

# TANGLED

## Chapter One

Soph

It's fair to state, I did not get my fairy tale ending. If a fairy tale ending involved him breaking my heart, then yeah—I got the perfect fairy tale ending. He also slept with my best friend, which he kept from me for three solid months. How do I know it was for three months? Well, he told me that.

His relationship with Kayla just “happened.” How the hell do you just stop loving one person, who you had spent three solid years with, and suddenly, out of nowhere, start to fall in love with my best friend!

Of all the girls in our year, and years below, he picked Kayla! Why? Just to hurt me more? Because not only did he break my heart, he also took the one person I was meant to turn to away from me.

I should have known something was wrong when Kayla was cagy about who she was seeing.

It was normal for Kayla to go through men. So I thought that was what was wrong with her. She had fallen for an older guy again. And again was going to be heart broken when he uses her just for sex and breaks it off when she gets clingy.

How I was wrong.

Well she had fallen for a guy—my guy, who is really good at lying.

Really good. They got away with it for three months. I should have picked up on the small things. Like the way he started to carry her books as well as mine. The way he always made a point to sit in between me and Kayla.

The little things should have lead me to discover their secret. Instead I was a dumb blonde for three months, not seeing that my guy, the guy I loved for three years, the guy that chased me down, well, he was in love with someone else... I didn't even see it.

I didn't see him falling in love with her. Didn't notice her red lipstick on his school uniform. I didn't even pick up on the fact he would pick her up before me.

I thought it was normal for the guy you are with to care for your best friend. Because they are your best friend and you want the guy you love to love them like you do.

That is, until last month, when he thought it was a brilliant idea to break up with me and tell me the truth on my birthday. At my birthday party, publicly. Kayla stood beside him, with this evil little smirk on her face as he told me. Then linked hands with him! In front of our family, our friends! Everyone.

I swear I have never been so humiliated.

How did I react?

Well, then the tears started falling—from shock, from my heart being squeezed tight. He always said he loved me. It had been hard to believe that a guy like him would ever take an interest in me.

I was an outcast. Publicly. At school. In life.

I was the girl you didn't notice. And I wish it had stayed that way. I wish he never took an interest in me. Curse that art partnership that put us together. He was charming. I mean, he was that good looking any girl would fall for his charm.

I put up a fight. I didn't just drool over his every word when he took an interest in me. I didn't give him my number when he asked because somewhere, deep down, I knew he was trouble.

But in the end I was stupid and followed my heart, and my brain was left behind. The fact he was bad news meant nothing to me. If anything, it lured me in more.

I loved the fact he had an edge to him. I loved that there was more than just charm in his voice. It was like chocolate—sweet, so very seductive. That was the power his voice had over me.

My own personal chocolate. And as soon as I got a taste, I was addicted.

Had to get more. Needed more. Couldn't get enough. And before I knew it, we were having sex, and I suddenly had a claim over a guy, that shouldn't have even noticed the invisible girl. I was brought into the spotlight being his girlfriend.

His friends took me in.

And they quickly became my friends.

His kisses were always sweet. His smirk always wiped away any of my concerns. His touch... I melted at his touch. Loved the fact his large hand took mine. Loved it more when those hands were exploring my body.

Like I said, I was addicted. Completely and utterly addicted.

That's how it was.

I was his.

I stopped fighting the need to keep distance between him and I. I fell in love with the golden boy at school and the devil in the bedroom.

You know what hurts the most? I think what hurts the most is I don't think he ever truly loved me. Cause if he did, he wouldn't have done this to me. He wouldn't have slept with my best friend and then had a relationship with her! He wouldn't do that if he loved me.

He didn't love me.

That fact ran through my head again.

All those kisses, all those memories, all the time he wasted chasing me, well, it was all for nothing. Not one of those memories was real. And not one meant enough to him to not do what he did.

And now?

What do I have to face now?

School. First day back.

I saw his car parked. I became a mute and a social outcast again as soon as he broke up with me.

Our "friends" were really his friends. And my one best friend, well, I was watching her get out of his car. Of course they would be facing the new year together as a couple. I was an idiot to think

they would keep it a secret or at least not shove it in my face.

But in order for that to happen, that meant one of them had to care about me.

They didn't.

So I shouldn't be surprised or hurt as I watched them link hands and walk across the lot to the school.

They were facing a new year together, while I face a new year without my best friend and without my boyfriend.

Two facts that broke what was left of my heart.

I got out of the car. Darn my parents for being back from their cruise early. Otherwise I would be skipping the first day. At least they leave again tomorrow. I was going to take the opportunity to avoid school altogether.

At least, that was the plan. I picked up my bag and noticed a dozen miss calls from my mum and dad. How odd. They knew it was my first day back. Sure, I hadn't seen them yet; they got back late this morning. They were asleep when I left.

I dialled mum's number.

This just can't be happening. Nope. It wasn't happening. I couldn't accept it. Wasn't going to accept. It'd be over my dead body.

I was eighteen for god's sake!

I opened my locker. Today couldn't get any worse after the news Mum had just told me. At first I wanted to kill her, and that

feeling hadn't gone away.

I glanced to my left, and just as I thought my day couldn't get any worse, it did. Kyle was heading directly towards me.

Please don't stop. Please don't stop.

“Hey, Sophia.”

Fuck my luck!

I turned with regret to face him. “Kyle.”

“Guess you've heard then?” He leaned against the locker, standing way too close to me.

I pushed back against my locker door. He was in my personal space and he didn't have the right to be there anymore.

I kept my lips clamped shut. I was not talking to him. The last time I saw him I threw my glass of wine at him and told him and my so-called best friend to get the hell of my house.

“Look, it doesn't have to awkward. It will only be awkward if you make it awkward, Soph.” His words were gentle and like always melted me. For a second I thought he cared about me again, but that was quickly wiped away when I saw the mark on his neck.

Kayla always liked to mark her men.

“It's Sophia.” I corrected him. Only friends called me Soph. He sure as hell wasn't a friend.

He rolled his eyes. “So you want to be childish?”

I gritted my teeth. I wasn't biting back at him. I wasn't giving him the pleasure of a fight with me in this crowded hallway. My "friends" already

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had a show starring me and him.

When he dumped me and admitted to being in a relationship with Kayla.

"Look, it's only for a couple of months. I'll stay out of your way. You stay out of mine?" He was suggesting a plan that was impossible.

"So that's your plan? Me coming to live with you for two months?" I crossed my arms. "I hate you, Kyle. Hear me when I say this. I hate you!"

My parents had cut their cruise short because doctors were needed in Africa. And Mum and Dad always went when needed. Though this time, because they had watched me withdraw from my life and stop caring about anything or everything, well, they didn't want me home alone.

Their solution?

Dump me at Kyles.

Our parents had got close over the three years Kyle and I had been together. Close enough that Mum and Dad didn't see the problem in my moving in with them for two months. My parents

didn't even consult me on it! They just did it! They just decided that the best thing for me was to dump me at Kyle's. Because they "trusted" his parents to look after me.

I don't know what was worse, Kyle getting a real look at the mess I was, or the fact that I wouldn't be able to stop him from seeing it.

"Like I said, it's only awkward if you let it be. Come on, Soph." He was calling me by my nick name again, like he had a right to.

"Sophia," I corrected him again. "I want nothing to do with you."

He sighed. "I knew you would act like this. I told Mum and Dad you wouldn't agree to it."

"Well, you were right, because I'm planning on never entering your house again."

"Why aren't your parents letting you stay home by yourself?"

Because of you. I clamped my mouth shut. I was never telling him how much he hurt me—to the point that I didn't see the point in life. I couldn't get up in the morning to face yet another day with a broken heart. He betrayed my trust.

Look where trusting people got me. Sick, depressed, and lonely.

Kyle was still looking at me, expecting an answer. I turned back to look in my locker. Now I just had to get my books and leave him behind.

Hopefully we didn't have any of the same classes.



“If it makes you better, I won’t let Kayla come over.” He was being nice. I didn’t want him to be nice. I’d rather he was rude because then I could have another reason to hate him. Hating him now was becoming easier. But I realized there was nothing he could say that would ever stop me from hating him.

“Do what you want. I’m not planning on being there much.” I grabbed my books. I intended to spend a hell of a lot of time at cafes or in libraries, somewhere—anywhere—but his place.

“I should warn you Joshua is home too.”

My head snapped to look back at him. He had to be joking? Joshua had been in prison for two years. His sentence was for four. “How?”

“Made an appeal and he won. He is on parole.” Kyle took a step closer to me. “Just come and stay with us. I promise to behave.”

He was saying that like he still cared about me. I had wasted two weeks crying over him. One week smashing everything in sight. And then next realizing he didn’t love me. And now? And now I was back to crying. It was like I had done a full circle and was back at the start.

“So I’ll see you tomorrow?” Kyle said, arching his eyebrows.

I didn’t want to go there. But Mum and Dad weren’t giving me a choice. “Yeah,” I finally said with regret. “But just because I’m agreeing to come, doesn’t mean I don’t hate you.”

A sad smile crept across his face. “I really fucked up, Soph.”

“I wouldn’t say that. You just didn’t love me anymore.” I closed my locker door, ready to walk away from him.

An expression captured his face. I knew the look. It was regret. Well, there was nothing for him to regret.

“How I ended us wasn’t acceptable,” he said and started to walk beside me.

I shrugged my shoulders. It hadn’t been acceptable. He did it in front of everyone. It was like he waited until it was my birthday to tell me. Like, to make it hurt more because every birthday from now on I was going to remember what he did.

I picked up my pace, hoping he would just stop following me.

I walked to the classroom door, and his hand wrapped around my upper arm and he dragged me back, forcing me to not enter.

I was about to yell at him for touching me.

“Why do you think I did it?” he asked, gripping my arm.

What do I think? Well, this time I was going to tell the truth. “Because you wanted her over me. Simple, really.”

His lips clamped shut. It looked like he didn’t like my answer. Wasn’t that why he did it though? He loved her. Hell, he had been sneaking around with her for three months and I hadn’t noticed.

“Can you let go of me now?” I asked as his grip got tighter.

A depressing smile crept across his face. “One day you’ll know

the truth, and I hope that is one day soon.”

“Kyle, I don’t want anything to do with you. I can promise you, I’m not waiting on ‘one day’ for your actions to make sense.”

I pulled my arm from his grasp.

“Soph, I’m really sorry.” It sounded like he meant it too.

I scoffed. “No you aren’t, Kyle. Now go find that girlfriend of yours that you love so much.”

With that said, I turned and walked into the classroom just as the bell rang. But I had seen the anger on his face... But the anger hadn’t been directed at me.

“Why can’t I stay with Nana?” I asked Mum as we pulled up at Kyle’s.

“Because your nana will let you do anything.” Mum put the car in park. “Now, Soph, we talked about this. I talked to his parents and they said he is rarely home at the moment.”

Yeah, probably cause him and Kayla were on a sex bender.

With regret I got out of the car and moved the duffle bag on my shoulder. How awkward could this be?

Living with him, his parents, and his criminal brother—surely I could get through a couple of months.

That was the reasonable side of me coming out. The other side was screaming for me to run far, far away from him and this

house.

“Just behave, Soph,” Mum said as we reached the front door and rang the bell.

This can't be happening. This was like every girl's worst nightmare, being made to move in with your ex-boyfriend!

The door opened, and, just my luck, Kyle answered. He greeted Mum like they were long-lost friends. Chit chat turned into ten minutes. And then he finally acknowledged me with the biggest smile on his face.

Was he bipolar? Why the hell was he smiling at me like that? Like I was his favourite person and he was seeing them for the first time in years.

It didn't make sense so I just ignored it.

We walked in and his mum, Louise, showed me the guestroom. It was right across from Joshua's and next door to Kyle's. How many hours, days, weeks and months had I spent in that room with him?

Again, it had all been a waste of time.

Kyle's dad was running for Mayor, and like my parents, they earnt good money, so the house looked similar to mine. Big rooms decorated expensively—yep, our parents were the same. Apart from Louise, she was an artist. How a hippy artist ended up with Jed, Kyle's dad, I don't know.

But Jed loved Louise's quirky ways. Like how she always had at

least ten bracelets on and always had paint or clay on her.

I never saw my mum becoming friends with her. They were opposites. But they did. They went for morning walks; Louise was always getting Mum on some herbal tablets.

Louise was lovely. And I was happy she was here. Just because I had wiped Kyle out of my life, didn't mean I had no time for his parents. They had always been kind to me.

My side was aching because Mum had been rushing me and I slipped on the stairs and hit my side on the rail.

Kyle, for some reason, was hanging around while Louise and Mum talked in my new room.

I said good bye to Mum and she gave me a final hug before leaving. Louise showed her out.

Which left me and Kyle in my new room.

He leaned against the doorframe and looked fucking delighted that I was here.

“Why the hell are you looking at me like that?” I snapped at him as he kept grinning at me. Did he forget the part where we broke up and he broke my heart? Had that skipped his mind! Cause he was looking at me like I was his favourite person. Hell he was giving me that look he used to give me before he told me how much he loved me.

“My luck is turning around,” he said, still grinning at me.

What the hell was he on about? His luck turning around? How was me moving in making his luck better?

## Chapter Two

Soph

I needed to get tougher skin if I was going to survive being here. I had to sit through dinner with Kyle, who for some unknown reason—and I was questioning his sanity—took every opportunity he got to make conversation with me.

He was acting like he had forgotten all about the part where he broke my heart. He even asked if I wanted to watch the football with him, like we used to. I couldn't understand how he had been so cold and blunt when we broke up, but now... now he was being friendly and caring and the guy I had fallen in love with.

The thought even crossed my mind for a second, maybe at max ten seconds, that was he trying to get back together with me. Then the doorbell rang and his new girlfriend, and my ex-best friend, showed up.

Immediately Kyle changed. He went from friendly to defensive. I lasted ten minutes in the same room as them. Kayla was all over him. It made my skin crawl. I couldn't cope seeing them. The way he kissed her back, the way he didn't stop her from being all over him... I did notice though she was the one touching and kissing him. He didn't start it.

But he also didn't stop it.

I had escaped from the lounge room right before I lost my shit.

Now I was in the shower. This was the first time I'd had a shower in this bathroom. I had always showered in Kyle's ensuite.

I was so lost in thought, basically plotting the death of Kayla, when the door swung open just as I turned the taps off.

“Fucking hell, Kyle, why are you using my bathroom!”

I spun around and saw Joshua.

His eyes were scorching with anger, until he looked up and spotted me standing naked in the shower.

The annoyed and angry expression on his face disappeared, replaced by shock.

I was just as shocked to see him. He wasn't wearing a top; he was bigger, more toned, and his body was covered in tattoos. Some of them I had seen before, others I hadn't. His black hair was short. His sharp blue eyes were the same, but he looked older. And he didn't seem as carefree as he used to.

I think the only thing he did in prison was workout. My mouth fell open. As I gawked at him, his eyes ran up and down my body.

I think a few minutes passed as we just looked at each other.

He didn't do the gentleman thing to do and look away, or turn around and leave me, instead he was the Joshua I always knew—a man that didn't shy away from an awkward situation.

His eyes snapped off me and he picked up and towel and through

it my direction.

It was an automatic reaction to catch it, even in my shock. The embarrassment slowly ticked in and I went bright red.

He crossed his arms. “Well, you’ve certainly grown up, Soph.” A smirk on his face.

I knew what he meant by that too. When he last saw me, I didn’t have breasts. I actually had plastic surgery to get the breasts I have now. Before that I was flat chested. I was skinner too. In fact, I had changed a lot since he last saw me.

I wrapped the towel around me, still with flushed cheeks. I hoped he thought it was from the shower and not him seeing me naked. Only one person had seen me naked and that was Kyle.

“Kyle didn’t mention you were staying. Why aren’t you in his shower?” Joshua didn’t leave, instead he stepped in and closed the door behind him.

I’m not going to lie. I had always been attracted to Joshua. He was older and he had this rough exterior. In short, he was the bad boy. While Kyle was the golden boy, Joshua didn’t follow the rules. He didn’t give a fuck what others thought of him. He lived to piss them off.

So right now, instead of doing the right thing, which was leaving, he leaned against the wall, his eyes on me.

Hadn’t Kyle mentioned that he wasn’t with me anymore? That I was being forced to be here? How had Joshua not seen his brother making out with another girl downstairs?



“Why aren’t you talking?” he asked, frowning. “Don’t tell me after all this time you’re finally scared of me.”

I rolled my eyes. The reason I hadn’t answered was because I was trying to come up with a way to tell him Kyle and I weren’t together.

“We broke up,” I finally said and held the towel tighter around me.

He frowned. “No you haven’t. He is downstairs with your best friend.” He clicked his fingers, trying to remember something. “Kylie?”

“Kayla,” I corrected him. “And that is his new girlfriend. So, not my friend.”

His expression hardened. “He is dating your best friend?”

“Yeah, pretty much.” That did sum it up. “I’m being forced to stay here while my parents are in Africa.”

“He always was a dickhead,” he muttered. “Guess that means we’re sharing a bathroom.” A grin appeared on his face. “I thought Kyle was in here just to piss me off.”

“Nope, just me.” I ran a hand over the fogged mirror. God, I looked drained. My flushed cheeks were the only thing giving me colour.

“You still cheering?”

I scoffed. “I’m the least cheerful person I know. So the answer to me being on the squad is no.”

“But you were captain.”

Yeah, I had been. The youngest captain in history. I had always gone to gymnastics, so I excelled in cheerleading. I only joined the squad cause Kyle pushed me too. I actually ran up the ranks and before I knew I was captain. But I wasn’t this year.

“Like I said, I’m not a cheerful person and the thought of cheering depresses me.”

I saw his eyes narrowed at me in the reflection of the mirror. “Does my brother have something to do with your sudden change?”

“Nope.” Yes.

“So how long you here for?”

“I’m hoping just two months.” I turned around. “Are you going to let me get dressed?”

His serious expression changed and he gave me the biggest smirk. “I’ve already seen everything, sweetheart.”

I kept control over my reaction. I would not get embarrassed. He was challenging me, and the old Soph would have bolted from the room, taking my clothes and changing in the bedroom.

But the new Soph didn’t give a fuck anymore. So I dropped the towel and his eyes went wide.

“Fuck, I was kidding, Soph!”

I shrugged and threaded my underwear on. I never thought a day would come that I would be naked in front of Joshua. But the new me just didn't care what people thought. When you have nothing to risk, you find yourself doing things you never thought you were capable of.

Like getting changed in front of your ex-boyfriends hot brother.

“I guess I missed the memo where you were joking, Joshua.”

His eyes ran up and down me and then finally locked with mine just as I was clipping my bra on.

“Call me Josh. I hate Joshua.”

I smiled just a little. “But all your family call you Joshua?”

“Kyle does it cause he knows I hate it. And the parents do it to try and take higher ground.”

I nodded my head. “I only get Sophia from the parents when I've pissed them off. I hate it.”

He grinned and nodded his head. “I'll make sure to always call you Soph then.”

“And I'll make sure to call you Josh.” I slipped on my dress and was going to close the zipper when I felt his hand move over mine and do it for me.

His eyes locked with mine in the mirror—his sharp blue eyes slicing through my hazel eyes. I noticed something in them, something I hadn't seen before, but I couldn't explain what it was.

He gave me a small smile and his fingers hovered on the zip.

“I... um, won't barge in next time,” he said, still with a small smile on his face. “I didn't realise it was you.”

“No big deal.” I think I had handled the situation well. I wasn't nervous or freaking out. And I had just shown him my naked body.

I turned around and noticed how close he was to me. I couldn't step away from him; I was already up against the basin.

My hands clamped down onto it and I tried my very best to not let my breathing become sharp. He towered over me and I just stared up at him.

“I always thought Kyle didn't deserve you.” His words were gentle. “Glad you ended it.”

I frowned. “I didn't. He broke up with me, on my birthday in front of everyone, and then told me he had been sleeping with my best friend for three months.”

Josh looked down at me. “You're joking, right? He wouldn't have done that.”

“If you don't believe me, ask him. His new girlfriend is mighty proud of how it ended.” And I knew that for a fact on how she acted when he told me. She loved seeing him break my heart.

Some best friend she was.

“He’s a dick. You didn’t deserve that.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Doesn’t really matter now.”

“Guess you’re hating it here?”

“You could say that.” Watching Kayla all over Kyle was hard. Really hard. Especially when he had been nice to me all night and morning and then she shows up and he goes cold towards me. Treats me like I’m invisible.

“Well, if you ever want to escape, I’m in the shed.” He took a step back. “Kyle is allergic to anything involving a car.”

I grinned. “You’re right. He isn’t really hands on, like you.”

“You saying I’m more skilled?” I couldn’t believe it, but Josh was flirting with me.

“When it comes to cars, yes.”

“Well, my mission is now to show you I’m more skilled at everything.”

I still had a grin on my face. For the first time in days of being here, I felt relaxed. “Don’t get a big head now. I said you were skilled with cars, isn’t that enough?”

He shook his head with a carefree grin. “I’ll prove to you, when it comes to everything, you are better off without Kyle.”

My grin fell. “I realized I was better off without him when he showed his true colours.” And that was the truth. I may have been heart broken. But I knew he didn’t really love me. Because when you love someone, you do everything humanly possible for them not to get hurt. And never been the one to cause them pain.

Josh stepped back away from me. “I hope he hasn’t ruined your faith in all guys.”

I scoffed. “I won’t ever trust another guy. Not after him. Anyway, it doesn’t matter. I won’t be giving anyone power like that over me again.”

The power to cause me to become an emotionless zombie. To be a tearful mess. To squeeze my heart so tight that I feel physically sick. Kyle had damaged me and I still wasn’t healing. So the last thing I was going to do was fall for another male who would just do what Kyle did.

I trusted Kyle and look where that got me.

“Um, I’ll see you around, Josh.” I stepped away from him and picked up my towel. “And next time knock.” I gave him a smile before he could say anything else. The last thing I needed was his pity. I wasn’t some helpless case. I was putting myself together. It was just going to take time.

So I left Josh standing there before he could say anything.

## Chapter Three

KYLE

“Fucking stop it,” I snapped at Kayla. “She’s not even here.” I was hoping that would get Kayla off me. Instead she kept to my side and kept her hand locked with mine. When she didn’t pull away, I got up, fucking sick of the show. “You’ve made your point now piss off.”

“I thought we could watch a movie.” Kayla said, pretending to be innocent. “Come on, Kyle, calm down.”

“You’ve come. You’ve made your point, now fuck off, Kayla.”

“You know what, I don’t think I have made my point because you are still clinging to the chance she is going to take you back!” Kayla got up abruptly. “She still looks at you like you are hers.”

“I am hers!” I would always be Sophia’s. She was my other half. I never wanted to hurt her. I never wanted to not be by her side. So right now I was suffering.

“No. You are mine,” Kayla put down a fake claim on me again.

She could say it over and over. She could lay claim on me anyway she wanted. It didn’t change the fact that my heart, every single piece of me, belonged to Sophia.

“You better start living up to the expectations, Kyle, because I’m not getting the thrill out of blacking mailing you as I was at the beginning.”

“How’s it my fault you are getting sick of your own game!”

One night. I had screwed up one night. And she just so happened to be there. I regretted having that line of ice, more now than

when Kayla first approached me.

She had a picture of me doing that line. And if you looked at the environment around me, you would think I was a regular user. But I wasn't. It was my first time. And I should have taken everyone's warning when it came to drugs.

I shouldn't have done it. My one night of letting go had cost me everything. My dad was running for Mayor, and if that photo of me got out he wouldn't have a chance in winning. Kayla knew.

Fuck, she was counting on me taking her offer, knowing I wouldn't want my Dad's career to suffer because of my mistake. My one night of letting go—of forgetting the pressures that surrounded my life.

One night, that was it.

And it cost me the woman I love.

At first I didn't think Kayla was serious when she approached me. But she meant it when she said she wanted me to end it with Soph.

I had delayed it three months.

But when Soph's birthday came around, Kayla said it was now or the picture was going to the press.

I never wanted to hurt Soph. I had promised her I would never hurt her. And instead of just hurting her, I betrayed her trust, broke her heart, and shattered our future together.



I knew that, one of these days, the pain in Soph's eyes when she looked at me would turn to hate, and as soon as it did, I would never get her back. I would never be able to get that hate out of her eyes or heart.

I knew it was coming. I shouldn't feel joy when I saw the pain in her eyes. But I was thankful to see it because it meant she still felt something towards me.

I didn't want her to suffer, but I didn't want her to let go of me completely.

Kayla was right when she said I was clinging to the chance of getting Soph back. I was. I was clinging to every chance. I was hoping when the election ended that I could tell Soph the truth and hope to God that she takes me back.

Soph

I rolled over. Another sleepless night. I couldn't get comfortable. I couldn't stop the racing thoughts. I couldn't turn the volume down. Always going over the same thing... How did I not notice Kyle was in love with someone else?

How could he do that to me?

How could he go from loving me to breaking my heart?

I sighed, frustrated. It didn't matter how many hours I wasted thinking about him, trying to come up with a reason he did what he did.

It didn't matter because, at the end of the day, why he did what

he did was beyond me.

I still couldn't explain why he wanted to hurt me so badly by picking Kayla.

I guess you don't pick who you fall in love with. I sure as hell didn't mean to fall in love with Kyle. I didn't pick him. My heart did.

And now... now I was suffering because of it.

I lit up my phone. Just after two in the morning. It was now a Saturday and I had dinner with one of Dad's friends tonight. It was meant to be a whole family dinner with him—Jeff always gave me the creeps—so I wasn't looking forward to a one on one dinner with him.

I picked up on the fact he would always make an effort to sit next to me. He would always touch me, just slightly, so not to come across like he was, and enough for me to explain it away as an accident.

But those “accidents” happened every time he saw me.

JOSH

I lit up a cigarette while staring at the motor. Whose idea was it to replace the motor? Mine. Seemed like a good idea at the time taking this heap of shit and turning it into a fine muscle car. I had more time on my hands than anything else. Now I was questioning my sanity.

My phone buzzed in my pocket. I got it out automatically, not

taking my eyes off the motor. I inhaled on the cigarette sharply and glanced at my phone. Then did a double take.

Soph's name was on my screen. How did she know I still had this number? More importantly, why would she be messaging me?

I hadn't seen her since I walked in on her in the bathroom. I smirked just remembering. She really had grown up. Fuck. It wasn't just her body that made me see she had grown up. She was way more confident now. I had only been with her for a few minutes and when she didn't bolt from the awkward situation I knew she had really matured.

I unlocked my phone and her message opened.

Help

I frowned. What did she mean by that? Was that message for someone else? Something told me it was meant for me. Well, if she wanted help, she would have to tell me what with and where.

Where r u? I sent back and took the cigarette from my lips.

Diamond Carat.

Why would she be at that restaurant? It was for the rich. I guess she was rich, well, her family was. Still, Soph never flashed money around. When it came down to it, Soph never rubbed in other people's face that her parents earned more than someone's yearly wage in a month.

I dropped the cigarette on the ground and put it out. I looked down at my jeans and white t-shirt, both covered in grease and oil stains. I would have to change if they were going to let me in.

Something was telling me to hurry the fuck up. I flicked off the shed lights and headed inside. Change of clothes and then I'd head for her. It wasn't like Soph to ask for help. In fact, I couldn't think of one occasion where she had asked for help.

Knowing that made me move quicker.

## Chapter Four

### JOSH

Prison. My time in there has defined me now. It reshaped my future and it crafted my life. Before prison I was empty, soulless, and reckless. I was still soulless, but I had found a purpose. That purpose being the Devil's Cut.

I never thought the most feared, most dangerous motorcycle club would give me a purpose. I didn't see my life heading anywhere; didn't have a fucking direction or plan for the future. So when they approached me in prison and drafted me, I didn't fight it.

It didn't scare me that I was going to join one of the world's notorious motorcycle clubs. I lived my life by two qualities: loyalty and I don't give a fuck what others think. So I didn't waste a second on what people's opinion of me would be. I didn't care if people thought I was reckless, soulless, or heartless. I didn't give a fuck what anyone thought.

I have no fear. Some would say I was fearless. Hell, that's what

other blokes called me until Wolf, the Mother Charter President of the Devil's Cut, gave me the vice president patch. I went from being called Fearless to Vice quickly.

I was the acting Vice President in prison. I was the enforcer there. Made sure everyone was safe, protected, and Wolf noticed my active role in making sure his members were safe in there. I did one year of being a prospect and I was given the vice president patch, six months after my prospect year ended.

It was unheard of. A member had to serve the club for years, and even then that didn't mean they would be given a title or become a VP.

Wolf lasted six months with me behind bars acting as vice president, then he needed me out in the world—he needed his VP at his side.

So they organised an appeal.

I sure as hell didn't see it being successful. But the club pulled strings. And before I knew it, I was out nearly two years early.

I got a four year sentence for beating a man that deserved it.

Still to this day I could never say I loved Christine. She was my girlfriend at the time. I was only with her because it was expected and I was having regular sex with her. It made sense to be her boyfriend: I needed sex, and she was good at it. It wasn't like I was in love with her. I didn't feel love for anyone. Not even my family. Sure, I respected them and cared for them. But love? I don't think I could call it that.

I didn't really know what love was. My parents never showed it to each other. I got four years for hitting Christine's Dad when he dared to hit her in front of me. It was an automatic response. I punched him and, like always, when the lid came off my temper it came right off.

How did Christine thank me? She broke up with me as soon as I was charged and out of her life. So I didn't feel or do love.

Loyalty however I do feel. I felt loyalty for the club. I think if I had to pick what love was I would say I felt it for the club. The first thing I did when I got out of prison was get the permanent patch, which was a tattoo of the club logo and shield on my back.

It was my first tattoo and not my last. The tattooist was now working on my arm. When I'm finished I doubt there'll be any bare skin left.

I pulled up at the restaurant. I wasn't in colours. It wasn't heard of for a member not to be in colours, especially when they are a vice president.

But my Dad wouldn't let me wear colours near the house.

He publicly disowned me when I got let out. When he was questioned on my early release, he confirmed what the media thought: he had nothing to do with me. The only reason I was at their house was because it was part of the condition of my parole. That and, for some reason, Mum was wanted it. She thought she could change me; wouldn't accept the fact that I had made my decision and I wasn't ashamed being a known criminal.

I had spent so many months keeping the order in prison it didn't

really throw me when the same was expected of me in the club now outside of prison.

I locked the car and got out. I wouldn't normally stop what I was doing for anyone. Maybe if Wolf really needed me. But I wouldn't stop what I was doing for a woman.

Then Soph was a different matter.

She was an expectation to the rule. Still don't know how that happened, but it did. Maybe because before I went away I watched her grow up. Though, when I left she was still an immature teenager who was hanging on every word my brother said.

Now... Well, now she was a woman that didn't give a fuck if I saw her naked. I still couldn't believe she just got dressed in front of me like that! She should know better. I was a man after all, a dangerous one.

I had wondered at the time whether she had done it because she felt comfortable or because she was hell bent on breaking rules that used to cage her.

As I entered the restaurant I walked straight past the greeter and ignored his complaint that I didn't have a booking. He was the one causing a scene by following me and demanding me to leave. I continued to ignore him and scanned the restaurant, looking for Soph.

She always stood out. One glance at her slim figure and blonde hair from behind and I knew it was her. She was in the sunken area of the restaurant that looked like it was for more intimate couples.

I scrolled through the restaurant, my eyes on her. I could see from where I was that she was tense. She looked stiff. I saw him move closer to her, and I think I could hear her panic.

She turned just slightly, I think to get away from him, and her eyes locked with mine.

I saw panic along with relief in her hazel eyes. Never had anyone looked at me with relief. Usually it was fear, and I encouraged that fear because it kept the unwanted away and the ones that needed to fear me, well, they got the message.

I was in earshot now and I could pick up on their conversation. It was a one-sided conversation because Soph's attention was on me.

She got up. "Babe, I'm so sorry. Our dinner just took a little longer." Her eyes were pledging with me to go along with whatever she was saying. I wasn't boyfriend material. So how she planned on explaining us together I don't know. I was the guy that everyone didn't want to associate with.

I was the guy your parents warn you about. I would happily say I didn't just scare men off, I scared off the female population as well. I think it had to do with the fact I was double the size of the normal guy. I intimidated everyone. And I didn't need the club doing that for me. Just my image sent the message.

"Your parents never mentioned you were dating anyone, Sophia." The man she called Jeff turned around and stood up. I saw his judgement. "They didn't mention you were dating Joshua Hawkins either."



Yeah, my mugshot had been plastered all over the newspaper about my early release. The media had been having a field day with it. Then my open connections to the Devil's Cut were highlighted. But the fact I was Vice President stayed out of the paper. So it surprised me that Soph would want to even pretend that she was in a relationship with me.

I was bad news, everyone knew that. Didn't need a reporter to tell you about my case, just one glance at me was enough to have people staying out of my way.

"Funny, Mom and Dad didn't mention your marriage breakup either," Soph said and picked up her clutch. "I should really get going, Josh and I have plans."

"I don't think your parents would approve, Sophia," he said that like he had some control over whether she would be leaving with me or not. How wrong was he. Soph was leaving with me. I could tell from one glance at her she was scared, she was nervous, she felt unsafe and this prick seemed to be the cause of it all.

"I'm sure her parents would also be wondering why you would be taking their daughter, who could be your daughter, to a place like the Diamond Carat." I stepped to Soph's side. She looked like she was a second from having a full on panic attack.

I couldn't remember the last time I touched someone. But I found myself touching Soph as I took her clenched shut hand. Jeff didn't seem to have an answer to my comment. I was used to men like him thinking they had power because they earned a good wage. Most people are scared of people with power and money. I, however, couldn't give a fuck if they had money or a position of power. Because when it came down to it, men like him didn't have

a spine to begin with.

I eased Soph's clenched hand free and linked her fingers with mine. She would have to know I wasn't about to let this guy hurt her.

Jeff's eyes were on Soph. "Sophia, are you sure you want to leave with this man? Remember my offer?"

It was like someone had poured freezing ice cold water of Soph. She was that stunned and shocked.

I didn't need Soph to tell me what she was feeling. I could see the panic in her eyes. She looked like a cornered animal.

I watched her gulp as she came up with a reason to deny his request again. He moved closer to her and it was my automatic response to block his path to her. I stepped in between them.

"Sophia is too polite to tell you to piss off. But I'm not. So back the fuck down and consider the answer to your offer a no." I stepped back and pulled on Soph's hand. She followed me out.

People pulled chairs in or stepped out of our way. I was used to that. People always stayed away from me. Soph was following in my shadow and I don't think she took a deep breath in until we stepped outside.

I stopped pulling on her hand and turned to face her. "You alright?"

Her eyes were wide and she still looked like she was in shock. I saw her gulp.

“Sophia, are you ok?” I repeated myself when she remained silent, with this look on her face that told me she was anything but ok.

She took another deep breath in. “Thank you, Josh.” She pulled her hand from mine and looked like she was calming down. “I’m so sorry to get you involved like that. I just didn’t know anyone else who would come.” She ran hand through her hair, looking upset. “I’m so sorry to bring you into my mess.”

“Soph, don’t stress about it.” I didn’t know what else to say to get her to calm down.

“Still, it’s not acceptable.” She shook her head. “I’m so sorry.”

“Stop saying sorry. I said it was fine.” I didn’t know whether to add to that or not but then I found myself knowing I had to by the look on her face. “It’s what friends are for, right?” I said awkwardly. I didn’t do friends. I didn’t bond with anyone. Unless it was made of steel and metal or a club brother.

Her eyes went bigger and I didn’t think that was possible. “We aren’t friends.” She was saying that like it was the worst thing to happen to her. “I really didn’t mean to use you like that, Josh. I don’t expect you to like put up with me or anything. Seriously, we aren’t friends because of that.”

“We were friends before tonight, Soph, otherwise you wouldn’t have called me.” I felt for some reason I needed to reassure her. “Now do you want to head home or are you hungry?”

She looked at me stunned. “You don’t do friends.” She repeated a

fact about me everyone knew.

I didn't know how to be one. But I guess I was going to learn. Soph was worth it. She was sweet, she was drop dead gorgeous—beautiful—the sort of beauty that would stop you in your tracks. She had every man's attention. It was curves to her body, the shape of her perfect breasts, and her beautiful creamed colour skin. One glance at her perfect shaped face and you were hooked.

Like I said, she was gorgeous, but it wasn't just her beauty or body that had me doing something I never did. It was her personality. And even though I hadn't seen or had a good conversation with her in years, I knew her personality hadn't changed.

She was the type of girl that put everyone before her. She was the type of girl that would break a rule if it meant the benefit outweighed risk. And she was the only woman I knew that wasn't selfish.

I scratched the back of my neck, watching her eyes debate. She was weighing up the facts; she had always been good at that. Even when I left and she was only sixteen, she knew how to weigh up the odds.

I guess I just had to be honest with her. "You're right, I don't do friendships. This is a one off." I forced myself to smile at her, while I felt a hell of a lot of nerves. I never got fucking nervous, but right now that was the only thing that explained how I was feeling.

Her serious expression broke and she smiled. "I better not stuff it up then." Her hair blew across her face and I should have stopped

myself but didn't when I tucked it behind her ear. For some reason it bothered me that it was in the way of her flawless face.

"You want to head home?" I asked, my hand hovering at the side of her face. I wanted to cup her cheek, but I wasn't sure if friends did that. I knew for a fact if she was my girlfriend I would have my hands all over her. I didn't do boundaries when it came to girlfriends.

"Um, yeah." She smiled and stepped in closer to me, getting out of the way of a couple walking past. "Sorry to make you come in and get me."

"How did you get here?"

"He picked me up."

I frowned. "That jerk was at my house?"

"He is meant to be a family friend." She glanced back at restaurant and sighed. "I don't know why I attract men like that. It's like I have a sign around my neck telling useless men to approach me." She rolled her eyes and looked back at me. "Thanks for saving me from him."

We started to walk to my car, and I knew I shouldn't but I took her hand. "Don't worry about it. You can always call me." I didn't say that to many people. Yeah, if they were my club brothers I was always reachable. But for a female to call me in case she needed me—that I didn't do.

"You know I read something about you today." Soph didn't pull her small hand from mine and I had to say it fitted perfectly.

“If it’s from Jill Mason, I’m telling you now it’s all lies,” I said. Jill Mason was a reporter who had it out for me. She was making it her mission to make sure my life was that bit harder. She even had an investigator on me, which I paid off to feed her back useless information.

“Actually it was on the Age.” Soph came to a stop next to my car and turned to look up at me. “You’re involved with a motorcycle club aren’t you?”

That I wasn’t expecting. There had been rumours, but no one had ever confirmed it. I swallowed sharply. Guess I was about to see her reaction on what she thought of her new friend being a known criminal.

I stayed silent, watching her expression as she sighed.

“I didn’t expect you to confirm it. I read all about how you keep it quiet because of your dad.” She kept staring up at me. She didn’t look one bit scared or frightened.

Dad was the one keeping it quiet. Not me. I didn’t give a fuck if it was plastered all over the headlines. Dad, however, did care and had control over the headlines and articles—at the moment.

If he didn’t win this mayor election, he wouldn’t have control anymore. The fact I was a criminal and a biker would get out.

“I know for a fact you weren’t in one before you left. You know, no one has ever told me why you went to prison.” She linked her fingers with mine, looking down at our linked hands. “You don’t have to tell me though.”

I remained quiet.

I didn't want to confirm her nightmare. At the same time, I wanted to tell her the truth. For some reason what she thought mattered to me.

Soph pulled up her strapless black dress and sighed. "Well, if you aren't going to talk at least take me home."

I nodded my head. I could do that. I couldn't answer or confirm her thoughts, even if they were true. But I could take her home.

I let go of her hand and she walked to the passenger side of my car.

I knew I was going to remain silent. But even when I was silent around Soph, it was never awkward.

It just felt, right, I guess.

Not uncomfortable or forcing me to make conversation. I never experienced that with anyone. Didn't know what to call it. I got in the car and like I expected the silence continued. I turned on the radio and pulled out.

Like I expected, it wasn't awkward.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Soph

I excelled in school. I never found studies hard. I could balance

the pressure of a serious relationship, school work, and being there for my best friend easily. I never struggled. Not when it came to being Kyle's other half or keeping up a flawless grade average.

But today—no—this week, I was struggling. It would seem like Kyle and Kayla had decided to always be in my view. I had been cursed to have nearly every class with them, apart from art.

I think the hardest thing I was coming to terms with was also the hardest thing I had to face every day: watching Kyle do with Kayla the things he used to do with me. It was simple things, like getting her lunch, carrying her books, sharing inside jokes.

And the one thing that really hurt me was he had picked the same place to make out with her. It was in between lockers in the b wing, and I had the misfortune of seeing them. Actually, it felt like they were doing it on purpose just to hurt me. Like they knew I had to take that way to math and would catch them.

Anyway, I didn't think it was possible for my heart to bleed anymore, but it did. Seeing her have him pinned against the side of the locker... When I first saw them, I had to do a double take. I couldn't actually believe that Kyle would make out with her in our spot.

I thought he had more respect for what we had. But I was wrong. I was also wrong when I thought he would respect me. At least be somewhat nice considering our history. But he ignored me. He ignored me when Kayla was there in the morning to pick him up.



He ignored me when I said hello to him when we were waiting to get in a classroom.

He even ignored me when we were put together in gym.

It didn't escape my notice that Kayla was watching his every move. She had eyes on her like a hawk. In fact, I'm sure she spent more time in that module listening to our lack of conversation than she did focusing on the class.

I got out of my car. I had survived another week. I somehow had made it through without killing Kayla, or letting Kyle see how heartbroken I was. I think I did well.

Wasn't until I opened the front door that I wished I had stayed in my car a little bit longer.

"Oh hi, Soph." Kayla gave me a smile that she used to give me when we were friends.

"It's Sophia." I couldn't stop myself from correcting her. But I guess, when I thought about it, I had to admit I didn't have friends anymore.

"We are heading to the party, celebrating the guys win tonight. Want to come?" Kayla actually said that like I would join them. What did she want to do—rub her relationship with Kyla in my face more?

I wanted to bitch slap her for even saying it; instead I stepped out of their way to the front door. I wanted them to leave. I wanted it badly. I couldn't stand one more second watching them together.

It made me sick seeing Kyle hold her hand, kiss her cheek, and look at her like she was his number one. He used to look at me like that.

I kept a pleasant look on my face but wished they would just walk out the front door.

“Come on, hun, I’ll drive.” Kayla pried herself from Kyle’s side and walked out the door.

I expected Kyle to follow her right away, but he waited until she was down the porch steps and unlocking her car. Then he stepped in front of me. “Are you ok?” He had a concerned look on his face.

“Fine.” I wasn’t about to open up to him on how much I was struggling. I wasn’t about to tell him that I was suffering, slowly and painfully, watching him move on from me.

“Soph, you aren’t fine. You haven’t said one word this week.”

I frowned. I knew I hadn’t spoken much this week. Actually, when I thought about it, I hadn’t had one conversation with anyone this week. Apart from the yes and no’s to teachers, I hadn’t said anything. Well, when I did go to make conversation it was directed at Kyle and he would ignore me. So I stopped trying.

I shrugged my shoulders. Wasn’t going to open up to him. Not now. Not ever.

I can’t believe it’s Friday night and I had gone a week being invisible. Not one person asked how I was. There was a point in time, when I was with Kyle, that I was peppered with useless

comments every day—every minute of every hour.

Now, nothing.

“You sure you don’t want to come?” Kyle asked, just as Kayla used the horn.

I narrowed my eyes at him. He couldn’t be serious! Why the hell would I want to go to a party to watch him make out with his girlfriend and then sneak off to the beach to have sex.

Yeah I knew what Kyle was like at these parties. Knew exactly what he would want from Kayla tonight. He would want her always in reach. And then when he had drunk enough, when he wanted more than just kisses, he would sneak her off to have sex with her.

He would know I knew his pattern. So why the fuck would he ask me to go!

The horn went off again and like normal Kayla hated waiting.

“Bye, Kyle,” I said and crossed my arms.

He frowned and looked like he wasn’t ready to give up on this conversation. But the horn went again.

“You should go before she gets your neighbours out,” I said and kept distance between us.

A look of regret captured his face. He finally nodded his head and walked out the front door, closing it softly behind him and leaving me in the foyer.

I had been so focused on Kyle—the sound of his breathing and heart beating, his short sharp intake of breathes and long exhales—I didn't realise I had been so tuned into his body until he left.

I sighed and heard the television going in the lounge.

I followed the noise and found Josh. I didn't want to disturb him. But he happened to glance at the double open door way before I turned to leave. A small smile spread across his lips.

“You've been keeping a low profile this week,” he said, not seeming one bit fazed that I was interrupting him.

I had been keeping a low profile. I didn't need to be here to watch more of Kyle and Kayla. I didn't need to see them be together at school and then being forced to watch them do things that I used to do with Kyle at his house.

Though Kyle and I were always in his room, Kyle and Kayla were always in the lounge or the dining room, like they wanted to torture me.

“How's your week been?” I asked, and I found myself having my first conversation.

“I think I should be asking you that question.” He gave me a pointed look, like he knew I had a crap week and it was showing on my face. “Well, are you going to come in or just stand in the door way, looking all cold and lonely?”

I rolled my eyes. I was cold. It had been warm this morning when

I left. But as soon as the night came, so did a chill.

He arched his eyebrows when I didn't walk in. Sighing, I found myself walking into their open lounge. "You didn't tell me what your week has been like," I said and sat down on the couch next to him, but kept a friendly and acceptable gap between us.

Josh's face tightened. And I knew then that his week had been as good as mine. I felt bad for him. I didn't know much about Josh's new life. But I had read an article that was linking him to bikers.

Some people go into prison and come out a better person with lessons learned. Others come out more of a criminal more determined to break the law, and with more knowledge on how to get away with it.

I had a feeling that Josh hadn't learned a lesson in there. We had rarely talked, but one look at him and the carefree guy he was before he went to prison was gone. He was hardened, more built, that was possible and I think what really had me guarded was, he looked terrifying.

I still don't know why he went to prison, Kyle never told me. It was like it was some shameful secret. Which I didn't get because Josh might have went to prison but he always had a good character. He would never hurt someone on purpose. But then, as I thought that, I remembered how he didn't handle emotions well—or feelings.

In fact, he had told me once, just before he went to prison, he said he had never loved anyone, which at the time I didn't believe because he seemed to love his girlfriend at the time. But then again, he didn't show love like a normal person. He showed love—

well, I think it was love—by protecting those close to him.

He was up front about not doing feelings or friendships. He didn't lead you on. He didn't lie.

He was serious, yet at the same time he was carefree. Like he didn't have a worry or concern on his mind. He lived his life a day at a time. That was one of the things I did know for sure about him.

“Guessing you saw my dipstick of a brother.” Josh grabbed his beer off the coffee table. “It was like they were hovering waiting for you to come in.”

I had thought that too. “Yeah, well it was just another awkward run-in. Should really get used to them by now.” I shrugged and tucked my legs underneath me. My legs were cold. In fact, my whole body was cold.

“Getting any easier?”

My head snapped to look at him. He said that like he knew how much I was struggling. I clamped my lips shut. I wouldn't tell him or admit to anyone how heartbroken I was.

Josh gave me a small, sad smile and looked at me with pity.

I didn't need pity. And when he kept looking at me with pity, I snapped.

“Stop looking at me like that! I'm fine!” I wasn't. I was anything but fine and he kept looking at me like he knew that too.

“If you are fine then tell me about it.” Josh leaned back into the couch but turned his body slightly towards me. “Tell me what happened.”

“You know what happened,” I snapped at him again. I was not repeating my heartbreaking and pitiful story to him.

“He broke up with you and is dating your best friend. You told me that but you didn’t tell me how you were coping.”

I frowned. Josh didn’t do emotions, he sure as fuck never cared enough about someone else to ask a question or well more of a statement like that.

“Soph, how are you coping?” he asked, sounding like he really cared about the answer to that question.

“Fine,” I lied again. I had found myself taking the longest ways to class, avoiding every place where they could be making out. Because Kyle was using the same places that he used to make out with me it was easy to avoid them, but sometimes I couldn’t and I would stumble upon them.

“You’re more pale than usual. You don’t come home until after ten. You hate being by yourself but you are currently spending all your time by yourself and then there is the look on your face.”

I frowned. “What look?”

“A look like you don’t have a heart anymore.”

My guarded expression dropped. I let him see the ice and numbness that filled me now. I tried my best for no one to see my

broken heart. I made sure to put up a front. But right now, it was gone. I was letting Josh see what was left of me, and it wasn't much.

I had lost my best friend, my boyfriend, and my personality. I guess, when it came down to it, I had lost myself when I lost them. I didn't realize how much I depended on them in my life until they were gone.

Josh's hand fell on my knee. His hand was warm and large and comforting.

He looked at me somewhat awkward, like he wasn't sure what to say. It made sense though; Josh didn't do emotions. He didn't do awkward either. Actually, I was surprised he hadn't made an excuse up to leave.

"What do you need?" His voice was soft, gentle, and kind. Three things no one had showed me since my heart got broken.

What do I need?

A tear dropped from the corner of my eye. I had really let my guard down. I pinched my eyes shut, telling myself not to cry. My guard might be down, but that didn't mean I was about to become a crying mess in front of him.

I didn't know how Josh would react to me as an uncontrolled crying mess.

"Come on, Soph, how can I help?" he said, his words still gentle.

Josh didn't do gentle. He did mean and hard and direct. So why



was he being kind to me? I opened my eyes and found the answer to his question.

“I just need time,” I said. It was the truth. I was hoping time would heal me. Time would wipe the pain away that I feel daily. Time would stop the emotions I felt and the reaction I had seeing Kyle and Kayla together.

Josh nodded his head. “Well, as long as you don’t become heartless like me.” His words shocked me. He considered himself heartless.

I frowned. “Josh, you aren’t heartless. You have a kind and loving heart. You just don’t show it or let yourself feel it.” My frown turned into a smile. “How else do you explain you being kind to me?”

A man like Josh should have no time for me. I wasn’t his girlfriend or sister. I was just some nobody that once dated his brother.

He took his hand off my knee, deep in thought. Finally he turned to look me in the eye.

“Friends, right?” He gave me a forced smile, as if there was another reason behind his kindness to me.

“Yeah.” I kept smiling and I couldn’t remember one time this week I had smiled. It actually felt odd to smile. There used to be a time when all I did was smile. I loved my life. I loved everyone in my life. And then I lost the life I loved so much because I didn’t realize the life I had was dependent on Kyle being in it.

How the hell did I let him become such a big part of my life? How did I let myself believe him when he said he would love me forever and nothing or no one would get in the way of him loving me?

I was so blindly stupid.

Such an idiot.

I wanted to slap myself for being so bloody stupid. Instead I hated myself that bit more for believing every word Kyle said. I believed it like it was law and he would never go back on his word.

How fucking wrong was I.

“You got plans for tonight?” Josh said, changing the subject to something he was more comfortable with. I knew he hated talking about emotions and feelings. Josh didn’t do those two things.

“Nope.” I leaned back on the couch. “You?”

He looked torn for a minute as he thought about his answer.

“I do, but I can cancel,” he finally said.

“Why would you cancel your Friday night plans? You don’t have to feel sorry for me. I can be by myself.”

“You’re spending a hell of a lot of time by yourself.”

I just shrugged my shoulders. It wasn’t a big deal. I was getting used to being by myself. It was kind of weird being with him now after two weeks of keeping to myself.

“I’ll cancel.” He pulled his phone out of his pocket.

My hand automatically went over his. “Don’t do that, Josh. Don’t be the guy that cancels on a girl at last minute.” I didn’t want his life being interrupted by mine.

He didn’t owe me anything.

“It’s not a girl.” He glanced at my hand which was over his. For some reason I didn’t feel awkward touching him. Like the night he picked me up. I hadn’t felt uncomfortable when he took my hand. If anything I enjoyed his touch. So I wanted to curse at myself for enjoying having my hand over his.

“Still, don’t cancel,” I finally said. “If someone is depending on you, you shouldn’t bail.”

“It’s just a party. There is one every weekend,” he said that like it was true. I couldn’t picture Josh at a normal party, but I could picture him at a biker’s party.

I smiled. I knew he wouldn’t be telling me if he was a biker or not. He wouldn’t confirm what was in the paper. But I think I had my answer anyway.

“Go. Drink. Have fun,” I found myself saying and took my hand off his. “I’m planning on an early night.”

His frown deepened. I couldn’t tell what he was thinking. But I had a feeling—a big feeling—he was debating whether or not to go.

“I’ll stay,” he finally said. “I’ve got beers here and you as

company.”

I wanted to laugh. “I’m hardly company. I can barely string two words together at the moment.”

He shrugged.

“You will easily pick up a girl. Get drunk. Get laid. And then wake up tomorrow feeling awesome.”

“Or with a hangover and an STD.”

This time I did laugh. “You really look at the positive side, don’t you?”

The corner of his lips twitched up. “Haven’t heard that in a while.”

“What, looking on the positive side?”

“No.” He smiled. “You laugh.”

My expression dropped and my grin fell. He was right, I hadn’t laughed in months. But he didn’t know that. I swallowed sharply.

“I guess I’ve had nothing to make me laugh.” It was the truth. I hadn’t had a situation that made me laugh. I hadn’t seen the humour in anything. Yet here I was, with Josh of all people, laughing.

His phone started ringing, breaking the awkwardness.

“So what are we going to do?” he said, ignoring the call. “You

said you didn't have any plans, right?"

"No, but you do," I reminded him. "And I think someone is calling you to remind you of those plans."

"We could watch the football or go out." He ignored his ringing phone again.

"Or you could keep your plans." I went to get up. "Thanks for the talk, Josh. You mightn't believe it, but I haven't spoken to anyone this week." I knew how pitiful that sounded, but he didn't look at me with pity—maybe because now he knew I hated being looked at with pity.

"You eaten yet?" Again he ignored his phone. Whoever was calling him wanted to speak to him and knew he was blocking their calls.

"Josh, seriously, answer your phone!" I was up now and starting to back away from him. "I'll um... see you when I see you." I gave him a smile just as his phone started ringing again. He didn't look settled on my decision but nodded his head and answered his phone, barking a hello into it.

Now that sounded more like the Josh I knew.

I walked up the stairs. I wasn't hungry. I had basically stopped eating when my heart broke. I just wasn't hungry at all. I knew it wasn't healthy, but when it came to a lot of things in my life I just didn't give a fuck.

