Hallelujah," Diamond agrees. "Diamond, Don't look now, but is that gorgeous guy at two o'clock staring at Georgia?"

Diamond trying to be inconspicuous is very conspicuous when she checks out two o'clock. "Georgia, I think you have an admirer!" She says in a southern accent. "Meadow, Go invite him to our table" she orders.

I down my third shot, stand from the table and go whisper an invite into two o'clock's ear. He comes to our table and introduces himself taking a seat next to Georgia.

Diamond whispers in my ear, "What did you say to him to get him to come over so fast?"

I whisper back, "I'll never tell!"

Diamond shoves my shoulder, "Knowing you, I can only imagine!"

It turns out Two O'clock is an Airline pilot for American Airlines. His black hair was cut in a crew cut, with the back not even reaching his collar. He wears a dark designer suit and shiny black pointed shoes. He looks like a sharp dresser and carries a conversation well. We chat into the early hours of the morning finding out he's widowed and ten years Georgia's senior.

By Georgia's third shot, Two O'clock and Georgia are making out near the bathroom of the bar. We pull them off each other because it's closing time, making a date to meet tomorrow evening.

~Chapter 18~

The next morning I wake up early and glance over at Diamond's bed, empty. The clock says six.

I quietly unlock the adjoining door to see if she is with Georgia. The room was dim, but not pitch black, I can see. I open the door a smidgeon more so I can get a better look.

I noticed Georgia isn't alone; she is in bed next to Two O'clock. He must have gone back to her room after we went to bed. Diamond is sneaking up on them.

What the fuck was she doing? Maybe she left something in her room and wanted to get it without waking them up. If I hadn't seen this happening with my own two eyes, I'd believe it.

The sheets are strewn all over so both of them are exposed, both were naked. Diamond is on to Two O'clock's side of the bed and she's kneeling down and starts sucking his piece while he's sleeping.

His eyes flutter open and then a surprised expression comes over his face when he notices Diamond, but he doesn't push her away. She is pleasing him. He starts encouraging her by whispering, "Yes" just loud enough for her AND me to hear it. He glances at the door slightly ajar and his eye catches mine, he smiles in acknowledgment, not minding being watched.

He grabs Diamond's hair and begins pacing her as she sucks him. Then he reaches over and effortlessly starts fingering Georgia's snatch. Her legs spread wider apart and she begins moaning with excitement. It seems to me like she thinks she's dreaming.

Even though I'm not involved, it's hot to watch. Diamond begins pulling off her pyjamas so that Two O'clock can grab her breasts and play with her nipples pinching them super hard. She almost cries out a few times but manages to control the noise so Georgia wouldn't wake up.

I touch myself down there only to see if I'm wet, and then I start stroking myself as I continue watching my best friends with the handsome pilot.

Pilot guy is close to coming because he takes his cock out of Diamond's mouth and mounts Georgia shoving it roughly into her cunt. He starts pumping her

hard and playing with Diamond's breasts at the same time. If she wasn't awake, she definitely is now.

Close to orgasm, Two O'clock instructs Diamond, "When I pull out of Georgia, I'm going to shove my cock to the back of your throat and I want you to swallow it before kissing your friend here."

He pulls his throbbing, red, glossy dick from Georgia and shoves it deep into Diamond's mouth practically gagging her with it. I can hardly see the shaft it's so far in.

Georgia is fully awake when Diamond takes his cock into her mouth. He releases his load and she complies swallowing every drop. Georgia laughs, "You have enough cock for both of us," she teases. She looks at Diamond, "I never shared anyone before!"

When Diamond finishes swallowing, she crawled over Two O'clock and started French kissing Georgia, remnants of his cum still in her mouth, as Georgia starts playing with Diamonds labia. Their faces look glossy wet even from a distance.

I keep imagining how Georgia must have felt getting surprised fucked while sleeping, I'm so close to coming, it takes everything in me not to cry out.

Two O'clock starts sucking Georgia while Diamond's fingers are inside her. I can't take it anymore, I convulse in orgasm, when it's done, I close the door behind me.

I take a shower and try to get more sleep. The next time I awaken, Diamond is back in her bed adjacent to mine and the connecting door is closed. I start thinking I dreamt it, but I can never imagine something like that if I hadn't seen it with my own two eyes, so I know it really happened.

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We decide to spend the day at the Manhattan Mall searching for suitable Acapulco attire. The weather is just too cold to hit the streets of New York. We hail a cab and due to the downtown congestion, a drive that should take two minutes, takes twenty.

The sales are phenomenal. I find the most adorable bikini and beautiful black lace bra with matching panties that has a few strings draping down connecting the two from Dream Works. I know Ben is going to love it after I break up with Danny of course. Wow, I know my answer. It comes to me so easily; I'm with the wrong guy.

I text him twice, but both times he doesn't answer. I start worrying. I text him more frequently and when he doesn't answer I call. Diamond and Georgia are trying to reassure me, telling me he's probably sleeping and that I shouldn't bother

him, but once I get him on the phone and know everything is all right, I will stop calling. I needed to know he's okay.

My mind begins imagining the worst. By the time we're supposed to meet up with the Pilot, I'm practically frantic. I keep telling myself in a few short hours I will be back home and I can check to see for myself whether he's okay. I wish now, I had never went on this trip or that I at least checked in on him.

Finally in a bad state, I excuse myself after the first round of drinks calling it an early night. I take a cab through the busy streets of New York and when I arrive back at the hotel, I keep attempting to make contact with no luck.

I call the hospital asking to speak to Ben, the operator says, "I'm sorry but we don't put calls through past ten o'clock."

My voice climbs an octave as I realize my fear has come true, "But you do have a Ben Colby there, is that correct?"

She pauses, "May I ask who's calling?"

Tempted to lie, I refrain, "I'm his girlfriend."

The operator responded, "I'm sorry but we don't give out confidential information to anyone other than immediate family."

I argue, "I'm a nurse practitioner, I work in the Emergency Department there, I'm in New York City right now and I've been trying to contact Ben Colby for the entire day and he's not answering any of his calls or texts. I'm concerned for his safety, and if you can't confirm that Ben Colby has been admitted, I'm going to have no choice but call the police to find him."

"What is your name Miss?"

"Meadow Ward."

"Just a second," I hear her typing what I assume is my name, "I've verified who you are and yes, Ben Colby has been admitted here. There's no need to involve the police."

I let out a long sigh, "Thank you!"

I text Georgia and Diamond about Ben being admitted. I go to bed early because I manage to book us all on an earlier flight back.

I try hard to sleep with no success; I'm restless and fretting the entire night. The plane ride home is horrible, I'm so scared for Ben that I can't think straight. I run to the bathroom where I begin to dry heave from nausea and start crying for not being there for Ben.

It takes me about ten minutes to compose myself, before I'm able to walk back to my seat without looking ridiculous. When I get back Diamond asks, "Are you okay?"

I shake my head, no and then slide passed them back to my seat. The plane lands 10:00 a.m. We wait for our luggage to come down the shoots and when we



are ready to go, Georgia says, “We’ll go to the hospital together. When Diamond and I know you are okay, we’ll leave you alone, and you call me whenever you like, and I’ll pick you up.”

“Thanks,” I say. We head to the car park and Georgia speeds us to the hospital. I run to the information booth and ask the girl at the counter what room he’s in. I assume that since I’m not immediate family, I should bring my badge so they don’t give me a hard time seeing him.

We find him on the sixth floor, in the Oncology section of the hospital; he’s in a private room. Its common knowledge that a private room on this type of wing means one thing, that you’re dying.

Diamond and Georgia stand back as I slowly push the door open, “Wait!” Diamond says, “He’s being isolated. Gear up.” I haven’t noticed the stop signs on the door until she says it. I wash my hands with the provided hand sanitizer and then don the gown, mask, and gloves. Diamond and Georgia do the same.

I pushed open the door and he’s in bed with his eyes closed, his chest was raising and falling, and he has a unit of blood being transfused in one arm, and an antibiotic being infused in the other arm, Flagyl. There’s also an empty bag of Ciprofloxacin hanging.

His skin is sweaty and his cheeks flushed. The rest of his skin is pale, he probably has a low hemoglobin. If I have to guess he’s probably got febrile neutropenia. It’s one of the most common and dangerous complications of chemotherapy, usually treated with medications.

The isolation is not to protect us, it’s to protect him.

It strikes me as odd that none of his treatments are going through the Hickman they’ve inserted into him. I slide the neck of his hospital gown down low enough to find a bandage over a very swollen area of his chest.

I deduce his Hickman to be the source of infection, it explains everything. Georgia is silent, but when I move the gown, Diamond gasps. Nothing is said. I reach for Ben’s hand and say his name, but he doesn’t move. To top it off, he’s unconscious.

The girls leave me alone with him, telling me that they will come back with clean clothes and a phone charger, because we all know I won’t be going anywhere soon.

~Chapter 19~

I hold his hand and say his name a few more times. His eyes never open. I busy myself getting a facial cloth from linen and wetting it before placing it on Ben's forehead. I suspect a doctor will be rounding soon so I didn't stray too far from the room, fearing I'll miss him. As expected, Dr. Smith comes strolling in.

Dr. Smith greets me, "Meadow, how nice to see you."

"I was away," I try explaining even though he hasn't asked yet. "What happened?"

"From what I was told, he was found unconscious in bed by a friend. The friend called an ambulance and we received him in Emergency, febrile and dehydrated. We noticed his infected Hickman site when we were about to bolus him with intravenous fluids. We started him on Metronidazole and Ciprofloxacin immediately."

"We did emergency surgery to remove the Hickman and gave him three units of blood since he's been here."

"Has he come to?"

"Not yet."

"Will he?"

"I hope so Meadow, but you should prepare yourself for the worst just in case, if he doesn't improve over the next forty-eight hours this could be his time."

Tears start coming, the doctor heads for the door, "I'll give you some time alone, do you have any questions?"

"None that I want answered," fearing the rest of his answers will be as dismal as the one he just gave me.

When the door closes behind him, I pull a chair up to Ben's bed and hold his hand while I silently cry for him, and myself.

The nurse comes in shortly after to take his temperature and do his blood pressure. She asks me if I want to leave the room so she can give him Tylenol, but I insist on staying. I want to help.

I assist her to roll him over so she can deposit the Tylenol suppository into his anal cavity because he isn't conscious enough to swallow.

Then she proceeds giving him a sponge bath and changes his gown. I help her to do all of it. I start crying as we wash him. She looks at me empathetically, "Are you going to be okay?" she asks.

"What if doesn't wake up? What if this is it?" I know she doesn't have the answers but I ask anyway.

"Don't ever lose hope! He hears everything you're saying." I know she's right, but he looks so vulnerable, and I understand the severity of his condition too well. He has taken a turn and there's a good chance he won't survive this.

The girls come back at dinner time with fresh clothes for me. I go to the bathroom and change. Diamond hands me a bag, "We brought you some food, and your phone charger."

"You didn't need to," I tell her. "I've been eating Ben's, and I haven't even looked at my phone."

Diamond says, "You look terrible Meadow. We wrote your name on the food; I'll go put it in the fridge. Have you spoken with the doctor?"

"Yes."

"When I get back I want you to tell me what they said?" She asks.

She leaves the room carrying a bunch of Tupperware and Georgia comes over to give me a hug, and doesn't let go. I feel her body move and I can tell she's crying.

"Sure Diamond, thanks."

When Diamond gets back, I tell her and Georgia, everything the doctor told me. They're speechless. Diamond's rough exterior begins to crumble when I see a hint of a tear forming in her eyes. She's not as hard ass'ed as I pegged her. I really broke down when I see Diamond cry, she doesn't DO tears, until now.

They stay for an hour trying to make small talk to help me but it doesn't work, each of us tear up while Ben lays comatose next to us.

"Diamond, did you see Eric since you've been back?" I ask.

"Ya, when we got back to the apartment, there was a bouquet of flowers waiting outside our door from him. He's taking me out tonight."

I look at Georgia, "How about you, any plans?"

Georgia rolls her eyes, "Liam's angry that we spent two nights there. He thinks I cheated on him, you know, one last fling before getting married. He's coming to the apartment to 'talk'".

I looked at her and smile, "You did fuck around on him!"

Georgia plays innocent, "I don't know what you're talking about, harmless kissing near the bathroom doesn't constitute as a 'fling'".

"It was much more than that, wasn't it Diamond?"

She looks over at me acting just as innocently as Georgia is, “That’s all I saw.”

I smile at them, “Well, I saw a shitload more than that around six in the morning.”

Unimaginably shocked Diamond calls me out on it, “Voyeur!”

I laugh for the first time since I got back, “I couldn’t take my eyes off you guys!”

Georgia giggles, “Why didn’t you join?”

I cry answering her, “Because I’m too much in love with Ben.” My crying turns to sobs, which turns into whales. The girls just hold me until visiting hours are over. I grab a stretcher and sheets from the hallway and make it up to sleep next to him. I stare at his chest rising and falling.

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The next morning Ben’s in the same condition. The nurse does vitals, and finds out he’s still febrile and his blood pressure is dropping. I help her give him another suppository. She routinely hangs his antibiotics, still hoping for a miraculous turnaround. I eat his meals, even though I don’t have much of an appetite.

The doctor comes in, solemn, “The antibiotics should already be helping him,” I get the impression he’s losing hope for Ben. I try to busy myself cleaning the room, opening the curtains. I even go down to the gift shop to buy flowers to brighten up the place.

We lay him on his side using pillows to prop him up and there’s just enough room for me to squeeze in next to him. I wrap my arm around his chest and drift off to the rhythmic noise of his breathing. There’s a tap at the door, but we aren’t expecting anyone. I call out, “Come in!” Its mom and dad at the door, I haven’t seen them in ages, since before the charity event, “Diamond called,” my mom explains. I clamber out of bed and they rush over to my side to hug me, “We’re so sorry Honey.” They’re being nice which makes me cry. They don’t like me being with him but they’re here.

Dad stokes my hair while my mother holds me, “If you need anything, anything at all.”

Mom reassures me, “I’ll talk to Chase about needing time off. He’ll be okay with it, I’m sure.” It was the first time they’ve seen me since I cut my hair but they don’t mention it. Too much is going on to bother.

I cry so hard I crumble to the floor, mom can’t hold me up. Dad picks me up off the floor and lays me back in Ben’s bed. Mom strokes my hair until I fell asleep and they sneak out, leaving us alone again.

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My phone chirps with a message from Diamond, she says she's with Eric downstairs in the Emergency department; they want to come up and see me. I cover Ben with a sheet and then brush my teeth and hair.

Diamond is wearing black and is dressed conservatively, it isn't like her. She has her hair tied back in a ponytail and he has his arm around her waist but I sense tension between them. They've been fighting.

She opens her purse and pulls out an envelope, "I promised Ben I would give this to you." She hands it to me. It's in Ben's handwriting.

Dear Meadow,

If Diamond gives you this letter then my time is nearing its end.

Meadow, my wish is to not be resuscitated. I appoint you as my substitute decision maker when I lose my capacity to make decisions.

Please don't sit around and watch me die when you can be out there living life to its fullest for both of us. Remember how much I love you and try not to cry over me.

Marry him, Meadow. You deserve to be loved the way he loves you. My soul will never rest thinking you're alone.

Thank you for giving me reason to live. Your love and courage gave me the strength I needed in my weakest hours.

Loving you forever,

Ben

Diamond wipes the continuous tears that are falling from her eyes. Her voice is broken, “I’m so sorry, but I promised him I would take you from his death bed. I can’t go back on it. Please say good-bye. We’ll be waiting for you outside.”

I have no energy left, I throw my upper body across his chest and sob so loud, Diamond can hear me all the way down the hallway.

Eric comes back in the room and tears my body from his. My heart rips open and I scream at the top of my lungs, “No!” I cry struggling to free myself from his arms. I try running back to Ben but Eric’s grip tightens as he carries me from the room. They bring me whaling in Eric’s arms to the emergency department where they are able to sedate me.

## ~Chapter 20~

The next several days Georgia and Diamond try putting me back together again, but the pieces left behind are too badly severed. I lay broken in my bed with the lights off sleeping continuously; when I'm not sleeping I cry myself back to sleep. I refuse to eat or shower, and they begin losing their patience with me.

Ben comes back to me in my dreams. I feel the warmth of his skin, his light touch, and the smell of his fragrant cologne. They're such vivid dreams that whenever I wake up, I'm shocked to realize they aren't real and he isn't next to me, it makes me cry.

In this one particular dream, he's at the wedding, my wedding. He's sitting in the back row. His long black shiny hair falling past his shoulders blending into his black suit. He's healthy, because his skin glows. His blue eyes are smiling at me, waiting.

I leave Danny, lifting the front of my wedding gown and begin sprinting to the back of the church, where Ben is. When I get there, I throw my arms around him, and he disappears. I find myself waking up embracing yours truly, myself, and then I begin sobbing hysterically all over again.

My dreams of him are my only respite for the times I'm awake. Whenever reality hits after a dream, it feels like the wound is being reopened, fresh.

My dreams with him are always happy, and I want more of them. When I open my eyes I feel the sheets next to me hoping he'll be there, but instead, they are always cold and empty. The pain of his loss comes flooding back to me.

The door to my room opens and a stream of light shines in framing Diamond's figure. She closes the door behind her and sits next to me on the bed, "Listen Meadow, we get it, we can't imagine your pain, and we never in a million years want to experience it for ourselves."

"Your parents keep calling me for updates and I never have anything good to tell them. They're so worried about you Meadow, they're beside themselves. You need to call them and tell them you're going to be okay, or at least let me do it without lying to them for you."

“You promised Ben that you would live your life to the fullest, and go ahead and marry Danny. Are you going to break that promise? You know you’re going to be seeing Danny tomorrow don’t you?”

My voice is hoarse, “The thought of being with someone else makes me sick, I just want Ben back.”

“I know,” Diamond reassures, “Ben’s not here. Georgia is SUPPOSED to be getting married to Asshole this Saturday. You are going to have to at least pretend to be happy for her, or you’ll ruin her wedding day.”

“I can’t even tell you how much just looking at you in this state is breaking both our hearts. I’m begging you, to pull yourself back together for Ben, Georgia, me, Danny, your parents, and most importantly yourself, and we are leaving TOMORROW!”

It takes everything in me to get off the bed and go to the bathroom to pee. Diamond follows in close pursuit. When I reach the bathroom door I close it in her face, separating us.

When I return, I find her parked on the couch in front of the television. I help myself to a glass of water and sit next to her, “I’ll go for Georgia, Ben, and you.”

She takes me in her arms and begins stroking my hair, “I’m so sad for you Meadow, so worried and so sad.”

“I’ll be okay,” I reassure her, but who am I kidding.

I get up to turn the light on in my bedroom and started packing for Acapulco.

~~~~~

The plane lands Friday afternoon, which gives Diamond and Georgia a day to prepare for the wedding. They walk to the front desk of the resort and check in bringing me a swipe card for my room. Diamond hands me the card, “We’ll walk you to your room, but after that we have to get ready for the wedding.”

She takes my hand the way Ben always did, leading me to my room, while Georgia pushes the luggage rack. She takes the card from my hands and deposits it into the slot until the green light flickers and the click noise occurs.

Diamond opens the door to my room. There is two queen beds and Danny sitting on a chair by the window, waiting for me.

He doesn’t move. He looks up at Diamond as she closes the door leaving me alone with him. His dark hair is cut short, dressed to the nines, but his eyes betray him.

I know he’s been waiting a long time to confront me, and I owe him this. I take the other chair and wait for him to address me, “I forgot you cut your hair.” He comments.

“For charity,” I explain.

“For Ben,” he corrects.

He rises and circles me before looking me square in the eyes again. He reaches down to grab a cigarette from a pack lying on the table next to him and lights it, “Do you want one?”

I shake my head refusing.

“Why tell me about Ben when I’m in Kenya, thousands of miles away from you? You left me stewing in it for weeks.”

“Sorry.”

“Eric told me you had to be torn from his chest, is that true?”

The vivid memory comes flooding back and I started crying, “Yes.”

“Where you in love with him Meadow?”

I can’t stop myself from weeping, “Yes,” I admit.

“Did you, with him?”

“Did I what with him?”

“YOU KNOW!” He yells. “DID YOU FUCK HIM?”

“No,” I answer softly.

His voice softens at the revelation, “So you never fucked him?”

“No, I never ‘FUCKED’ him,” I answer bitterly unable to suppress my anger at his vulgarity towards Ben. “He would never ‘FUCK’ me, he only made LOVE to me,” I correct.

“While you were engaged to me?” He demands.

“Yes, while engaged to you,” I reiterate.

His open hand smashes my cheek. I take the blow stoically never imagining he would ever lay a finger on me. My skin gets hot from the slap but I don’t acknowledge his actions. I refuse to beg forgiveness for what Ben and I did together, what we had was never wrong.

“So you cheat on me and then you have the audacity to say nothing or give any further explanation?”

“Yes, that is correct, Danny.”

I turn my back to him and lay down on the bed. His slap is the first thing I felt since I lost Ben.

~Chapter 21~

Time passes and I feel the mattress dip, he joins me on the bed. “Turn over, we need to talk,” he orders. He’s propped up on his elbow facing me. The hurt in his eyes is evident.

“Was it because I left you to work?” he probes.

“No, it’s not about you.” I answer.

“It has everything to do with me. You were supposed to be mine; we were getting married. Remember?”

“I will always be Ben’s whether he’s here or not. Marriage was never a priority to you so you shouldn’t be upset if it’s not a priority to me.”

“You’re wrong Meadow, I wouldn’t ask you to marry me if it wasn’t a priority to me.”

“You chose to go to Kenya knowing how much it upset me. Why do I have to keep telling you this?”

“I had every intention of marrying you when I got back.”

“Why do your intentions always trump mine? What are they now? To spend a few days with me, make sure everything is okay, and then fly back to Kenya?” I ask bitterly.

“I know everything isn’t okay, and I’m not flying back to Kenya. I’m never leaving you again. My intentions are to save what we have, even if you’re willing to throw everything away.”

“Danny, I want you to leave me now. I’m not giving you a choice and I’m not going to work on fixing what we have, because we don’t have anything anymore, whatever it was it’s gone now.”

“You’re just emotional and heart broken, you don’t mean what you’re saying, you’re lashing out.”

“The damage is irreparable. You left me, and I met someone else. I fell in love with that somebody else. There is no you anymore.”

“So that’s how you feel?”

“Yes, that’s how I feel. I’m so pissed off at BOTH of you for leaving me. I’m even more pissed off at you though, because you did it voluntarily. That was just fucking great! It took everything in me to be here. All I’ve wanted to do since I left

Ben is die. HE made me promise to keep my commitment to marry you no matter what happens. He said his soul won't rest if he knows I'm not with you, but his expectations are just too unreasonable."

"You're not thinking clearly," he criticizes.

"I've never been more clear or coherent."

He flips onto his back and stares at the ceiling. I see tears roll from his eyes.

"If you hadn't met him, would we have been okay?" he questions.

"It doesn't matter. Falling in love with Ben wasn't something I could control, and it's not something I regret. He's more than deserving of my love, he was a gift from God." I close my eyes and wish myself to sleep.

Seconds, minutes, or hours later, I'm not sure which, I open my eyes and find Danny in the same spot he was in when I close them.

There is a knock on the door. Danny gets up to get it, its Diamond. She looks over at me and then Danny, "What did you do to her?" She rushes to my bedside and touches the cheek that was slapped, "Are you okay?"

I nodded affirmatively but can't put words together for her, it isn't in me. Danny looks like more of an asshole than Liam right now, and I couldn't imagine that being possible.

"I just came to see if you guys were okay and invite you to dinner with us, what the fuck did you do to her Danny?"

Diamond starts touching my face, "How can you possibly hit her in the state she's in? She's barely touched any food or water for the last five days, we could barely get her out of bed to come here, and this is what you do to her? You broke capillaries in her face, and she's beginning to bruise, talk about kicking someone when they are down. You knew for months about her and Ben. Get the fuck over it. The whole left side of her face is swollen! You're coming with me Meadow."

"No, she's not. She's staying with me," he speaks up.

Diamond defies Danny looking at me, "It's okay Meadow, you don't have to stay with him. Let's go." She reaches for my wrist tugging it gently but I wouldn't move.

I know he shouldn't have hit me but his anger is understandable. I can definitely forgive him for not being able to control it under the circumstances. His trust was betrayed, and his pride demolished.

"There are things we still need to sort out. I'll be okay Diamond."

She gives me a final glance and I give her a reassuring look back. She reminds me what room number she's in, in case I need her.

We find ourselves alone again.

"I still love you," he says. "unconditionally, give yourself all the time you need but don't cancel our wedding. You'll learn to love me again," he resolves.

~Chapter 22~

There's a little over an hour before the wedding. I slip on my red silk summer Dior dress that Georgia picked out for me and Diamond. The dress lands above my knee and the colour is stunning I have to admit. It definitely isn't a onetime wear. I have matching three inch pumps with sexy leather straps that snaked up my calf.

My hair is too short to do much with, but I compensate by applying makeup that is vibrant and lively. Danny appears behind me in the mirror. His face is close to my neck, as if he's trying to touch me without me feeling it. I pretend not to notice, but notice, his proximity giving me goose bumps. It irks me that he can be gone for several months and he's okay with it, but when I end it with him, suddenly there's this newfound interest in me.

"Turn around," he commands. I turn to face him and catch the strong clean scent of his cologne. His eyes caress me from head to toe, giving his need for me away. "You're going to tell both our families together at dinner when we get back, everything." He orders.

He's dressed razor sharp in a black suit and dress shoes minus the tie. He leaves the top couple of buttons on his shirt open for a more casual look. I grab my bag and we leave the room in discord.

We are the last to get to the beach, with the exception of the bride and groom. The officiant is talking with Diamond and Eric. We join them in their little circle of conversation. The officiant looks up at me, "You must be Meadow and Danny? It's a pleasure to meet you."

Danny shakes his hand. "Thank you, the pleasure is ours." I nod but remain silent. He's talking like we're a couple. It feels rather uncomfortable. He is taking charge of us.

Georgia and Liam come out of the hotel. Georgia is wearing a simple white chiffon dress and Liam is dressed exactly like Danny but with a satin red cummerbund to match our dresses. Georgia's eyes express joy that I'm there. She comes to me and hugs me tight before whispering in my ear, "You look beautiful."

The bride and groom speak for a couple of seconds with the officiant before everyone takes their places. Liam and Georgia stand facing the arch. I'm on the right of Diamond and Danny is on the left of Eric.

The officiant opens his book and begins, when suddenly I notice a distant noise sounding like a helicopter in the background. The level of noise increases the further we go into the ceremony. I eye Diamond and she returns my look with her own, concern.

My intuition tells me the helicopter is here for the wedding. The only people I suspect in it; Georgia's parents, mine, or Diamond's.

The wind from the propellers can be felt. I look at Diamond, "Should we get the officiant to stop for a few minutes?" Diamond shakes her head no, but he stops coincidentally.

The wind is increasing and the sand is flying up in the air. Little mini waves are getting bigger as the chopper starts descending into the water close to the wedding party.

Nobody speaks as we wait with anticipation for the uninvited guest to present themselves. Diamond turns pale as a ghost, clearly knowing before any of us who the surprise visitor is. I can't help being suspicious that she orchestrated this surprise.

The unexpected guest who disembarks off the helicopter was none other than; Two O'clock dressed in his American Airlines uniform. This is Diamond's doing, it has to be, she can't stand Liam. He walks up to the wedding party with his ankles soaked from the water he's landed in.

He apologizes to all of us and then faces Georgia, "Can I have a word?" Georgia glances at Liam and then leaves with Two O'clock to talk far enough away so that they can't be heard.

Liam, Eric, and Danny cluster around us wanting to know what is going on. Liam looks angry enough to kill. Forgetting himself in front of the officiant he asks, "Who the fuck is he? Why does he want to talk to Georgia?"

Diamond shrugs innocently, "We met him in New York when we were buying the dress. We just had a few drinks with him. It was nothing," she explains.

Liam seethes, "For him to fly here interrupting our wedding, it has to be something." He looks at me, "Did she cheat on me with him?" I don't answer. He screams at me, "Answer!"

"Don't yell at her like that!" Danny defends me.

Liam looks at Danny confused, "She cheated on you. Why the fuck are you defending her? She's just another fucking whore!"

Danny controls his rage by averting his attention back to Georgia and Two O'clock who are returning in what appears to be our direction. Two O'clock is talking on his cell. The propellers begin spinning again. The wind picks up, the waves grow and sand starts flying around.

Pilot and Georgia run like hell towards the chopper and never turn back. It lifts from the water. Liam is about to chase after it but Danny grabs his shirt and

his fist sails into Liam's cheek, causing him to stumble back and hit the ground. Diamond and I smiled at Georgia's happy ever after.

~Chapter 23~

“Let’s go,” Danny orders, “I’m not done with you yet.” He takes my hand and then turns to Eric, “We’ll meet up for dinner around seven?”

Eric winks, “Sounds like a plan.”

Danny leads me back to our room. He sits in his chair and glares knowingly at me, “Okay, out with it, what happened in New York.”

I take the chair facing him and start fidgeting with my hands, “Why do you think there’s something to tell?”

“Out with it.”

“It was nothing, we were shopping for a dress in New York and after we were done we went out for drinks. He seemed nice enough, so we let him join our table and we talked. He had tons of hilarious and scary stories to tell us about flights he had flown, he was very interesting. To be honest with you, I couldn’t be happier Georgia left Liam. Diamond and I hated how he treated her.”

“When it got late we went back to our hotel without him. Diamond and I stayed together, Georgia had her own. I woke up early, finding myself alone, so I checked Georgia’s room and I saw Diamond sneak up on Georgia and the pilot in bed. She went down on the pilot while Georgia was still sleeping next to him. It became this really hot threesome.”

“Did the pilot fuck Diamond?”

“No, he only fucked Georgia. Believe me; I was as shocked as you are.”

“What did you do?”

“Watch.”

“The entire time?”

“For the most part.”

“Is that all you did?”

“If you’re asking did I join? No, I didn’t unless you call masturbating, joining.” He closes his eyes for a second. I can tell he’s turned on, but he’s too angry to show it.

“I’m telling Eric about Diamond so he can make his own decisions whether he wants to stay with her or not. He should know.”

“What’s it going to accomplish? The pilot is with Georgia. It didn’t mean anything. You’re just going to hurt Eric unnecessarily.”

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We stayed in the hotel for a quiet meal, just the four of us. We had almost the entire restaurant to ourselves and yet the service was still slow, it was like your average Denny’s. The inside of the restaurant looks like it’s in desperate need of a renovation with decorations dating back from the early eighties.

I have no way of warning Diamond about what Danny is going to do, because he never leaves my side. I know what he must be feeling, angry and pissed off with nothing to lose, so why won’t he tell him.

The waitress gets our coffee when Eric picks up the desert menu and says, “Liam flew back to Toronto.”

Danny glances at Eric and then glares at Diamond, “Did Diamond tell you what happened in New York City?”

Eric puts the menu down and looks at Diamond, “No, Did something happen there that I should know about?”

Danny continues, “Georgia slept with the Pilot. Meadow caught them in bed together.”

Diamond is cool the entire time, only raising her eyebrow once preparing herself in case she’s mentioned.

Danny doesn’t bring up her part, and relief floods me. He’s seen sense. If Eric found out, that could have ended their relationship.

Eric smiles back knowingly at Danny, “I knew something must have happened.”

It was our last night in Acapulco so we go our separate ways. Eric and Diamond opt for a moonlight swim, and Danny and I return to our room.

I take the chair he sat in and say, “Thanks for not saying anything; the outcome would have been disastrous.”

“I didn’t do it for you,” he says vindictively.

I walk into the bathroom to take a shower, closing the door behind me. I don’t lock it because Danny usually respects my privacy and he’s experiencing unmistakable hostility towards me. I remove my clothing and run the water in the shower to warm it. When it’s nice I step in.

My face is under the water when I sense the penetration of his stare. I turn to find his eyes riveted towards me through the shower door. They are dark, forlorn.

He’s still wearing his pants but his shirt is off. He opens the door to the shower and says to me, “Turn the shower off and come to bed. If this is our last



night together, I don't want another second of it wasted." He hands me a towel to dry myself off and leaves me alone in the bathroom.

When I'm dry, I rejoin him in the room. I take my time, his impatience increases. He waits for me in bed, wearing his briefs but nothing else. I join him not bothering to dress, I'm naked too.

His somber eyes lock on mine, "Are you sure ending it is what you want? We can push up or back the wedding, whatever you like."

I spent so many years of my life with Danny and even though I'm not in love with him anymore, I still care for him and this is sad for me. In the back of my mind, I know Ben wants me to stay with him but I can't. "I'm sure Danny, I'm sorry. I can't marry you if I'm not in love with you anymore."

"You can fall back in love with me Meadow."

"And what if I don't?"

"That's a chance I'm willing to take."

"No, Danny, I'm sorry but its over between us. I should have ended it before you left on your sabbatical knowing how much it bothered me that you didn't want to marry me until you got back. That's when I should have finished us off."

A tear falls and he quickly swipes it away before rolling onto his side, "I want to make love to you one last time," he implores.

He doesn't wait for an answer. After years of being together he knows exactly what to do. He starts rubbing his thumb gently against my labia. I close my eyes with a new set of tears finding their way down my cheeks. I never refuse Danny even though I would do anything for it to be Ben. I make myself focus on the sensation his finger is giving me. The tickling soft touch just the way I like it. I'm doing everything I can to push Ben to the back of my mind for however long this is going to take.

Our familiarity with each other however isn't enough for me to get through this. The act of Danny's finger touching me feels wrong, a betrayal towards Ben. My stomach is sick.

My body begins betraying me and I involuntarily get wet. He likes what he feels and speeds up, "I know you're not ready, but I'm going to take you now, Meadow, make you mine again."

"I'll never be yours," I insist.

He mounts me ignoring what I say, and his cock slices through my folds. My sorrow is primal and deep, he takes me torturously slow, acting like he wants it to last forever. I don't think my heart can fray more than it has, but when Danny penetrates me, he steals me from Ben. To Danny's misfortune, the pleasure comes quick and his cum starts pouring into me. Danny's sobbing, as he whispers in my ear, "I will always love you enough for both of us, Meadow."

~Chapter 24~

It feels great to be home. I stop by my parents on the way back to the apartment. I haven't seen them since the hospital and I need an update, no matter what the news they had for me is. I open their front door and call, "Mom! Dad?"

Only mom answered me, "In the kitchen Honey, your father's at work." She has her juicer on the counter mixing some sort of concoction. I didn't miss the juice that's for sure, just her company.

"Do you want one?" She asks.

"No thanks mom."

"How was the wedding?"

"It never happened."

"You're kidding, Georgia didn't marry Liam? Why?"

"She found more than just her dress in New York, she met an American Airlines pilot. He showed up in Acapulco and whisked her away from Liam. He's much nicer anyway."

"How did Liam take it?"

"I don't know, Danny and Liam got into a fight after Georgia and the Pilot took off in a helicopter."

"Are you back with Danny?" Mom asked.

"Well, Danny and I want to have you over for dinner, to talk about the wedding. Can you guys make it tonight?"

"Sure, what time?"

"Just come over to Danny's around seven."

"Great."

"Tell me about Ben mom."

She shakes her head with pity in her eyes, "We took care of everything."

Hearing the reality come from my mother, makes me feel the loss all over again.

"Did Danny come back with you to Toronto or are you alone again?"

"Mom, I was never alone before. Danny says he's not going to be returning to his sabbatical. He knows all about Ben, I told him that we're finished."

“That’s a good guy staying with you after having an affair with another man. Many wouldn’t have taken you back. Danny is a keeper. You should inform Human Resources that you are back and haven’t dropped off the face of the earth; I don’t know how long Chase is planning on keeping your job open for. If Danny’s not going back to his sabbatical, did you want to push the wedding date up? I spoke to Chase and he thinks it’s a good idea.”

“Did you hear a word I just said?”

“We’ll talk about it at dinner,” mom dismisses, sighing with relief, “No more hiccups Meadow, my heart can’t take it.”

Her last comment crossed the line, “Ben is more than a hiccup, he’s the love of my life, my soulmate.”

Mom rolls her eyes, “Honestly dear, you’re so dramatic. Ben was an affair that you happened to get caught up in.”

My mother never ceases to amaze me.

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Diamond is parked in front of the television eating a sandwich and catching up on Coronation Street. Carla had just lost Peter’s baby, and he was back on the bottle. I sit next to her and feign interest in the show. I didn’t know how Diamond is going to take my news.

She nudges me, “You okay?”

I nudge her back, “Ya, I broke up with Danny.”

Her eyes never leave the set, “Seriously? I had a feeling you would, especially after he hit you.”

“I had that coming; it’s not why I broke up with him.”

“You never have that coming, no girl does. It couldn’t work out for the two of you?”

“No, Diamond, I’d rather be alone.”

“Did you tell your parents?”

“Tonight, Danny’s inviting Chase and my parents to his apartment. We’re telling them at the same time. I told mom but she didn’t hear me.”

“What about Ben?”

“Mom said he’s gone shortly after we left for Acapulco.”

“I’m so sorry Meadow.”

“Me too Diamond.”

“Is there going to be a service for him?”

“I don’t stay long enough to find out the details. She referred to Ben as a hiccup in my relationship with Danny and I stormed off. Can you call her for me and find out?”

“Sure, I’ll text you the info.”
We hug before I leave her apartment.

~~~~~

His new two bedroom apartment is ultra-modern. I find his spare key on my key ring, so without knocking I let myself in.

“Are they both coming?” He asks me walking over to the sofa.

“They’ll be here at seven.”

“Is your dad coming?” I ask.

“Yes.”

“Was Chase disappointed that you left the sabbatical without finishing it?”

Danny smiles at me, “You have no idea.”

I dial the hospital asking for Ainsley and get put directly through to her voicemail. I leave a message saying that I’m ready to return to work whenever they need me back.

Diamond calls me with the details to Ben’s memorial.

## ~Chapter 25~

We order food from an Italian restaurant for the occasion. It was just going to be my parents and Chase, dinner for five.

The food comes minutes before seven, just enough time to scoop everything out and make it look like we had cooked it ourselves. Danny takes the wine out of the fridge and places it in silver buckets of ice. The aroma from the Italian food was quickly diffusing through the air.

I dress in a black mini-dress with matching black heels for the occasion. I make my make-up suitable for evening and when I stare at me reflection I'm pleased.

Danny is dressed formally and he cleans up really well. If I wasn't mourning over Ben, I probably would have been able to appreciate it more.

He's in black tie, his hair just cut super short and cleanly shaved. The only thing better than the smell of the food was him, he was smoking hot.

He walks around with an alpha male air to him, giving off very mixed signals. He has this longing look in his eyes but the rest of him walks around with a pompous shark like attitude that my mother always described Chase as having. I guess it is their normal, like father, like son. There is a bite in the air around him.

My parents arrive first. Mom is dressed in her most elegant chiffon outfit and Dior handbag, and dad is obviously dressed in black tie. I encourage my parents to make themselves comfortable while I pour them a glass of wine. Dad isn't seem himself since he's arrived; he is quieter than usual, less all over mom, knowing that his arch rival will be having dinner with us.

I placed glass coasters in front of them, and Danny brings out the hors d'oeuvres. There's a knock at the door. Danny answers it, "Dad, glad you could come," he says.

Chase's presence fills the doorway, then the apartment as Danny steps aside for his father to come in. He nods a cordial greeting to dad and then kisses my mother's hand ever so slowly. I can tell he likes riling up my father. Dad glares at Chase's cockiness, not even bothering to hide how smitten he is with my mother, "Enchanting, you are the only lady I know who gets more beautiful with age. I don't think its possible." Chase returns my father's glare.

Danny hands a glass of wine to Chase who takes the lone wing chair facing my parents, leaving Danny and myself to sit on the love seat.

Mom crosses her legs at her ankles and addresses Danny's father, "Shelly couldn't make it today?"

Chase answers her as if she was the only person in the room, "I thought you heard."

Mom shakes her head, "No, heard what? I lost touch with her when she took that job a few years back at Grimsby Medical."

Chase sips his wine while Danny and I take a seat on the sofa, "She had a battle with colon cancer. We wanted to keep it private so we used the transfer as a reason for her absence. She wouldn't have wanted you to worry about her. She lost the battle a little over a year ago."

Mom looks at Chase, Danny, and then me, "I'm so sorry. I really liked her. I wish I had known. Did you know Meadow?"

I check Danny's expression to see if it's okay with him for me to talk about her. He nods his approval, "I knew mom, but I was told not to say anything."

I reached for Danny's hand and give him a supportive squeeze. It must have been hard for Chase and Danny to lose Shelley. Mom always goes on about her at length.

Mom's upset that I hadn't informed her, but it wasn't my place to. If Shelley was as close to her as she thought, you would have figured Shelley would have been in touch with her personally.

"Where was she treated?" Mom asks.

"She was at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre. They did everything they could for her but it was aggressive and advanced quickly."

Mom looks like she wants to run over to Chase to console him, her eyes and gestures towards him are empathetic to a fault, its like him being widowed makes him more attractive to her. I want to remind her dad is in the room. She's ridiculous.

Dad changes the subject, "So about the wedding, will it be in September as planned?"

Danny and I look at each other at the same time; I speak up first getting off the sofa, "Let's have dinner shall we?"

Everyone gets up at the same time. I remove the silver domes off the dishes so people can begin eating. Chase takes the head of the table, mom and dad on one side, Danny and me on the other.

Once everyone helps themselves to the food, Danny looks at me expectantly, "There's no easy way to say this, so I'll just say it. The wedding is off." Dad slams his fork down, mom turns to him annoyed and Chase keeps his cool but appears slightly shocked.

“This is about that sick boy again isn’t it?” mom asks.

Chase looks at her, “What sick boy?”

Mom tries shedding light, “He’s a porter at your hospital, Ben Colby.” Chase doesn’t show any recognition after hearing his name. The hospital has hundreds of employee’s and the CEO isn’t going to know the porter’s name.

Chase glares at Danny, “Danny, why would you call the wedding off over a porter?”

Danny appears frustrated, “I didn’t call the wedding off, SHE called it off.” Now all eyes were on me.

Chase looks confused, “What does this boy have to do with you getting married to Danny?”

“I fell in love with him.” I admit.

Chase looks at mom for an explanation, “It was nothing, she just mistook her COMPASSION FOR PASSION. She loves your son; she just doesn’t realize it yet. It’s a hiccup in their relationship.” Mom is sounding pathetically desperate for me to marry Danny. “They will get back together. The kids just need time.”

“It’s more than a hiccup” I argue.

Dad watches it unfold in silence, studying mom’s reaction to the events and her interactions with Chase. He’s unimpressed to say the least.

Danny looks at me and in a low voice says, “Maybe that’s it. Maybe she’s right.”

Chase puts his drink down on the table and growls at Danny, “God damn it, I told you not to go on that sabbatical. You stupid fool. That trip cost you your future wife.”

Danny grabs his napkin off his lap and throws it down on the table. He grabs his car keys and storms out the door. Everyone looks at me expectantly waiting to see if I will run after him. I’m not all about saving the relationship. I stay behind.

Dad throws himself on the sword and offers to talk to me alone. He knows it’s what I need and the sacrifice is him leaving mom alone with Chase.

We didn’t leave the apartment; we just go into the bedroom. Dad sits at the edge of the bed and holds his arms open to me, “Come here Honey.”

I sit next to him and he places his arm on my shoulder, “Are you sure you don’t love Danny?”

I lean my head into the crook of his arm, “Yes daddy, not enough to spend the rest of my life with him, not as much as he deserves to be loved.”

“Then you do what’s right for you. Don’t listen to your mother or anyone else. I was just razzing you when I said I wanted to push you out of the nest, my door is always open to my little girl.”

My tears well up, “Thanks daddy.”

“You’re welcome and I’m sorry that your time with Ben was so short. You deserve a lifetime with him.” Dad’s reverted back to being my childhood hero. It turns out I was all wrong with him, and he has all my best interests at heart. He’s now my lifelong hero.

We leave the bedroom to find Chase has taken dad’s place on the couch, his arm is around mom and he’s whispering something into her ear. Dad catches sight of their intimacy and grumbles, “Come on Chanel, let’s go.”

Mom quickly stands and straightens her skirt before walking to the door. Dad places his hand on the small of her back guiding her out of the apartment. You can so tell she is going to hear an earful when she gets home. Dad tends to be on the possessive side, especially with her history.

Chase taunts dad by grabbing my mother’s hand, “Until we see each other again.” He takes it and kisses it with his eyes closed. If I didn’t see it play out this way, I wouldn’t believe it, grown men acting so childish and territorial. Mom is basking in the attention. She has this huge soft spot for Mr. CEO.

Dad pulls her away leaving me with Chase. He looks at me, “Are you okay Honey?”

“Yes, Dr. Hart. I’m sorry about the news.”

“It’s better to find out now, then right before the wedding. Things have a way of working themselves out. I’ll see myself out. Tell my son I said good-bye.”

I wait for Danny for over an hour, but he fails to show up. I lock up his apartment and slide my key under his door. He has become a closed chapter in my book, or so I think.



~Chapter 26~

I shower and dress in black. Diamond drives to the hospital. It's freezing cold but no snow, so the roads were good.

The chapel is on the main floor near the staffing office. We have a few minutes to kill so we grab a coffee from Tim Horton's. We sat near the entrance and sip our coffees. Sadly, I reflect back to the first time I saw Ben roll a patient out of the hospital in the wheelchair shortly before my interview. I have come so far and lived so much in such a short time.

"Meadow, Meadow, I'm talking to you."

"Sorry Diamond, I was lost in my own world, what were you saying?"

"It was nothing, what were you thinking about?"

"I was sitting right here, the first time I saw Ben. He was rolling an old man out of the hospital."

"Were you attracted to him right away?"

"Totally!"

"Are you sure you don't want to work on your relationship with Danny if for nothing else, to carry out Ben's dying wishes?"

"I don't think I can. I don't feel close to him the way I used to."

"Are you ready to go in?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

She takes my hand and we walk to the chapel together. Danny passes us in the hallway but pretends not to see us. I wonder if he is watching me or if he really needs to be at the hospital. We haven't discussed work since he came back.

We stop at the door. Diamond pulls it open and the chapel has a few porters in it. I recognize one of the porters, Ben sat with him at the Paddock before. There is a collage of photos of Ben at work and a picture of him at a Valentines-day party the hospital held, 'When Your Gone' by Avril Lavigne is playing in the background.

I walk up to the front and admire the photo placed next to a vase of flowers. The rest of the time I sit in the front row, remembering the warmth and love Ben brought into my life. Diamond sits next to me the entire time but I'm lost in memories of Ben, I hardly notice her presence. I doubt I'll ever feel okay again.

The hour passes quickly and I'm emotionally exhausted. We stop at Tim's and grab another coffee to drink while we drive back to Diamonds.

## ~Chapter 27~

Georgia texts us to meet her at the Paddock for drinks. She says she'll be alone. She wants to catch up with us.

It's almost been two weeks since we've heard from her. I'm still staying with Diamond so we took her car to the bar.

I open the big heavy wooden doors for Diamond to enter and then I follow her in. We walk passed the table that Ben sat at when he was still alive and I lament over it. I touch the spot where his drink would have laid and the chair he probably would have sat on.

Diamond watches me and says, "You're being ridiculous, stop feeling sorry for yourself, you can't bring him back, live a little. Sign up for the valentines auction, at least you'll have one date and it won't be with Danny!"

I look at her dumbfounded, "Who would pay to go out with me?" That's my mother's charity, she volunteers for it every year without fail. Heart disease is her thing, and more than likely she's involved in all the planning.

"You need to put yourself out there again Meadow. Staying cooped up at home and slugging it out at the hospital, can't be a healthy balance. Embrace being on the single market again."

"Seriously Diamond, I have no interest in meeting anyone right now."

"I'm not telling you to marry someone, just date, spend an evening with someone other than me, I'll even double date with you if it makes you feel more comfortable."

"I am spending my night with someone other than you; Georgia's coming tonight isn't she?"

"Not funny, Meadow."

As if she knows we're talking about her, Georgia pushes open the door to the Paddock. Her skin has a healthy glow and she walks with a bounce to her step. Her smile grows larger when she spots us.

The Paddock is busy, we grab the last table, the only seats left are at the bar. I glance over and think I see the back of Danny's head but without him turning, I'm not sure. He's drinking alone.

We slide Georgia's Cosmo towards her. "Thanks guys," she says grabbing the straw and stirring her drink. We look at her with anticipation, she bats her lashes at us, "What?"

"Spill," I prod.

"He's fantastic. He told me that after we left New York, he couldn't think of anything else but me. He had to come and get me; nothing was going to stop him. His coworker from American Airlines was flying the chopper. We were in the EC 155 helicopter airbus, it was surprisingly quiet, and the inside was so luxurious. It was all white leather; it had the interior seating of the most expensive luxury car you can imagine. It wasn't anything like what you see on television. It was totally tres tres!"

Diamond is getting frustrated with her attention to details, "Enough about the chopper, where did they take you?"

Georgia looks at us like her answer is painstakingly obvious, "Niagara Falls, of course!"

"Of course!" I say sarcastically.

"We knew!" Diamond teases.

"Ya, okay," Georgia cut us short. "Anyway, we stayed at Fallsview Casino for two days. We spent every waking second getting to know each other; talking about our childhood, our careers, you name it we discussed it. When we weren't doing that you can only imagine what else we were doing. I honestly never thought I would be able to walk again."

Diamond interrupts, "You were gone fourteen days, what else did you do?"

Georgia rolls her eyes and takes a sip of her drink. She looks up towards the bar, "Is that Danny? Look, he's brooding over you; you should go talk to him Meadow."

I follow her eyes, "I wasn't sure."

"You're still together aren't you?"

"No, we broke up."

"Holy Shit! He loves you. He's been sitting there brooding the entire time; I'm going over to talk to him."

"Don't you dare!" I warn. "Keep telling us what happened."

Georgia shifts in her seat, "I get wet just thinking about it!"

Diamond interrupts again, "Don't give too much information; I don't want to get nauseated."

"You just wish his dick was in you," Georgia teases.

Diamond takes a quick sip of her drink, "No argument there! He's rather hot, but go on with your story."

"We had his friend drive us to the Buffalo airport and from there Two O'clock flew us on his commercial airliner to Heathrow, where we stayed at the Hilton

located by the airport. I never knew they had such fancy hotels. Our room had its own living room with reclining chairs in front of the television.”

While Georgia takes a break and reaches for her drink this unusual glittery whitish blue light blinds me. I shield my eyes from the bright light. I stand accidentally knocking my chair to the floor. Now the entire bar is looking at me but I don’t care because this is the happiest I’ve felt in ages, only thing is, this happiness isn’t for me, it’s for Georgia. She’s wearing this massive diamond ring on her wedding finger that looks too big to be real, next to it a gold band, “You got fucking married didn’t you? You married Two O’clock!”

“Give the girl a prize,” Georgia says sarcastically. Diamond’s brain is still synapsing the information.

Over the moon for my best friend I race over to hug her, that’s when Danny turns around catching my eye. There’s an instant of sexual tension.

Diamond gets up and gives her a hug too, before returning to her seat to complain, “It would have been nice to be there. Couldn’t you have told us or something?”

“It was all so unexpected,” Georgia gushes.

I pick up the fallen chair, “Where are you going to be living?” I sit down never taking my eyes off Georgia. I’m sincerely happy for her.

“402 E 67th street NYC of all places! He lives in the Penthouse of this huge white high rise. I haven’t been there yet, but he showed me pictures, it’s gorgeous. He said that it was really close to the lounge we met at.”

I look at Georgia, “Does Two O’clock have a name?”

“He does, I love it, it’s Philip Mansbridge. So girls, you are now talking to Georgia Mansbridge! I decided against the whole hyphen thing. It’s such a glamorous name! We’ve talked about everything, don’t worry. We will fly here to see you guys whenever we can. He knows how important my relationships with you guys are! I’m going to apply to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center once I’ve settled in with him.”

Georgia’s eyes darken for a second as she looks at me, “You’re looking better, tell me what happened with you and Danny? I think Ben wanted you to end up with him.”

“I can’t go there right now. I’m not ready.”

Diamond adds, “I tried talking her into putting herself up for auctioning. It’s for a good cause and she might enjoy doing it.”

Georgia winks at me, “You have nothing to lose. It might even get your mind off Danny and Ben for a while. We promise we’ll be here for you and Philip will bid on you if you don’t get any other bids so it’s not like you’re going to suffer from embarrassment, promise me you’ll volunteer?”

I hush Georgia, “Shh, Danny might overhear you. Don’t forget he’s just over there.” I turn to Diamond, “If you do it, fuck it, so will I.”

Diamond fidgets with the straw in her drink, “What if Eric gets mad?

I hold my finger up, “It’s one harmless date for charity and Philip can bid on you if you don’t get any bids.”

“I’m not worried about getting bids,” Diamond says confidently. “Then why? Did Eric put a massive rock on your finger that we don’t know about?” I ask.

“No,” she pouts.

“Great,” I say. “We’re in it together.”

## ~Chapter 28~

The event is like no other. They booked the Crystal Grand Banquet Hall. Every time I visit mom and dad they keep going on about it. She said it was way more elegant than all the other venues they used over the years, this was five stars.

Diamond, MY MOTHER, and I sign up to be auctioned for a charity date. I have to get Diamond to pinch me when I see my mother's name on the list. Honestly, she's pushing sixty and I don't know what she's thinking joining the auction. Diamond tells me that seeing my mother's name on the list definitely isn't in my imagination and she has a distasteful expression on her face.

The prep for the event is long and arduous. Diamond says she wants to give the bidders their money's worth so we start off by going to our first of five appointments at the Belar Laser Clinic.

Diamond booked me without running it by me first so when we get there the lady calls me in, "You must be Meadow. Cindy will take you now."

"Pardon me?" I ask having no idea what she's talking about. To my knowledge, I'm there just to keep Diamond company.

Diamond glances at me casually, "Oh, I booked you in too. Its good for you," she encourages.

"What am I getting done?" I ask clueless.

"Pussy hair removal of course, what else would we come here for?"

My face gets overheated with embarrassment. I'm shocked, speechless.

"My area down there is just fine, I'll have you know."

Diamond shakes her head, "I'm sure it is, but EVERYBODY is doing this. Don't you want to make it look pretty, inviting? You don't have to do it just because you have a boyfriend, you can do it for hygiene purposes."

I know better than to argue with Diamond, she always wins. I follow Cindy into a back room where I'm treated to coffee and a snack before she does her magic. We have to follow the appointment up with several more sessions. The final session is the icing on our cakes; we have the skin just above our clits pierced with colourful butterfly rings.

The procedure hurts and the sensitivity in that area skyrockets while it's healing. When the swelling is down and it is no longer red and sore, movements

like walking up a flight of stairs will stimulate me giving me a tickling sensation. I can only imagine how easy it would be to have an orgasm with it in.

Our next step of preparation is finding the perfect dress. I go online first and find Madeline's, a boutique with beautiful dresses in Toronto. I fall in love with Jovani's picture of a formal light and dark grey dress which kisses the floor. It's very elegant and flattering. They offer a pretty Dior clutch purse to match, so now I'm ready for tomorrow's big event.

Diamond picks a black evening gown that is nearly backless. I balked at the price and the need for such an extravagant dress, but Diamond says she will find places for us to wear them again.

The big day is finally upon us, and we go to none other than Solis Salon for our hair and make-up. Their reputation precedes them as being the top salon in Toronto for several years in a row, so we keep our opinions and desires to ourselves and let the experts do what they will.

Diamond is given an angled bob and I'm given golden highlights with a sleeker more modern looking cut hardly removing any length.

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We are the last to arrive at the Crystal Grand Ballroom. The hall is full and it seems everyone has a drink with the exception of us. The lights are dimmed and there is soft music playing in the background.

We go to the bar and I order a whisky, I need it to get through the night, Diamond orders the same. With drinks in hand we go in search of Georgia and Two O'clock. They have our seats saved for us. Georgia looks like a princess in an emerald green gown with rhinestones and Philip is wearing a tux, of course.

We coach Two O'clock on how to bid for us. We have about ten minutes to spare so we catch up with each other and down our whiskies before Chase take centre stage announcing the beginning of the auction.

He asks for all the ladies being auctioned off to meet with him back stage. Diamond and I leave Philip and Georgia to join the other dozen or so ladies including my mother.

The lights come back on so we can see where we are walking and the music resumes until everything is organized. An organizer approaches us with a pen and paper and asks us to write three things about ourselves and hand it back to her. I jot down three things and wait for Diamond to finish her biography on the same size paper I was given. She makes it look hard.

The lights turn off again, and the lady who gave us the pens takes her place at the podium under the spotlight. The people in the hall begin applauding as she introduces herself. Chase disappears into the crowd.

We are told that when our names are called we are to walk centre stage and smile. The spotlight will be on us and we will be blinded so try not to walk around too much. They feared us falling off the stage. The winning bidder will escort us off stage, and we are to spend the rest of our evening with them.

Diamond and I draw numbers out of a hat, she is fourth and I'm fifth. They run out of numbers when they get to my mother, so they give her the option of either going first or last, she chooses last. Diamond and I spend a few minutes touching up our makeup and the rest of the time watching the auction from backstage.

I start feeling nervous. I look at Diamond and say, "I don't know how you manage to talk me into these things!"

She grins back at me with a smear of lipstick on her teeth, "I know what's best for you!"

I point to my mouth and she roots for her compact to get the lipstick I gestured about, "Thanks," she says. She finds the spot and wipes it off licking the whites of her teeth, "Gone?"

"Yep." The first three people range from two to four hundred dollars. When the third person walks off the stage with her date it is Diamond's turn. She steps onto the stage and there is a bunch of whistles from the audience and a few people clap. The lady speaks into the microphone, "Please help me give a warm welcome to Diamond on stage. As beautiful as her name she is in her early thirties and works as a General Practitioner who enjoys exercising at the gym and retail therapy in her spare time. Would anyone like to start the bid off at one hundred dollars?"

Her final bid is seven hundred dollars. We are so surprised. We don't see who's bidding, just find out the winner when they are on stage, Diamond's date turns out to be Ben's doctor. He is super nice, I'm sure she's going to enjoy her evening with him.

Almost nauseous with nerves, the Lady begins introducing me, "Please help me give a warm welcome to Meadow on stage." I don't receive whistles, but a large part of the audience is clapping when they see me. It's reassuring.

I walk out carefully; scared I'm going to trip over my dress. I find the X on the stage and stand on it, looking straight ahead and smiling.

The lady continues, "Meadow is a nurse practitioner in the Emergency department of the The General, when she's not helping the Emergency doctors save lives; she's participating in charity events and spending time with her best friends. Would anyone like to start the bid off at one hundred dollars?"

The light is hot and blinding so without squinting there is no way of seeing passed it. I'm literally in the dark over what is going on. I can hear people bidding and determine the direction of where it is coming from, but that is it.

There is a pause and then a bid of one hundred dollars comes from straight ahead. A person to the left calls out one hundred and fifty dollars. Two O'clock's voice calls out two-hundred dollars, guessing its him because he sounds like the direction we were sitting in before we came up to stage.

Straight ahead calls out three-hundred dollars. The person on the left calls four-hundred, A quieter voice from the far back calls five-hundred dollars. Two O'clock calls out six-hundred dollars. The far back calls seven-hundred dollars; it was gaining momentum rather than slowing down.

The bidder on the left is out. Two O'clock tries to beat out the guy in the back, eight-hundred dollars. He's reached Two O'clock's maximum bid. The guy in the back called out nine-hundred dollars. Two O'clock is still out. A new voice close to the front of the stage calls out one-thousand dollars. The voice at the back calls out twelve hundred dollars. The voice at the front calls out two-thousand dollars. The crowd hushes. The guy at the back is out.

The lady running it says, "Going once, going twice, sold for two-thousand dollars!" Everyone in the Hall claps. The lights come on and Danny stands before me. I wonder who the guy at the back was, I'll never know.

~Chapter 29~

Danny holds his hand out for me and I step off the stage. It's the best I've ever seen him clean up. His eyes are smiling over his victory. I genuinely return his smile. I try seeing who the bidder is in the back, but it's too crowded. I look over at Two O'clock who shrugs as if to say, 'I tried.' I give him a forgiving glance, letting him know it's okay that Danny won.

Danny's eyes are smouldering as they lock onto mine. He looks down at me, "We'll watch your mother."

I nod, and he pulls a chair out for me next to his own. They are already onto the sixth person. Everyone is pulling in five-hundred dollars give or take. Then it's my mother's turn, the last of the evening. I see where my father is sitting so I focus on him knowing he will be bidding.

The lady introduces my mother, "The last of the evening is well known cardiologist Chanel. Chanel, like her daughter Meadow who we saw earlier, actively participates in charity events and spends her leisure time in the garden. Would someone like to start the bidding at one hundred dollars?"

Dad calls out, "Five hundred dollars."

A deep voice across the room from dad calls out, "One-thousand dollars." There's a big hush in the hall when everyone tries to see who did the five-hundred dollar jump. It is who I guess, Dr. Chase Hart.

Dad puffs out his chest, "Two-thousand dollars!"

Now everyone is talking in hushed tones. Everyone turns to Chase with anticipation, "Five-thousand dollars."

Without hesitation dad says, "Ten-thousand".

I turn my attention away from the auction for a second to look at Danny when I hear Chases voice declare, "TWO MILLION DOLLARS." EVERYONE, and I mean EVERYONE including my mother gasps.

Dad is red under the collar as he sits quietly defeated. The lady running the auction says, "Going once, going twice, gone, for two million dollars!"

The hall breaks out into huge applause. When the lady has everyone's attention again she announces, "All the winners and their dates, please meet backstage. A volunteer will escort you to where you are to dine."

There are two dining rooms that cater to the winners of ten dates and the last two who obtained the highest donations which are my mother and I are escorted to our own personal dining rooms.

Our room is candle lit with a corner gas fireplace. The table has a bottle of champagne and is set with Flora Danica China, the most expensive in the world. The seats are plush and tan coloured to match the China. We have a personal waitress at our disposal. She informs us the dinner is going to be served soon, and the room is ours until two in the morning.

Danny pulls my chair out for me and then takes his own. His dark eyes are smouldering across the table at me. I couldn't tear mine away from his.

Being alone with him now, makes me realize that a small part of me misses him. I only vaguely remember the anger I felt towards him when deserted me to go on his sabbatical or when he slapped me across the face, it's gone now, completely dissipated.

"Have you been dating?" he asks politely.

"No," I answer, "I've been trying to put my life back together, how about you? Do you have someone special yet?"

He shakes his head, "No." He puts both elbows on the table rests his chin on his hands. "I carry a torch for one woman and she's here with me now." His eyes penetrate me. I squirm in my seat. Intense is the only way to describe him.

The waitress interrupts the moment by walking into the room and laying a basket full of warm baked bread on the table, "Can I pour the champagne?"

Chase looks up at her, "Please."

The waitress skillfully removes the cork with a loud pop noise and no mess. She pours the champagne into our glasses and excuses herself leaving us alone again. There is rejuvenated electricity in the air, it's palpable.

I cross my legs and the motion causes my ring to stimulate me. I find myself fantasizing about him exploring me with his finger tips and coming across my piercing, imagining his reaction to it. Just the thought of him finding it is getting me wet, and we haven't even been served our salad yet.

He has this charming look to him, "You look very debonair," I tell him. He gleams at the compliment.

"Where are you living now?" He asks me.

"I'm living with Diamond. Georgia moved out."

"It must feel good to finally be out of your parents' house."

"You have no idea," I grin. "I do miss them sometimes. I'm just glad I'm not going to have to go home after tonight. My father is furious for losing out to your dad, I can tell he was all red under the collar. Why did your dad do that? Does he always give that much to charities?"

“He’s in love with your mom, the way I am with you. He loved your mom even while he was married to mine, Shelley.”

“Shelley wasn’t jealous of mom?”

“No, because my mother trusted yours. She knew dad would never stray while they were together.”

“He has too much class,” I agree.

Danny’s eyes furrow, “I can’t say he’s going to be classy tonight. He bid two million dollars on her, and since my mother is gone, there’s no telling what he’ll do with yours. I think he’s hell bent on stealing her from your dad.”

“Oh my!”

His hand touches mine by accident as I reach for a piece of bread, “I’m hell bent on winning you back Meadow, I’ll do anything,” he confesses.

I can’t help being coy, “You won’t!” He is so ominous. I don’t think I’m worth going to such great lengths for. It’s obvious he’s trying really hard to get me back.

“You just saw my father bid two million dollars on your mother; you can’t honestly doubt how much I want you back.”

The waitress brakes the mood again by bringing in soup. She lays it down before us and quietly leaves the room. I blow on it lightly, “I believe you Danny, but let’s just enjoy tonight with no heavy conversations or expectations. Let’s keep it light.” I bat my eyelashes at him.

Flirting with him here, feels safe. I can’t say that the whisky and now the champagne aren’t helping the situation either. Between the new piercing tickling me and the champagne stripping me of my inhibitions, there is no telling which way the night will go.

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Dinner finishes with Chocolate Mousse Mochaccino, which is out of this world, and our night begins. He waits patiently for me to savour the last spoonful of my mousse before suggesting, “Do I take you here now or at the Ritz Carlton? I’ve got the Simcoe Suite booked.” He had this planned, even booking the suite. He must have overheard Georgia at the Paddock and is evidently willing to pay anything for this evening. He is so confident, overconfident. Hm, it’s an attractive feature.

“How do you know I want to spend more time with you?”

“I can tell.”

“Could you tell when you booked the Suite, or bid on me?”

“I hoped.”

“What’s the Simcoe Suite?”

“It’s very luxurious. Overlooks the CN Tower. There is a beautiful hot tub, living room and gorgeous King bed.”

“Or here?”

“Pinned against the table, I’ll make love to you right now.”

“If I have a choice I’ll take the suite, even though the table sounds fun. Having my mother next door with your father, is a slight turn off.”

“The suite it is.”

He doesn’t give me a second to change my mind. He drags me by the wrist to his beamer and we head straight for the hotel. He parks in the parking lot and opens my door for me like a gentlemen, waiting for me to get out of his car.

We check in under his last name at the desk and get the key pass to our room. It’s the second highest floor and everything he said the room was, it is and more. He’s really going all out with this evening.

We open the door to the suite and there is a sofa, two chairs around a square table that resembles a wrapped present. The curtain is open and we can see the CN tower with all its lights, so phallic in stature. I take a seat on the sofa and he joins me.

“Don’t think, just surrender to me,” he orders. His mouth covers mine. My eyes close so I could concentrate on his kiss. He pushes me into the couch so my back is against it. He gives me short rhythmic kisses prepping me for the entry of his tongue. He makes me want more, my lips work his open and I thrust my tongue into his mouth. He moans in response. I start throbbing down there and my piercing is making me lustful for him. I want to rub against him but the dress is in the way.

I can taste the champagne, the mousse, but most of all I can taste him and it is so good, I just want more. I lean into him while we continue to kiss and I feel his hand clutch my zipper and pull it down. My back is open to the couch now. He pulls away from me and orders me to stand. I stand so he can remove my dress. I step out of it and now I’m only wearing my bra and panties.

I slide his jacket off his shoulders and let it fall to the ground. I then begin unbuttoning his shirt while he stares into my eyes. It too slides off his shoulders falling to the ground. I start working on his pants noticing his briefs. It’s the first time in the suite I think of Ben, he would have been commando and it would have been so hot. I have to press on or stop. I remind myself that Ben wanted me with Danny.

I’m losing the moment, Danny can tell. His lips cover mine. He finishes undressing himself and then backs me up into the bed that is waiting for us in the next room. It is a King bed with plush blankets and rose petals scattered over it.

“You’re not ready,” he observes. “We don’t have to do anything.” He continues kissing me and I take his hand and place it on my underwear. He is right

but that damn piercing is making me so needy that my brain is fighting with my body, and my body is winning.

He slips his fingers underneath my underwear knowing I invited him to do it and starts exploring. He begins moaning incessantly into my mouth and barbarically tears my underwear from my body, "What have you done?" He lowers himself on the bed and looks at my pussy, "Did it hurt?"

"Yes, it did, I did it last week with Diamond," I admit. I know if I don't say it, he will wonder if I did it for Ben and I don't want to ruin our night after we've come so far.

He shoves a finger into me and then starts licking my clitoris close to the piercing, his warm breath, his hot slippery tongue. The feeling is unimaginable.

My entire body is stimulated; orgasmic convulsions I've never experienced before. My toes curl from the second he sees the piercing until now. He continues tickling me internally while he licks around the piercing. It's the most fantastic feeling, I cry out as I completely lose myself and his mouth finds mine.

True to his word, no more is expected of me, he finishes himself off while I watch completely exhausted. He plays with my piercing several more times before we both take a quick shower, and fall asleep in each other's arms.

## ~Chapter 30~

The next morning I feel around with my fingertips for that warm body I always search for night after night. My fingertips come across Danny's warm chest engaged in rhythmic breathing. It's comforting having him there.

I lightly shake his shoulder and hip, his eyes slowly open and when he sees me his lip curls up in a smile, "What?"

"Take me home," I insist. I need to know how mom and dad are doing after last night.

"I didn't do anything wrong?" he questions.

"No honestly, you didn't. I want to know if mom came home last night."

"Let me shower," he says getting up. He disappears into the bathroom and doesn't come back until he's dressed. I follow suit and take a quick shower. I have to dress in the gown I wore the night before because I don't have an overnight bag with me.

Danny grabs the pass card off the desk, does a quick scan of the room making sure we don't leave anything behind and leads us to the checkout desk.

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Both of my parent's cars are in the driveway. I stare at the house frozen in my seat and Danny asks, "What's wrong, why aren't you going in?"

"Do you want me to go with you?" he offers.

"No, it might get dad angry seeing you after what your father did last night."

"Good point, I'll wait for you in the car. Should I leave it idling?"

I shove him in the chest, "Now you're just being silly!" He grabs the back of my neck and kisses me hard. He releases me immediately after, but I have to regain composure before opening the car door.

Mom answers the door surprised to see me, she's still in her evening gown. She whispers, "It's not a good time for a visit darling. Your father's tearing a strip off me! Why aren't you with Danny?"

Dad calls out, "Is your lover at the door?"

Mom turns back to where dad's voice is coming from, "Oh, for crying out loud Nick, its Meadow. Did you want to come and check?"

Dad slams what sounds like the lid to the Tassimo one cup brewer down. I stare at mom, "What time did you get home?"

"Ten minutes ago," and with that comes a guilty smile like I've never seen before. It tells me way more than she ever plans to.

"I assume she's cheated on dad to some degree, "You didn't!" "Didn't what?" She feigns innocence.

"See my passport?" I cover, trying to protect her and dad. "I'm visiting Georgia and they ask for it when you cross the border."

"No, you can go look. We haven't touched anything in your room since you moved out."

I run passed the kitchen, "Hi dad! I'm just looking for my passport. Don't mind me," to the stairs. I hear mom paddle back to the kitchen and I hide in my room with the door open.

Dad is seething, "We've been married thirty-two years, and you don't bother calling me to tell me you're not coming home?"

"I couldn't."

"So where were you until seven-thirty this morning?"

"I was with him."

"Fucking him?"

"I won't dignify that with an answer."

"What should I think? You were gone all night!"

"After thirty-two years of marriage, you should trust me more than that."

Mom sounds offended. Now I doubt whether she slept with him or not. I don't think she would be this offended if she was guilty.

"Chase, who's madly infatuated with you, pays two million dollars to spend the night with you and you don't call or come home until the following morning, what should I be thinking?"

I decide to leave, I grab my passport and walk rather loudly down the stairs to stop the conversation in its tracks. Dad is pretending everything is okay and asks me about my date with Danny, "How was your date last night dear?"

I turn to him, "It was nice dad, the best I felt in ages."

He smiles and pets my shoulder as he walks me to the door, "Come visit under better circumstances. I'm sorry you had to heard what you heard. I don't want you to worry about your mother and I, everything always works out between us. This won't be any different, after I whip your mother's ass for staying out that is!"

I crinkle my nose at the abundance of information and head out the door to Danny who is waiting in his idling car for that quick getaway I need.

He drives me back to Diamond's shutting off the car in her parking lot, "What happened when you went inside?"

"Mom and dad were arguing in the kitchen."

"What did you hear?"

"Apparently mom didn't come home until early this morning."

"Do you think my father and her?"

"I don't know. She was quite offended when dad made the assumption that she had done something with your father. She said to him, 'After thirty-two years of marriage, you shouldn't even be questioning it.'"

He looks at me disbelievingly, "Then why didn't she come home?"

I looked at him suspiciously, "Ya, it doesn't make any sense to me either."

~Chapter 31~

Danny and I sit in the car, and he waits for me to leave, but I don't want to. I reach for the door handle and gaze back at him, "I don't want it to end now," I blurt.

"Either do I," he admits. "Why don't you go up and pack an overnight bag? You can stay at my apartment for a few days."

"Sure!" I head up, Diamond is there.

"Wow," she exclaims, "Where, where you all night?"

I smile and continue walking to my room. She of course follows me, "Well? Tell me everything!"

"He's waiting downstairs for me. I have to go. We'll talk soon, promise.."

"I have office tomorrow!" she complains.

"I'll text you! I want to hear about your night with Dr. Smith too. You know he was Ben's doctor don't you? Is Georgia still here?"

"Yes, he spoke highly of Ben, Georgia went home after the auction."

"Okay, get out! I have to change," I order.

Pretending to be offended, she turns to leave while I pick something casual to wear and pack a bag. I say, "Bye" as I leave the apartment.

She calls out just as I'm about to close the door behind me, "Text me!"

Danny is waiting for me outside of his car smoking a cigarette. He sees me coming and pulls his pack out offering me one, I take one and he flicks his bic, so I can light mine. I take a deep drag and blew O-rings enjoying the sense of relaxation it seems to bring me.

I take another drag and don't bother exhaling, I just talk and the smoke comes out with each word, "I'm starving, can we go for breakfast first?"

He takes the last drag of his cigarette and flicks it far away from his car, "So you want a breakfast of champions or a real breakfast?"

"I need nutrition."

"McDonalds or would you like to go back to the hotel, check in for another night and eat at the Toca restaurant?"

"I only brought casual clothes, so McDonalds sounds okay this morning."

He takes me back to his place where we laze around on his sofa watching television while I text Diamond.

Meadow: R U there?

Diamond: Totally, waiting 4 U to text me!

Meadow: Sorry, had 2 eat 1st, starved!

Diamond: From fucking all night?

Meadow: No!

Diamond: What happened last night? Did U have fun? What did U guys do?

Meadow: We watched the rest of the auction. Then we had dinner, he took me 2 a hotel (The Ritz Carlton)!

Diamond: Slow down! 1st of all, why weren't U in our dining room?

Meadow: Mom & I pulled in the most \$\$, so they brought us 2 private rooms.

Diamond: Not fair! So dinner must have been friendly with him if U went 2 a hotel after, or did U feel like U had 2?

Meadow: I wanted 2.

Diamond: What did U do in the hotel room?

Meadow: We did just a bit of oral. He didn't push me 2 do >.

Diamond: I bet it was amazing since the piercing!

She answers her own question, but we have too much to write about to call her out on it.

Meadow: Yes, it was actually.

Diamond: Was he surprised with U'r piercing?

Meadow: Happily, he <3 it. I couldn't get his tongue or fingers away from my snatch all night unless he was sleeping.

Diamond: R U going 2 get back 2gether with him?

Meadow: I don't know, it seems 2B looking that way.

Diamond: Nice, can't wait 2 tell Eric. He'll be happy. MayB U will get married in Sep after all!

Meadow: OMG we had 1 date. Don't tell Eric. He'll talk 2 Danny, Danny will get his hopes up & it might turn in2 a mess.

Diamond: Don't worry, promise.

Meadow: How was U'r date with Dr. Smith?

Diamond: A M A Z I N G!!!

Meadow: U didn't?

Diamond: 5 X's! The man has stamina!

Meadow: Eric!

Diamond: I know, :-() what should I do?

Meadow: You're going to break his <3.

Diamond: I feel bad, but I don't C a ring on my finger, & he's had ample chances 2 propose.

Meadow: Did Ben's doctor ask U out again?

Diamond: Yes, I started talking about visiting Georgia & he said he wants 2 come.

Meadow: R U going 2 break it off with Eric?

Diamond: Not until 1 of them proposes. Don't make me feel bad about this Meadow. Not every1 can B dedicated like U R.

Meadow: No, actually I like U'r attitude. Did U C what mom sold 4?

Diamond: OMG did I ever! No offence 2 UR mother but I was shocked. I thought UR dad would have won.

Meadow: Me 2

Diamond: Have U seen her since the auction?

Meadow: She didn't go home that night.

Danny looks at me annoyed, "Are you almost done?"

"Almost," I say, barely looking up at him.

Diamond: Do U think she cheated on your dad?

Meadow: That's the 2 Million \$? She denied it 2 dad, but why didn't she come home then?

Diamond: Why didn't she?

Meadow: You know!

Diamond: Oh, I know. What was she up 2 if she WASN'T sleeping with Chase?

Meadow: Exactly, who knows!

Diamond: Do U want 2 come with us 2 visit Georgia & Two O'clock?

Meadow: Would love 2 but don't know if I can get the time off. When R U going?

Diamond: Early April. Will U B needing 2 tickets?

Meadow: I don't know if I should ask him.

Diamond: What do U have 2 lose?

Meadow: True, okay, get us 2 tickets but let me make sure I can get it off.

Danny is tired of being patient. He grabs my phone away from me and throws it out of reaching distance, "I didn't say good-bye," I complain. He picks me up caveman style and carries me off to his room. He lowers me gently onto his bed.

"You're not getting me," I call out playfully. I scrambled off the opposite side of the bed and run out from his room. He's following me in close pursuit. I can feel him behind me, coming up fast. I run into the bathroom and try closing the door

behind me, but Danny is too quick and half his body is caught in the door frame. I have no choice but surrender to him as he grabs both my shoulders and kisses me passionately.

Never letting go of my shoulders, he marches me back to his room, kissing me feverishly the entire way. It is going to happen, we are going to happen. He playfully pushes me back onto his bed and rests one of his legs between mine before his full body weight covers me and I open my mouth wider to catch my breath only to have him fill it with his own.

I frantically try to get his top off while his leg rubs against my piercing. I gasp for air and I'm getting nowhere with his shirt. He pulls away for a second in efforts to help me, and I grab the top near his neck and rip it apart so all the buttons pop off all over the bed. He looks surprised by my aggression.

He reaches for the bottom of my shirt waiting for me to lift my upper body so he can pull my shirt over my head. I grab his leg and push it harder into my pussy before I start feeling around for his zipper. I have more success this time and I unzip his pants wildly pulling them down over his ass, he assists me the rest of the way and then with one rapid motion mine are off too. Fuck, he is hot when he wants to be.

We are naked and I'm desperate for him to be inside me, "Please," I grovel! "Make love to me."

He has the upper hand now, because he know I'm all hot and bothered. He likes this power and starts tormenting me with it. "Just a second, I want to have another peek at you're piercing. You don't mind do you?" I let out a breath in exasperation.

Aggressively he pulls my legs farther apart showing me who's boss and starts fingering me skillfully near the piercing. I try keeping my composure and hold it together but he knows how to get me going and my sensitivity threshold is much lower since I had it done, I don't know how much longer I can hold off for.

I try thinking of gross things picturing my parents having sex, but it isn't working, his fingers are heavenly and I'm going to combust with orgasm. I struggle to get away from him but his arms come down on me like a vice and I'm trapped.

He looks down at me shaking his head, "You are not stopping until I have my pleasure, are we clear on that?"

"Crystal," I gasp.

"I'm still hungry from breakfast," he says with a gravelly voice. "You don't mind if I have a little taste, do you?"

"Please," I urge. "Try it, you'll like it," I chuckle in the heat of the moment.

That magical tongue of his swipes my clitoris and this warm tickle sensation washes over me. His hair is way too short for me to grab so I bang my fists onto

the bed, unable to control my urges I push up to deepen his licking. I moan as his tongue starts rousing the more than 8000 nerve endings simultaneously making me call out, "Danny!"

He stops licking me knowing I'm close, and he waits. I can only feel his warm breath and I try to relax. Then he nips at it and I scream, "Holy Hell!" Halfway through the scream he rams two fingers into me making me moan, and he leaves those fingers in me as he heaves himself back up, over top of me.

"Are you ready for me?" He teases.

"Yes," I plead hysterically. I'm at his mercy. He slowly pulls his fingers out and then pushes them roughly back in, making me groan at the friction. I can feel his fingers inside me and the rest of his hand presses against my sensitive folds. I'm losing it.

He places his dick against my opening and feeling the thickness of his dry head suspended there waiting to get inside of me is making me insane with need. Sexually deprived and waiting for penetration he pins my arms down and says, "Marry me." Without waiting for an answer he begins thrusting himself deep inside me.

The satisfying initial thrust makes me call out spontaneously, "Yes!" He breaks out into a rapid rhythm of deep penetrations that I meet, while his words replay in my head and I realize what that yes means to him.

~Chapter 32~

He drops me off the following morning, and this time he really does drop me off. I run upstairs hoping to catch Diamond but she's probably at work so I resort to texting.

Meadow: Diamond, R U there?

Diamond: Busy, C U 2night.

Meadow: I'm working 2night. When's U'r lunch?

Diamond: 1:30ish

Meadow: Meet @ Starbuck's, I'll bring U food.

Diamond: I have, just meet @ Starbucks.

Meadow: OK, C U later.

I'm bursting.

Meadow: Georgia, R U there?

Georgia: Sure honey! How R U?

Meadow: Better, thx 4 asking. Did Diamond tell U what we had done 2 ourselves?

Georgia: Girl, I was the 1 who persuaded Diamond to take U'r pretty little pussies there in the 1st place. What happened after the auction?

Meadow: We had dinner & then he took me 2 a hotel.

Georgia: Did U, U know, 2gether?

Meadow: Just oral.

Georgia: Were U okay?

Meadow: Yes. I actually enjoyed his company & spent an additional night with him. That's why I'm texting U.

Georgia: R U getting together with him again?

Meadow: Apparently! He asked me 2 marry him, right B4 he shoved his cock in me.

Georgia: What did U say?

Meadow: I screamed yes out of excitement! He thought it was 2 his marriage proposal!

Georgia: Holy shit! Do U want 2 marry him?

Meadow: I don't know, this is way 2 soon. We only just started Bing 2gether again, I'm not ready 2 make any major decisions @ this point of my life.

Georgia: You better think long & hard, (pardon the pun) Because if you push him away now, U may never get him back.

Meadow: I know! So what should I do?

Georgia: Marry the poor mite! He <3's U.

Meadow: That's not the advice I want 2 hear!

Georgia: What do U want 2 hear? BTW, what's happening with Diamond & Eric? Is Diamond going to break up with him? She told me she fucked Ben's doctor, Dr. Smith 5X's!

Meadow: Nope she plans on dating both. She says until either of them put a ring on her finger, she can do whatever she likes.

Georgia: She has a point.

Meadow: How's Two O'clock treating U?

Georgia: Awesome, he calls me his 'Southern Bell'!

Meadow: That's great!

Georgia: R U coming to visit us when Diamond comes?

Meadow: Yes, it will B me & Danny. She's bringing the doctor; I think she wants U to meet him.

Georgia: Have U met him?

Meadow: I know him just from the office visit's Ben had with him.

Georgia: I can't believe she's not bringing Eric.

Meadow: Diamond says Ben's doctor is amazing. I think she wants Ur opinion. I got 2 run; I'm meeting Diamond @ Starbucks. She has a busy office today.

Georgia: Ok, TTYL.

Meadow: Bye.

I arrive at Starbucks on time and she is nowhere to be found. I order her a caramel macchiato and I stick to my favourite, a chai latte. I pick a table as distant from everyone as I can. She rushes in twenty minutes late looking frazzled, "Sorry, I'm super busy today, a virus is spreading in the States, and of course the news has to blow it all out of proportion, so anyone with as much as a sniffle thinks they have the D-68 virus!"

"It's okay; I got you a caramel macchiato. I didn't add sugar, I don't know if you're dieting this week or not."

Diamond shrugged, "Not, it doesn't need any though, thanks. Now, spill."

“Danny and I,”

“Shut up!” Diamond smacks my shoulder.

“I feel rushed! Okay so we are,”

“Fucking!” Diamond continues.

“Stop!” I beg, “Right before he penetrates me, he asks me to marry him, then he shoves his cock into me and out of pure excitement I scream ‘yes’ because I’m so turned on, not because I’m agreeing to marry him.”

“Oh.My.God! So now he thinks you’re marrying him again?” She asks.

“Most definitely!” I admit, “What am I going to do?”

“The little fucker is manipulative,” Diamond grins. “Do you want to marry him?”

“I can’t think in the long term about a commitment like that. Not after everything I’ve been through.”

Diamond warns, “You better start thinking long term, because if you reject him again, I think it will be over for you guys permanently. He’s not going to wait around forever.”

“What should I do?”

“Marry the manipulative fucker! It’s obvious he wants you.”

“That’s not the advice I want to hear.”

“What did you want to hear? What did Georgia tell you to do?”

“The same but she didn’t call him manipulative. She also asked what you’re going to do about Eric, if you were going to break up with him or not.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I told her what you told me you’re going to do.”

“What did she say?”

“That you make sense. She’s surprised that you are bringing the doc to her place instead of Eric.”

“I want her to meet him.”

“That’s what I told her.”

Diamond takes one last sip of her coffee and says, “I have to go.”

“Okay, see you tonight.”

“I’m working!”

“I forgot,” and with that she’s out the door.

~Chapter 33~

We meet at our place and share a limousine to the airport. It never occurs to me until today that I might feel uncomfortable being with Danny in front of Dr. Smith, he is after all, Ben's doctor. His opinion matters to me, and I feel embarrassed to be seen with Danny, so soon after Ben's death. I don't want him to judge me or think I'm the kind of woman who's weak and has to be with somebody all the time.

Danny and Dr. Smith show up together at our door. Diamond beats me answering it. Diamond gives Dr. Smith an X-rated kiss while I peck Danny on the cheek. He grabs my waist demanding a longer kiss from me. She turns to me glowing, "This is Chris! Chris I'd like you to meet my roommate Meadow and her fiancé Danny."

Mortified by her brazen introduction, I reach to shake Chris's hand, "It's a pleasure to see you again."

He nods, "How are you doing, Meadow?" He asks with concern.

"It's been rough," I admit. I don't think I'm convincing after our introductions though.

We have Danny's full attention so I elaborate before he asks, "Chris took care of Ben while he was sick."

"Oh, I didn't know. Can I see you for a minute Meadow, ALONE?" he demands.

I can't imagine what I possibly did to upset him now. I look at Chris, then Diamond, and finally to Danny, "Sure."

He grabs me by my arm and leads me to my room. "First you tell me about a threesome with Georgia's new husband Philip and Diamond, and now I have to learn through introductions that Diamond is dating someone other than my best friend Eric! Don't you think you need to explain to me what's going on with her? Does Eric know they aren't exclusive?"

"No, he has no idea that she's dating Chris. This is a new relationship. YOU'RE not going to tell him! This isn't any of our business."

"He's my best friend," Danny insists.

“If you get involved in Diamond and Eric’s business, then I’m breaking up with you. You’re turning into a meddling housewife. Eric hasn’t placed a ring on Diamond’s finger, so as far as I’m concerned she can date whomever and whenever she wants to.”

“Don’t threaten our future based on your promiscuous friend,” growls Danny. I’ve never seen him so infuriated, his jaw is tight and his eyes black. I pushed him too far and now I have to back down.

“We better go back,” I encourage. We return to find them kissing in the main room. When they hear us, they pulled apart. The tension between Danny and myself is palpable

“We better go, our limousine should be downstairs any minute,” Diamond says breaking the tension.

I lock the door behind us and we take the lift down in silence. The men are burdened with carrying the majority of the luggage while Diamond hobbles in her three inch heels that are already hurting her.

I encourage her to dress comfortably for the plane but she refused to saying Chris is going to be their. If she were flying with Eric, she wouldn’t have bothered dressing up, they were too comfortable with each other to worry about appearances.

The driver helps the men pack up the limousine’s trunk before we piling into the car. The estimated flight time to NYC is an hour and thirty-five minutes if there are no delays, so we are expecting to get there just before dinnertime.

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Philip (Two O’clock) and Georgia are waiting for us when we land. We greet each other like we’ve been apart for years. There’s a glow to Georgia I’ve never seen before. I notice Philip holding a jar of ‘Prego’ spaghetti sauce and Georgia holding an arrow pointing down to her belly. When Diamond and I notice we squeal in unison and group hug her.

Two O’clock stands proudly next her as the men congratulate him. Georgia introduces Two O’clock to Danny and Chris before he navigates us through the airport leading us to his white hummer parked in the reserved for pilot’s parking.

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Their apartment is the penthouse taking up the entire top floor of they’re building. Two O’clock gives us a grand tour before showing Danny and Chris to their rooms so they can put away our luggage while Diamond and I follow Georgia into the kitchen.

“How far along are you?” I ask.

Diamond questions suspiciously, “Was it planned?”

Georgia starts reaching in her cabinets for glasses, “We discussed having children but never thought it was going to happen THIS soon. Philip refuses to wear condoms so he usually just pulls it out and lets it dribble into his hand and smears it all over my body or sprays me with it! He’s such a dog!” She giggles. “He must have taken too long to pull out, anyway I’m only eight weeks along, I shouldn’t have told you guys this early but I had to share the news with you!”

Almost afraid to continue the conversation I courageously ask, “Are you having any symptoms?”

She places her hands on my shoulders, “I feel tired all the time, and I’m always peeing. We had no idea what the problem was until Philip broke out his nipple clamps which had me jumping through the roof. Then we knew for sure something was up.”

The men sit on the micro-fibre sofa which is strategically positioned around their 90 inch led television. Georgia calls out, “Drinks?”

Danny says, “I’ll have a beer if you have any.”

“I’ll have one too,” Chris says.

“Whisky,” Orders Two O’clock.

I open the fridge that is the size of a closet and pull out two beers while Georgia finds the whisky. Diamond digs through the fridge and pulls out two Palm Bay’s for us and then asks Georgia, “What would you like?”

“Orange juice is fine, thank you.”

We sit next to our other halves. Everyone starts scanning the movie listings on Netflix with the exception of me, who’s studying Danny. I can’t peel my eyes away from his lips. They are a natural rosy colour and plush looking. After he takes a drink of his beer they get moist and I don’t stop myself from caressing them with my finger. “Do you need me to take you into the other room,” he offers.

“Oh yes, please,” is all I have to say before he picks me up off the couch and carries me to the guest room where he lays me on the foreign bed and makes love to me. He’s so gentle and selfless.

Just as he’s about to finish and pull out, I grab his butt firmly preventing him from withdrawing. He is forced to finish inside of me which isn’t something I let him do very often. He moans softly out of the sheer pleasure of releasing himself within me.

We take turns showering before we rejoin everyone. Danny acts like nothing happens as he wraps his gorgeous lips around his half-finished beer bottle. I sit down and Diamond winks at me. I start enjoying my Palm Bay while Danny begins playing with the little hairs at the base of my neck; it feels so good it makes me shiver.

The movie finishes and the guys decided to go pick up pizza from Roberta's while we rustle up salad. Georgia obviously can't wait for them to leave; the second the door closes she's all over Diamond, "Where are you going with Chris? Does Eric know you're seeing someone else?"

"Eric's working; he has no idea I'm dating anyone but him."

"Don't you think you should tell him, before Danny does?"

"No, I'm not crazy for shit hitting fans."

Georgia looks at Diamond, "I think you should text him, he needs to know. Give him a fighting chance against lover boy. Let them know they have a little bit of healthy competition. Text him"

"Eric might leave me, my relationship with Chris is so new," she complains.

Diamond looks at me expectantly, "I'm with Georgia on this one. You're not getting any younger, and Danny's threatening to tell Eric."

Diamond looks at me shocked, "What did he say?"

"He said that Eric's his best friend and he should know that you aren't acting as though your exclusive."

"So how do you know he's not going to tell Eric?"

"I threatened our relationship if he does."

"What did he do?"

"So he's not going to tell?" Diamond confirms.

"I don't think so even though he got really mad at me. He said that I shouldn't be protecting you. You should let Eric know though. He has to realize that he can't take you for granted anymore."

Georgia giggles, "I like Chris more than Eric!"

"Which one do you like more?" I ask.

"I have a history with Eric, we're comfortable together. Chris on the other hand makes me feel beautiful and he's amazing in bed. He has great stamina, almost as much as me!"

"You need to do something; your relationships are affecting Danny and me," I plead.

The peer pressure is too much for Diamond and feeling daring, she picks up her phone, "What do I write?"

Georgia advises, "Keep it simple." Diamond starts typing out a text on her phone:

Diamond: We've never been exclusive, & now we really Rn't. I'm dating Ben's doctor, 'Chris'.

She gives the phone to Georgia who reads it, "Perfect!" Georgia hits send for Diamond. The little circle is doing it's thing when she passes the phone back to her. There is no retracting her move.

Diamond looks at Georgia, "You didn't!"

Georgia shrugs, "I did, and it was in your best interest."

The phone chirps. Diamond swears, "Fuck!" She looks at her phone. I can't help but laugh at her reaction, it hits close to home.

Georgia asks innocently, "Who is it?"

Diamond looks frustrated, "It's a co-worker, who the fuck do you think it is? It's fucking Eric!"

Georgia steps back from Diamond slightly offended; I step up trying to catch a glimpse of the screen. She turns it to me so I can read it with her.

Eric: Who is it?

Diamond: The oncologist who bid on me @ the auction.

Eric: Ben's doctor?

Diamond: Yes

Eric: How long have U been C'ing him?

Diamond: Since the auction.

Eric: How could U?

Diamond: I'm so sorry.

Diamond looks beside herself with guilt, "You shouldn't have done that Georgia! Now I have to tell him."

"He would have found out sooner or later, if not from you than Danny." Eric texts back:

Eric: We were amazing, we don't need a stupid piece of paper 2 legitimize it.

Diamond: U don't, but I do. I want a family. U've known that all along.

Eric: We need 2 talk.

Diamond: I'll B home in 4 days.

Eric: I'm flying 2 New York. Where R U staying?

Diamond: Don't! I told U he's here. U'r not going 2 change anything in 4 days.

Eric: If our relationship means anything 2 U, U will meet me 2morrow afternoon @ the main entrance of the Empire State Building @ 2pm

Diamond reads Eric's last line out loud, and we can't help it, we break out in complete hysterics. Of all times to pick, two o'clock! Whatever is going to happen its destiny!

The guys take a long time getting back, but it's still too soon. We finish making the salad just before we hear the door open but we make it look like it's been finished ages ago. We divide up the food but not surprisingly Georgia is famished and Diamond loses her appetite completely. She sits there watching everyone eat, but we can tell she's lost in deep thought.

Dinner flies by and all I can think about is Diamond's new predicament. I figure she has to come clean to Chris tonight if she is going to meet Eric in the middle of the day tomorrow. Danny and I retired to our room the same time Diamond and Chris went to theirs. I dressed in my pyjamas and get comfortable under the plush tan comforter laid out for us.

Danny wears a pair of pyjama bottoms to bed and I snuggle into the crook of his arm. He lifts my chin and starts kissing me. His lips are so soft and spongy. I'm getting heated but I'm more interested in what is going on in the next room.

I push Danny away so I can focus on what's happening. He realizes I'm trying to listen in on their conversation next door and then he stops trying to get close to me so he can hear what is going on too.

~Chapter 34~

We lay in complete silence with the lights out.

At first the voices aren't clear, but as Diamond and Chris start raising their voices at each other, we don't have to strain as hard to hear.

"Chris, I have something to tell you."

"Can we talk about it tomorrow? I have to get rest, I have a meeting with the head honcho of Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital in the morning, and I want to be my best."

"Why are you meeting with him?"

"I'm toying with the idea of relocating to New York. Wouldn't you like to live near Georgia?"

"And leave Meadow? I never knew you were considering moving out here, that's a big decision. Why wouldn't you include me in that?"

"It's early days yet and I want a job offer on the table before I come to you with the idea. It's one of the best cancer hospitals in North America. It will do so much for my career."

"What if I say I want to stay in Toronto what will you do?"

"Stay in Toronto," Chris confirms. "Is something bothering you Diamond?"

There's a long pause before I hear Diamond answer, her voice is significantly lower, "I don't know how to say this but, you're not the only person I'm seeing right now."

"I'm sure you understand that even though it's early days, I have an issue with this. How serious is your other 'relationship?' Are you in more than one other?" Chris asks. (Danny's doctor).

"Technically I am in one other, I'm not engaged or married but Eric thinks we're exclusive."

"Why tell me now Diamond?"

"Because, the girls encouraged me to be honest with him so I told him about you and now he's coming to New York tomorrow. He wants to hash things out with me."

"Do I know him?"

“He’s Danny’s best friend.”

“I’m not sharing you, so say your good-byes to him tomorrow. I don’t ever want to have another conversation like this with you again.” Then the head board begins banging against the wall relentlessly as we hear her muffled screams. We assume he’s fucking the bejesus out of her.

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The next morning I find Diamond and Georgia in the kitchen. I grab the carton of orange juice on the counter and pour myself a glass, “Where’s Two O’clock?” I ask.

“He’s going to get the BEST bagels you ever had!” Georgia brags.

“And your new man?” I ask Diamond.

“He’s interviewing at the same cancer hospital I told you about. The one I sent my application to. They haven’t called me yet.”

“I heard you telling Chris about Eric last night.” I tell Diamond.

“I had no choice. I can’t just come up with a reason to disappear and leave all of you at Two O’clock.” I almost choked on my orange juice. Georgia laughs out loud. The time of day will never have the same meaning for us even though we originally used to decipher direction.

“Can you still walk?” I venture. “Chris fucked you really hard last night judging by the sound of your headboard.”

“Barely,” Diamond complained.

Danny comes from the bathroom at the same time Two O’clock bursts through the door with warm bagels, cream cheese, and something I can’t get my nose around. We dig through the bag for our bagels and then start opening the containers of cream cheese. Unfortunately, I grab the one containing lox, a fillet of brined salmon. The putrid odour turns my stomach and I fly to the bathroom just barely getting my head into the toilet before I throw up whatever is left of last night’s dinner.

I wash up and brush my teeth, but my stomach feels raw. It’s hard to tell if it’s just the odour of the salmon that made me sick or something I ate yesterday. I think if it was something I had yesterday, I would have been sick earlier. It had to be the smell.

Danny looks at me with concern, “Are you okay?”

Two O’clock says, “What made you sick? I’ll get rid of it right away.” I point to the offending container. He grabs it and tosses it in the bin, “Gone!”

I’m embarrassed, “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. I prepared a plain bagel for you with a little bit of butter,” Danny offers.

“Thanks, but I’m not hungry.”

Diamond and Georgia glance at each and then Georgia says, “I have graval in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, Come on Meadow I’ll give you some.”

I follow her into the bathroom and she closes the door locking it behind her. She starts digging through her medicine cabinet but rather than pulling out a bottle of graval she pulls out a first response test, “Pee on this,” she orders.

“No fucking way!” I whisper, “You don’t think!” I can’t finish the words.

“We think. Just do it.”

“Okay, turn around.” She turns around and I lowered my pyjamas and pee on the stick. “What now?”

“We wait three minutes. One line means you’re not pregnant, two you are.” We recap it and vigilantly watch the clock. Its torture following the second hand. It’s the longest 180 seconds of my life. When the three minutes are up, Georgia grabs the stick without looking at it and repeats to me, “One you’re not, two you are.”

Hesitantly, I peek in the window, immediately I fill with mixed emotions. I see two, “Georgia, I am! Years ago, my mother made me swear that I would never make the same mistake she made, and I did, I swore.”

“A baby is never a mistake,” she admonishes.

“What do I tell Danny? I doubt it’s his! Do I let him believe it’s his?”

“What choice do you have, it’s not like you have any other option,” declares Georgia. We stop talking before we leave the bathroom. Georgia gives Diamond a look and now she knows. Danny is chewing on a bagel when he asks, “Did you find the graval?”

“Yes, I did, if you don’t mind, I’m going to lie down until this nausea passes.”

“Sure, call out if you need anything,” he offers kindly.

“Okay,” I go straight to the bedroom and stand before the mirror pulling up my shirt to study my body. I see the beginnings of a bump I never noticed before.

I don’t hear any hint of a noise before Danny flies through the bedroom door catching me looking at my image. It registers on his face immediately, “You’re!”

“Pregnant,” I finish. He walks up behind me and placed his hands on my bump all the while staring into my eyes through the reflection in the mirror. “Whose?” he demands, but he knows. We both do.

His sabbatical kept him away from me, and we weren’t back together long enough for me to already be showing. I just think he needs to hear me say it. “It can only be...Ben’s.”

It’s the first time I ever see Danny breakdown. Tears well up in his eyes, and at the same time he’s seething with jealousy. “I want you to bare MY fucking

children, not HIS. He manages to fuck us up, even when he's gone! It feels like I never stop paying for going on that damn sabbatical."

It's the first and only time I ever fear him. He storms off like he does in Toronto, it's becoming normal for him. He needs time alone.

~Chapter 35~

Two O'clock insists Georgia and I accompany Diamond to the Empire State Building, while the men stay behind. Diamond dresses in black and navy like she's attending a funeral. You can tell by looking at her, she's scared.

We get there with five minutes to spare. We spot Eric immediately. The devastation in his eyes can be seen from a distance. Diamond stares at him entranced. She walks slowly towards him, we follow closely behind.

I don't know which way this is going to play out but I'm rooting for Eric. Georgia taps my shoulder and points to a bench where we can sit down while Eric and Diamond talk. We watched from a distance as the two of them talk, cry, hug, and then kiss for the better part of an hour. It is hard to tell without hearing, what's happening.

Diamond comes back to us with a tear stained face, little red blotches speckle all over her forehead. She wipes her eyes, and blows her nose into a tissue she fishes out of her Coach purse, "He's so mad at me for taking up with Chris while we were together. He says our exclusiveness was assumed and that we aren't children anymore."

Georgia asked, "What did you say?"

Diamond shrugs her shoulders and pats her eyes dry with a new tissue trying to fix her eyeliner at the same time, "I told him that he's the only one that assumed exclusiveness and if he's going to take me for granted and not ask me to marry him, then he's not the guy for me."

"He doesn't want to get married or have children and he's in his thirties, he's the one who's childish. He needs to grow up."

"You go girl," I encourage, but I'm inwardly sad that their romance didn't make it. I always thought they were the most likely to get married, the Barbie and Ken couple.

We grab a hot dog off the street vendors and sit with the pigeons while we eat. I put tons of sour kraut and mustard on mine and dig my teeth into the bitterly warm hot dog moaning at its delicacy. I realize it's the first thing I ate all day. The pigeons are gutsy little birds inching their way towards us when we have food in our hands.

Georgia tells us her and Two O'clock are going to bring us to Times Square tonight. I tell her that after what happened today at the Empire State Building, I can't imagine how much more our hearts can take.

Diamond agrees, "Hallelujah girl!"

We find a salon on 5th Ave and E 34th Street. They kindly take us without an appointment as we order the works, time permitting. They lavish us with full facial makeovers and manicures. There is no time for more; we are expected back at the apartment for dinner before our big outing to Times Square.

The men prepared our dinner made. Georgia and Two O'clock are getting along splendidly. Georgia nudges Two O'clock, and he asks her, "So, how was the Empire State Building?"

Georgia's cleared her throat indicating to Two O'clock that he shouldn't have asked that question. Diamond locks eyes with Chris, "It went as expected. I broke up with him. He thinks I'm childish and that him and I were exclusive, yet he refuses to consider marriage or children."

"You are better off with me," Chris reassures. "I want everything you want. Trust me, sweetheart, okay?" He places his hand over top hers and I just know he's deeply in love with her, you can tell by the look in his eyes. He kisses her before returning his attention back to his food.

Two O'clock looks at me and Georgia, "I trust your visit to the Empire State Building was more enjoyable than Diamonds?"

I smile, "It got better once I had that delicious hot dog with; sour kraut and mustard. The facial and makeup was also relaxing." I can feel Danny's eyes on me and I turn to face him. He has a drop of gravy on his lip and unable to leave it there, I wipe it with my finger as I gaze into his saddened eyes. 'It's okay; you don't have to stay with me or father a baby that's not yours, I understand.' Suddenly his lips crash down on mine in front of everyone. The kiss is demanding and intense. Only a morsel of decorum is holding us back from tearing each other's clothes off and doing it on the table where we're all eating.

After dinner we go to our separate rooms to change for the evening. Danny dresses in a black dress suit, just a tiny more casual than black tie. I dress in a plain sweater and skirt with a leather jacket in case it gets too chilly at night. He's acting like the perfect gentleman before we leave and we avoid discussing what happened earlier.

We take a cab to Times Square and go our separate ways as couples. The plan is to meet back at T.G.I. Friday's for ten o'clock. Danny and I walk around looking in store windows and we kiss. We do way more kissing than peering into store windows. The time passes quickly and the hustle and bustle on the street almost

sweeps us away if we aren't careful. We get back just in time finding out we are the last to arrive.

At the strike of ten, Georgia nudges me and points to the giant spectacular screen. Centred on it is Danny and me! If my jaw wasn't attached to my face, it would have hit the sidewalk. I watch the screen as he drops to one knee. Time stops in time square, how ironic is that? People look at us and then up on the screen. I look down at him. He is digging in his pocket and then he pulls out this box from Tiffany's. He opens it, and inside is the most beautiful diamond ring I've ever seen.

He says to me, "I love you more than anything and everything. I promise to worship you and the baby you carry. I will love him or her as my own, because it comes from you. I will care for you and support you for the rest of my life if only you will let me. Will you do me the honour of being my wife?"

Without hesitation I throw myself at him just as he's standing up. People must have thought I was trying to tackle him. He loses his balance and begins stumbling backwards. Weight, gravity, and a whole bunch of bad things put together make him land flat on his back with me on top. "Yes," I cry, "I will marry you!" I kiss him while he's lying on the ground and a big round of applause come from all the pedestrians who are within viewing distance.

## ~Chapter 36~

I can't get Danny off his phone for the majority of the morning, he claims he's planning a nice day for us but won't tell me what we were doing or where we are going when I ask. He bites his lip trying to hold back a smile. This mischievous behaviour is starting to get me edgy.

At noon, Danny calls out to everyone, "Dress warm, its time!" Everyone scurries to their rooms with excitement with the exception of me who has no idea what we are in for. I just knew the surprise is directed to me.

I decide to wear my most comfortable pair of jogging pants and hoodie that I've had since forever, with a warm jacket over top. Danny takes one look at me and shakes his head with exasperation, "You couldn't find something a little fancier than that? How will I pick you out from the homeless people?" He teases.

I crinkle my nose at him and stubbornly continue to wear what I'm wearing. We pile into the hummer with the exception of Chris who stands in the parking lot dressed in a suit and says, "You guys go on. I'll meet up with you later. I have to go back to Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital to talk to someone."

The truck is silent for the majority of the ride. Diamond isn't herself, seeing Eric was hard for her. Georgia is antsy wondering how long it will take for Chris to get back to us, which I don't quite get. This job prospect is important for both of them and he shouldn't feel rushed if he's meeting with someone. He reassured us that he will catch up with us, and they both have their cells.

It's sunny but a bit on the chilly side. There isn't a cloud to be found in the sky. We get out of the hummer and Danny takes my hand. There are three horse drawn carriages parked at the front gate of the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. I look at Danny, "Are those for us? How romantic!" I purr.

He grins, "Right! Let's take the first one."

I chuckle, "OMG you didn't? I was just kidding."

His look is intense, "I've always wanted to go on a carriage ride with you, humour me."

"I don't have to humour you; I would love to go on a ride with you." I turn to the rest, "Are you guys going on the horse drawn carriages too?"



Diamond and Georgia chirp, “Sure!” in unison. Danny assists me and then Diamond into her carriage. Philip assists Georgia. When we’re in our individual carriages, it feels like it’s just me and Danny. He seems over the moon happy to be with me. I can’t help fretting over Diamond’s mental state right now; she has to be sad over Eric and she has to internalize it. If there’s anything I could do to lift her spirits I would, but I can’t.

Our horse drawn carriage is different from Diamonds or Georgia’s. Ours is enclosed and white like in the movies. Theirs is open to the elements, and not as fancy. I offer the pretty one to Diamond and Georgia but they insist we have it.

Danny takes the blanket that is laid across the bench seat opposite us and covers me with it. He takes my hand, the smell of his aftershave fills the buggy. He leans into me kissing me softly on the lips.

The sound of the horses hooves against the paved paths and the little bit of roughness to the ride makes me snuggle into Danny a little more. The grounds are full of beautiful tree’s that blossom in mid-April. All the trees have pretty white or pink flowers on them, it’s breathtaking.

We continued down the path to a green space where there is a small body of water and a pretty little bridge with large beautiful green trees behind it. It was so picturesque.

The spot seems popular, in the distance I can see five people standing on the small bridge. One person is taking a picture of a couple that looks like they are getting married with a witness and a priest of some sort. We are heading in their direction. I look at Danny, “We shouldn’t disturb those people, let’s tell the driver to go in a different direction.”

He can’t contain this huge smile on his face and doesn’t make any motion to stop the driver, so I lean forward about to ask him to change directions, when Danny holds me back. “Those people are waiting for us,” he informs me.

“They’re not! Who?” I ask. The people are getting a little closer now, but it’s too hard to make out their faces. I cup my hands against the window to get rid of the reflection, so I can see who is waiting. The action doesn’t improve my vision; I have to wait longer, until we get to our destination.

“Kiss me,” he orders. I look at those soft lips of his and I’m all over them, but it isn’t enough of a distraction for my mounting curiosity. I push Danny away by the chest and try to get a better look at the people on the bridge, “Oh.My.God. Its mom, dad, and Chase! Who are the two other guys?”

“The officiant and the photographer, they are here to marry us,” Danny says with excitement. He’s staring at me, waiting for my response.

My head is spinning. This is so gloriously romantic. I open the door to the carriage practically falling out of it with excitement, I call out to Georgia and Diamond, “Did you guys know?”

I can hear their laughter, and Diamond yells back, “Yes!”

The carriage can’t stop fast enough for me. I dash out of it the second it does, and hug my parents with tears blinding me the entire time. I don’t realize how much I miss them until I see them again. Chase looks proudly at Danny, shaking his hand congratulating him. I turn to Danny and push him as hard as I can in the chest, “How can you let me get married in jogging pants and a hoodie?”

“I learned a long time ago not to fight you when you have your head set on something.”

We introduce everyone to each other and now we are waiting on Chris. Diamond keeps apologizing for him, “I don’t know what’s taking him so long.”

We wait forty-five minutes before the Officiant begins to complain saying that he has another wedding to do and if Chris doesn’t arrive here in the next five minutes he will have to leave.

I look at Diamond frantically, “Text Chris.”

She rolls her eyes at me, “I did, five times, he’s not responding.”

A minute later I notice what appears to be a golf buggy in the distance driving towards us. The men in the buggy are wearing black and are dressed more formally. I glance at Diamond and then back at the buggy squinting to see better, “Is that Chris? Who’s that with him?”

Mom, Chase, and Dad turn to look. Diamond begins to answer, “That’s Chris and jeez it’s hard to tell.”

Chris stops the cart and they get out. Our eyes lock onto each other. “Ben,” I whisper.

I hear Diamond say under her breath, “What the hell?”

“Is it really you?” I ask. “Where have you been?” I turn to mom, “You told me he’s dead!”

Dad looks confused, “She what?”

I answer dad vehemently, “She told me he’s dead.”

This look of complete disillusionment washes over him, and then she looks at Chase as if to ask for help. It’s obvious they’ve collaborated.

Chase defends his actions, “We had him transferred here for the best cancer care in the country. I wanted you to marry my son!”

“Who’s we?” I ask.

I glared at Chase and demand again, “Who’s we?”

Chase responds quietly, “Your mother and I.”

I turned back to dad, “Did you know?”

He shakes his head, his face bright red with anger. Then I looked at Danny, “Did you know?”

He shakes his head but he doesn’t look angry, he looks destroyed. The officiant who’s acting like his nickers are on fire is too amused to even complain

about how late he's going to be for his next appointment after watching this spectacle.

Infuriated I ask mom, "Did you sleep with Chase on the night of the auction?"

"No," she says confidently. "We went to New York to check on your porter."

"Why?" I yell. "Why would you hurt me like that? How could you do this?"

Mom starts crying as she explains, "He wasn't right for you."

Diamond looks at Chris, "Were you in on this? Wasn't he your patient?"

He looks at Diamond before explaining to me, "I was led to believe he was dead. A nurse at his nursing station approached me to sign his certificate of death. I bumped into Ben yesterday when I went for that interview. If I hadn't gone, I never would have known he was still alive."

"Thanks for bringing him to me Chris; I'm forever in your debt." He nods warmly to me.

I turn to Danny, "I'm sorry but I need to talk with Ben before I decide what I'm going to do. Philip, can you take us somewhere private please?"

Philip kisses Georgia and says he'll be back shortly. Ben and I go with him, and we drive the golf cart to a car which brings us to the Promenade Hotel. I tell him I will see him in the morning after I talk to Ben.

We check into the hotel as husband and wife under his name. I'm shaking at this point. It's all too much for me to handle.

I sit in the chair and he sits opposite me waiting for me to ask whatever I need to ask, "You've been at the other hospital the entire time?"

His blue eyes smile at me, "Discharged two weeks ago."

"What were you doing at the hospital when Chris found you?" I'm confused.

"I had a follow-up appointment as an outpatient."

"Are you better?"

"100 percent!"

"Why didn't you come to get me, tell me you were alive?"

"Chase and your mother said you were happy, they told me you were back together with Danny and getting married."

"Were you angry that I went to New York when you were sick?"

"You didn't know how sick I was."

"You don't know how much I regret not being there with you in your darkest hour," I heave. My chest feels like its splitting open. My voice cracks and I'm sobbing as I talk. "If I could have done it all over again I would have been there. You are everything to me."

He's pinching his nose trying to stop his tears, "Who are you in love with?" he asks.

"You, Ben," I say with no hesitation.

I walk over to his chair and kneel before him fondling his face with my fingertips while his tears reluctantly begin spilling from his eyes.

“I’ve been dreaming of this exact moment, it gave me the will to live.”

I take his hand and bring him over to the king bed. He sits on the edge of it and lets me lead. He starts laughing at me. I don’t know how to react, “What the hell are you laughing at Ben?”

“I can’t believe you were going to get married in a jogging suit! Now I’ve seen everything. Remove his engagement ring.”

I dropped my head down, and slowly worked it off my finger. I continued by removing my clothing as he sits and watches. The content look on his face slowly transforms into a more serious, intense one. When the last piece of my clothing falls to the floor his hand immediately covers my bump. He pulls my abdomen softly into his face as I stroked the top of his head. “You’re having my baby,” he speaks into my skin. His warm breath heating me.

He looks down and starts fingering me, “What did you do here?” He begins kneading me absentmindedly like it’s natural, he doesn’t have to think about. It’s getting me out of control. I cry coming into his hand. It doesn’t take him more than thirty-seconds to make me come. “Oh my,” he says under his breath, “I’m going to have fun with this.” He doesn’t leave me alone all night.

## ~Chapter 37~

Liam

He was engaged to a girl named Melody, shortly after Georgia broke up with him.

One night shortly after they were engaged, he misinterpreted a hug she shared with a friend that she hadn't seen for several months. Liam started an altercation with that said friend, and was arrested for assault causing bodily harm.

Melody contacted Georgia who agreed to be flown back to Toronto to testify for the Crown.

He was forced to do six months hard time and go for anger management counselling.

Georgia

She remains happily married to Two O'clock (Philip). Her first born was a little boy (Philip Junior) who weighed nine pounds two ounces and was born naturally. Diamond and I got to witness the entire birth and we were all in tears laughing so hard when she cursed the good Lord for giving her a uterus.

Her second child's name was Emily born a short twelve months after the first. She said she wanted them close in age, but Diamond and I think it was a big surprise for her. With the birth of her second daughter, she became a stay-at-home mom and never went back to nursing.

Georgia refrained from ever using nipple clamps again.

Philip (Two O'Clock)

Philip turned out to be a: fantastic father to little Philip and Emily, husband to Georgia, and a good friend to us. He was promoted to Captain and decided to go the teaching route so he could spend more time with the kids. The majority of his career was spent in classrooms and flight simulators.

Diamond

Diamond and Danny's doctor Chris got married. They managed to get pregnant on two different occasions. The first time ended in spontaneous abortion

seven weeks into the pregnancy and the second time she was forced to deliver her baby stillborn.

With a lot of love and encouragement from Chris, Georgia, and me, she was able to accept Cassie's death. She has since adopted a little boy named Jayden.

Diamond and Chris started a clinic that provided social services and counselling for pregnant mother's diagnosed with cancer. They named their clinic after their daughter, "Cassie's Care Centre." The clinic has many heroic stories under its repertoire.

### Chris

Chris was very happily married to Diamond. He declined the prominent job opportunity offered to him at Sloan Kettering so Diamond wouldn't have to move her family practice. Devastated with the loss of his daughter, he came up with a way to carry on his daughter's name.

Chris and Ben worked out together on a regular basis at the local gym, so they could keep their strength up for the kinky sex acts that Diamond and I had them endure.

### Danny

Danny was devastated by our break-up. He told Eric that it was hard for him to live in Toronto or New York for that matter, so he chose to resume his sabbatical in Kenya.

It wasn't until the end of that sabbatical year that he met Alicia. They dated for several months before he cautiously proposed to her. They chose to move out to Vancouver, BC where the two of them continue to practice medicine and build a family.

Danny's double specialty and professionalism landed him the role of Chief of Medicine and he keeps in touch with his father Chase and Eric.

Alicia didn't wear jogging pants to her and Eric's wedding.

### Chase

Chase remained at Toronto General until his retirement. He happily accepted Alicia as his new daughter-in-law and moved out to British Columbia where he could watch his grandchildren grow up. Most ties were severed with Chanel and Nick after the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens incident with the exception that my parents were allowed to continue their signing privileges at his hospital and I think Chase managed secret visits with my mother that my father never found out about.

Danny insisted that his first daughter be named Shelly after his mother, which brought a tear to Chase's eye.

Eric

Eric (Diamonds ex-boyfriend) rebounded with a volunteer at the hospital. They started dating soon after Diamond broke up with him. They were seen kissing in dark corners of the hospital, EVERYWHERE!

Chase had no choice but suspend Eric for three months with no pay when they were caught performing sexual acts in a room close to the emergency department that happened to house the crash cart.

A patient apparently went into cardiac arrest, and when they needed to get into that room they couldn't. Security had to be paged overhead to come with the spare key. Eric was literally caught with his pants down fucking the volunteer.

It made the papers, including the picture of Eric and the volunteer who was caught. A staff member captured it on her cellphone and posted it on FB. The staff member that took the picture and posted it was also disciplined.

The patient was lucky that even with the delay, they managed to restart his heart and there were no cognitive deficits.

Chanel

Nick made her swear that she would never get involved in her daughters private life. Meadow had a hard time forgiving Chanel for her involvement, in keeping Ben away from her.

Chanel slowly accepted Ben as her son-in-law and is a phenomenal grandparent to Kennedy.

Chanel no longer put herself up for auction, Meadow suspects they meet up from time to time secretly. Meadow was able to understand the capacity of the human heart and what it was like to be in love with two very different men.

Nick

He was so shocked and devastated by what Chanel did and attempted to compensate for her actions. He helped Meadow financially and helped put Ben through college.

Dad was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Ben supported his father-in-law as if he was his own father. He took him to any and all of the chemo and radiation sessions mom couldn't bring him to, and our bond with him has never been stronger.

Luckily like Ben, Nick is also in remission. He had a prostatectomy which all but put the kibosh on many of mom and dad's unadulterated sex acts.

Ben

Ben and Meadow got married in the honeymoon capital of the world on their way back from NYC. Diamond and Georgia were at her side and he had Chris and Philip (Two O'Clock) on his. They made a pact to maintain their ties together, no matter what.

Sadly, they were too angry to invite Chanel or Chase to the ceremony, although Nick came. No matter how angry Ben was at Chanel, he never spoke of any hard feelings towards her, and he always made an attempt to please her.

Ben was the most amazing dad to Kennedy and Husband to Meadow. Although his cancer was cured, Ben had a drive to support others with the same disease.

Ben chose social work and achieved his masters. Upon graduating, he worked for Diamond and Chris in Cassie's Cancer Care Centre as a support counsellor in a time of family crises.

He became recognized in the medical community as well as the local community for his supportiveness and compassion.

In 2017 he was nominated for a Gerald Kirsh Humanitarian Award in the City of Toronto and recognized as runner up at the ceremony held in the Children's Cancer Hospital.

Meadow can't remember a time she was ever more proud of him.

Meadow

Kennedy and Ben were the loves of her life. Living with them, gave her, her happily ever after.

The End.



## MEADOW MURPHY

Meadow Murphy is proudly a Canadian author of Romance. She has written:

[What Happened in Vegas, Didn't Stay in Vegas](#)

What Happened in Vegas, Didn't Stay in Vegas Part 2

[Kiss and Cry](#)

Kiss and Cry Part 2



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