

What a cruel joke having to start my junior year in a new high school on Friday the 13th. I've never been overly superstitious, but this could certainly change that.

My first two classes aren't too bad. The rooms are so over-crowded that the other kids barely even notice there's someone new. The teachers hand me my textbooks without so much as a 'how do you do' and steam ahead with the business of crowd control for the day. That's fine by me just let me blend in. I have the early lunch period after my second class; I'll be starving by three o'clock. The campus is busy today. The football team has a home game tonight, and there's a pep rally after school. I couldn't care less. Football games are really not my thing.

I make my way across campus to the cafeteria. It's so enormous it's impossible to miss. The front and side walls are all glass, it's like a giant mirror. I catch my reflection, and I look like I'm five years younger than everyone else. I can't see in, but I feel the rumbling of the noise from inside as I approach. All I want to do is find a quiet corner so I can observe. I need to get familiar with my surroundings before I know how to behave. I watch the other girls closely. Maybe I can find a friend this year.

As I'm scanning the room, I notice the usual jock table. The football players are wearing their letter jackets, so they're easy to spot. There's a small gaggle of girls that buzz around them like a cloud of gnats. I can't help but notice a very tall boy from behind; he seems to be the nucleus of the group. His hair is brown and wavy, and just touches the top of his jacket. He's broadly built, and the other guys are all paying close attention to whatever he's saying. As I'm watching him, he slowly turns his head like he can sense that he's being stared at. I catch eyes with him for just a split second. Wow... he is *gorgeous*. I don't even bother trying to look away, because boys usually stop looking first. If I didn't know better, the look on his face seems like he's *trying* to find me. Of course, I know that's not true. A guy like that owns high school, and all the girls in it. He probably has a steady girlfriend, gorgeous, head cheerleader, sickening high school movies...Wait, is he blushing? He can't be. A guy like that doesn't blush. Maybe he's just nice. Someone was probably making fun of me and he feels bad for looking. That's got to be it. I

pack up my backpack, thankful that I brought a couple of novels from home to give me something to do, and head out of the cafeteria. That's enough embarrassment for one day.

My last class of the day is P.E., ick. I'm not exactly 'sporty'. Once the other kids get a load of my skills, I'm usually picked last for the teams. While our class is assembling, a girl comes up and introduces herself to me.

"Hi, I'm Colleen. I haven't seen you in this class before. I'm sort of new here too, just a couple of months for me. My family moved to Chicago over the summer from Wisconsin."

She seems really sweet. We're both trying to avoid the gaze of the P.E. teacher, so we pretend to help each other stretch before running. We're forced to wear awful, school assigned gray shorts and a black shirt. Doesn't do a whole lot for my already boyish looking shape. No date for the prom for me today.

The football team has already been excused early to warm up for the game tonight. They're slowly gathering on the field, and they're all staring at the girls in our class. Something in my mind forces me to look up, and I see a tall shadow coming out of the field house. I know exactly who it is. I can *feel* it. The afternoon sun is bright, and catches him in the eyes as soon as he steps onto the field. He catches me staring when his eyes adjust and he sees me. Great. Twice in one day. He abruptly stops walking in our direction like something has nailed his feet to the ground. He looks down and just as quickly turns on his heel and runs to the center of the field. Was he blushing again? He can't be hot yet he hasn't even warmed up! I stop my wayward thoughts in their tracks. Get a grip Katie. I watch him subtly, so as not to get caught looking again, as he joins the rest of the team. My hands are shaking.

My new friend Colleen and I sneak back early to the locker room to change. There's way too much activity out there for the teacher to notice our leaving. Colleen loves to talk, which is good because I don't. She lives just down the street from the school, so I agree to walk home with her. She babbles on as we walk.

"It's so great to have another girl to talk to. Some of the other girls at school haven't been very nice. I have brothers at home, so any girl time I can get is awesome! Thank you so much for agreeing to walk home with me. I owe you one."

She gives me a sideways hug. I can't see how other girls have been mean to her, I think she's one of the nicest people I've ever met. I call my mom when we get to her house, and she's thrilled I found a friend already. We feed her brothers dinner, macaroni and cheese, and decide that we'll go to the football game tonight since we're desperate to get out of the house. At least the football game we can walk to. We go to her room to have a little privacy and to freshen up before the game.

"I have so much make-up if you want to try some! My mom's sister is a make-up artist and always gives me extra make-up she has. Have you ever worn any?"

I don't want to sound too babyish, so I lie.

"Of course! I, uh... just don't have much of my own."

"Great! I love doing makeovers!"

She proceeds to dump an entire drawer of make-up on the floor, and we sit while she plays beauty salon on me. She's really good at it. She puts color after color on my lids, shakes her head, wipes down my eye and starts over. She's having a little too much fun, and I'm beginning to get nervous. She ends up using just a little blue shadow and some mascara.

"Oh my gosh! You have the most beautiful eyes! They look so blue with the make-up, and your eyelashes are to die for. Just a little shiny lip gloss and we're done!"

I look in the mirror and I can't believe it. I actually look like I belong in high school, and not the fourth grade. Thanks to Colleen, I'm excited to try out my new look tonight. I feel like I've made a friend for life.

\* \* \*

We walk down to the stadium early to get the best seats. Not to watch the game of course, but to check everyone out. Colleen doesn't know many of the

other kids either, so it's a great way to eavesdrop and find out the good gossip. We choose seats up high, behind the student section so we can watch all the drama unfold in front of us. She runs to get us some Cokes while I keep our seats. The team is suited up and out on the field. Helmets are on, but I can easily make out #15. He's the tallest player on the entire team. The back of his jersey has the name Weber on it. Mmm. A good place to start.

Colleen returns with our drinks, and I point him out to her.

"Do you know who that tall boy is? I think his last name is Weber."

She perks up.

"Jason Weber? The tall one? He lives down my street. He is so gorgeous! If I weren't so madly in love with Pete back home...why? Do you like him?"

Uh oh. She seems way too excited about this possibility. I better get her to back off now or I have a feeling I'll come to regret it.

"No, no, no. Just wondering. I think he may have been in one of my classes."

She looks deflated.

"I wouldn't think so. He's in all senior level, honors classes. He's really smart. His younger brother and my brother are in the same class and our moms have gotten to know each other. He's very focused on his classes and sports. No girlfriend, so he's eligible!"

"Sorry Colleen, not interested. Not my type."

Unfortunately, that was true. Successful and gorgeous in high school never go for the invisible type in real life, only in the movies. I just can't understand the way he looked at me though. I know a guy like that isn't shy. He certainly wasn't shy in the cafeteria around all his friends. Colleen strikes up a conversation with a girl in the crowd that she recognized from her English class. She turns back around to me and looks excited.

"Guess what! We were invited to a party after the game! Do you want to go?"

Poor thing has a look on her face like it's Christmas morning. She's been so nice to me all day that I don't have it in me to tell her I would rather die than go to one of those parties. I bite the bullet and tell her I'll go. When the game is over, we

head back to her house to freshen up. She braids my wild hair and leaves a few tendrils along my face. She touches up my sparse make-up, and then sprays me with cologne. She looks thoroughly pleased.

"Are you ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be I guess."

I've never been so nervous in my life.

It's already 11:15 by the time we walk over to the party. We hear the music thumping before we're even close. I think I might be sick...

"Colleen, I don't think I can do this. I don't know anyone, and I don't drink. What am I supposed to do?"

"Just grab a cup, no one will even know the difference. Follow my lead and we'll meet some new people. If it's unbearable, we'll go home and watch TV. Fair?"

Ugh, tenacious, I better go it's not worth the fight.

I take a deep breath as we approach. The front door is open, and people are spilling out of the packed house. We aren't even noticed as we walk up, thank God. Once we're in, a guy starts waving at Colleen. He motions for her to come over. The place is so packed; he's definitely not making it to us. He's standing with a group of guys who are clearly football players. Big and scratched up, with wet hair from post-game showers. I hear Colleen say that this boy helped coach her younger brothers' football team. She doesn't know his name, but he knows her or would like to.

It takes us forever to manage the crowd to get over to that side of the room. At my height, I'm staring at a lot of backs as we weave our way through the crowd. I walk with my head down behind her holding onto her shirt like we're in a haunted house. Someone trying to rush through the crowd bumps me, and it sends me straight into Colleen's back, headfirst. The cup I was given as soon as we walked in the door spills down my shirt and down her back. We both scream at the same time from the cold, strong smelling liquid we are now bathed in. I look up at the same time his head turns to see where the yell is coming from.

It's *HIM*.

I stare into the most beautiful blue eyes I have ever seen. I'm mesmerized. I've not yet seen him this close. His presence fills my senses; I can smell his scent in spite of the crowd. He smells so good, like fresh soap and musk. His hair is still damp from the shower, and it lies on his muscular neck just grazing the top of his jacket. His body is much more imposing up close. He's taller and more muscular than I've been able to tell from a distance. He must be a foot taller than me at least. His eyes are wide, and a strange look crosses his face when he registers mine. Why would he look at me like that? He doesn't even know me! Of course I had noticed him, every girl with a pulse would, but he looks at me like he knows me, and isn't at all pleased for the intrusion. His eyes turn down to see my dripping shirt and he mutters something under his breath and walks away into the crowd.

His friends seem confused as to what made him walk away. They shrug their shoulders, and continue their heated discussion about the game. The guy who had called Colleen over is introducing her to the others in the group. I am cemented to the ground. Too embarrassed to speak due to my wet blouse, and too shaken by what has just transpired. It all happened in a matter of moments, but I'm struck deeply by the event. All I want to do is leave. I gather up the rambling thoughts in my head, I turn and run. I maneuver the crowd like an NFL running back, never looking up. I slow down as soon as I make it out of the front door. I figure I can wait for Colleen outside; I just couldn't stay in there a minute longer. What is wrong with me? Am I that big of an annoyance that the most popular boy in school can't even stand my presence? I get out of the way just in time as a large group park their van and head inside.

The night is getting chilly, and I shiver due to my wet shirt. I want to find a quiet spot to sit and wait. As I begin to walk around the side of the house, I notice a figure leaning against the fence. There's no mistake about who it is. GREAT. I can't turn around fast enough. Hopefully he doesn't see me. I may as well just head back to Colleen's house now, I'm sure she'll understand. As I start back in the opposite direction, I feel a large hand on my shoulder. It startles me and I jump. I hear his deep voice.

"I'm sorry, I thought you may need this, it's getting cold out."

He's standing right next to me holding up his jacket, and he's trying to put it on my shoulders.

"Uh, thanks, I'm okay. I was just leaving anyway."

That's all I can get out of my mouth before it dries up. He holds my gaze. Even though it's dark I can still see his gorgeous eyes. The look on his face is considerably different than it was in the house. What changed? He holds his stance for a minute, then lowers his proffered jacket. He doesn't make a move to say anything else; he just stands immobilized like a statue. I shrug, knowing when to give up, and keep walking. I keep my head up and practically sprint to Colleen's house. Her mom and dad are in bed already, and thankfully the back door is open. I slip inside and head to Colleen's room to lie down. My head is reeling with the pounding in my ears from the party, the smell of my shirt, and the exchange between blue eyes and myself. This has officially been one of the longest days of my life, and I am so ready for it to be over. I shrug off my shirt and bra, put on an oversized tee of Colleen's and fall sound asleep on her bed. I'm awakened by a giggle when she sneaks into the room. The clock says 2:30 a.m. She pounces on me.

"Why did you leave? The party was so crowded it took Kevin and I forever to look for you! We bumped into Jason and he said you had left. You should have told me, I would have walked with you. Of course, spending so much time with Kevin wasn't bad!"

She starts giggling harder.

"He is so cute!"

"What about Pete?"

"Well, maybe some time apart wouldn't be so bad..."

Traitor. I can't believe how quickly she jumped from Pete's boat to Kevin's. Poor guy, clueless....

"Anyway, a friend from back home said that he was flirting with someone in class. Serves him right."

She's clearly nowhere near as tired as I am. I'm struggling to keep my eyes open while she pines away about Kevin. 'So cute, so nice, football player....'

"Kevin was talking to Jason when I was leaving, and I thought I heard Jason say your name."

*THAT* I hear. I shoot straight up from my half comatose state.

"WHAT? How does he know my name?"

"I don't know, but I think he was asking Kevin about you. Kevin didn't know anything of course, so Jason walked away like he was angry. Did you talk to Jason tonight?"

She looks hopeful.

"He walked away from me like I was contagious when he saw me at the party. I ran into him outside, and he offered me his jacket. I have no idea what his game is, and I'm not playing anyway. He doesn't need to do me favors because he feels sorry for me."

I feel a small lump form in my throat as I'm saying those words out-loud.

"Well, if it's any consolation, I don't think he feels sorry for you. He seemed agitated, or something. I've never seen him act like that. He's always such a pleasant guy."

I roll over to go back to sleep. This is just too much for me to handle. I don't have much experience with boys, and certainly not ones of his status. I'll just stay out of his way.

\* \* \*

I meet Colleen outside her house at eight o'clock sharp on Monday morning, and she looks as if she's going to burst. Kevin called her on Sunday, and they talked for three hours. He asked her out for the following weekend, but she doesn't know what to do about her back home boyfriend Pete.

"He's so sweet, but we've been together so long, and I think a change may be good for us both."

So much for my single friend, I'll never see her again if she and Kevin get serious. Great. I'm wallowing in my self-pity when I feel her nudge my shoulder.

"Hey look, it's Jason! He's walking with Kevin."

She runs up to them and gives Kevin a hug. I would give anything for that amount of confidence. She turns to Jason, and says something to him. I know



what's coming next; sure enough she turns and motions for me to join them. Jason says something to them, tosses a quick wave goodbye and he walks ahead, alone. She turns and gives me such a pitiful look, I feel like I'm going to burst into tears. FOR WHAT? I don't even know this guy! Yes, he's gorgeous, but there's something else. Something there... I feel an electric pulse in my gut when he's near me. I'm sure every other girl feels that as well, he *is* very easy to look at and dream.

I say goodbye to Colleen and, despite my mood, make it through my first couple of classes without crying or punching something. When the bell rings for lunch, I feel a pit in my stomach. He and I have the same lunch! How can I possibly avoid him when he's the center of this high schools universe? Then I remember there's a nice outdoor seating area behind the cafeteria. I'm thankful that I chose to bring my jacket today, because that's where I'll be eating lunch from now on. I don't want to go inside, because I know that I won't be able to help myself looking for him. I opt for some chips and a soda from the vending machine outside, and go to grab my spot for the next thirty minutes.

Thankfully, I'm alone. It's too cold today for anyone else to choose this option. This is a private area probably built with loner kids in mind, I'm sure. The back wall of the cafeteria is brick, so no one can see me. I take a deep cleansing breath and sit down ready to read my book. I really need to relax. I can't think of a worse way to start my Monday morning than with more of Mr. Personality's pouty drama towards me. Just as I'm nice and content, I hear leaves crunching behind me, and that feeling comes again. My insides start quivering before I look up.

"Is anyone joining you?"

I turn my head slowly from side to side, at least that's what my head was instructed by my brain to do, which right now feels as useful as a bowl of pudding. He sits down on the bench on the opposite side of the table. We both sit stock still in an electrified silence. He breaks first.

"My name is Jason. Jason Weber."

Um... "Hi. Katie Barnett"

"I wanted to apologize for my behavior the other night at the party. Colleen told me that you thought I was rude. I guess I was. I didn't mean to come across that way. You caught me off guard."

He says, while inspecting the table.

I remain so still I can barely tell if my heart is still beating. I'm confused. What's he trying to tell me?

"What? What does that mean?"

I say that much louder than intended. Obviously, I *had* noticed something. He's visibly uncomfortable after my mini outburst.

"I don't know how to say this without sounding crazy, but you took me by surprise. At least my reaction to you did. I feel compelled to get to know you."

Yeah, right. I hear that one everyday from gorgeous hunks.

"Look, I understand that I'm new to this school, so if someone put you up to a prank I get it. You're free, you can tell them that it worked and have a good laugh."

He looks hurt. Uh oh... this can't be happening. Does he really feel that way? It's not possible. He's the most beautiful guy in the entire school, even the teachers check him out. My reaction to him was understandable, his to me? No.

"Well, I'm sorry I disturbed you. Nice to meet you Katie."

With that, he stands up and walks back up the path. I stare dumbfounded at his back as he walks away. He doesn't return to the cafeteria to be with his friends, he heads in the opposite direction. Am I awake? Was that a dream? He seemed sincere. More than sincere, he seemed...*compelled*... just like he said. Like a force stronger than himself physically forced him to come and talk to me. Now I feel even *more* alone than I did before he sat down. Like Earth tilted just a bit, and everyone but me flew off. His eyes looked so deeply into me. I've never known a feeling like that before. I feel, *exposed*.

The bell rings loudly and jolts me out of my trancelike state. I don't know if I can make the proper synapses in my brain to make my legs work. He was only with me for a couple of minutes, which means I've been daydreaming for half an hour. I have to shake loose the euphoria surrounding me to stand and walk to my

next class. I feel a little, *off*. I'm bumping into people in the halls, and I know my body is in the chair in class, but I can't seem to process anything being said. Like I'm an alien who is floating around above and doesn't speak the language.

Thankfully, the day is almost over. Crap! I have P.E. next. I don't know what we're doing in class today, but I saw him during this class on Friday. It's possible I could melt on sight if I see him. Colleen comes bounding up to me.

"Hey! Where were you at lunch? I looked all over for you. Kevin saw that I was alone and came and sat next to me. We talked the entire time; I didn't even eat! He is so sweet. He asked me out for Saturday. Well, kind of. There's a bonfire that some kids are having at the lake, and he asked if I was going. You have to come with me!"

Before I can say anything in response, the P.E. teacher blows her whistle and tells our class to get dressed and meet in the gym. We're doing basketball today. Thankfully, that means no more accidental meetings outside on the field with Jason. I don't know how much my poor heart can take in one day. The week goes by achingly slowly. No sign of Jason at all. I've been replaying our meeting in my head, wishing he would give me another chance to not make a jerk out of myself. Trying to avoid running into him in the cafeteria, I keep to my routine of eating outside. The weather is cooperating for this time of year, so that's a good excuse.

Colleen has been mooning over Kevin every chance she gets. Lunchtime is their time together. The football game on Friday is away, and Colleen's parents are going out so she's watching her brothers. I opt to stay home and read instead, but in exchange I agree to go to the lake with her on Saturday. Kevin is meeting her there with his friends. Of course, I'm hoping this may be my second chance with Jason.

\* \* \*

Even though I'm petite, I can still work some curves if the jeans are tight enough. Mine are so snug; I have to lie down on the bed to zip them. I put my hair back in a thick ponytail, knowing that around the water it will frizz like crazy. I throw on a light blue Polo sweater and my boots. I know it'll be cold and windy so

I grab my jacket as well. A little mascara and lip-gloss, courtesy of Colleen, and I'm ready. My mom agrees to drive us, she's fallen in love with Colleen, but the real reason she's so eager is to get the chance to check out our other friends.

She drops us at the public beach entrance to Lake Michigan. The sun is going down, and we see a small group of kids on the beach. One of the girls calls out Colleen's name, and she grabs my hand to amble down to where they're sitting. Kevin is already here with two of his friends that I recognize from the party. Jason is nowhere to be seen. Even though I know she wants to go hang on him, Colleen proves to be a good friend and she stays by my side. She introduces me to the other girl, who then introduces us to two more. They all seem nice. I give her a little nudge to let her know it's okay for her to go and sit by Kevin. She takes the cue instantly, and smiles a huge smile as she walks, no *struts*, over to him. She makes me laugh.

He and his friends are trying to get the fire started before the sun goes down, and they're having trouble. They're all laughing, and he can't seem to take his eyes off of Colleen. I'm sitting with the other girls on a large tartan blanket. One of the girls, I think her name is Missy, is surveying the slowly growing crowd around the pit.

"Do you think he's coming tonight?"

Her friend rolls her eyes.

"I don't know! You need to give that one up. He doesn't date. Mr. Football doesn't waste his time, and if he did it would be with me!"

They both start laughing. I have a sinking feeling I know who they're referring to. As his image pops into my head, Missy squeals.

"Oh my God, he's here!"

My stomach drops like I'm parachuting down from the moon. I *feel* his presence again. He's walking with another guy from farther down the beach. The sun has disappeared into the sky already, making it difficult to see anything from a distance. His height is a dead giveaway. He stops when he reaches the fire pit, which they finally set ablaze. I like that I can watch him from over here without fear of being noticed. Our blanket is a few feet behind the fire, and we're shielded

by the glow of the large flames. He waves to Kevin, and then sees Colleen. As soon as he sees her, I notice his head jerk up and look around like he's searching for something. Me? Ha. I sound just like these other girls fawning over him and pretending like he would be in my reach. He's already apologized; maybe he's just trying to avoid me. Again.

I see him ask Kevin a question, and he points over to the blanket. I feel like I'll pass out on the spot. What should I say? He approaches the blanket, and I realize he's headed for the cooler of beer and soda next to us. Missy is the first to speak up.

"Hi Jason!"

He looks over our way, and I can tell he's having difficulty seeing in the dark.

"Um, hi. Sorry I can't see you, hang on."

He turns and heads in our direction. The other two girls squeal again, barf, as he approaches us. I turn ever so slightly to put my back between us. Maybe he won't notice me, and leave.

"Oh, hi Missy. Good to see you."

He is so polite. She squeaks out another 'hi' with a dry mouth. I can't be trying any harder to make myself turn into a crab and dig a home right here in the sand. He turns to head back to the fire. Whew. Just when I think I'm safe, I hear him say quietly, "Bye Katie". The girls stop what they're doing and stare at me like I've sprouted horns.

Not wishing to engage in a conversation for which I have no answers, I say, "excuse me" and stand up. I have no place to disappear. I go to the cooler and pull out a Coke. I am so grateful I brought my jacket; the temperature is really beginning to drop. I'm stuck. I don't want to go to the fire where he is, and don't want to stay with the other girls and take the inquisition. I head down the beach for a walk; it's my only option. The air is crisp and the fire smells so good. My mom isn't picking us up for another two hours yet. Maybe I can have Kevin drive Colleen home, and I can find a place to call my mom. She'll give me the third degree about

why I would want to leave early. I can handle her, but the humiliation of going back to the fire and facing him is far more difficult.

I've never been to this area of the beach before, and realize it's going to be tough to find a pay phone. I resolve to try to keep my distance until it's time to leave. I turn to walk my fourth stretch of beach, and I see someone approaching me. I'm nervous when I catch a glimpse of the fire way down the beach, and see just how far away I've meandered. As if on cue, I hear a deep voice.

"Hi Katie. I was worried about you, I thought you may have gotten lost."

It's Jason. My insides jump from scared to melting all in the exact same moment. How can I pull off calm indifference?

"Oh, hi. I didn't realize just how far down I had walked. Is Colleen ready to leave? Did she send you to find me?"

He closes the dark space between us, and I can see his face. It's dark out, but his features seem to light up in front of me.

"No, she didn't. I noticed that you hadn't come over to the fire, and when I went looking, Missy said that you had gone this way a while ago. I kept hoping that you would come and sit so we could talk."

What?

"Oh, I'm sorry. I just feel, um, a little *embarrassed* by the way I behaved the last time I saw you."

Massive understatement.

"Where have you been all week, I haven't seen you around?"

I ask with a masked coolness I in no way feel.

"I drove to school this week, and I've been busy. I've been in the library during most of my free time. Just trying to get ahead of things."

He whispers that sentence like he's thinking about something else entirely, but that's what came out instead. We stand planted in our respective spots for a few minutes, neither of us knowing what to say next. I feel his eyes dare to look up and we catch each other in our gazes. It's so dark, but the distant glow of the fire is enough. I'm transfixed. He slowly steps a few inches closer to me without breaking our visual bond. I hear him breathing, it's shallow and rapid and I know it wasn't

from the walk down the beach. I'm breathing just as erratically, and my heart is racing in my chest. My cheeks are burning with heat, I'm so glad he can't see me blushing in the dark. What's happening?

He closes in on me the slightest bit, until his face is looking straight down at me. God I wish I were taller. In an instant, he squats down and wraps both arms around my legs and hoists me up so that I'm face to face with him. He's panting now, and so am I. His eyes are all over my face, searching for something to give him a sign that this is okay. My lips let out the slightest involuntary moan, and that's all he needs. He kisses me, *hard*. His lips are all over mine begging to release and explore the kiss with him. I eagerly return his ravenous kiss with matched desire. He slowly lowers both of us down, so now I'm standing and he's kneeling in front of me.

Our lips never break apart. He locates my hair tie around my ponytail, and loosens it gently. The wind is whipping my hair around his face and he moans. Both of his hands are softly kneading my head and stroking my hair. They move to cup my face in the sweetest gesture. We aren't moving like two fumbling teenagers, but more like two lovers in a movie that reunite after years apart.

I lower myself to straddle his legs and push him down to a seating position. The muffled moans and grunts that are coming from our busy mouths are such an odd sound in the quiet darkness. My skin buzzes wherever he touches me. He treats my body with reverence like he's trying not to break me. He keeps his hands in my hair, on my face, and on my back. Never allowing them to travel anywhere else. A piercing scream breaks our connection. We both jerk our heads toward the sound, which is coming from the direction of the fire. From what I can tell, Kevin tried to throw Colleen into the freezing lake. She's up on his shoulders, laughing and screaming and loving every minute of it.

This moment gives us a chance to calm our breaths and come down from our high. Whoa. My heart is still racing; I can't seem to get it to slow down. I see a bead of sweat on his forehead.

"I'm sorry." He whispers.

NO! Please don't be sorry! I'm screaming in my head. On the outside I say calmly, "What for?"

"For losing control like that. I don't know what came over me. I've never felt like that before. I thought that if I didn't kiss you, I would go crazy. I've been feeling that way since the first time I laid eyes on you. I guess it was built up.

WHAT? Since the first time he saw ME? When??

"Oh."

Really? That's all I can spit out? He seems worried at my lack of response. I think he's assuming I must be offended. He puts his head down, as if he's ashamed. I know I have to get my voice back.

"It's okay, trust me. I was just caught by surprise, and now I'm even more surprised by your admission."

Get it out Katie...

"When did you first feel like you wanted to kiss me?"

He seems hesitant to spill, but I keep my eyes on him hoping he'll feel comfortable enough to let me in on it.

"I'm a little embarrassed to admit it. The first time I saw you was on your first day of school, last Friday."

Oh yeah, in the cafeteria when I was trying not to be obvious I was staring.

"You were outside the cafeteria looking around. Something pulled me to look out the window and I saw you. Your eyes are so beautiful, and your face...but there was something more. I don't know what exactly, that's why I've been acting so strangely around you. When I saw you at the party, I wasn't expecting you to be there, I couldn't speak. I wasn't trying to be rude, I just wanted to gather my thoughts so I walked away. When I saw you outside shivering, I couldn't stand it. I felt uncomfortable, that you were cold."

"I've spent most of my high school years avoiding the dating drama. I saw how my friends would lose their focus on the team, and I have goals and dreams. I don't want to waste my time with someone who doesn't keep my attention. You've had my attention without even knowing it since the first time I saw you. I'm really sorry if that freaks you out. I just have to be honest. When I tried talking to you



during lunch the other day, you looked like you had no interest in my being there, so I left. I tried my best to avoid seeing you until I could figure out why I feel so strongly.”

“I noticed you tonight before you even saw me. I saw your beautiful hair pulled back, but still blowing around your face in the wind. I heard your laugh, and saw your smile. If you didn’t speak to me tonight, I don’t know what I would have done.”

Oh.My.God.

I’m literally speechless. I have no words forming in my head in response to this flood of information. His thoughts flowed out of his mouth faster than I could actually process what he was trying to tell me. *HE* noticed *ME!* I thought I was the one dumb struck by *HIM*. He’s waiting for me to say something. The longer I wait, the more frustrated he seems to be getting.

I blurt out...“I noticed you too!” duh... “I mean that, I had similar feelings when I saw you. I just know that every girl around looks at you like that, so I thought you saw me as just another annoying girl you had to let down. I haven’t dated much, okay I’ve only had two dates, and one was a set up. Neither of which turned out well. I just don’t know how to respond when a boy shows interest I guess.”

His face changes from confusion to lust in rapid-fire sequence. With what I can tell seems like great restraint, he gently cups my face with both of his large hands. He leans in so that he’s only a breath away from me. His eyes are heated and his lids are low as he gazes into my face. It looks as if he’s trying to read a map of a place he’s never been before. Taking it all in, trying to learn it and commit it to memory. He inches closer and kisses me chastely on my mouth like he’s trying to apologize for being so forceful before. We sit and hold this soft kiss for ages. I feel like the earth could swallow us whole, and I wouldn’t care. I never want this feeling of intimacy with him to end. It feels more natural to me than breathing.

Our friends call out for both of us. They can’t see us down the beach, and the fire’s been snubbed out. I pull back from him slowly and notice that his eyes are still closed like he’s in a dream state. Slowly, he opens them and he looks like

the happiest person in the world. I can't believe *I* make him feel that way!! My insides are churning at the thought. I take a quick look down at my watch. Oh no, it's 11:30. My mom will be waiting for us.

"I have to go, my mom is picking us up now."

He takes a long deep breath to get oxygen to return to his brain so he can speak.

"Okay, I'll walk you back. Can I get your phone number?"

I tell him my number as we walk back down the beach. Colleen's jaw drops when she notices his arm around my waist pulling me tightly to his side as we approach.

"I'll call you tomorrow," he whispers in my ear, "but I'll dream about you tonight."

He sucks the wind right out of my lungs by saying that.

"Okay. I'll be home in the afternoon. Bye."

I'm not quite as eloquent saying goodbye. It's nothing short of a miracle I even have any strength in my legs to walk. My entire body feels like it has turned into jelly. Colleen pulls me violently out of my reverie by grabbing my arms.

"What were you doing with Jason? Oh my God! Even Kevin was surprised when he saw the two of you! He said that Jason rarely goes after girls. He doesn't have to. What did he say?"

Hello big splash of cold water in my face. Wow. I shake my head trying to remember what he said to me. I want to play it back in my head over and over again. I feel like I was semi-conscious the whole time he was speaking, because I can only remember some bits and pieces.

"He just told me that he had noticed me at school, and that he is going to call me tomorrow."

"You guys were down the beach for a while. That can't be everything!"

I feel my face flush a burning red.

"Oooh! He kissed you? How was it? Kevin kissed me too!"

She keeps talking all the way home. My mom is riveted to the entire one-sided conversation Colleen is having. After we drop her off, my mother's gaze is piercing the side of my head.

"SOOOOO? Are you going to tell me who Jason is?"

Ugh... thanks Colleen Bigmouth.

"He's just a boy from school mom. He's nice".

I'm dreaming of climbing into my bed so I can focus on remembering his words to me. My mother doesn't stop asking questions until we get home. The last thing I remember her saying was that she was going to talk to Colleen's mom and find out more about him. Fantastic.

## Chapter 2

Jason

I will never forget the first time I saw Katie. It was the summer before my junior year, and I was working at our family bakery. Usually I came in early to help unload trucks or help clean in the back. I had football in the afternoons, so I was there before the store opened. Our coach had given us two days off of practice so he could attend a wedding downstate. I took advantage of getting to sleep in for once, so I told my mom I would be there around 9. When I arrived, she needed me upfront to help on the register, and re-stock while she was getting some paperwork done. Mrs. Bay was there as usual, and I was her back up.

I heard her talking to a woman about bread as I walked into the counter area loaded down with two trays of cookies. I set them behind the counter, and I saw a girl standing over next to the door. No one else was in the place, and I assumed she was with the woman at the counter.

Her face was stunning. Not necessarily in a traditional sense of beauty, but it stunned *me*. It was plain, no make-up, but it glowed. Her eyes were the biggest eyes I had ever seen. She had thick lashes that were trying their best to hide the girl beneath. She appeared shy, and looked to be miserable tagging along with her mom on her errands. I stayed behind the large coffee machine, not wanting to be

noticed, so I could keep looking. I felt like if she saw me, she'd run away like a deer spotting the hunter.

I was completely mesmerized. I don't think I took a breath for a solid two minutes. I'd never felt like that before. I've had plenty of girls fawn all over me since the fifth grade, maybe even earlier. I never cared for the attention, and actually found it annoying most of the time. I've been so focused on my studies and my sports, that the whole dating scene didn't hold much appeal. That's not to say I didn't enjoy the company of a few girls in high school, but I made it clear I didn't do the girlfriend thing. When I saw this girl, I couldn't even seem to remember my own name. Her mother finished up her purchase, and without ever looking back up she left the store. I could feel Mrs. Bay staring at me.

"Well, well, well! Look who's blushing!"

She giggled.

I shook my head as if the action would reset my brain.

"Who *was* that girl? Do you know them?"

I may have sounded a bit too eager, and she began to laugh.

"She *is* a pretty little thing, isn't she? That was Mrs. Barnett and her daughter. I don't know the girls name, but she's been in before with her mom, she's quiet."

Arg! That I knew!

"Anything else? How old is she, where does she go to school, where does she live??"

"Whoa, settle down cowboy! That's all I know. I think she may be in high school, even though she doesn't look it. I believe I remember her mother mentioning one of the private schools nearby. She was buying cookies for the ladies in the office. Sorry dear, that's about all I can give you."

She smiled her sweet smile, and seemed a little sad for me. She knew I didn't date a lot, and for me to ask about a girl was pretty big.

It would be a full year before I would ever lay eyes on her again. Never did I think it would be in my high school cafeteria! I had spent the rest of the summer with my radar up. Everywhere I went, the mall, the beach, even the Cubs games, I

was on the lookout for her. How could she live that near, but I never bumped into her? I kept telling myself that I must have built her up in my head for some reason, that there was no way a girl could have a grip on me like this. I actually started to believe it too, until today.

There she is.

I'm mindlessly listening to my friends go on about some party this weekend, while my eyes scan the room out of boredom. I look out the large, one sided cafeteria window, and there she is. Wandering and looking a bit lost. It's her, no doubt about it. Any lies I had told myself about her not being that special fly straight out of my head. Seeing her again sends a spasm clear through me from my head to my toes. I can't believe I feel this way about a complete stranger after seeing her *once*, a *YEAR* ago! I lose sight of her, and stop my thoughts. I'm losing it. This girl is probably some psycho who transfers schools over and over after she murders the cheerleading squad!

I turn my head, and I feel my face fall. She's staring right at me. I stare back, temporarily immobilized by the feeling that runs through me. I feel my face flushing and she looks away. Whoa. What is going on with me? Have I stayed away from dating for so long now that my system is going haywire? That has to be it. I haven't even spoken a word to this girl, yet I feel like I know her. She looks a little more mature than the last time I saw her. She's petite and cute. I begin to imagine what her voice sounds like. My buddy Kevin hits me hard on the arm.

"Dude! What the hell? Snap out of it! You haven't heard a word we've said, have you?"

Uh, no.

"Sorry man, I was just thinking about the test in calculus. I'm good."

Kevin is a good friend, and smart enough to know when I'm full of it.

"Yeah, whatever man. She must have been hot!"

He says with a huge slap on my back and a laugh. The bell rings, and we grab our stuff to leave. This has to be one of the weirdest days of my life.

\* \* \*

This is not good. I have *never* bombed a test in my life. I've never had anything but straight A's since Kindergarten. I can't get that girl's face out of my head! Mr. Ford, my calc teacher clears his throat trying to get me to focus. I guess it's pretty obvious something, or someone, is on my mind. After I turn in the exam, he studies my face.

"Jason, is everything alright with you? You seem a little out of it."

"Yes sir, I'm okay, just a lot on my mind. The game tonight, you know."

What a lie. It will be nothing short of a miracle if I can even remember my plays.

Last period, we suit out for practice. We just have a walk through since we have a game tonight. At least I won't see her now; I can try to focus on tonight. As I make my way through the tunnel, I notice that the P.E. classes join us. Great. It's so annoying to listen to them during practice. The sun is bright, but I see a shape that's all too familiar. It's her again. I feel like I'm living in my own personal hell. Just when I think I can get back on track, she pops back up. She and another girl look like they're bored with class. Oh my God, she looks amazing. The sun is shining on her hair and face, and her legs look so sexy in those shorts. She looks up and I run the other way. God help me. This is not the time to be obsessing over a girl.

I have a great game surprisingly. In fact, it's a record breaker for me for passing yards. At practice I focused harder on the plays that I ever had in my life. I knew that if I didn't, she would wiggle her way into my thoughts. Oh, I can't think of her and the word wiggle at the same time.

After the game, everyone's going to a party at Jeff's house. I'm not a drinker, so I usually stay for a little while, and then duck out once it gets crazy. I'm not a big one for drama, and a little booze mixed with teenage hormones means plenty of drama.

Kevin and I are comparing notes about the game, when I hear a scream. I turn towards the sound, and I find myself face to face with her. She and her friend are soaked with the trash can punch. She's staring at me, and I feel as if I've been electrocuted. A jolt of energy makes my entire body shiver. I don't know what to

do with these emotions; they're frustrating to say the least. I don't even know what to say to her right now. I need to compose myself, so I turn and walk away. I may seem like the biggest jerk in the world right now, but if I get any closer to her I may grab her and kiss her. She doesn't even know me or how I feel about her. I'm sure that grabbing her might seem just a bit weird.

I practically knock people down trying to get outside to get some air. I don't like feeling this out of control. What the hell! I go around the side of the house where I'll be alone and can gather my thoughts. This is going to be a problem. Now she's everywhere. School is hard enough, but now that she's around in my social group I'm going to have to do something, I just don't know what. I can't have this distraction right now, senior year is too important. It's a bit chilly tonight, I assume based on how everyone is huddling around, but I sure don't feel it. My entire body feels nice and warm, and I think I'm even sweating. Just thinking about her gets my system going. Seeing her and smelling her is a major double whammy. Her shirt was wet and see-through just enough to get a glimpse of her bra. As much as I enjoyed the view, the thought of anyone else seeing her like that infuriates me. *Why??*

I'm getting a little too warm, and I take off my jacket. As I start to move, I see someone come around the corner of the house. Shit! I can't get five minutes alone. I hear heavy breathing, and I see a small shadow. Shit! Just the person I'm trying to avoid. She's shivering. Her shirt is soaking wet, and she doesn't have anything else on over it. An overwhelming sense of protectiveness floods over me. I walk over and touch her shoulder to get her attention. I feel a warmth pass through us both. She must feel it too, because she shudders. I offer her my jacket, but she refuses. Even in the dark, I can make out how beautiful her face is. I'm even closer to her now than I was inside. I can feel her breath as she's talking to me. She looks nervous, but I feel calmer.

Something has changed inside me, and instead of wanting to avoid her, I come to the conclusion that I can't. I have to get to know her, and as soon as possible. She walks away from me at first, and then starts running. She's either



painfully shy, which I already know is the case, or I've hurt her feelings somehow, which would not be a surprise given how I've reacted to the poor girl.

I head to my truck to see if I can find her and offer her a ride home. I didn't see which direction she headed, so I take my chances and drive up and down the neighborhood streets. No luck. I go back to the party to see if I can find out some more information about her. When I go back in, I notice that my buddy Kevin and the girl she came with are getting cozy. I recognize her as the sister of one of my brother's friends. I think her name is Colleen. She heads towards the bathroom as I pull Kevin over to talk.

"Hey man! Where were you? We were looking for you and Colleen's friend Katie. Do you know her?"

Kevin looks hopeful.

"Katie? Short girl covered in punch? No, but I saw her outside. She left. Do you know anything about her?"

I'm trying my best to be cool, but I don't think it's working.

"Katie's awesome!"

I hear loudly behind me. I turn and Colleen is staring me down.

"Of course, she did find it a bit rude how you glared at her when she bumped you. She didn't mean to, we were pushed."

She's hyper, and LOUD. Seems pretty nice though, perfect for Kevin. I decide now is not the time for questions and answers with her though. I slap Kevin on the shoulder.

"Gotta run. See you later. Nice to see you Colleen."

With that I leave and head home. My head is beginning to throb. I'm not made for this crap.

I can't sleep. I keep re-playing our face to face in the yard over and over in my head. I'm getting hard just thinking about her big eyes looking up at me, and her sweet, sweet scent. I usually masturbate in the shower, with many different girls playing the lead. I've had so many show me their tits; I have great mental images to use. This feels so different. I don't feel like masturbating to her image. It feels so good to be this thick for her that I don't want it to stop. It enhances the

strong feelings that are building for her, and makes me want to get to know her that much more. I've never been this hard before. I feel like I'm going to explode without even touching myself. The images I have of her in her shorts, her tight jeans, and her wet, see through shirt are enough to make me crazy. I roll over and try my best to sleep, but I know it's not happening.

I'm a grouch all weekend. I've had no sleep, and a huge boner for about thirty-six hours now. I've gone running, mowed the lawn, helped coach my brothers football game, raked leaves, etc. etc. Nothing seems to help. By Monday morning, I'm ready to throw in the towel. I'm exhausted, and I can't even study. If I don't talk to her today and get her out of my head once and for all, I'll certainly flunk out of school and die from my multi-day erection.

Kevin and I usually walk to school when the weather is nice. He lives farther away, so he drives to my house and we walk from here. He is going on about Colleen; I guess they really hit off at the party. I hear her voice calling out to him, and we both turn around. Katie is walking with her. Oh God, not now. I didn't expect to see her this morning. I was going to try to talk to her sometime today, but I can't see her now. I mutter a quick 'See ya' to Kevin and walk on ahead. I hope she doesn't notice, she'll probably just add that to the list of why I'm such a jerk.

Monday drags by, as Mondays usually do. Lots of talk about the game Friday, and what a great party it was. It seems like it was all so long ago. The lunch bell rings, and I lag behind my group of friends. I know she and I have the same lunch period; maybe I can talk to her now. I tell my friends I'll see them later, and I hover around the outside of the cafeteria waiting for her. No luck yet. She can't have switched out already, did she? I start to walk back up the hill when I notice a small figure walking down the path behind the cafeteria. I've never been down there, but I see kids sometimes go down there to smoke. That hardly seems like her.

I follow as quietly as I can, hoping to get my nerve up to see her before she notices me. I watch her sit down, and look around. She looks quite content to be alone. Now I feel guilty that I'm going to spoil her lunch.

Her beautiful, thick hair is blowing with the breeze, and I can smell her. Apple Blossoms this time. I close my eyes and drink it in. As I do, a bead of sweat rolls down the side of my face. Please God, no hard on now! I swallow hard, and walk down the path. I do so with purposefully heavy steps so as not to startle her. She looks up and we catch eyes. I don't know how long we hold our stares like that, could be five seconds or five days, I don't want it to end. Her eyes are as big as lakes and I feel like I could dive right in. Oh God, I'm in deep. I have to get this out while I can.

"Is anyone joining you?" I ask quietly.

The surroundings encourage peacefulness. She slowly shakes her head like she's attached to strings and someone else is doing it for her. I introduce myself, and apologize for seeming rude at the party. I don't know what type of reaction I was expecting, but hers is definitely not it. She thinks that I'm talking to her as some sort of prank. She seems put off and doesn't believe that I actually want to talk to her. Ouch! I never thought that she wouldn't believe me! I was hoping that my sincerity would be enough. That she would be able to see right through me, and know that I mean what I say.

I take her reaction as a signal that I'm no longer welcome. I apologize for disturbing her, and I leave. I feel like I've been kicked in the stomach. Why would she think that she deserves to be pranked? She thinks that I would do something that horrible? It makes me feel badly for her, that she thinks that little of herself. I don't feel like going into the noisy cafeteria, so I head out to my truck to sit until next period. If she only knew how much I was struggling to not reach out and pull her to me, run my hands through her hair, kiss those full lips... This boner better go down before chemistry.

All week I lay low. I stay in the library during lunch, I'm the first on the field during practice, so no run-ins with the P.E. class, and I drive myself to and from school everyday. It helps a little not seeing her, but she's still on my mind 24/7. We have a big game on Friday, so I'm going to bed early every night. I lost so much sleep last week that I need to catch up.

After the game, I ditch the party and go straight home. I'm wiped out. Kevin had mentioned something about a bonfire at the lake on Saturday, and it sounds great. I know she'll be avoiding anywhere I might be hanging out, so I think it will be safe. She clearly doesn't feel the same way about me as I do her. Although when our eyes met, she looked just as mesmerized as I felt.

Saturday comes, and I just can't get myself up for going out. I think my parents are getting worried about me.

"I saw Kevin's mom today, bonfire tonight? Should be fun! Always lots of pretty girls there, right?"

My mom is trying her best to get me to crack. Girls are always calling the house, but I never ask any of them out. She's dying for me to bring a girl home.

"Yeah, I guess. Not sure if I feel up to going."

"I'm concerned about you Jason. You've seemed mopey over the last couple of weeks. What's going on?"

How do mothers know? My dad looks as clueless as I guess he would be.

"I'm fine mom. Just senior year, you know. Lots on my mind."

I whisper that last part, hoping not to give anything else away to the private detective that lives under my roof.

"Well then, all the more reason to go hang out with your friends. Time will fly by this year, and before you know it you'll all be headed in different directions."

Of course, she's right as usual. I decide to go. I just pray that the squealing football groupies aren't there tonight. I don't have the energy to listen to them.

I arrive at the lake, and the sun is setting. I see the fire in the distance, and I hear girls laughing. I'm really not in the mood to fend them off tonight. I think about turning around and leaving when I realize that Kevin probably invited Colleen, which means she would drag Katie along. I know she hates me, but just a chance to see her tonight is enough for me. I know I'm torturing myself, but my feet keep walking ahead.

I reach the fire pit, and I see Colleen and Kevin, but no Katie. Everyone is having a good time, and I fake it for my friends.

"Jason! Hey Man! The cooler is over there!"

Kevin shouts from across the ring of logs, where he and Colleen are talking closely. I figure I'll have a soda, hang for a few then leave. I don't want to start getting a reputation for being anti-social as well as a jerk. I walk over to the cooler, and I hear a familiar voice say 'Hi' as I approach. Jeez, Missy. She's been chasing me for as long as I can remember. She's nice enough, just one of those hang on your every word kind of girls. Not my taste.

"Oh, hi Missy, good to see you."

I can just make out her face in the dark. I notice some movement to my left, and realize that it's Katie. Punch in the gut number three hundred. She looks as if she's trying to hide herself in the dark. I pretend not to notice her, but as I turn away I can't help but say, "Bye Katie." I need her to know that I'm a nice guy. She doesn't have to like me, but I don't want her thinking badly of me either. I walk back over to the fire, and Colleen comes straight over to me.

"Did you see Katie? Did you say 'Hi'?"

I look over at Kevin, and he gets the message. He comes from behind and scoops Colleen up and runs away with her. Neither of them is upset at the turn of events. I see him put her down, and they sit away from the fire by themselves and start to make out. I'll have to thank him later for saving me, and he can thank me too for giving him an excuse to grab Colleen.

My back is turned to the blanket where Katie was sitting with the girls. I'm dying to turn around and look at her; I just don't want to make eye contact with the others. I make a subtle move to go and stoke the fire, and when I look up I notice she's gone. No longer caring about subtlety, I look all around the beach, but she's nowhere to be seen. Much further down the beach, I see a small figure walking fast in the opposite direction. She's literally running away from my presence. I panic for a quick second, knowing that it's really dark down there, and she's alone. The thought of something happening to her makes me sick. I take off in her direction. Too bad if she thinks I'm rude or a stalker, I just have to make sure she's safe. She stops for a second, looking around for something. I close in faster towards her; I don't want her to be frightened.

"Hi Katie, I was worried about... I thought you might have gotten lost."

She turns around slowly. She seems just as nervous as I feel. I tell her no, that Colleen didn't send me, that I wanted a chance to talk to her and I noticed that she was gone. When I asked Missy, she just pointed down here. She seems surprised by that statement. She apologizes for her behavior at lunch the other day, and that she noticed I hadn't been around. So she *DOES* notice me after all. My heart does a little leap thinking about her looking for me at school. I've felt this attraction has been so one sided, it never occurred to me that she would miss me. I give her a half-hearted explanation about the library, etc., but all I can think of is how much I want, no *need*, to touch her right now. I close the space between us and look down at her. Her eyes are sparkling in the moonlight. The glow from the fire down the beach is softly lighting her face for me. Her expression hints of desire, as our bodies get closer.

Without thinking, I squat down, reach around her legs and hoist her up so that we're finally, truly face to face. She's so small in my arms. I try to hold her as gently as I can, while I fight some very strong urges. Our eyes are locked on one another. She's breathing heavily, and she looks down at my lips. The smallest moan escapes her mouth, and I'm gone. This is the moment I've been dreaming about since I saw her in the bakery for the first time. The moment I've fantasized about, alone in my room, at school, while running, basically every minute of every day.

I kiss her hard as if she has the only oxygen left in the world in her mouth, and I'm a suffocating man. She has no idea what this means to me right now. I'm fighting everything in my body that's screaming to go harder and faster. I don't want to scare her off; since she has no idea just how strong my feelings are for her. I loosen her hair out of her ponytail, and let my hands roam the softness of it. It feels like the softest of silks, and smells better than anything I've ever smelled in my life. I cup her sweet face with one hand, while continuing to hold her up with the other. I want her to feel how much I cherish her right now. I'm trying hard to keep the massive erection I have right now away from her body. She's so sweet and innocent; I don't want her thinking this is all I'm after. I slowly kneel down to the sand so she's standing in front of me while I'm on my knees. This makes us

close to the same height. We never break the kiss as I kneel; we're breathing each other in.

I've never experienced a first kiss like this before. All the other girls have been a clumsy, hormonal practice leading up to this. We make out for a while, a bit of petting, then done. Most of them try to bring it to the next level, but if I don't feel something emotionally, I don't want to have sex. The consequences never justified the rewards. I know now why I've been waiting. My guts feel like they've melted down into my shoes, including my brain. She pushes me back a little and places a leg around each side of my waist. I sit back and she's sitting on my lap. I adjust her a little so that she's not shocked by what's straining in my jeans. My level of self-control has reached an all time high. My hands want to roam every square inch of her body and drink her in. It's a struggle to keep my hands on her 'safe' areas. It's so important to me that she knows this is different, that *I'm* different.

We're both startled by a loud scream down the beach. It breaks our bond, and we gasp for air. We're breathing heavy and are each a little embarrassed by our behavior.

"I'm sorry."

I get out with what little air I have left. She seems disappointed.

"What for?" She asks, clearly trying to hide some hurt feelings.

"For my losing control like that. I don't know what came over me. I've never felt like that before. I thought that if I didn't kiss you, I would go crazy. I've been feeling that way since the first time I laid eyes on you. I guess it was built up."

Her face brightens, but she still looks confused.

"When did you first feel like you wanted to kiss me?"

I tell her about seeing her outside the cafeteria. I have her attention now so I decide to go on.

"I've spent most of my high school years avoiding the dating drama. I saw how my friends would lose their focus on the team, and I have goals and dreams. I didn't want to waste my time with someone who didn't keep my attention. You've had my attention without even knowing it since the first time I saw you."

No way am I going to tell her that was actually over a year ago in the bakery. She would turn around and run the other way!

"I'm really sorry if all this freaks you out. I just have to be honest. When I tried talking to you during lunch the other day, you looked like you had no interest in my being there, so I left. I tried my best to avoid seeing you until I could figure out my feelings. I noticed you tonight before you saw me. I could see your beautiful hair pulled back, but still blowing around your face in the wind. I heard your laugh, and saw your smile... If you didn't speak to me tonight, I don't know what I would have done."

She looks like the same fragile little deer, only now it's staring into headlights and can't move. I've stunned her into silence. Oh God, I've said way too much. Why would she want to hear all that? It sounds way too creepy. I haven't even told her the full truth that I've actually been searching for her for a year! She may never need to know that little piece of information. She admits that she's had the same feelings, but she thought she was in a long line of girls that would never get noticed. I can't even understand it myself. It's not just a physical attraction, which is definitely there, but it's like I've found the person I am meant to be with. Something primal is fulfilled each time I look at her. We are destined for each other. What the hell! My thoughts are getting away from me.

After her confession, I close in to kiss her again. This time slowly, so I can take it all in. Her soft lips, her scent, and the way she looks at me... We hold this soft kiss forever. At least that's how it feels. If this were what it feels like to be on drugs, I would be an addict for sure. I don't know if I'll even be able to break from her now. We both hear Colleen calling down the beach for her, and we break our kiss. I look over every small bit of her face. I want to commit it to memory just the way she looks right now. Flushed and breathless; her hair blowing around my face.

She notices the time, and says that her mother will be picking them up soon, so I offer to walk her back. I pull her to standing, and guide her back down the beach towards our friends. I have to bend, but I secure my hand around her waist. I want everyone to know that we're together. Another new step for me, and



it feels great. As we approach the group, I see jaws drop, primarily Missy and her friends. She glares at Katie, and then whispers something to her friend. Thankfully, Katie's being pulled away by Colleen and she misses it. I whisper to her that I'll dream about her tonight, and she leaves.

As soon as she's out of earshot, I storm over to Missy and her friends. I feel like if she were a guy, he would be knocked out cold before he even hit the sand, I'm so angry. I get close to her face and tell her in no uncertain terms that if she so much as looks at Katie the wrong way, I'll make sure she regrets it. Her eyes look as if they're going to pop out of her skull.

"Oh, I *LOVE* Katie! I would never say anything about her!"

She says in a sarcastic tone, but I can tell my message made it across.

"Any gossip starts about her, and I'm coming to you first, and if you hear any, I suggest you nip it in the bud."

She backs away, and looks as though she's going to cry. Good. I can't stand catty girls like her, and I can't understand their logic. Just because they can't have what someone else has, they'll try to ruin it for everyone. I feel empowered with a new sense of purpose; keep Katie Barnett safe and happy at all costs, period.

## Chapter 3

### **Katie**

Jason calls me at two p.m. promptly the next day. I'm sitting in the living room with my mom and dad, and I excuse myself to talk to him in private. I keep checking the shadow under the door, because I know my mother's fondness for snooping. I should mention on the phone that I'm pregnant just to hear her cough up her lunch. That image puts a smile on my face, and Jason must hear it in my voice.

"Hi! I'm so glad you called. My mom's been driving me crazy asking questions about you today. Of course I realized, I don't know anything about you."

I say as quietly as possible without whispering.

"Well, I kept my promise and thought of you all night. I wouldn't call it dreaming, because I couldn't sleep. What have you done to me Katie?"

That last line was barely audible, but I heard it. My stomach does a little flip knowing that he is still feeling as strongly as he proclaimed last night. We talk on the phone for two and a half hours. I tell him all about me, not that there's that much to tell. Only child, private school I hated, and not many friends or boyfriends to speak of. My life story is over in about five minutes. I find out from questioning him, that he loves sports, all sports. He plays football, basketball, and runs track. He wants to go into some type of sports medicine, so he keeps his grades first priority. He has an older sister, Megan, in her second year of college down in

Arizona, and a younger brother Johnny who is friends with Colleen's brother, Luke. His parents, Walter and Mary, own a bakery together. Two actually. The local one by the grocery store, and one they just opened downtown. They've been really busy, and Jason has to help out a lot with the house and his brother. That explains no time for girls.

He asks if he can meet Colleen and me in the morning so he can walk with us. He had noticed that I was walking with her every morning. When we finally say our strung out goodbyes, I feel like I'm on the moon. Are my feet even touching the ground? Both of my parents notice when I float into the kitchen for dinner.

"Wow, look at her!"

My dad, Bob, says with a chuckle.

"She's on cloud nine dear, I can tell. A mother knows..."

Of course my mom knows everything. That's what happens when you keep your ear to the ground, or against the door, or eyeballs looking through a window. I love my parents very much, but it's hard being an only child sometimes. They mercifully leave me alone about the subject of Jason for the rest of our meal. I excuse myself after helping clear the table. I really just want to go back to my room and daydream about him.

Monday morning can't come fast enough. My eyes have bags from not being able to sleep. I am far too excited to see him again. I have a little nagging voice in the back of my head that keeps saying, 'It was a one time thing. He won't feel the same way today around all his friends.' I try my best to bury that thought deep in my brain. I think after all he had confessed to the other night, my heart would be permanently shattered if he backed up now.

"Hi Colleen!"

She's waiting out front trying her best not to look like she's dying to see Kevin.

"Hi Katie. I hear that Jason will be joining us on our walk this morning?"

She says a little too happily while playfully batting her lashes. I roll my eyes back at her and she laughs.

“Can you imagine the buzz at school today because of you two? I’m so happy! Jason is such a sweetie!”

She gives me a quick hug. She is such a nice girl; I’m lucky to have made a friend so quickly.

“I know, I’m a little worried about that. What if it was just a one-time hookup? What are people going to say? I’m not used to all this, I don’t know how to act.”

As I wallow in my imaginary drama, I feel warm hands encircle my waist from behind. He spins me around and plants a quick kiss on my lips. There’s a group of people, including Missy, from the bonfire that are walking by about the same time. All jaws drop. I’m guessing by the looks on their faces, that no one has ever seen Jason Weber in a public display of affection. I feel my cheeks turning twenty shades of purple, but I don’t care. My heart feels like it’s going to burst out of my chest and fly around like a balloon releasing its air. Colleen and Kevin are standing awkwardly next to us, not knowing what to say. They grab hands and start walking ahead of us.

“I missed you”, he says while nuzzling into my neck.

He smells so good, clean and fresh shaven. His beautiful white teeth in a perfect smile all for me!! I still expect to wake up from this dream any minute. It all seems so surreal. He wraps his arm around me and pulls me tight up against his side. He puts his nose on the top of my head and takes a deep inhale.

“You smell so good, like strawberries.”

With that he gives me a little squeeze. We walk like this, taking long slow strides, all the way to school. He walks me all the way to the door of my first class.

“I guess I have to let you go now. I’m pretty sure your teacher wouldn’t approve of you sitting on my lap during class.”

He gives me a heart-clenching smile, and tells me to meet him at ‘our spot’ at lunchtime. He kisses me on the cheek as he reluctantly pulls away. All the girls in my class are staring at me when I walk in. We are truly the buzz around campus. News in high school spreads fast, and Jason Weber being ‘taken’ is huge news. Plus the fact that the most eligible guy in school was now seeing the new girl, when he

wouldn't give most girls the time of day, just didn't seem to add up. There were even rumors before that he must be gay. A guy like him is usually going through girls by the dozens in high school, and now after not dating anyone, he is dating the plain new girl in school. Yup, doesn't even make sense to me when I think about it. I guess I should enjoy it more, and think about it less. I really need to get a grip and stop daydreaming so much in my classes.

Before I know it, the bell is ringing for lunch. I practically trip over myself to get out of class first. I try to appear as though I'm walking a normal gait, but I'm speed walking to get to 'our spot'. His class is closer, so he's already there when I arrive. He's looking around, spots me, and his face lights up. Wow, I wonder if I'll ever get used to the knowledge that it's *me* he's beaming like that for? I hope not. Butterflies are dancing in my stomach again as I walk down to meet him. He rises gracefully and walks toward me. He scoops me up in his arms and spins me around like I'm weightless.

"Hi beautiful, I've been thinking about you all morning. Mr. Parker in Chemistry thought I was on something. I still don't think he's convinced I wasn't high."

"Me too. I haven't been able to concentrate all morning. Is this normal?"

I ask only half kidding.

"How would I know? This is new to me too Katie."

I love the way he says my name. He makes it sound so beautiful. He buys us fries and sodas from the cafeteria, but neither of us is in the mood to eat. We talk the entire lunch period. He has football after school, but says he'll call me as soon as he gets home.

For weeks, our schedule remains the same. He meets me in the morning to walk to school. If it's raining, he drives his truck. We are together everyday for lunch, and speak every night on the phone. Fridays are his football games, his house to babysit, or watch TV. Saturdays are dates with friends or just us. We can't seem to get enough of each other. Our need to be together grows stronger every minute we're apart. My mother decides it's time to talk to me about it.

"Honey, you know that your father and I like Jason very much. He's a nice boy. We are a little worried that the two of you seem inseparable. I know it's only been a few weeks, but you seem desperate whenever you have to be apart. I'm just concerned that there is an unhealthy obsession between you two."

What?

"Mom, I know that we seem a little more into each other than our other friends relationships, but isn't that a good thing? When you're in love shouldn't you want to be together always? Didn't you and dad feel that way when you were first together?"

She ponders that for a moment.

"I guess we did honey, but the intensity naturally fades a little. Yours and Jason's seem to have grown. The two of you act like you won't survive a moment without each other."

She's right on the money.

"Mom, Jason is an intense person. He takes everything he does seriously. He has worked his life around mine. I love him with all my heart."

"Okay," she sighs, "we just want you to keep your perspective. You're still in high school after all."

"I know mom, and I love you both for it. Don't worry about us. Jason keeps me safe and happy."

## Chapter 4

### **Katie**

Monday after school, Colleen and I are discussing what to do for Halloween. Some other girls over hear us, and come over to join in on the conversation. It falls on Thursday this week, and we're off of school on Friday.

"We need to have a party and dress up!!"

Colleen practically shouts. She gets so excited when discussing anything social. She's exhausting sometimes.

"Jeff is having a party I think," says Missy, "we can just go there."

His house was the site of the first party I went to with Colleen when I saw Jason.

"That sounds like a plan, I'm sure Jason will be up for that."

I see them collectively roll their eyes. They don't even try to hide it anymore. Jason's friends do the same thing whenever we mention each other. It's clear in our peer group that we're different. Colleen has already broken up with Kevin and has her eyes set on another guy.

"How does Jeff's Halloween party sound for Thursday?"

I ask Jason when he calls.

"I was going to ask you about that. I just heard at football. Sounds good to me. Are you dressing up?"

Mmm...

"Maybe, what do you think? Sexy witch or a cat?"

"You'll look amazing either way cutie. I have to run, I love you."

I can hear the laughter in his voice. Ah. Will I ever get tired of hearing him say that? I hope not, I can't bear the thought of it.

Thursday comes, and I opt for cute instead of sexy. I am way too short to ever pull off the sexy witch. I found a cute set of ears, a tail, and a bodysuit to be a black cat. I have a black mask to cover my eye area, and I paint on whiskers. Jason found some mouse ears for himself and thought it would be a funny. He picks me up first, and then we go to get Colleen. She comes along with us frequently. Neither of us minds though, she's a good friend to me, and her and Jason's families are friendly. She's going as Madonna, like every other girl. She looks great. Most of the guys at the party turn their head when she walks in. She's wearing torn fishnets, a very short skirt, and layered ripped t-shirts. Jason seems to be the only one that appreciates my kitty cat costume.

"I think you look hot."

He keeps saying to me all during the night. Best. Boyfriend. Ever.

Jason doesn't drink. He's not opposed to anyone else drinking, but he's too responsible to ever lose control. He doesn't mind if I have something when we're together, because he knows for me it doesn't take much. I had half a beer after a football game one night, and couldn't stop giggling. Someone at the party made some punch and Colleen and I decide to try some. A few small sips, and my head is fuzzy. Whatever's in it is *strong*.

Colleen disappears to go talk to her latest crush. I'm feeling a little light headed, and I can't find Jason anywhere. I think I remember him saying he was going to the bathroom, but with this crowd it's going to take a while. I need to sit down. Jeff's house has a small den off the kitchen. Most of the kids are in the front living room and bedrooms. It's nice and quiet in here, so I sneak in to close my eyes for a second and clear the buzz in my head. I hear the door open, and someone is coming in. I assume it's Jason looking for me. He doesn't like our being separated when we go out. He's very protective. I open my eyes and instead of Jason, it's a guy I don't recognize. He closes the door behind him. Strange.



"Hi kitty!"

He says a little too enthusiastically. He's not in a costume; he's wearing a sweatshirt with the Catholic high school logo emblazoned on the front.

"Um. Hi. Do I know you?"

"I don't think so, I go to Trinity. I really like your costume, extremely cute."

He stumbles over, and sits down next to me. I can tell from his breath, he's had way too much punch. This could get ugly. I quickly stand up to leave and get woozy. I fall over his feet and onto his lap. He clamps his arms around my waist and has a dark look on his face. The door to the den opens and in a blur I see Jason's huge frame cross the room and grab the guy by the shirt. He jerks him up so quickly; I tumble off his lap, and onto my butt. I stay still.

*"GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF HER NOW BEFORE I KILL YOU ASSHOLE!"*

Jason is in a blind rage. He holds the guy up and carries him through the living room, then literally *throws* him out of the house. A sea of people part for him as he storms through. I get to my feet, and watch the drama unfold while leaning for life onto the doorframe. When he comes back into the house, there are hoots and yells of 'Awesome!' and, 'You should have kicked his ass!' He ignores everything and everyone around him. He makes a beeline for me. He barely slows to tell Colleen to find a ride home, before closing in on me quickly. I start shaking uncontrollably. I've never seen him like this. He's jealous, I know, but he's never had the opportunity to show just how much. I brace myself thinking he's going to grab me, but he doesn't. He places his hand on the small of my back and says, 'Lets go.' very quietly. The crowd is still stunned into submission, and we make it out the door quickly. He's breathing through his nose like a bull. His veins are popping along his temples, and sweat is beading on his face.

"Are...you...okay?"

I say as quietly as possible, but loud enough to make sure he can hear me.

"No Katie, I'm not. Give me a minute please."

I have no idea who he's most angry at. Me, the jerk, himself, or a combination of all three. He opens the truck door for me, and marches to the other side. He hops in, fires up the engine and speeds out of the neighborhood. He turns

off the radio, and we sit in silence. He's gripping the steering wheel so tightly; it looks like he's going to break it in half. It's obvious that he has no destination in mind. He's randomly turning down roads and speeding up and slowing down without even realizing it. I'm afraid to speak, but I don't know how much more silence I can take.

"Where are we going?" I peep. He visibly exhales.

"I don't know.... I just need to drive..."

"Okay." I whisper.

It's only 8:30, and we don't have anywhere to go. I'm dressed like a cat, great, and don't have a change of clothes. I've already taken off my mask and ears, removed my tail, and wiped off my whiskers. I look like some kind of out of place gymnast in a head to toe black bodysuit. Sensing what I'm thinking, he shrugs off his sweatshirt for me to put on. It's so big; it covers my rear down to my mid thighs. I look a bit human again.

"Thank you. Do you want to take me home?"

He's still quiet.

"Look, Jason, I went to sit down somewhere alone. That creep followed me in the room, I..."

He cuts me off.

"I'm not mad at you Katie, but I need some time to calm down."

Well, that makes me feel a little bit better. I slide over next to him, and curl up. He finally relaxes enough to put his right arm around me. After thirty minutes of driving to nowhere, he slows down and parks in the empty parking lot behind the elementary school. He kills the engine and rests his head back on the seat. He squeezes his eyes tight then turns his head toward me. I see a tear come out of his eye at the corner.

"Katie, I'm so sorry I lost control like that. I've never been that full of rage in my life. Not even in a football game."

He sounds frightened of himself in a way.

"I was already nervous when I came out of the bathroom and couldn't find you anywhere. When I opened the door, my worst fears had come true."

He squeezes his eyes again before continuing.

"When I saw you on his lap, I knew something was wrong. You looked scared and shaken. I was more upset at the thought that someone could harm you or scare you like that that I went crazy. The fact that I wasn't there to protect you killed me a little inside."

Oh Jason...

"You can't be near me every second of everyday. I could have taken care of myself. That guy was so drunk I could have easily gotten away."

I sound much more calm than I feel.

"But what if you couldn't, and he..."

Before I can brace myself, he's on me. His hands grip my face while his lips are making love to mine. His tongue is insistently urging mine to mingle. His hands move down my neck to my shoulders. He clutches me like he's trying to save himself from drowning. His mouth covers mine and his kisses rush to tell me how much he needs me. He's always so in control whenever we make-out. He stops himself, sometimes visibly hurting to do so, before he touches me anywhere he doesn't think I'm ready for.

Oh, I'm ready now...

I take his hand, and kiss his fingers one by one on the tips. He slows down his assault to watch me. I take his index finger and put it in my mouth. I swirl my tongue around it, and pull it out slowly. He shivers, and stares into my eyes. His pupils are dilated, and his breath is ragged. He takes my hand and speaks to me so sweetly.

"Not right now sweetheart, you're not ready and I'm not sure I want our first time to be in my truck."

We're both virgins. He has confessed to me that he had come close a couple of times, but he needed to feel a connection first. I take control of his hand again, and place it under his sweatshirt I'm wearing. My bodysuit is thin, and it's cold in the truck. My nipple hardens the moment his hand touches it. He groans and bends his head down to mine and breathes me in.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

I don't say anything. I kiss his jawline and slide my tongue down his neck. He smells so good, and tastes salty from the adrenaline overload caused by the altercation at the party. It sends my body into hormonal overdrive. He is gentle with my breast, cupping and squeezing it while kissing my neck. I feel his restraint in every breath he takes. I can tell he's trying so hard to keep himself in check.

"Jason, I love you. I want to give myself to you. I need you to love me...."

I wiggle out of his sweatshirt, and turn around for him to access the long zipper on the back of my bodysuit. He pauses for a moment, and then agonizingly slowly he begins to pull the zipper down. When it reaches my hips, I wiggle my butt enough to get it under me and take it off. The space in the truck is confining to say the least especially for someone his size. He stares at my body, clad only in my bra and panties, for a long moment. He raises his hand to touch me in the gentlest way a person can be touched. He starts at the hollow of my neck, and makes his way down to my small breasts. I see his erection in his pants, and he's wincing at the pressure against his jeans. I reach down to unzip his zipper. He leans back and unbuttons the top button to make it easier for me. As I unzip his pants, he leans back again and pushes them down to his ankles. I take off my bra and panties as quickly as I can. I am so excited I can hardly breathe. His erection is so big. He takes my hand and places it on the satiny skin, and I squeeze. He exhales abruptly.

"Easy, I want to make this last."

I'm amazed how something so hard can also feel so soft and silky. I lean down and kiss the top of the crown; it's salty and slick. He tries to turn the attention back to me. He sits me up, and I straddle his thighs with my own. I am so much shorter than him; this angle is perfect to see his face. His erection presses painfully against my thighs. I'm beginning to worry how it will fit inside me. He starts kissing me again, slowly. Kissing my breasts, torturing my nipples with his tongue. I begin to understand how it will fit. I'm getting so warm and wet between my legs; I'm developing an ache for him to be inside me. He looks up into my face, and his eyes are wet.

"What's wrong?" I whisper.

He brings his lips to my mouth and I know what it is. He's fighting his control. Control that he has over everything else in his life. This urge, this pulling need, is more than he can take.

"I love you, Katie."

He says it so honestly I almost start sobbing. Intense feelings are flooding my system. I know at this moment, we'll be together forever. I swallow hard, trying my best not to cry. He reaches around with both hands and begins to feel my rear. Kneading, rubbing, and slapping as if he wants to consume me. I'm writhing now on top of his lap, sliding my wetness up and down the full length of his erection. He grabs me forcefully by the hips and lifts me up. This is it; I'm ready. He holds me up while I take hold of his erection to locate my slit. I'm so aroused, that the head slips in easily and he slowly lowers me down his length. The large muscles in his arms are quivering. He holds me tight so I can't go too deep, too fast.

He's gasping for breath and his hands are shaking. I feel the incredible pressure, and begin to get nervous that it won't work; I'll be too tight. He tells me to lower a little more, then he bucks his hips up just enough that his hardness rips through me. It pinches and pulls, and feels too full. I yelp a little, not wanting him to stop, but needing relief. He stills for a few moments. I ease myself back down his hardness, and then back up again. I get wetter each time I stroke him. I finally start to feel less pain and more pleasure. He looks like he's holding back, trying not to come. His gaze roams over my breasts and body. His eyes roll back as he feels my warm, wetness squeeze him in the most intimate way. We are now lovers, a special part of each other forever.

I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him lightly on the ear. I whisper to him.

"I love you, I love you, I love you..."

He releases himself and his orgasm explodes inside of me. I can feel his warm liquid, bathing my aching insides with sweet relief. His body shudders and he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me in close. We stay still in our loving embrace, neither of us wanting to break the precious bond. He's the first to

pull his head up. I follow and look at his face. He loves me. He said it; he showed it. Not with the sex, but so many other ways. We gave each other the precious gift of our virginity.

## Chapter 5

### **Jason**

My night is tough. I'm rock hard thinking of our encounter on the beach. I sleep in my sweatshirt that still smells of her. I still remember the feel of her silky hair, and how warm and soft her lips were. I might have to help myself out tonight; I can't even roll over onto my stomach. I may as well take a late/early shower just to get my erection to go down.

No luck.

As soon as I feel the warm water, images of her body flash into my head. I replay our first kiss over in my head, and I come within a minute. In my defense, that one has been held up a while. I go back to bed, my body just a little more relaxed, but my mind is still racing. I eventually drift off to sleep with my sweatshirt curled up like a pillow by my face. Katie and I talk on the phone for most of Sunday afternoon. Bears game? What Bears game? I don't care about anything else other than listening to her voice. She could be reading me a cookbook and I wouldn't care, just so long as she doesn't stop.

I learn so much about her. She's an only child, and she went to private school, which explains why I never saw her around. She's close to her parents, which is great because I am too. Actually, there's not one thing she tells me about herself that comes as any surprise. She's perfect, for me at least. I tell her about myself, and my family. I tell her about my plans after graduation, but it all seems

dull when I think of those things without her. All my achievements in life so far seem meaningless since she wasn't there to share them. This can't be a healthy way of approaching a new relationship! Of course, how would I really know? All I know is what feels right, and that's her.

She has to get off the phone, so we agree to meet up and walk in the morning. I know Kevin and Colleen are too. I really hope that every weekend doesn't turn into 'the four of us'. I want time with Katie alone. Hopefully, she feels the same way, but I know that the girls like to be together. I'm up early after another restless night; I can't wait to see her. Kevin and I head up the street, and I spot her. She is even more beautiful than the last time I saw her. My memories never seem to do her justice.

I notice her looking around, and before she sees me I grab her waist. I turn her towards me, just to look at her face but that's not enough. I plant a kiss on her right in front of everyone we know. I know the news of Saturday has surely made the rounds, but for me to show PDA is a whole other thing. I don't like to touch or be touched in public. Oh well, another first. There's just no way I can be this close to her and not kiss that mouth. I dig my nose into her neck just to add today's scent to the bouquet in my head.

"I missed you." I tell her. She seems pleased, thank God.

At lunchtime, we meet outside at our spot behind the cafeteria. We talk and laugh, she tells me about her day, what she's reading, her parents, and her cat, on and on and on. I could listen forever. We fall into such a comfortable rhythm with each other. We have merged our lives to include each other in everything, from the smallest to the largest of plans. We talk about the future like it's inevitability, even though we've only been together for a few short weeks.

Jeff's Halloween party is coming up, and all our friends are going. I would much rather just hang out and watch scary movies with her alone than go be with a bunch of drunken knuckleheads. Even though the knuckleheads are my buddies. She asks me what she should go as, a sexy witch or a cute cat. If it's just the two of us? Sexy witch for sure. Not okay at a Halloween party with eyes all over her though. I tell her she'll look great either way. I don't dare take the stance of telling



her what to do. I care for her too much to not want her to make her own decisions. I just cross my fingers and hope. Cute, cute, cute, not sexy.

I pick her up for the party, and I just about fall over. If that's her idea of cute and not sexy, I couldn't have survived the witch costume. She's in a second skin full black body suit, showing every delicious curve she has. I want to run my hands up and down her body, even after she puts on the ears and tail. Wow. It's going to be a really long night.

I'm not one to drink; it's just not my thing. I don't like the way it makes my body or mind feel, so I just choose not to. Katie's not a big drinker either. I've seen her have half a beer, and giggle for the rest of the night. We get to Jeff's along with Colleen, and the party is in full swing. She and Kevin didn't last long, but they ended it okay so we're all still friends. Colleen and Katie end up with some cups full of punch. If it weren't for Jeff's punch at the last party here, I may not have had the chance to talk to her. She could have avoided me all night, and I wouldn't have even known she was there. I should have warned her though, that punch is lethal. There's a reason it's called 'punch'. She and Colleen are deep in discussion about something, so I take my chance to run to the bathroom.

There's a line to get in. Jeez, I should just go outside, but it's freezing, definitely not worth freezing my balls. When I come out, I can't find Katie anywhere. Colleen is over in the corner gabbing to Clay. My friends are pulling at me to come and talk as I walk around the room, but I'm getting worried. There are a lot of assholes at this party that I don't recognize that have been ogling every girl walking through the place, including my girlfriend. Katie can't hold her alcohol well either, and she downed a big sip of that punch. She may be somewhere getting sick.

I start to head outside, when I notice a guy walking into the den, and he closes the door behind him. People in there are probably trying to get high, and I don't think Jeff would appreciate that in his house. I make a beeline over to the door. I'll find Katie in a minute, but something about this guy doesn't sit well with me.

I feel like it was all a blur. I open the door, and instead of seeing a couple of kids passing around some weed, I see my girlfriend on the lap of some asshole with his hands all over her. The terrified look on Katie's face makes something inside me snap. A burning sensation is rising up from my gut, and I taste acid in my throat. I'm screaming something at him as I close the space between us in two steps. I grab him by the shirt as Katie falls to the floor. I know she's fine, but I have to get this guy as far away from me as possible before I crush his windpipe. I don't think I've ever had this much rage about anything in my life.

Thoughts of not finding her until it was too late are flooding my brain, and it makes me lift this guy even higher. The front door opens, someone understands my intent before I get there, and I throw him out the door like a rag doll. I hear things being shouted at me by him and his friends, and by the crowd too. My ears are hot, flooded with my pulse so everything they're saying sounds muffled. I don't give a shit; I just need to get Katie. I see her standing by the doorframe with her jaw touching the ground. As soon as our eyes connect, she begins to shake. My heart is breaking seeing her so scared, and I'm praying that fear isn't from me.

She cowers as I reach for her, but I gently lead her out the front door and head to my truck. I have to get out of here and give my adrenaline a chance to stop flowing. I speed out onto the street, without any thought about where to go. I probably shouldn't even drive right now, I can barely see straight. Poor Katie is hugging herself and shaking. I can't tell if she's cold, scared, mad, or what. Her face is down, and I can't see her eyes.

"Where are we going?"

She asks so quietly; I barely understand what she says.

"I don't know.... I just need to drive."

She is still shaking so hard. I crank up the heat in the truck, and wrestle out of my sweatshirt to give her. She has stripped out of most of the cat costume, except for the bodysuit. Oh God, that bodysuit. That dick had his hands on her wearing that bodysuit! I'm gripping the steering wheel so tight my hands are going numb. She takes the sweatshirt and says, "Thank you. Do you want to take me home?"

She's being so formal, I get the feeling she thinks I'm mad at her or that I blame her for what happened. She begins to try to explain what happened, but I cut her off.

"I'm not mad at you Katie, I just need some time to calm down."

With that reassurance, she looks relieved. She moves closer and snuggles in deep beside me. She's warm in my sweatshirt, and she feels so goddamned good. I continue to drive around for a while to allow my heart rate to slow down. Her being this close to me is making the opposite reaction happen, but in a much better way. I pull into the parking lot of the elementary school. I'm not ready to say goodnight to her yet. I cut off the engine and take a deep breath. I can tell she's waiting for me to say something.

"Sweetheart, I'm so sorry I lost control like that. I've never been that full of rage in my life. Not even in a football game. I was already nervous when I came out of the bathroom and couldn't find you anywhere. When I saw the closed door, I knew something was up; I just never in my imagination thought it would be you in there. When I saw you on his lap, you looked scared and shaken. I was more upset at the thought that someone could harm you or scare you like that that I went crazy. The fact that I wasn't there to protect you killed me inside."

She tries to tell me how she could've take care of herself. As she's speaking, my eyes look over her beautiful face. This lovely, tiny-framed sprite next to me is trying to tell me that I don't need to worry about her. My eyes can't seem to break focus from her soft lips. I need to feel her and now. All the tension from tonight as gotten my engine started, and she's got her foot on the gas pedal revving me up without even knowing it. I lean over and stop her mid- sentence with my mouth. I cradle her sweet face in my hands while my mouth is all over hers. I can't get enough. It feels like the first time we ever kissed. Hot, fast, and needy. *Needing* to have that physical as well as an emotional bond with someone.

I have fantasized so many, way too many, times about what our first time would be like. Definitely not here in the cab of my truck. She deserves candles and music, not a cold night in my old truck in the elementary school parking lot. I pull back to try to catch my breath and slow things down, but she grabs my hand.

We're staring into each other's eyes as she takes my hand up to her mouth. Oh God, she seems so sure of herself, like she's done this a thousand times. She slowly kisses the tips of each of my fingers, very softly. Her soft touch sends a shiver straight down my spine and into my groin.

Just when I think I can't get a stiffer erection, I do. I can feel my pulse in my dick. She wraps her lips around one of my fingers and gently pulls and sucks all the way up to the end. I don't know how much of this I can take. I either have to stop this right now, or tonight's the night. I love this girl and she's driving me crazy!

"Not now..."

I get out of my mouth with as much sincerity as I can in my current state. She doesn't even blink. She guides my hand up under my sweatshirt she's wearing. Her bodysuit is so thin; I can feel her nipple harden as she places my hand on her breast. She squeezes her hand over mine and the softness of her breast fills my hand. I have to swallow hard to be able to say what I need to say.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Jason, I love you. I want to give myself to you. I need you to love me...."

She says it with such conviction; I know she's ready and so am I. She takes off the sweatshirt, and turns so that I can unzip her costume. I'm trying my best to take as many mental snapshots of these moments as I can. Second only to the day I met her; this is the greatest day of my life. She wiggles out of her suit, and is sitting next to me in her bra and panties. She's not the least bit embarrassed. Oh God, she's so beautiful. I want to cherish her, and ravage her both in the same instant.

She reaches over and tugs on the waistband of my jeans. I unfasten the top button to help. She has to be careful around my erection to unzip them. She pulls them down as far as she can, and I help by pushing them down to my ankles. Her eyes look a little frightened at the size of my penis. I've never been this hard in my life. She slips off her bra and panties and I'm stunned speechless. I take in her body as best I can in my aroused fog, but she looks so beautiful. She reaches for my dick and puts her hand around it to give it a squeeze. I flinch.

"Easy, I want to make this last."

Who wants the greatest night of their life to end? Not me. I feel like I could be like this forever. She slides her thumb over the moist head of my dick, and she bends down to kiss it. I'm a man in Hell, but I love it. She throws her leg over my lap and straddles me. I feel her soft, warm wetness as she rubs herself up and down my length. As I kiss and suck my way down her neck, my feelings overwhelm me. I want this girl for the rest of my life. I feel tears forming in my eyes from the intensity of it all. She gives me power and strength just by loving me, and I don't know how to express my gratitude to her. I look deeply into her eyes and say what's in my heart.

"I love you Katie."

Her hands come to my face to wipe away the tears coming down. She looks so happy, but there is a darker side too. An arousal deep in her body just waiting to meet mine. We kiss once more, but all caution is gone. We match each other's intensity of the moment, and feverishly begin to kiss again. I move my hands to her ass, and begin to knead it. I grab it hard, and rub her against me fiercely. She's helping as she moves her body all over mine while holding on to the seat behind my head. If we don't go now, I'll come before we even get the chance to get it started. I harshly grab her hips and take a second to settle her over my cock. My arms are quivering. I tell her to grab me, and guide me in. I'm too nervous I'll hurt her if I put in before she's ready.

She reaches down and slides my cock up and down her slit. I feel the wetness, and she puts the head in. Jesus Christ... hold it, hold it... now's the time. I push in a little more, God she's tight, and thrust my hips up for her. She gasps a little, then eases her body slowly back down on it. I feel her squeezing me from the inside and it's the greatest thing I've ever felt in my life. She's warm, soft, and wet and feels so perfect. Her lips are on my ear quietly saying, "I love you, I love you, I love you..." over and over again. That's my undoing. I've had so much self control over the last few weeks that some days I thought I would literally burst. It's all come together for us right here, right now. Even though it's a cold, October night in the cab of my truck, it's our moment, our *first* moment as lovers and I finally let go. I come hard inside her, filling her up with each thrust. My breath is ragged against

her skin, I'm gasping for air. I pull her in even closer, if that's possible, and we hold each other for what seems like forever.

I'm crazy about this girl.

## Chapter 6

### **Katie**

Jason and I are inseparable the rest of his senior year. I attend every single sporting event he has. Football, basketball, track meets, and even his weekend softball games, I'm there. He spends most of his free time, not that he has much, at the bakery or at my house. I help out at the bakery for free whenever they need extra help. My parents love him like a son, and his parents love me too. Our lives have merged together so perfectly, like we were 'made for each other'. That's the same cliché everyone uses about us, and it's true.

I know we'll be together forever. Everyone around us sees it. The other girls at school have gotten the message loud and clear. We've had a few incidents when a girl would get him alone at school or a party, and offer him all kinds of things. That would be the first time and the last time they would ever make that mistake. He's made his stake on me crystal clear to the girls, but most of all to the other guys around. After the incident at the Halloween party, guys won't even get near me.

We talk a lot about our future, his career, my indecisiveness, everything. We want to plan our life together. School before marriage, marriage before kids, and never, EVER, spend too much time apart. We know what we want, and that's each other. Everything else will fall into place.

He decides to attend Northwestern. It's close by, we will still be able to see each other often, and it has a top rated Physical Therapy school.

Perfect.

\* \* \*

I know for my senior year that I have to get more involved to keep myself busy. Otherwise, I'm destined to go insane. We start our senior year with Colleen between boyfriends. That helps a lot, because she somehow manages to stay one step ahead of the game. She will definitely keep me hopping.

She got a paying job at Weber's Bakery. She's saving up for college. She has notions of going to study somewhere in the northeast. Dartmouth, Yale, and Princeton, she always sets her sights high. I'm still working for free. I don't need the money, and the Weber's are always so kind to me. It's fun to help out. Colleen loves the job especially when she notices how many guys stop by to grab a cookie and her phone number. That keeps most of our weekends busy.

Jason is studying like crazy. Once his mind is set on a goal, he achieves it no matter what. He's taking the maximum number of hours each semester and even lands a work-study job. I drop in on him at his dorm, the library; anywhere we can spend time together. I've gotten pretty adept at giving him blowjobs in the library. I can be very quiet! We almost got caught once, but that made it just a bit more exciting. He has turned me into a sex addict. I just can't get enough when I'm around him.

After a brief pregnancy scare right before graduation, I got on the pill. I talk frankly about sex with my mother, and she's happy that I am choosing to be responsible. We will have plenty of kids someday, but not now. It has also allowed us to be spontaneous with our sex life. If we are driving to dinner, we can pull over and screw each other's brains out without fussing with condoms.

One topic of discussion that I can never really escape is what I want to do with my future, other than be Jason's wife. He wants me to be happy and fulfilled, and he supports any choice I make. My parents are a different story. They are waiting to find out what colleges I'm interested in, and what I might want to study, but I've struggled to find an interest. I have always been so lazy in school. Good



grades have always come so easily for me, that I've never fully invested in any particular area of study. I excel at math; I'm more than proficient at writing, even mastered Spanish IV. Colleen and I attend the college fair that's held at the school. She wants to get her face out there to the admissions officers who may be attending. I don't even consider any school that isn't in Chicago, which has excellent schools but definitely limits my possibilities. I also don't want to burden my parents with outrageous tuition bills so hopefully I can find something affordable. Northwestern is definitely out, too pricey.

After speaking with a few schools, and more than a few meetings with my school counselor, I decide to go into nursing. My parents are thrilled! 'I always *knew you* should go into medicine! Your brilliant brain...' She babbles non-stop. I love my mother, but if I told her I was going into waste management, she would have had the same reaction.

Jason, on the other hand, is truly happy.

"I think you will make a wonderful nurse, Katie. You'll really enjoy your studies. You can take it as far as you want to go."

He always says the perfect thing without even trying. With him, I always know it's sincere. He just wants the best for me, and wants me happy.

Studying advanced biology and chemistry, along with a number of other classes, allows me to study with Jason. We study together when we can; of course we both know neither of us need extra help. It's just an excuse for an extra, late night trip to the library. I whiz through nursing school, and they were right. I do love it. I graduate with honors. Jason completed his undergraduate degree the year before, and is already working towards his masters.

## Chapter 7

### **Katie**

As Jason neared completing his Masters program, his father was diagnosed with liver cancer. He struggled through long, grueling treatments before he passed away. The entire family is devastated. I accepted an R.N. position with a small pediatrician's office, and Jason was able to put the job he was offered on hold. He decided to focus on helping his mother with the day-to-day operations of the bakeries. They expanded their business over the years to twenty-three small stores around Chicago and the suburbs, having become locally famous for their bread recipes.

His sister Megan is teaching in Arizona, and could only make it back to see their dad a couple of times before he died. His younger brother Johnny is in college in New York, and as much as he wanted to quit and come back home to help, Jason wouldn't hear of it. Their parents never pushed the kids into going into the bakery business. They encouraged each child to find their passion and follow it.

After Walter died, Mary insisted she would sell Weber Breads. She had lost her passion for the business without her husband by her side, and the sale would make her comfortable for the rest of her life, and then some. They had received numerous offers in the past to sell, so she knew just who to call when the time came. That put Jason's mind at ease. He was ready to give up everything he had worked so hard for, to help his mother. She knew that he would, that's why she

sold so quickly. The sale was completed by late summer. Knowing that his mother is financially set, eased Jason's mind to get his life back on track. He's ready to start his job and begin planning our future, and so am I. He mentions frequently, almost daily, that we could make a quick trip to the Justice of the Peace, but my mother would kill me.

Being an only child and a girl, means my mother has been planning a wedding in her mind for a long time. I qualified for a number of scholarships to college, so my tuition never came close to how much they had saved for my education. She was clear that it could be thrown into a wedding budget. Jason doesn't care about any of it. He just wants us to be married, and for me to be happy.

He worries so much about my safety when we aren't together. I think he wanted to hire a bodyguard for me when I was in school. My clinical training had me working all hours of the night in some tough neighborhoods. He underestimated my toughness. I took some self-defense classes that they offered at our school for free. I never told him, because I didn't want him to think that I was ever worried or scared leaving work. That would have done him in.

I really love my job at the pediatrician's office. The Dr.'s are great, and everyone on staff gets along well. A few of the nurses I work with insist on taking me out for my birthday. Jason is so busy at night getting up to speed on the practice he's going to work for, so I reluctantly agree. I've never had much of a social life, even in college. If I wasn't busy studying, any extra time was for Jason. It will be fun to have some girl time.

We go to a local chain restaurant within walking distance of our office. No one wants to drive, so one of the girls asks her boyfriend to pick us all up later so we are free to have fun. I was going to offer to drive since I'm not a big drinker. I seem to have an aversion to alcohol or maybe alcohol has an aversion to me. One or two, I'm okay, more than that I go from sober to black out quickly. I'm way too small to be able to keep up with these girls. Of course, Jason does seem to like it when I have a little and get the giggles. We also have great sex when I've been

tipsy. Then again, we *always* have great sex, but I figure what's the harm. I'll have a cocktail, and then surprise him later for some stress relief of the Katie kind.

It's Ladies Night at the restaurant. Some sporting event is on TV and its buy one get one free for women. We skip eating and head straight for the bar. I start slow with a glass of wine. That's all I was planning on having, which is more than enough for me. I can make a night of sipping on one glass. One of the girls buys a round of shots to sing Happy Birthday to me. I'm feeling really good after two of those. When the game on the TV ended, the karaoke began. After a couple more shots, we're screaming for each awful singer and having a blast.

Someone requests some old school Madonna's *Like A Virgin*, my favorite song ever. I run to the mike and take over. No one will ever mistake my singing for Madonna's for sure. I imitate her music video by rolling around seductively on the floor. Groups of men that had been discussing the game, take notice and begin to whistle and yell. One in particular is cute. He's wearing a Bears jersey and keeps his eyes on me.

Everything I'm looking at seems fuzzy, but he's close enough for me to see him clearly. I'm still in character as I crawl over to where he's sitting, which is right in front of the large piece of carpet which doubles as a stage. I slowly climb up his legs and turn and shake my ass right in his face. I think my work friends are all going to pass out. They're screaming at the top of their lungs. He puts his hands around my waist and yanks me down hard onto his lap. He has an erection from watching me dance; I can feel it through his jeans.

I don't know what is happening in my brain, but my lips are all over him. I kiss him with wild, reckless abandon. He tastes like warm beer, but I'm too drunk to care. His hands are all over me. He's kissing me back aggressively. Not in the sweet, passionate way Jason does, but with a raw sexual lust. As my senses slowly return, I realize that the bar is quiet. I look up and my song has ended, and no one else is on stage. All eyes are on my lap dance recipient and me. My friends are all gawking at me with their mouths wide open. They don't really know me very well since I've only been working there a few months. This is the first time I've ever

socialized with any of them, and it could be my last by the looks on their faces. None of them have even met Jason yet. Oh Dear God, Jason.

I sober up quickly and extricate myself from this poor guys lap. He's so hard; he's embarrassed and tries to cover his swollen crotch the best he can. I rush out of the bar after throwing a quick wave to Becky, who works the front desk at work. I'm mortified. I walk three feet and throw up violently in a nearby trashcan. Thankfully it's a Monday night in the suburbs, and no one's around.

I stumble the couple of blocks back to the office to get my car. I know I shouldn't drive, but I need to see Jason and my mind's not making the greatest decisions this evening. I just know he'll see right through my guilt. What I did at the bar, wasn't nothing, it was something. I don't know what got into to me. Oh yeah, booze.

I've never had any desire to be with anyone else, ever, and *really* don't now. As fleeting and exciting as that was, it makes me sick to think about now. Jason is the sexiest guy I have ever seen, and he's all mine. Our sex life is amazing, and he has always treated me like a precious gift. I guess it was just the thrill of something a little different combined with the buzz that had me acting that way.

When I reach the apartment, thankfully without wrecking the car, myself, or anyone else, I park and go to peek in the window. His head is buried in his books on the kitchen table. I knock lightly and I hear him bump around the furniture from being startled. He opens the door, and the look on his face is so endearing I jump into his arms and begin to cry. He can instantly tell that I've had a bit too much to drink, and reasons that's why I'm crying. He holds me so sweetly, and rocks me back and forth. He strokes my hair and looks into my eyes.

"Hi Katie Matie, I missed you."

Whoosh, straight to my groin. My plan was to confess the whole thing, but I'm way too turned on by the sight and smell of him. I point to the bedroom, and he scoops me up. He carries me in his arms, and we kiss as we walk down the hall. He tosses me down on his freshly made bed. He is intoxicatingly sexy. His five o'clock shadow, his beautiful dark brown hair, just a little too long because he hasn't had it cut, and those piercing blue eyes. He keeps his body in top shape too. Always

running and doing calisthenics to keep himself fit. His long, muscular torso is gleaming with sweat when he takes off his shirt. He kneels down beside me on the bed.

"Even though I shouldn't take advantage of someone in, ahem, your *condition*," he grins a sexy grin, "I don't think I can help myself."

The large erection in his pants lets me know just how ready he is. Jason has such measured control when it comes to sex. Even in the throws of passion, he keeps the rhythm under control to make it last. It drives me crazy! He knows my body better than I do, knows how to worship it, and worship it he does.

"Get down here."

I pull him on top of me. My head is spinning as I lay down, but somehow it adds to the whole experience. He's kissing my face so sweetly. My eyes, my nose, my cheeks, then moves onto my ears and neck. Quick little bites and nibbles on my already over sensitized skin are creating a burning in between my thighs. I'm already wet with anticipation of our soon to be sex. He is so skilled, and everything he knows, he has used me for his classroom. Together we are uninhibited, and will try new things. Our love is so strong, and our trust in one another makes our relationship safe for anything.

At some point in the course of his mad seduction, he has removed my clothes. I'm in another world, floating with pleasure. He leans down to kiss my breasts. Licking gently between, then focusing on one. With a repressed hunger, he begins sucking my nipple. I feel his hot tongue circling and sucking, pulling it like it's attached to my loins. I writhe under him, crazy with the sensation, I hear myself beg him.

"Please, lower, I want to feel you."

He happily obliges. He slides down the bed and grabs my knees. He pushes them up to my chest, and yanks them open. I am wide open for him to explore. I shake when his greedy tongue goes right into my slit. He groans loudly finding me so wet. He loves devouring me. One hand slips under my ass, and the other is on top of my mound. His deft fingers find my clit, and begin massaging it torturously slowly. His other hand is squeezing my ass, and his finger is teasing my tight hole.

Just enough of a tickle, it puts me over the edge. I come loudly and forcefully, and my legs start to quiver. My head is spinning; it feels like I'm on the greatest roller coaster in the world. I grab the back of his head and push his face harder into me while I come. He loves every minute of it. He looks up at me with a triumphant grin.

"I love it when you're ready, look was it does to me."

He rises up onto his knees with the biggest erection I think I have ever seen on him. He has a ferocious look on his face that's directed at me. I know what's coming, I can feel my body flush waiting for his to enter me and make me whole. He leans over me and kisses me lightly on the lips as he thrusts into me, *hard*. It's such a contrast of sensation. I moan loudly, and that intensifies his need. He is pushing my knees into my chest making it so tight. His cock is stroking the sweet spot inside me that we'd discovered together. He knows how to make love to me, and it's never boring or routine. Each and every time he makes it special.

These thoughts in my alcohol rattled brain are enough to push me over the edge and I come again while squeezing his thickened cock. I enjoy my after glow for only a short minute. I want to take more from him. I pull him out of me before he comes, and I turn him onto his back. I grab his wet shaft and slide my mouth down to his sac. I gag at first from the sheer size, but he is so deliciously salty and sweet, I swallow and take every delicious inch of him. He lays back and curses something loudly. I can only hear the sound coming from my mouth sucking our juices off his beautiful body. I grip him at the base tightly, then suck one long length and let go. He jerks his hips and convulses into my mouth. I can feel his come on my lips and tongue. It's a heady mixture of the two of us. I wipe my mouth with his shirt from the floor. He lay with his eyes closed, and doesn't move a muscle other than his chest involuntarily rising and falling getting his breath to return.

I go to the kitchen to make us some drinks. I'm thirsty, and my head is beginning to throb just a little. I grab some ibuprofen from the shelf above the sink, and pour us two big glasses of the lemonade from the fridge. When I return to bed, he's sound asleep. The books and manuals all over his table indicate many

hours of work tonight. I love to see him at rest; it's so rare. I swallow the ibuprofen, and swig the cool lemonade. Ahhh. That's exactly what I needed. I place the glasses on his nightstand, and snuggle in beside him. He reaches over and pulls me to him without even waking. I love this man.

When I wake up, Jason is gone. He's left a note saying that he was going for an early run, and to please stay until he gets back. I look at the clock, 6:45 a.m., yuck; I get up and wobble just a bit. I won't be doing that again soon, or ever. I do not handle my booze well. Because of my size, it sneaks up on me pretty quick. Oh no, my friends from work. I hope they don't think badly of me. I'll have to explain my low tolerance for alcohol. I drag myself to the bathroom, and I'm frightened to catch a glimpse of my reflection. Yikes. Worse than I even imagined. Mascara and lipstick smeared around my eyes and mouth. Between making out with a total stranger, and the hottest night of sex with Jason, I can't believe any of it's still on my face.

I run the shower, nice and hot, and find a towel. I scrub my body with his soap, God I love that smell, and wash my face as best I can without any women's products around. The hot water feels so good, like everything inside is passing through my pores and rinsing down the drain. I hear Jason come in the front door, uh oh, should have locked it, and he comes into the bathroom.

"Katie, you're in the shower with the door unlocked? Please tell me you don't do that all the time, I won't be able to sleep at night."

"I don't mean too, I guess I just don't think about it. I'm sorry, I hate to make you worry."

I'm talking to him while not moving from under the restoring hot water stream. I feel a flash of cold air from him getting into the shower with me. God his body is beautiful. I get a tingle whenever I see him naked. He comes up behind me and holds me against his front.

"Did you wash your hair already? I love to do that."

"No, not yet, you can if you want."

He takes the shampoo and begins to massage my scalp with his soapy hands. Heaven. I have died and gone to heaven. Any sort of lingering hangover I



had is gone now. He shifts his body so that the water is on top of my head, rinsing the shampoo away. His soapy hands continue to explore the rest of me.

"You were amazing last night. Do you know how much my body craves you? You sucked me so well I thought I might come twice. You know I worry about you when you drink, but maybe I could keep some wine or vodka around? You know, under my close supervision."

I feel him grinning as he whispers this into my ear.

"I love you Katie. You are my world."

He turns me around to look into my eyes. He holds my head in his hands and kisses me so sweetly. I'm thankful he can't see the tears on my face from the guilt I feel about the night before. Whatever I did in a past life to deserve him must have been pretty amazing. My evening shenanigans will have to remain my little secret.

## Chapter 8

### **Katie**

#### The Proposal

Valentine's Day is approaching, and I can't wait to see what Jason has planned. He's one of the few men I know who loves Valentine's Day. Our first Valentine's, when we were in high school, was so sweet. He picked me up in the morning before school and presented me with a single, dark red rose and a basket of warm muffins with red sugar on top. All throughout the day, I found notes in my backpack. He must have snuck them in one by one each time we were together. Each one describing a different feature about me he loved.

After school, he brought me home and told me to be ready at 6. It was a Friday night, so we had the whole evening. When he picked me up, he was dressed in jeans and a baby blue sweater that made his eyes look incredible. He prepared a 'picnic', even though it was 25 degrees outside. He drove his mother's station wagon instead of his truck so we would have more room. We went to the same parking lot where we made love for the first time. We climbed into the backseat, and he laid out our meal.

He prepared peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, potato chips, and Coke. My favorite meal. He kept the car running with the heat on so we wouldn't freeze. He also brought a small votive candle and placed it on the console while we ate. To this day, it's one of the best meals I've ever had. After we finished our dinner, he

handed me a small wrapped box. In it was a beautiful silver link bracelet, with a small silver padlock. The lock was inscribed with the words *'forever mine'* in script. He didn't have to say another word. That inscription said it all for him. I put it on, and jumped into his lap. I kissed him with all the love I had in my heart. Our body heat steamed up the windows. We were fumbling with each other's clothes to get at what we wanted most, our naked, uninhibited bodies together.

He leaned the back seat down as far as it would go, which wasn't much, so that I could climb on top. We had long before learned with our height differences, we had to 'adjust' in certain situations. This reminded me of our first time. His pants down around his ankles, and me completely nude looking down into his lovely face.

I braced my feet against the seat on either side of his hips. I raised and lowered myself on him in perfect rhythm with his thrusts. His eyes were glistening in the soft light coming from the moon shining through the condensation on the windows.

"I love you Katie, forever. It's like I was missing a big part of me, and when I found you I became whole. Tell me you'll never leave me. While I'm inside you, tell me. I need to hear it."

He said to my face while our foreheads were pressed together.

"I love you Jason, I'll never leave you. I can't imagine my life without you."

Whispering those words was what he needed to hear. He came deep inside me. He pulled me down by the shoulders so that I encompassed him completely. He rubbed my soft mound that was straining for friction against his body, and I began to shiver. I screamed his name and he held me against his body while I came. We were soaked in sweat. My bracelet caught the glimmer of the moonlight, and he took my wrist and kissed the lock.

"Mine." He whispered.

\* \* \*

This Valentine's Day falls on a Saturday. Poor Jason has been so busy; I've barely been able to see him.

He told me to block out the day after one o'clock. He has a patient to see in the morning, but the rest of the day is ours. He's always had two requests for me for Valentine's Day. One, that he get to plan the day, and two, that I keep his gift limited to a card and me. That's it. He hates when anyone spends money on him, but he loves to do it for others. I always let him because of how much sheer pleasure he gets from it.

Just as he asked, I'm ready on the dot at 1. At 1:02, there's a knock on the door. When I open, there stands my knight in shining armor. He is so gorgeous. His eyes are dark, probably from a lack of sleep, but it doesn't take one thing away from his face. He gives me that killer smile, zooms in fast and scoops me up. Before I know it, he's kissing me fiercely and we're headed toward my bedroom.

"Whoa! I thought we were going out?"

I can't help but giggle as his lips are sucking on my neck.

"I never said we were going out, I said to be ready at 1, I didn't say ready for what."

Oh, silly me. I grin right back at him and let the assault on my senses continue. He strips me down to nothing in a minute flat. I begin to return the favor, but he grabs me by my wrists.

"Wait. I want to look at you."

His gaze sweeps over my body, and I feel heat wherever his eyes roam. He does that to me so easily. I can't take it anymore, so I whisper to him; "Now it's my turn," and I begin to undress this beautiful man. His shoulders are strong, with thick muscle running down his neck to his upper arms. I climb up to standing on the bed so I can kiss him there. My tongue glides down from his earlobe to his arm, and back up again. He's an intoxicating blend of salty and sweet.

"Mm, So strong."

I swear he blushes. I unbutton his shirt slowly, and toss it aside. I caress his chest with my naked body and he moans. He wraps his arms around me, and cups my rear. I wiggle out of his grasp, and lower myself down on my knees on the bed. I take one of his nipples in my mouth, which makes him gasp. I alternate licking, sucking, and gently biting. He is moving his hips trying to ease the strain in his

tight jeans. I run my tongue down the length of his torso, pause at his belly button, and swirl my tongue in and around. His abdominal muscles are so tight, I can't even get a good bite, but I try. I reach the top of his pants with my tongue and I tease his skin along the entire length of his waistband. He is rock hard and groaning. I grab the top of his jeans with my teeth and pull, which makes the top button pop open. I reach for his zipper, but he beats me to it. He removes them faster than I can blink.

He lifts me off the bed, and pulls the covers back in one swift motion. We fall in together and make a little tent. It's warm and sweet in here. His skin smells like his soap and the cologne I got him for his birthday; what a great mix. We start playing and wrestling under the covers, but he stops abruptly and looks me in the eyes.

"I can't wait to do this Katie."

He leans out of bed, and fumbles with his jeans. He rights himself back in the bed, and sits back on his heels. I'm still on my back lying next to him. He produces a small piece of red velvet cloth.

"Katie, you know I love you, I tell you that everyday. What I also hope you know is that you are my world. You always have been. I can't imagine what my life would be like without you by my side. I had different plans on how to do this, but I just can't wait any longer. Will you marry me, sweetheart?"

He opens up the cloth, and I'm blinded. There is the most beautiful ring I have ever seen. A large, emerald cut diamond, in an antique platinum setting with 4 small baguettes on each side. I sit stunned for a moment.

"It was my grandmothers on my fathers side. She wanted the oldest grandson in the family to have it, and that's me. I've been holding it for years, knowing it would be on your finger someday, and now's the time if you'll have it."

I feel myself nodding as he slides it on my finger. It's a little loose, but I can have it sized. I kiss it, then I kiss him. He squeezes me so tightly I huff out some air.

"You've made me the happiest man alive, thank you for giving yourself to me. I love you."

We return to our lovemaking with a renewed sense of passion. Marriage. I knew it would happen someday, it was inevitable. We talked about it in high school like it was a given. I lay back while kissing him and spread my legs. It's an invitation just for him, and he accepts. He drives himself into me and we move in unison.

He lets loose of his control, and gives himself up to the pleasure. He comes quickly inside me. He grunts and thrusts with each spasm until he fills me completely. I feel his warm come inside me, and down my legs. It's all him, and I'll take every bit of it. He kisses my neck and he's still shaking. He kisses my breasts one at a time, but doesn't linger. I know where he's headed. He slides two fingers inside me, and his tongue is circling my clit. His fingers begin to do their magic. I was already so close to coming before, that I let myself go and explode from his expert knowledge of my sex. I look wearily down at him, and he is smiling from ear to ear. Usually our sex relaxes him so much, that he passes out. Not tonight. He looks downright energized.

"You said yes, I heard it. Can't take it back now!"

He is so happy. He takes my hand and kisses my ring.

"Mine forever."

He hops up out of bed, and unceremoniously tosses me my clothes.

"Up and at 'em! We have things to do!"

Why can't we just lay here and bask in our joy? Mr. Overachiever has more Valentine's Day plans, but I will never complain.

## Chapter 9

### **Jason**

#### The Wedding

I feel like I've been waiting for this day my entire life. From the first time I ever laid eyes on her, I knew. From some unknown place deep in my soul, I knew she was the one. There are no other words to describe it. Only if you've felt it yourself would you ever know the true feeling of finding your soul mate. Other people just don't seem to get it.

I just want to be married to her. All of this expense and time consuming preparations just seem so unnecessary. Her mother wouldn't have had it any other way though, and I knew it. We essentially sat back and let her have her way, except for Katie's dress. Katie had seen a dress a few years ago that she loved, and she managed to find a close rendition at a store near her office. She won't tell me anything about it, except that it's 'her'. I know I'm supposed to know what that means, but I really have no clue.

Her mother found us a beautiful reception hall near our church. She organized the flowers, the music, the limos, the cake, the food, the photographer, etc. I don't think I've ever seen the woman happier. Katie is so easy going that she was happy to give her mom this much to do. We decided to keep it small, relatively, so that the expense to her parents would be minimal.

Walking into the sanctuary today, it's overwhelming. The bouquet of all the flowers is amazing, smells just like Katie if that's possible. It's as if she's invading my senses already and I haven't even laid eyes on her yet. The scent stirs something deep inside me, and I'm aching to see her. We only have a few more minutes, and she'll come walking through those doors. I have no nerves, no cold feet. This is our destiny. The organs begin to play, and the doors in the back of the church open. She walks in and my life begins. She was right, that dress is... *her*...wow. I feel the tears run down my face.

Thank you God, thank you for her.



## Chapter 10

### **Katie**

I'm not going to make it!! I'm screaming in my head as I run down the corridor toward the bathroom in my office. I do make it, but barely. I've been throwing up for three days. I know I'm pregnant, but I'm pretending I don't. I've been able to hide my squeamishness at work by dodging most of the sick kids. I've been handling the well cases for a couple of days, and the two other nurses are getting peeved. Now there's no hiding it. I either have to tell them I'm pregnant, or that I have the flu, which would get me promptly sent home. I don't officially know yet, but I can just tell. I woke up one morning with boobs for the first time in my life.

Jason was delighted, of course. He had no idea why it was happening exactly, but he wasn't complaining. He loves me just the way I am, but a little more of the 'goods' never hurts. I tell Dr. Wilson that I believe I caught a bug and, as expected, he sends me home. On the way home, I stop at the drug store to pick up a pregnancy test. Jason is busy with patients all day, then a private session with some big athlete after regular office hours. He knows I don't know much about sports, even though I'm learning, and I don't have a clue who's who. Plus, I may slip and mention a name to my boss or someone in passing and that's a no-no. The media tries to get too involved with the rehab information when there are key players injured. He keeps me pleasantly ill informed.

He won't be home until 9. I don't know if I can find out alone, then have to sit on it for hours. Jason and I have discussed kids many times, but neither of us has been gutsy enough to say, 'okay, I'm ready'. I've stayed on the pill, and we have enjoyed two years of wedded bliss.

About a month ago, he and I went to Colleen's wedding up in Milwaukee. After she graduated from Boston University with a degree in communications, she began working for a small local TV station in Milwaukee doing research for the news. That's where she met Tom. I met him once when they came down for Jason's master's graduation. I knew she was head over heels in love with him. She looked absolutely beautiful at her wedding and they seemed so perfect for each other. While we were up there, I realized that I forgot to bring my pills. I really didn't think that a couple of days off would make a difference. Jason and I were so caught up in the romance of the weekend; we couldn't keep our hands off of each other. We even left the reception and went to our hotel room for an earth shattering 'wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am.' We were back in the ballroom in 30 minutes, no one even noticed.

I get home with the tests. I've bought five, just to be sure. I'm so nervous; I have no idea how Jason will react. I down a large glass of water and wait. I have been so sick, that I feel dehydrated. I don't even know if I can pee enough for one test. I fumble with the first package. I pee on the stick, and throw it on the counter. I reach for the second one, and repeat. All five tests are scattered all over my bathroom counter like some mad scientists gynecological office. I remind myself to breathe because I think I've been holding it so long I'm light headed. I pull in a deep breath through my nose, as I steel myself and walk to the counter. A couple landed upright, and it's obvious. Two lines on that one; a bright plus sign on that one. I flip over the others, and they all indicate the same thing.

Definitely pregnant.

It's 7:30, and I haven't eaten. With my stomach feeling so queasy, I don't dare. I'll puke all over Jason when he comes in from sheer nerves. I lay down for a minute to help the nerves subside. The next thing I know, I feel a freezing kiss on my cheek. It startles me, and I jump.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, it's really cold out there. You looked so peaceful sleeping, I just wanted to kiss you."

Jason says while grinning down at me. He looks so gorgeous. There are light snowflakes melting in his hair. His cheeks are a little red, and his eyes are beaming. I sit up and see that it's 9:45. I've been sleeping for a couple of hours.

"What took so long?" I say as I wipe my eyes.

"Well, Dr. Parks was in the office after I finished with my last patient. He called me in his office to talk."

Oh no, I hope he's not losing his job. Not a great time to tell him he's going to be a daddy.

"He's going to retire next year, and wants me to take over the practice. He wanted to discuss a buyout, but he's making it cheap. He's essentially giving me the practice."

"Why would he do that? Won't he lose a lot of money?"

"No, he's very well off. This practice has grown to be the go to place for all the major athletes in Chicago. He's built an amazing clientele with his reputation. He treats me like a son, and told me that's how he feels about me. He knows I'll continue to grow the practice the way he would."

I'm taken aback. Wow. This is unbelievable news.

"Oh honey! I'm so proud of you, congratulations!"

I jump up and throw my arms around his neck. The swift movement, plus the fact that my stomach is empty, makes me feel dizzy and green. I run to the bathroom, and dry heave a few times. Jason comes running after me.

"Honey, are you okay? What is it?"

I turn around to look at him, and I whisper, "I'm pregnant."

## Chapter 11

**Katie**

**10 years later**

Jason just bought us a large house in Glencoe. We've been looking at larger homes for years, but have just been too busy to act on anything. The small home we purchased near his office after we got married is bursting at the seams. I love being close to his office though; I can pop in whenever I want to say 'hi' with the kids. I've made the most of our living space, but Grace and Zach need more room.

Jason got up early and went for a drive alone this morning. When he returned, he had a gleam in his eye. He placed a book, yes, a book, about a house in Glencoe on the table in front of me.

"I bought it for you sweetheart. I know you'll love it."

He's grinning from ear to ear. The house is stunning, as in I'm *stunned*. The price tag is just over two million. The practice is doing really well, but even so, this is too much. He wants me to like it so badly.

"Come go for a drive with me. Leave the kids next door with Anne."

The expression on his face is pleading. I bring the kids over to our elderly neighbor, and ask if she wouldn't mind watching them for a while. She loves to spend time with them, and they enjoy her too. I would miss this.

We hop in Jason's BMW, and speed north. The town is beautiful. After some few twists and turns down some lovely streets, we stop. It really *is* stunning. White colonial from the turn of the century. Completely re-modeled, but has still retained it's charm. I'm entirely overwhelmed. Jason can't read my face, and is getting flustered.

"Honey, I know it's a drastic change, but we deserve it. YOU deserve it. You've always been by my side while I've worked so hard. Let's enjoy our successes."

I still don't have anything to say. I just meander from room, to room, to room, trying to take it all in. I grew up in a house for three. He takes my hand and leads me out into the most beautiful backyard I have ever seen. From the second story deck, there is a breathtaking view of Lake Michigan gleaming. In the center of the large yard is an in-ground, kidney bean shaped pool. Blooming trees and gardens surround it, and a waterfall streams into the pool from a large stone structure. A gorgeous outdoor fireplace sits opposite the waterfall. This yard was designed for all four seasons. I'm struck mute.

"Katie! Please say *SOMETHING!* You're killing me!"

He's trying so hard to gauge my expressions.

"I love it sweetheart, how could one not? It's the most beautiful home I've ever seen. What are we saying to our children though? I wasn't raised with this level of affluence. I don't know how to behave with all of...*THIS.*"

I wave my hand around toward the backyard and the house, encompassing everything with one swoop of my arm.

"How in the world can we afford this?"

I say sounding much more grown up than I ever have in my life. He walks over to me, and takes my hand. We sit down on the beautiful stone steps that lead back up to the house.

"After dad died, and mom sold the bakeries, she received a large sum of money. It wasn't just the stores, but some of her recipes were going to be used for commercial products. She still receives royalty money. She divided the money from the sale by four. Johnny's is in a trust until he gets married, Megan and her husband used theirs to open the private school in Arizona, and mom kept one-fourth in a trust for all of her grandchildren. Our share, only a portion, went to the house. I've sat on this money for a while now just waiting for the perfect time to do this."

I knew he got a lot in the will, but I had no idea it was that much.

"I'm also using some to expand the practice, with two more facilities in the city. We will have no debt. I need to do this for you, Grace, and Zach."

Even though I know that's true, I also know that a little part of him needs this for himself too. He wants to prove that he can provide for us and give us the best life imaginable. He has achieved and, in most cases, exceeded his success in all areas of his life. I don't think he ever dreamed of owning his own practice quite this soon. He is so fortunate for that to have worked out the way it did, and he knows it. He doesn't take that for granted. Moving to this neighborhood was going to be a major life adjustment for us. Jason and the kids will be okay, but it's up to me to make it *work*.

## Chapter 12

### **Katie**

I meet Melanie the week we move into our new house. It's the middle of football season, and Jason and all three practices are extremely busy. He's primarily focused on seeing his A-list athletes only and managing the business. This keeps him at the office until pretty late each night. He promises that it's temporary, and that he'll hire full time practice managers. He loves his work and feels that he needs to handle everything himself. Melanie is our neighbor, two houses down. She has three boys, John, Matthew, and Luke who are 9, 6, and 4 respectively. With such biblical names, one might assume they're little angels, but quite the contrary. They're wild. Grace and John are in the same class together and get along well. Zach is between Matthew and Luke in age, but is bigger and more athletic than both. Zach is quiet and focused, just like Jason. He doesn't tolerate it well when the boys are being silly, and they're *always* being silly.

She and her husband Chris are quite a few years apart in age. He has a big job with an investment-banking firm, and travels all the time. Even when he's home, he defers all discipline to her. He doesn't want to be bothered, and she gets overwhelmed doing it alone. She and I hit it off immediately. She's a tiny bit taller than me, and probably 15 pounds heavier. She has bottle blonde hair; big green eyes, and stays tan year round from the pool during the summer, or the salon during the winter. She's from the south and has a really heavy accent. I adore her.

She has such a bubbly personality; you can't help smiling being around her. I've only been around her husband Chris a few times. He's very dry. The type that always seems bothered by anything anyone has to say, including, and especially, her. I have no idea how their marriage works.

She's never offered up how they met, but I've been dying to know. I have been living in my own romantic fairy tale for so long, that I forget not everyone has what Jason and I have. I think my love story has always seemed a little boring on the surface. High school sweethearts, he was my first, just like in the movies. I love hearing other couples 'how we met' stories. The blind dates, the heartbreak, the engagements, I eat it up. I'm definitely one of the lucky ones. I've never had any drama with Jason.

Melanie and I are having our usual morning coffee after we put the kids on the bus.

"How did you and Chris meet?"

I ask her while setting some cranberry muffins out on a dish for us to pick on. I notice she's uncharacteristically quiet after I asked. After a long pause, she sighs heavily and opens up.

"Well, usually when anyone asks, I make up a story, but I feel too close to you to lie. I was Chris' mistress while he was married to another woman. I didn't know until I was in pretty deep."

She's blushing while looking down at her hands absently. I can only imagine what she must tell other people when the harmless subject comes up. I didn't even know he was married before.

"I was a floating administrative assistant in the office where Chris worked while I was in graduate school. I helped him on some large projects. He acted as if I held no interest to him whatsoever. He would bark orders at me without even looking up."

I can tell she really wants to get this off her chest. She's speaking so rapidly I can barely keep up.

"Then one night, he asked me to stay late to help catch up on some end of quarter paperwork that needed to be finished by the next day. We stayed in his



office and began to talk. He was charming when we were alone. He didn't wear a wedding band, and never mentioned a wife or kids. I just assumed he was married to his job."

She takes a long sip of coffee and for the first time since I've met her, she looks melancholy.

"We ended up having some really hot sex on the couch in his office that night. He admitted that he had been attracted to me since I first began the job, but he was trying to stay professional. We only saw each other after work in the office for the first few months. He finally agreed to come to my place when I forced it. Of course, he never spent the night. Always had to 'get up early'. Anyway, I ended up getting pregnant, and he came clean. He and his wife could never have kids of their own, and they were unhappy."

She seemed a bit relieved getting all of that out.

"At least that's what he told me. He got divorced; we married, and then had Johnny within a few months span. We were caught up in the whirlwind, but the thrill of it all was over pretty quick."

Now she's tearing up. I sit in shock. Not what I was expecting, at all.

"I had the next two boys back to back thinking that may help us be a real family, but I was kidding myself. He was never in it for the long haul. We were supposed to fizzle out like all affairs. I think he was intrigued to finally become a father, but never really knew what it meant."

"We basically live separate lives now. He comes home from being on the road, and I couldn't even tell you where he's been. He doesn't call, doesn't ask about the boys, nothing."

Wow.

"He bought us this house in this quiet neighborhood thinking that was all I needed, I guess."

She quickly wipes her eyes with the back of her hand, and smiles a bright, Melanie smile.

"Well! You know all about my skeletons, huh?"

She looks contrite, like she's expecting me to be shocked and throw her out of my house with disgust.

"Melanie, no one is perfect. You have three lovely boys who adore you, and a husband who provides. Maybe someday the two of you can find that spark again that brought you together in the first place."

Her eyes tear up again.

"Oh Katie, that's the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me. Thank you."

She throws her arms around my neck and squeezes me so tightly my face turns red.

"I'm sorry, I've just been unhappy for so long. Chris won't even go to marriage counseling with me. It helps so much to talk to you about it. Thank you for not judging me, you have no idea how much that means."

We finish our coffee, and end up talking about the kids, what's for dinner, anything to put that talk behind us. She gives me another big squeeze that has many unspoken words behind it. The gratefulness in her eyes says it all.

