

TANGLED

Chapter Twenty One

Soph

There was a detail of my life I didn't really share with anyone. Well it wasn't a detail. It was a person. Ryan Butcher. My parents adopted him when I was a newborn. He was five at the time. His parents left him at the hospital with a letter.

It was Dad who was his treating doctor. It was Dad that read the letter saying that his parents weren't coming back for him. Ryan was malnourished, skinny, covered in bruises, a clear case of abuse.

Mom was due to have me any day. But Dad couldn't hand Ryan over to the system. So they made a decision that most people couldn't and wouldn't ever do. They adopted Ryan. And they may have greased a few palms to make it happen.

The adoption went through the day after I was born. I still don't know how my mom did it. She managed to raise a newborn and a child who didn't trust her.

But Mum and Dad never gave up on Ryan. They treated him like he was blood because, in my parents eyes, he was.

And Ryan slowly accepted them. He had never been shown love, or simple things like a meal three times a day. I still remember Mom telling me she had never cried as much as she did when

Ryan couldn't stomach food cause his body wasn't used to it.

His body was used to liquids and sometimes the odd meal.

Mom and Dad hid him under every specialist to help Ryan learn to eat. Mom always said Ryan's biggest fear was they would leave him, like his parents left them. He would have nightmares about it every night. His biggest fear: being left by himself again.

So they did something that goes against Mom and Dad's image of professional surgeons. They both got Ryan's name tattooed on them.

Ryan, I think, was around seven when Mom and Dad did it. Mom told me from the day Ryan saw those tattoos he stopped having nightmares.

Mum and Dad supported Ryan in everything he did, just like they did for me.

Then on his eighteen birthday we had a family party. I was thirteen. Ryan and I were always close. He was there for me as I grew up. Every photo of me had him in it. He was my brother. And he saw me as his sister.

We were best friends. And I thought he would always be there for me. But the day after his eighteenth birthday, he left my parents a note thanking them, and that was it. Not telling them why he left. Not one word directed at me. No I'll miss you. No I'm sorry. Nothing.

Just two words: thank you.

My parents were heartbroken. Mum stopped working, and for the first time in her life she stopped doing what she loved—helping people. Dad threw himself into work, started to miss important events in my life, sports games, achievement awards. Then on my first day of high school mum didn't even get out of bed for it and Dad, well, he was working a double shift and seemed to forget his only daughter was facing the biggest fear in her life.

It was on the first day of high school, when I had to walk there in the rain, I realized my parents loved Ryan more than me.

I can't remember how long that went on. We were a fractured family. Mom and Dad weren't even sleeping in the same room. My love for Ryan turned to hate because he had cost me my parents, and most of all my happy family.

Instead, I had a mom that was dosed up on prescription pills and dad that lived at the hospital. And then there was me; I had never felt more lost then in the first year after Ryan left.

Thank god for Uncle Kane.

One day, I can't remember how long it had been, but I do remember the day clearly it was a Saturday, I walked downstairs ready to have another breakfast alone when I found Mum and Dad talking and cooking breakfast.

That was the day I got my parents back. They sold the house and wanted to start fresh, so we moved closer to the hospital and my school. Then it was about a month after we were settled in and I started to think things might go back to normal, but at the same time I was grieving for my brother. Ryan left a hole in our family.

And I wasn't the only one who realized that there was now a hole in our family.

It so happened to also be a Saturday when my parents told me they were going to do mission work. They left for Pakistan the following Monday. And they hadn't stopped doing mission work since.

It was like they needed to do it—helping others—to fill the hole Ryan had made in their hearts.

I didn't blame them. If I could have filled the hole that Ryan made in my heart somehow I would have too.

But I never did. I just learned to live with it. I wasn't heart broken when Ryan left. I felt like he took half my heart with him.

And now, in the dead of the night, my parents call me, telling me Ryan was locked up and the police had called them.

My parents didn't hold a grudge towards Ryan. They loved him. So tonight when there was a chance for them to help him again they took it. Dad was so panicked on the phone. He knew that Ryan wouldn't have wanted them to be called.

It had been five years since Ryan left. I was now eighteen. And he would be twenty-three. I didn't say a word to him. I signed the bail information. I paid the money. And then I was handed the court date. I knew I had to make one phone call to make sure the charges were dropped.

Even though he had chosen to stop being my brother five years

ago, I was still going to call and get the charges dropped. I knew if mom and dad were here right now they would be making the call.

I pulled away from the station, keeping my eyes on the road. Not on my brother, who was sitting in the passenger seat. I didn't know what to say to him. Sure, over the years I had questions for him, but as the years went on I realized I didn't want the answers anymore.

So I didn't speak to him. I didn't make eye contact. In fact, I hadn't even really looked at him. I just walked straight to my car and he followed.

I wasn't going to talk to him. He had no idea what impact he had on my life and my parents when he decided to leave.

Every birthday of mom's I knew she waited for a card from him or a phone call. And every birthday of Ryan's, Mom and Dad would be extra quiet.

Even though it killed me to see pictures of Ryan throughout the house, Mum and Dad had still put them up in our new house. I hated walking up the stairs, seeing pictures of Ryan and me together.

I lost my best friend, my brother, and my family the day he decided he didn't want to be a part of it anymore.

So what the hell was I meant to say to him now? How has the last five years been? I wanted to scoff. Nope. I had nothing I wanted to say to him.

The car was silent.

I think he finally realized I wasn't going to speak. And I hoped he respected me enough to keep his empty words to himself.

I heard him sigh, and out of the corner of my eye I saw him run his fingers through his black hair. Something he used to do when he was facing an awkward situation. Then I felt his eyes on me.

“Well, you've grown up, Soph.” He decided that was the best line to break five years of silence.

I ignored him.

“Guessing the parents must be real pissed with me not to show up. I don't blame them. Still, you didn't have to take pity on me and bail me out.” He was speaking like my parents would actually ignore him.

I didn't want to say it cause I didn't want to speak to him. I knew I had to correct the flaw in his reasoning. Mom and Dad would have been at the station bailing him out if they were in the country.

“Mom and Dad are in Africa,” I said. I really hadn't wanted to, but I did. “So I didn't get a choice in picking you up or not.”

I changed lanes, putting more focus on the road than him.

“What, on a holiday? Mom and Dad don't do holidays.” Ryan sounded surprised as well as interested. He knew our parents never took time to relax and a holiday would be a nightmare for

them. Not helping people. Not having a purpose every morning. Yep, they would hate it.

I glanced at him. I couldn't stop myself. The expression on his face told me he cared. He cared where Mom and Dad were.

"They aren't." I put my eyes on the road. "They do mission work."

Ryan was silent for a minute. "So they fly all around the world helping people?" Seemed Ryan did have some idea of what mission work was.

"Yep."

"So you'd be left on your own a lot then?"

I glanced at him with a blank expression and nodded my head.

"When did they start the mission work? Was it not by choice? Cause Mom and Dad wouldn't want to leave you behind."

I gritted my teeth. Yeah, the version of our parents, back when he was still in our life, couldn't see Mom and Dad leaving me at all. But Ryan wasn't factoring in they stopped being those type of parents when he left.

I didn't answer him. I wasn't going to tell him that he sent our mom, the strongest, bravest, smartest woman into a depression so bad she didn't get out of bed for a year. All she did was take pills and sleep.

Then there was Dad, the family man, who made sure to be there for big and small events in your life. He would even turn surgeries

down if that conflicted with whatever was on in our life. Then when Ryan left Dad stopped being the family man.

He worked and worked and worked. And when he wasn't working, he was trying to convince Mom to eat something.

Then their relationship fell apart. Dad started sleeping in the guestroom on the rare occasion he was home. Mum wouldn't even leave the house to get her pills, she sent our house keeper.

So the parents Ryan was referring to died the same time he left us.

“So how often are Mom and Dad in the country now?” Ryan was still talking about them like he actually gave a fuck.

“A couple of months or weeks of the year,” I answered simply with no emotion. “They try to be here for holidays, but usually Christmas and Easter is when they are needed the most.”

“You can't be serious.”

I glanced at Ryan, seeing his shocked expression. “What?”

“Mom and Dad aren't even home for Christmas and Easter? You are seriously telling me they are barely in the country? Did they forget they have a daughter!” Ryan's words had heat to them. I think in his head he really thought Mom and Dad would have accepted him leaving their life.

Should I give him a reality check?

“When did this start happening?” Ryan's words were firm. He

really wanted to know.

I looked at him, and I couldn't stop my eyes narrowing. He couldn't be fucking serious. Was he really that bloody dumb!

I took my eyes off him and back onto the road. "What did you expect to happen, Ryan?" My words were cold. "You left."

"So what happened... I left and suddenly they headed overseas?" Ryan was trying to piece together the last five years with only limited facts.

"Nope." I felt the rage boiling. "First Mom went into depression for a year, didn't get out of bed and just popped prescription pills. Mind you, she wouldn't leave the house to get them. Our house keeper's list of jobs went up." I was trying to resist the urge to yell at him. "Then Dad threw himself in work, stopped coming home. And on the odd occasion he did, he slept in the guestroom."

I glanced at Ryan, whose face was blank of expression. "Then one day Mom got out of bed and Dad came home from work and they told me they had joined the mission. They left the following Monday and have been coming and going since."

I saw his fists clench. "So they just forgot they had a fucking daughter! They just left you!"

I slowed the car down. "No." I didn't hold anything against my parents because I knew what they were feeling. "They were grieving a son and found a way to cope." I pulled in the driveway and looked at Ryan. "The way they found cope didn't include me." I put the car in park.

I saw the frustration in Ryan's eyes. But what did he expect? He left our parents, causing them to fracture into pieces.

Ryan looked me in the eye. He was about to open his mouth, but I didn't need to hear him say the word sorry. We both knew he wouldn't mean it.

I opened up the glove box grabbed the envelope and handed it to him. "Mom and Dad wanted to make sure you got this." I let go of the envelope as soon as his hand gripped it. "There are two checks in there. One from the apartment they bought you in New York. The other from a beach house they bought you." Then my eyes landed on the house we had pulled up at. "And the titles to this house. This one Mum couldn't bring herself to sell on your behalf. All your stuff is here."

I sighed and looked back at him, seeing his shocked expression.

"They bought me houses?" He had opened the envelope. Shock wasn't just one his face, it was in his voice.

"One when they adopted you. One when you turned eight-teen. And another when you turned twenty-one." The memory of Mom and Dad purchasing his house for his twenty-first ran through my mind. And then the pain on their faces when the private detective they hired told them they couldn't find him.

All Mom and Dad wanted was to give him money. To make sure he had money behind him. They didn't expect him to come back to the family; they respected the fact that he wanted to lead his own life. But they wanted to make sure he had money behind him so he could follow his passions and not just have to work for the sake of it.

“They only ever wanted to make sure you wanted for nothing. These houses are investments, to be sold when you wanted the cash. But people kept making offers. Mum and Dad had this delusion that if they sold them and got in contact with you and gave you the money you wouldn’t end up on the streets.” My hands tightened around the stirring wheel. “But they never found you.”

Ryan was extremely quiet. I guess if he was like any other human he would be feeling guilt right now. But this was Ryan; he didn’t give a fuck when it came to other people’s feelings. Him leaving the way he did proved that.

“You can get out of my car now.” I wouldn’t look at him. The rage I was feeling was unhealthy and I knew if he gave me even just one excuse on why he left I’d kill him.

Because, if he had a real reason to leave, he should have told us. Hell, if he didn’t want everyone to know he should have at least told Dad. Dad could have comforted Mom when she realized her son left, instead of hiring every person possible to find him.

Ryan made sure not to be found.

And he had been successful.

“Give it back to them. I don’t want it.” Ryan dropped the envelope in my lap. “And I’ll pay you back for the bail you posted.”

He could not be fucking serious. I was forced to look at him and he was about to get out of the car when I pressed the automatic lock button.

“You have hurt them enough. Don’t you dare insult them again.” I couldn’t stop the anger I was feeling from creeping across my face. “You have dragged them through mud. You wanted out of their life. Fine, you got it. But they never let you leave their life. They fucking hoped and prayed you would come back.”

I was so angry. The word angry didn’t even cover what I felt right now. “You really think that not taking their money will prove something? Like you are too good for them? All they ever did was love you and how do you repay them? Fuck off as soon as they weren’t legally responsible for you. You may have stopped loving them the day you left, but they didn’t stop loving you.”

I threw the envelope back at him. “You know I used to imagine what our first conversation would be like when you came back. Then after a few years I stopped because I never wanted to fucking see you again. So take the money and get the fuck out of my car.” I unlocked the car. I wanted him gone. Out of my car. And back out of my life.

I was so upset, so furious that I couldn’t stop the tears if I wanted to. He never understood how much I depended on him. How much I loved him. How much I needed him. How I needed him in my life. He was my best friend. He was my brother.

And he left.

When it came down to it, it was his fault that I was so hurt over Kyle. Losing Kyle reminded me of losing Ryan. I had been fooled again. Ryan said he would always be with me. He left. Kyle said he would always be there. He left.

“Soph.” Ryan’s hand went to my knee. I didn’t want him touching me. I wanted him gone.

“Just fuck off, Ryan. Don’t take these tears as sadness.” I pushed his hand off me. The sooner he left, the sooner I could forget he existed.

“No.”

My head snapped towards him. “I said fuck off. You fuck off.” I spoke very clearly. “I paid your bail. I’ll call the judge and get the charges dropped. All I am asking in return is for you to fuck off.”

The hate in my voice was clear but also was the pain. The pain he caused me. The pain I felt every time I looked at a photo. The never-ending pain, when it came to him.

He still wasn’t leaving. And I couldn’t keep myself together much longer.

“Please, Ryan, just leave.” My tears were flowing down my cheeks. I was so used to crying these days. Usually over Kyle though. I had stopped crying over Ryan a long time ago. But it looked like, when it came to it, I still had tears left for him.

He looked like he was in pain himself. I didn’t understand why. He left. Not me. His fingers ran across my cheek.

“Please don’t cry Soph. You know I hate it.” His leaned in closer to me. “I never wanted you to cry over me.”

I scoffed. “What the hell did you expect, Ryan! You were my brother. There one minute, gone forever the next! You didn’t even

say goodbye!” I pushed his fingers off my face. I didn’t need him to comfort me. Well, I did need him too—years ago. “You wanted out of our family. You got it.” My words were bitter and covered in hurt. “Stay in the house. Don’t stay in the house. Cash the checks. Burn the checks. Just do whatever you want.”

Because when it came down to it, Ryan always did what he wanted.

He sat back in the car seat, looking like he wasn’t getting out.

“You moved,” he said firmly. “All your numbers changed. Mom and Dad weren’t at the hospital anymore. I tried ok, Soph. Every one of your birthday’s I tried to reach out for you. But I couldn’t find you.” He turned and looked at me, honesty painted on his face. “You think I didn’t hate myself every time I couldn’t find you? Every time your birthday came, every Christmas, every Easter, I hated myself a bit more. Cause I knew I was letting you down.”

I couldn’t believe what he was saying, so I just stared at him. Silently the tears rolled down my cheeks.

“On your eighteenth I drank myself into a fucking coma. I knew I had let you down. More on that day than any other because we had plans. I remember every detail of what we had planned.” His eyes were locked on mine, and I saw his pain—actual pain. “I made promises to you, and on that day I knew my time to make it up to you was over. You wouldn’t need a brother anymore.” His eyes dropped to the envelope. “I failed you, Soph. And I am sorry. But I can’t make up for five years of broken promises to you. I’m not that stupid to even try.”

I nodded my head. He was right. He couldn't make up for being absent for five years.

“The last conversation we had was about you starting high school.” He looking me in the paused. “I always wanted to know how that went. I guess you most likely don't remember it. You would be in your final year now, right?”

I just blinked, tears dropping down. I remembered my first day of high school really well. It had burnt a permeant memory in my brain. I opened my mouth and I wasn't sure if I was making a mistake by telling him.

“Mom hadn't got out of bed for months. She wouldn't have known if I went or not. Dad forgot, which I understood because he hadn't been home for a week. So why would he come home for my first day. I walked the hour to school, in the rain. When I got there, I didn't have textbooks.” But that wasn't what I remembered the most. “Mom and Dad forgot to pay my tuition, so I wasn't officially enrolled. I ended up paying my tuition with my credit card. And Uncle Kane came and signed the papers.”

Ryan looked speechless. He opened his mouth and then closed it, like he didn't know what to say. He was most likely thinking how unbelievable it was that Uncle Kane was sober enough to do anything involving paperwork.

“I don't know what to say. I just can't believe Mom and Dad would do that.”

I shrugged. “Wasn't a big deal. It turned out alright. For that year Uncle Kane took care of me.”

“Are we talking about the same Uncle Kane? The alcoholic?”
Ryan looked at me with disbelief.

I nodded my head. “He basically took care of me when he realized how messed up Mom and Dad were. He stopped drinking to the point of passing out. He used to have a ‘Soph limit,’ he called it, where he would drink a certain amount and stop in case I needed him.” I opened the compartment in the middle and pulled out a photo that I kept in the car and handed it to Ryan. “That was the opening of his first bar. It’s called Sophia’s.” I smiled just slightly remembering that night. “He has made it into a chain now and he has bars up and down the coast. Still bartends at that one though.”

Ryan was staring down at the picture. “When was this taken?”

“I was fifteen.” I remembered it clearly. “Mom and Dad never made it. Dad was working and Mom wouldn’t get out of bed.” Those two facts didn’t change for a full year. Dad was always at work. Mum was always in bed.

And Uncle Kane went from the no-good alcoholic to the only family member I had. Uncle Kane thought it was best that Nana and Grandad didn’t know how Dad was coping. He always decided not to tell my other grandparents that Mom, their daughter, was battling depression.

Mom hated anyone seeing her weak. So I understood why Uncle Kane made sure that my parent’s behavior was kept to ourselves.

“I really fucked them up didn’t I?” Ryan’s words were coated in disbelief. “I thought they would be ok. I thought, they would be relieved not having to pay for my university or my way in life

anymore.”

I frowned. “You were taking a gap year? You weren’t heading to university.”

He scoffed. “Yeah, exactly, as if they would ever want their son not striving to make a career.”

“They bought you a year tour of Europe,” I said the words and his eyes snapped off the picture and on to me. I smiled. “You were meant to leave the following week.”

“They were actually going to let me go overseas?” He sounded so shocked.

I shrugged my shoulders. “You know all they ever did was support you. I think Mom was counting on you being a drummer. They just wanted you happy. Didn’t care what you did.” I took the photo off him. “Anyway, you didn’t want that.” My eyes ran over the picture and then I put it back in the compartment. “I should go.”

It was late, and I knew once he got out of this car he would disappear from my life again.

“Don’t.”

My eyes snapped to him and I frowned. “Don’t what?”

“Don’t go.”

I was puzzled for a minute. Was Ryan seriously asking me not to leave? I couldn’t believe it. Ryan had lived the last five years

making sure we weren't a part of his life, and now he was asking me to stay?

I just stared at him. I don't know what was more shockin: him wanting to spend time with me, or that I was actually thinking of going inside.

Chapter Twenty Two

Soph

I wiped the tears away but they just kept falling. It was a song. A stupid fucking song! That was all it took for me to come this blubbering mess.

I can't believe a song could get this reaction out of me. It wasn't just any song. It had a memory attached to it. A memory with Kyle. I thought after all this time I had fixed myself—you know, got myself together to the point I was over him. But just hearing that song reminded me I was so far from being back together.

I was like a broken mirror. I was trying to put myself together but you could see the cracks, and while I was trying to put that broken mirror back together, I was cutting myself on the broken pieces.

My tears were slowing just when the bell rang and I knew I had to get out of the car.

I was trying to ignore the heartache. But I couldn't get that memory of Kyle and me singing and play fighting in his bed to that song. The way he touched me. The way he kissed me. The way

my heart pulsed when he took my top off...

I clenched my eyes shut. I guess today was going to be one of my weaker days.

I cracked open my car door and got out. I just had to get through the day. I knew I wouldn't get the pleasure of not seeing Kyle. Kayla and him were in all my classes. Thank god I didn't have art with him today. Cause I honestly don't think I'd be able to ignore him being nice to me.

It was like I needed him to be kind to me right now, like I was craving his attention.

Today was one of those days. I didn't want to face that I had lost him and that what we had was over.

I walked like a ghost through the halls to get my books. I didn't care that people were shouldering their way past me, heading for their classes, as the second bell had rung. I literally didn't care, not even when I had my books and a boy ran past me, knocking them out of my hands.

I dropped to my knees, gathering them up. My weekend was intense and I felt like a shell today. A shell of the person I was.

Ryan was back in my life. I didn't know for how long for, but he was back in my life. My brother. And there was only one person I wanted to tell. And that was also the one person who said they would never, and could never, love me again. Yet it was still Kyle who I wanted to tell.

A tear dropped from my eye and fell on my textbook.

God, not more tears. I quickly wiped under my eyes and then I glanced up, hoping no one saw it, that no one saw Sophia, the pitiful thing, crying in the hallway. And I realized the hallway was empty.

Just like my life.

I got up and I knew I couldn't blow off class. But it was like I was invisible, not just to other students but also to the teachers.

So I wasn't surprised when the teacher didn't even acknowledge me as I walked ten or so minutes late.

I walked to my normal seat, like a zombie, and then when I came to a stop at my chair there was someone fucking in it. I quickly snapped out of my zombie mode and scanned the classroom.

This had to be some sick and twisted fucking joke.

There was only one seat empty.

Only one bloody seat!

I glanced at Kyle, and it would seem he was aware of the situation. I wanted to groan. In fact I wanted to turn and walk out of the class.

The teacher wouldn't notice. The students didn't care, and as I looked at Kyle I think he would be relieved if I didn't take the seat next to him.

“Sophia, can you please take a seat?”

I clenched my eyes shut. Great. The teacher had noticed. I guess I was standing in the middle of the classroom.

God darn it! Why the hell did I have to be late!

I slowly walked towards the last man on the planet I wanted to be near right now. There were four seats. First Adam, then Kayla, then Kyle, and then the empty seat, which unfortunately had my fucking name on it.

I could feel Kyle's eyes on me as I reached it.

He pushed his things to his side, but he didn't move closer to Kayla. He had his chair more in the middle of the desk, and I didn't have the guts to ask him to move down, closer to his woman.

I slumped in the chair, my eyes glued on the desk. His arm brushed mine and it sent a million sparks through my body. I think what was worse was that my body was craving his touch, bathing in the memory of his arms and the touch of his lips. It was fucking cruel!

I wanted to groan. What had I done to the universe to deserve this?

I opened my textbook. I had no idea what we were meant to be doing and to be honest I didn't care. I just had to get through the hour or so being tortured by being near him.

I think what was making this worse was that I had spent the weekend with my brother. My brother was back in my life, and I

couldn't tell Kyle. I couldn't bring myself to tell Ryan about Kyle either. I kept asking about his life, and when he asked about mine I just kept redirecting the conversation back to him.

I heard all about his crazy adventures. I laughed and laughed and even cried a bit out of laughter.

When I left his house this morning, I wanted to tell someone—anyone—that my brother was back. My brother who I never thought I would see again.

I then did a count. Josh didn't even know I had a brother, so he wouldn't understand how important it was Ryan was back. Bax wouldn't give a fuck cause all he wanted me for was sex. He wouldn't want to hear about how my brother was back. There was only one person who would understand how important it is to me and how much it meant to me, and that was Kyle. I snuck a glance at Kyle and was surprised to find his eyes on me.

I swallowed sharply and my eyes snapped back to my open textbook. My leg was nervously shaking up and down. It was a sign I was close to losing all control and bursting out crying.

I then started tapping my fingers on the desk, trying my best to try and get myself together. I couldn't keep thinking about Kyle, but oh my god, being near him was killing me. It wasn't like I didn't crave him sexually. I just needed him emotionally.

Fuck, I needed anyone. Right now I needed someone to calm me down.

I was about to get up and leave because I was positive the lack of sleep and the emotions flooding my body was going to cause me to

go into meltdown mode. Then I felt it and my whole body stilled.

I looked down at my knee, seeing Kyle's hand.

I looked up to see him turn slightly towards me.

"You ok, Soph?" His words were soft.

I don't know what Kayla was doing to not notice that Kyle was talking to me. I couldn't pull my eyes from Kyle. He was looking at me like he was worried.

He started to move his thumb in a circle on my knee. "Breathe, Soph." His directions were low and soft.

I didn't even realize I was holding onto my breath and I exhaled quickly. His lips twitched up slightly as if he was pleased I was listening to him.

He leaned in closer to me. "Move your chair in."

I frowned, not understanding why I had to, but I did as I was told. His hand went off my knee and I thought maybe he just wanted me to get under the table so he didn't have to see my leg shaking up and down.

Then his hand was back on my leg, but this time moving up my inner thigh, pushing my dress up slightly. My breathing hitched just when his hand stopped and his thumb started working in a circle again.

I was instantly reminded how he used to always do this when we sat together. I couldn't believe he was touching me right now after

all the things I had yelled at him at the dinner table.

I needed him to be there for me emotionally and he was doing just that. He was calming me down. And I couldn't help but look back at him. Why? Why was he doing this?

He smiled at me softly and leaned in. But then Kayla called for his attention.

He turned and started talking to her, but his hand stayed on my inner thigh and his thumb kept moving in the delicious circle.

I was flooded with all the memories of how he would touch me as if I was fragile. How gentle he was. I was getting lost in his touch, in the feel of his hand on me. As much as I knew it was wrong, I wasn't stopping myself. I couldn't stop myself from just enjoying it.

“Oh, Soph, I didn't see you there.”

My stare snapped off the table and I looked up and to my side, looking at Kayla. She was speaking to me? Why?

“Hi, Kayla.” I forced out, trying my best to not sound nervous. “Sorry for crashing your table, there was no other seat.”

She was smiling at me, but it was bitter and sour and forced. The fact Kyle had one hand under the table and on me seemed to have gone completely unnoticed by her.

“It's ok. Feels a bit like old times, right?” She kept that forced smile on her face.

We both knew she had the upper hand here. She was the queen bee and I was a nobody.

I went back to staring at my textbook, while all my attention was on Kyle's hand. And how it flooded my body with memories and how much I had loved him.

"You know there is actually this thing on tonight." Kayla was speaking, but I assumed it wasn't to me. "Kyle and I are going. Adam, Soph, do you want to come, you know, for old time's sake?"

My eyes snapped up. Did she just invite me out with her and Kyle?

I looked at Adam, who was staring at me. It was no secret that Adam hadn't gone back to being Kyle's best friend. He did however still hang around them. But he had told me multiple times he wouldn't hang out with them because Kayla, well, according to Adam, was off the rails and a trouble maker.

"I will go if Soph does," Adam, said, putting all the attention on me.

Kyle hadn't looked at me, even though his hand was still on me and his thumb was moving in smoothing circles.

I opened my mouth and I wasn't sure what my answer was.

"It's a beach thing." Kayla turned her whole body towards me and Kyle. "I won't be swimming, but I will be drinking." She kept smiling at me.

Was she plotting to kill me at this party? Was that why she

wanted me to go?

“The four of us—it will be like old times!” she added, and this time she gave me a smile that was actually real. “Come on, you three can make sure I don’t go drunk swimming or something.”

I didn’t know what to say. I doubted Kyle wanted me anywhere near him. Though he was touching me right now. And he was hiding it from Kayla.

I frowned. Could I hang out with them like old times? Today I was weaker. Today I was needing my old best friend and my boyfriend. I was craving my old life. And the temptation of just a night with them... I was considering it.

Kayla sighed and turned back in her seat. “Don’t worry about it. Clearly you would rather be with bikers.” Her words were bitter and, if I was honest, it sounded like I had hurt her feelings.

“I’ll come.”

Kyle’s head snapped in my direction, his eyes slightly wide.

I swallowed sharply and realized Kayla and Adam was also staring at me.

“For old time’s sake, right?” I added.

Kayla nodded her head, giving me a real smile again. Adam gave me a grin but it was Kyle’s expression that had me. The smile on his face said it all. He was happy, as if me coming meant something more than just us hanging out as friends for old time’s sake.

Our moment was quickly ended when Kayla started to ask him questions on what she should wear, and what she should get to drink.

I forced my attention back on the book in front of me. But while Kyle was answering Kayla's questions, his hand was on me. I knew I should stop it. I knew it was unhealthy and as soon as I got out of this mood I would want to slap myself for letting him touch me.

Yet I didn't push his hand away. And silently I trying to think of a solid reason why he would want to.

The beach was packed and the drinks and bon-fire were roaring. The mood was causal, and everyone was enjoying themselves. I was having fun with Adam. He was in one hell of a playful mood, which usually always revolved around annoying me. And that was exactly what he was doing, but I didn't mind.

In fact, I had missed it.

So the fact Kayla hadn't stopped touching and making out with Kyle between throwing back drinks didn't really bother me. Adam had been entertaining me until a girl caught his eye. I had to give him a push to go after her. She hadn't stopped looking at him, so he was in luck.

Kayla was peeling herself off Kyle. I didn't mean to be spying on them, or keeping an eye on them, but I had. And I had noticed Kyle's attention was on me, not his girlfriend who was busy making out with him frantically. She was kissing him like she was trying to prove something.

Kayla's eyes were slightly glazed over, and I knew it wasn't just alcohol that caused her to look like that. She was still using.

Just as I thought that, I caught sight of a guy I had been glad wasn't in my life anymore. Greg, or as Kayla and everyone else calls him, Gaz. He was the local dealer. And Kayla noticed he was here.

She gave Kyle a peck on the lips and then was quick to sprint off in his direction. Gaz gave me a wave, which I didn't return.

"God, I hate that guy." I couldn't stop myself from saying it. It was just me and Kyle now. We were slightly away from the full on party. I looked at Kyle in time to see him nod his head.

"Fucking dick of a guy," he muttered and picked up his beer off the rock.

"I can't believe she still sees him." I shook my head and went to stand next to Kyle. I was looking back at Gaz as he dragged Kayla off into the dark. I'm guessing to do lines.

Kyle let out a long sigh, but one that sounded more like relief, and turned his attention to the ocean. Then he leaned back against the rock, his shoulders sagging, and drank the rest of his beer. I had to admit, this was the first time I was willingly alone with him. I leaned against the same rock. My mind flickered back to how he calmed this morning in class. I still hadn't thanked him for that. I didn't really get a chance cause Kayla was glued to him for the rest of the day.

"Um, about today..." I awkwardly brought up the subject and turned my full body to face him. I didn't know if he had done it

out of pity or something.

His eyes had been on the ocean, but now they were on me.

He didn't say anything. I took a sharp breath in. I was incredibly nervous all of a sudden. I opened my mouth.

"You know what I think?" He spoke before I could say anything. His eyes still on me. "Every time I look at the ocean, you know what runs through my mind?"

I frowned, not sure what to say. I went to open my mouth again.

"You. The night I told you my plan." He moved closer to me. His eyes glued to mine. I saw the honesty in them and I saw the memory playing across his mind.

I didn't know what was worse, the way my heart was pulsing instantly or that I knew which night he was talking about.

I kept looking at Kyle as he approached me. Then he stopped, closer to me, but not too close.

I was biting my bottom lip and I finally nodded my head. "I remember the night." And then I remembered the night even clearer because he told me that I was his forever. I loved him before that night, but that night I gave him everything I had. I wanted to be his forever.

All those emotions I felt all day. All the emotions I had kept under lid all day. Well, they flooded me.

But I knew it tears were falling and this time I wasn't by myself.

“Soph.” His voice broke and he stepped towards me. “Please don’t cry.”

I scoffed as his wiped away my tears. “I..” My words dried up in my throat.

“I know, Soph. I know.” He cupped my cheeks, pain was painted across his face. “I fucked up. And one day I’ll be able to tell you how much.

I then felt his lips on my forehead and his arms wrapped around me, just as the tears overcame me. Kyle had no idea how much damage he had done to my heart.

And right now he was getting a glimpse of what I was really like.

“Every fucking day I’m reminded of what I lost. Every day I’m reminded how fucking lonely I am now.” He spoke so softly as his hand ran down my back, smothering me, while he held me so tightly to his chest.

All I could hear was honesty in his voice.

“You gave me a taste of heaven, Soph. I miss you falling asleep on my chest. I miss the way your back would arch just as I too you.” He pulled back to look me in the eye.

And then before I could say a word, before I could point out he was the one to end us, his mouth was on mine.

Immediately I was given a dose of a flavor I was once addicted to. It was like tasting your favorite candy that you hadn’t tasted since

childhood.

Crazy. Complete madness. That was what was happening.

I didn't push him away. I couldn't even say that my lips were still against his. As soon as his lips touched mine, before I knew it, my tongue was exploring his mouth. The mouth that used to worship my body.

My hands were in his hair while he picked me up, sitting me on the rock and he was reminding me just how good we were.

His hands ran up my thighs, pushing my dress up around my waist.

The word crazy ran through my mind again. But it didn't stop me from stopping him from exploring my body like I was still his.

His lips broke from mine. "Come home with me." His forehead was leaning against mine, my breathing rapid. "Come home with me. Let me remind you how fucking great we are together."

My eyes widened. Kissing was one thing, but sex... he couldn't be serious.

"What about Kayla?" I don't know why that one concern came out and not the others, like how come morning he would be kicking me out of his bed and going back to her.

"I don't care. I want to fuck you. No"—he took a sharp breath in—"I need to make love to you. I'm dying here without you and I can't last much longer." His words wavered in desire. "Let me have you again."

And just like that I snapped the fuck out of it. Those five words: let me have you again.

I pushed his hands off me and climbed down from the rock. I had made a promise to myself, and I was remembering it right now. “You nearly had me fooled,” I muttered and shook my head. “You put me through hell. You know that? No. Let me rephrase that. You are putting me through hell.” Everything single fucking day I was suffering because of him. I looked him in the eye. “You told me I was nothing without you.”

He may be saying now that he misses me, he may be basically looking at me like I was his world, but I knew better, because he had fooled me before.

“You cut me up and left me to bleed!” That was putting what he did to me nicely. I kept staring at him. If he had a reason, one reason, for doing what he did to me now was the time to tell me. I shook my head when he remained silent. “I loved you, you know that? When you told me that night in that ocean that I was your forever, I fucking believed you!”

Maybe this was the reason I hadn't got over Kyle. We hadn't had a confrontation. I had never told him how much he hurt me. Sure, he confronted me. But I never confronted him on what he did.

He took a step closer to me, looking panicked. “I love you, you hear me, Sophia? I fucking love and I didn't...” He groaned. “I don't have a choice! But I am still yours forever, you just...” he trailed off and sighed, his eyes locked with mine. “You just need to have faith in me.”

Faith in him? He couldn't be fucking serious right now! But then I frowned. He said he didn't have a choice? "Is there another reason you ended things with us?" .

I watched his face tighten.

"Kyle? Was Kayla the reason or not?" I couldn't stop myself from stepping towards him as my hopes went up. Maybe he wasn't as madly in love with my ex-best friend as he led on. "Now is the time to tell me. If you really want me to have faith in you, give me a reason to."

Just give me a reason Kyle. Just one reason. I hoped. I saw the expression on his face; something was boiling in his eyes, and just as I saw it, he hid it.

"No," he said and shattered my hopes.

It was bitter. It was sour. It twisted my stomach. And finally I nodded my head. I needed to get out of there.

I didn't need to say a word. I just backed away from him. I was done. I was done with him. Done hoping his actions would make sense. I turned my back to him; it was about time I walked away from him.

"Soph?"

I paused.

"I'm sorry." His voice broke, and if I just took in the sound of his voice I would think it was breaking his heart watching me walk

away from him. If I didn't take in his actions, if I just wiped what he had done and ignored the fact that he had a new girlfriend, I would think his world was shattering.

I didn't turn back. I didn't turn around and tell him we could be friends. I didn't want to smooth the pain out of voice. Sure it hurt me to hear it in his voice, and it hurt me knowing he was hurt right now. But instead I just started to walk away from him, officially marking the night I was letting him go.

I hadn't driven to the beach. Adam had driven us. And cause I was at Kyle's it was one easy pick up. Seeing as Kayla, Kyle and I were all at the same spot. Pity I didn't give much thought into how I would be getting home- considering I knew Adam wouldn't be remaining sober, and would most likely go home with someone.

I kept walking up the foot path. Walking away from Kyle, it was like a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders. I didn't even know there was something weighing me down, but there had been and now it was gone.

I think it was hope—hope that Kyle and I would get back together. Now I knew it wasn't going to happen. Ever. I had been holding onto our relationship. I had been living, mourning a loss, but at the same time I wasn't letting my relationship with Kyle die completely

I sighed and kept heading towards the house. I was still at least a good half an hour away.

A thought ran through my mind again. The same thought that kept coming back to me as I walked in the dead of the night.

How was Josh?

I hadn't spoken to him since the weekend, since our moment. I chewed my bottom lip and paused, unlocking my phone.

I knew I shouldn't, but at the same time he was my friend. So I could ring him and ask him how he was, couldn't I?

Chapter Twenty Three

JOSH

Becoming the Vice President brought on a lot of responsibilities. I knew that when I took on the role. But when I did take it on, I thought I'd be doing that role from prison, at least for the next few years. Then I got released.

Wolf left me in charge of shit. At first I was in over my head, going in fucking blind. Wolf was expecting me to be able to make decisions like him, even though I didn't have nearly as much experience as him. But when I mentioned that to him, he said I had something a lot of other blokes didn't yet, life experience and a cold heart.

He then gave me a lecture about how only a man who had a hardened heart could do this job. He said it took him nearly half his life for his heart to get to the point where he could be president. He said I was inspiration and was going to be a success story.

I shrugged it off. But to be honest, that just put more pressure on me. Sure, I didn't give a fuck what people thought, never let anyone stop me from doing what I want. I took that a cold fist to

every problem that came my way.

I lit up a cigarette, my eyes on the source of my current headache. I glanced at Bax. He was here because he was meant to be handing this shit— a petty who said what.

Honestly, they were grown men, but here I was being forced to play a parent role.

“Already start spitting shit and tell me why I’m here.” I took my eyes off Bax and on to the Grave Robber. “Maybe you could explain where you were last week?” The fact he was meant to be in town as of last week hadn’t slipped my notice. “You should have come to us the day you rolled into our town.”

The Grave Robber had a reputation, and not a good one. I didn’t trust him. The only reason we had to deal with him was because Damon, his cousin, had traded positions with him. Damon was our supplier for the ingredients we needed to cook crystal meth.

They gave us the supplies for our cook houses. I trusted Damon, but the Grave Robber... I didn’t. He got his name for going back on deals, doing whatever it took to make his cousin more money. He didn’t have standards or loyalty. He lived up to his nick name cause he would steal from the dead.

Ryan was his real name, and he would do anything to make sure that his cousin came out on top. He didn’t give a fuck if that meant things got dirty. He would burn bridges if it meant more money in their operation.

But right now Bax and Ryan had a disagreement that had to be sorted. Bax had been one of the bridges Ryan burned when he was

last in town.

I looked between the two.

“I said spit it out!” I yelled at them, pulling rank. “Why the fuck am I here!” I was being short with them—shorter than I should be. I was in more of a foul mood than normal since Soph left. It really bugged me she hadn’t been home since.

I was on the verge of telling her everything about me, about the club, everything, but she disappeared that night.

“He screwed a chick I was screwing,” Bax finally snapped, telling me the purpose of their disagreement. “And he knew I was with her. He is a fucking low life.”

Ryan scoffed.

“Can you even remember this girl’s name, Bax?” I looked at Bax, seeing if this girl had been special to him or not. My phone started buzzing in my pocket and I pulled it out.

“What does that matter?” Bax called for my attention to go back to the situation but my eyes were on the Soph’s name, which was flashing across my screen. She was calling me.

“For fuck sake, Vice! You aren’t listening!”

With regret I looked back at Bax, not answering the call. The sooner I wrapped this up, the sooner I could call Soph back.

“Well it’s been years, right? Surely you two can move on.” I attempted to approach this subject with common sense. Now I

just wanted to hurry this up so I could call Soph back.

Bax was back at to glaring at Ryan. I wanted to groan. He was going to be childish. Fucking Bax wasting my bloody time.

“Fine then! Bax, pull your fucking head in. Club comes first.” I wanted this over. It was childish. “Women come and go. Shit, Bax, why are you even worried about some old fling.”

Last time I checked he was one lucky bastard that had my Soph talking to him. I couldn't bring myself to saying she was having sex with him cause it didn't bring out the best side of me. The sooner I was honest with Soph, the sooner I could get her away from bloody Bax.

Even if she didn't want to be with me, I could at least get her away from men like Bax. It was a bitter taste in my mouth thinking about it, but I would prefer Soph back with Kyle than with Bax.

Ryan opened his mouth and I knew my hope of wrapping this up wasn't going to happen. But we were saved from his rant by his ringing phone. Saved me from hearing Ryan throwing insults back at Bax.

But him answering the phone put off me trying to end this petty fight to begin with. I didn't know Ryan very well, but the fact he was taking a call in a business conversation clearly wasn't normal by the way Bax looked at him.

“Well if it isn't my number one girl.” Ryan's voice was friendly and I sure as fuck never heard him speak like that to a girl. Then again I didn't know him very well. Wasn't even in the club last

time he was in town.

Ryan laughed, whatever the girl said had caused the grave robber to laugh. Who knew that was possible? “Where are you?” he asked, and his voice dipped in concern.

Bax glanced at me, arching an eyebrow.

“Clearly he is over whatever chick you are bitching about,” I muttered to Bax and lit up a cigarette. Bloody hell, I was becoming a chain smoker. I was a heavy smoker in prison cause it was the only fucking thing to do.

Ryan said he would see whoever it was soon, and when he hung up I went back to trying to get this resolved.

“Still lying to women, Ryan?” Bax scoffed, clearly not thinking Ryan had been serious when he said he would see that woman soon.

“Nope, we done now aren’t we?” Ryan went to get up.

“What, you just backing down?” Bax made that sound like that wasn’t something Ryan would ever do.

“I’ll drop it if you do?” Ryan looked back at Bax. “I want to keep it business, keep personal aside. Though I didn’t realize I screwed the woman of your dreams or something.” His voice had a bit of disbelief in it.

I glanced at Bax to see his expression, which was tight, and then a smile bloomed across his face.

“That chick was just a hang around. The woman I’m with now, well, she is the woman of my dreams.” Bax pointed a finger at him. “Go near her and I will fucking kill you.”

Ryan started laughing. “Well, what do you know, Bax, the man with an endless appetite for woman, has settled for one.”

Bax’s huge grin fell slightly. “Nah, as much as I want to lock her down, she’s against it.”

Now that’s my Soph. I kept the smile to myself. At least between the time I had last seen her and now she hadn’t let Bax put a label on her. My chances weren’t completely fucked yet.

“Seems like a smart girl,” Ryan said playfully. “When do you want to pick this back up?” It seemed he wanted this to end.

I took the cigarette from my mouth. “Friday night. Before the club party. Guessing you would be attending anyway, yeah?”

Ryan frowned, seeming hesitate to agree.

“Don’t tell us, this chick has you working around her?” Bax’s voice was fully amused and he whacked me on the arm. “And you thought I was pussy whipped!”

Ryan rolled his eyes. “I’ll be here Friday.” He picked up his jacket from the back off the seat and threw down the rest of his drink. “Call me if things change in between now and then.”

I nodded my head and was already getting my phone out. I heard the club door shut but I was more focused trying to come to a decision on whether to call or message.

“Well, seeing as my night just cleared, I’m calling the missus.” Bax’s words caught my attention.

“Thought you hadn’t locked her down?” I wanted to see if I had heard him wrong or not.

Bax winked at me. “I will if I work my magic tonight.” He got up, giving me a grin. “I’ve heard my charm is irresistible. Night, Vice.”

I already had the phone to my ear, but I would admit I was clenching it tighter because of what Bax just said. I had to get to Soph before he did. My grip on the phone got even tighter when she didn’t pick up.

Bax had only just pulled out his phone and was leaving, so there was a chance I’d get to her before him. So I kept ringing her.

I slammed the front door shut. Didn’t give a fuck if I woke everyone up. For the last hour, I’d been calling her and not once did she bloody well pick up. I knew by the missing car she wasn’t here.

I walked into the lounge room and then my eyes landed on Kyle. We hadn’t really spoken since I got out. He was always the golden child and it seemed even though I had been away for a few years that fact hadn’t changed.

I watched him bring the glass to his lips, throwing down what looked like Dad’s good liquor. I knew he most likely didn’t want to speak to me. But something had him drinking hard.

“You right, bro?” I asked, walking towards him. I was speaking to

him with a level of respect in my voice. As if I was talking to one of my club brothers. I knew blood brothers should have a stronger bond, but Kyle and I didn't have it. We went separate directions in life and our father liked to play us against one another.

There was a whole lot of reasons why we weren't close. Little reasons and big reasons, all adding to why we didn't get on. But right now, I was going to put that aside.

He glanced at me and I knew as soon as I looked into his eyes he had been drinking for a while.

He remained silent and his eyes went back to his glass.

I couldn't force him to talk to me. I had to admit I don't think I've seen his girlfriend not on him.

"Where is that woman who loves to cling to you?" I crossed my arms, not giving up on him answering me.

Kyle sat up, from his slumped position. "Ever fucked something really good up?" He reached for the bottle. "Like a life defining type of thing?" He was speaking but his eyes were on the glass which he was filling up with Dad's top the shelf.

I had fucked up. "Do I have to remind you the years I spent locked up?"

"I'd pick prison over this," he muttered and had filled the glass to the brim.

"You trying to save on refills?" I stood in front of the coffee table, my eyes on him and his full glass.

“Saves me filling it up every couple of minutes.” Kyle shrugged and his eyes dropped to the glass. “I thought I had a shot tonight.”

I had no idea what he was on about. But I had been around my club brothers long enough to know when a man just needed to get something off his chest.

“She left. Just turned her back on me and left.” He leaned forward, placing his glass down. “I had been hoping I’d do something tonight, you know ,prove to her I love her.” He ran his hands through his hair and then dropped his head to his hands. “But she fucking just walked away.” His words were muffled from his hands.

“I’m sure Kayla knows you love her. You don’t have to prove that to her.” I didn’t know much about his relationship with her, but it seemed like she lived for him.

Kyle took his head from his hands looking at me confused. “I’m not talking about Kayla.”

His words slowly sunk in. At first I was confused, and then I realized. “You’re talking about Soph?” My voice hardened. His words that she turned and left ran through my head. “What did you do to her tonight?”

Chapter Twenty Four

Soph

There were two sides to this town, and I wasn’t going to lie and say that my parents and Kyle’s parents had bought on the wealthy

side of the town. My parents had expensive taste, not that they rubbed it in to anyone. But it did make sense why Ryan's house was still in the wealthy side of the town.

So while I was now heading in the opposite direction to Kyle's, it was still a respectable suburb. So when the car slowed down, I didn't think anything of it. Until it started to slow down to a crawl. I glanced at it. I didn't know the car. It was a classic muscle car with heavily tinted windows.

I turned the corner and picked up my pace. Then my heart raced as it picked up and turned the corner as well. Shit. Who do I call?

Police?

Josh?

Ryan?

Josh hadn't answered earlier but he did call me back. Maybe I should try him? I got my phone out just when I heard the window of the car slid down.

Shit.

I heard the driver turn down the music.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

"Walking around in a bikini like that, someone might call you jail bait."

I paused. That voice.

I turned around to look at the car, lowering to the level of the window.

“Since when did you own a car like this?” I looked at my brother. I should have picked it was him by the music.

Ryan leaned across the car, closer to me, a huge grin on his face. “Borrowing it. Now you going to get your jail bait ass in the car or wanna keep walking the street in your underwear?”

“I have you know, this is a designer bikini and I have a cover on.” I looked back at him smugly.

“Hate to break it to you little sis, but it’s fucking see-through. Get in.”

I rolled my eyes and cracked the door open. “So who did you get this ride off?” I asked and then glanced in the back seat. “Holy shit Ryan! You got enough alcohol?”

I had never see so many bottles of spirits and slabs.

He started pulling us away from the curb. “That, my little sister, is for us.”

I scoffed. “It’s the start of the week, Ryan. A school week. I can’t get off my face with you.”

“Yeah you are.”

“Why?”

“Cause we are going to get that bloke you are upset about out of your system.” Ryan was lighting up the cigarette, letting the car stir itself. Then, once he had the cigarette lit, one hand went back to the stirring wheel.

I was just staring at him. I hadn't told him anything about a guy. Nothing. So how the hell did he know?

“Stop looking so shocked, Soph. I am your brother after all.” He rolled his eyes at me. “Now you up for getting him out of your system?”

I was positive I had just got Kyle out of my system. “I'm done with him. I don't need to drink myself to alcohol poisoning to let him go.”

“There are stages of breaking up. You clearly are at the stage where you need to drink to let him go completely.” He glanced at me. “Trust me, I've had to get an ex out of my system too.”

I sighed. It wouldn't kill me to get Kyle completely off my chest. I had let him go, but maybe I needed a drink to make it official?

“Ok, one drink.” I somewhat agreed to his plan. Then I saw his expression.

“Sis, we are going on a bender. And once it is over, you'll be thanking me.” Ryan gave me his all-knowing grin and I knew then he had plans for us, and it wasn't just for tonight.

Kyle

“Josh, I’m fucking telling you again, she isn’t here!” I yelled back at my brother who was on the phone. “She didn’t come back to school at all last week and now it’s the middle of another week and she hasn’t come home or shown up at school!”

“Well isn’t it funny she disappears as soon as you speak to her,” Josh’s voice hissed back at me. “Wanna tell me again what happened last week?”

I groaned. “I didn’t fucking make her run away! She has my number blocked so can you call her again?”

I can’t believe I had to rely on my brother to call Soph. I don’t know whether he was lying or not. But he said she wasn’t picking up.

“Come on, Josh, don’t be a jerk, just call her again, please?” I hated asking anyone for a favour. But asking Josh it was like having my eyes scratched out.

I glanced into my English classroom, which I was skipping cause I couldn’t fucking think straight knowing Soph was off the grid and it could be my fault. I heard the hallway door open and I glanced at it automatically. Then I did a double take.

“She just showed up,” I said into the phone at Josh and then hung up, heading up the hallway. She better have a fucking good reason!

She was on her phone.

“So you decided to show your face?” I snapped at her while approaching her as fast as I could. “Just disappear don’t fucking

tell anyone!”

Soph’s head snapped up and she looked at me startled.

“Why are you looking so fucking shocked? You disappeared!” I yelled at her.

“Um, I don’t know what you mean?” Her eyes went back to the phone and then looked back at me. “Sorry for worrying you? I guess. You parents know where I’ve been. Didn’t realize they hadn’t told you.”

My parents knew! Why the hell hadn’t they told me they knew where she was!

“So you at the biker’s house or something?” I wasn’t letting her go. “Why you so late today? School started hours ago.”

“Oh, I’m just handing this in.” She raised a piece of paper. “Oh, hi Kayla.”

You have to be fucking kidding me. I turned to see my bitch of a fake girlfriend step out of class.

“Hi, Soph. You haven’t been around.” Kayla was actually speaking nice to Soph. Considering she was trying to ruin Soph’s life at the moment, it gave me insight into just how low of a person Kayla was.

“Yeah, um, sick.” Soph flashed Kayla a smile. “It was good to see you two. I need to hand this into the office.”

She went to step around me and I blocked her. “You in a rush or

something? Do your parents know you are just blowing school off? Moved out of our house?" I crossed my arms, not letting her go.

"Um, yeah I am in a hurry. Someone's waiting for me." She put her phone away and gave me a smile. "I'll see you guys around. And Kyle, my parents know where I am."

"Staying with some biker!" I couldn't stop the scoff at the end. As if her parents would let her near a biker, let alone let her stay with him.

Soph's smile just got bigger. "Geez, Kyle, calm down. I'm fine and my parents know who I'm with." She looked between me and Kayla, still smiling. "I'll see you two around, ok?"

Soph was giving us a real smile. A real fucking smile.

Kayla said a good bye to Soph as she walked past us. I couldn't fucking believe it. Soph was blowing me off. I turned around, seeing her body slightly sway as she walked away from me. And never in my life had I wanted to go after her more.

Soph was acting like there was nothing between us. She just acted like she was fine seeing me! Every time she looked at me since we broke up I saw pain but also love in her eyes. This time she looked at me like I was nothing. Like she was completely over me.

Fuck, it was even worse. It was like she accepted her and I were over.

I dialed my brother's number.

“Did she tell you to fuck off, cause that’s what I’m about to tell you.” Josh was ruder than normal to me. To be honest, he had been a dick since I told him about me speaking to Soph. Didn’t help she disappeared after that.

“You are connected with bikers, right? Being one of the lowlifes?”

“Why?”

“Cause Soph is shackled up with one.” I pushed open the hallway door, going down the steps and spotting Soph getting into a muscle car. “And you are going to threaten him and get him to back off.”

I heard Josh scoff in the phone and then he hung up. I knew my brother could be a dick. But he did like Soph. I was hoping he liked her enough to do something about it.

Chapter Twenty Five

Soph

I hadn’t really been eating solid meals. Ryan wasn’t exactly a cook. But we had binging out on music, games, and alcohol and, in Ryan’s case, drugs as well. I got a certificate easily from our family doctor for the week. Plus he back dated it, which is like a huge no no when it comes to medical certificates.

I came back to Kyle’s. I just wanted a change of clothes, then I was heading back to Ryan’s. Though he said he had something on later tonight. I was planning on heading to Bax’s when he went to whichever girl’s house it was. I assumed it was a girl who had her

hooks in him.

His phone was always going off, though he was rude to whoever was calling.

Anyway, I was planning on getting clothes and heading out of here. But I ran into Louise, and suddenly I was roped into family dinner.

I looked down at the food. I wasn't sure it was a good thing that just the look of food was making me sick, let alone eating it.

“So Sophia, where have you been?”

My eyes went off the home cook meal and onto Jed. Great, here comes twenty questions.

JOSH

I'm going to kill him. He is going to be fucking lucky if my hands don't end up around his throat tonight. I swear, if he doesn't show tonight, I'm tracking him fucking down and finding out the reason why he kept blowing us off. The only reason he was in this town was business with us and he seemed to be ignoring that.

Instead Ryan, the bloody Grave Robber, was always blowing us off. Every meeting he cancelled.

If he didn't show up to the party tonight, well more for the confrontation I was going to have with him before it, he would be lucky to have a beer after I was through with him.

I closed the front door. I needed a new top. Seeing as I was living

at the club, I couldn't show up in this one. I was still on a man hunt for Soph. But every time I questioned Bax about who he was seeing he would shut up or change the subject, not even giving me a hint on what was going on.

Any day I was expecting her to rock up at the club, considering she had moved in with him basically. Fucking pissed off me to no end. What was worse was I couldn't even get her to answer the bloody phone!

I had never hated hearing a voice message as much as hers. First, it reminded me how sweet her voice was, and that sexy luring swirl to her voice. Second, it reminded me how fucking much I missed her and I hated she was with Bax.

Had she listened to one word I said about her doing better? I was so close to opening up to her, telling her everything, and she disappeared from the face of the earth. The only thing that reassured me she was ok was overhearing her parents tell my Dad she was with a friend.

“So Sophia, where have you been?”

I froze at the bottom of the steps, hearing my father's voice from the other room. No fucking way she was here.

“With family friends.” I heard her reply just as I walked into the room.

“Josh, darling, what are you doing here?” Mum was the first one to spot me. Typical.

Kyle threw me a glare; we weren't really on speaking terms at the

moment. I ignored his request to scare off the biker that Soph was with. Little did he know I was doing everything possible to get her away from Bax.

Dad turned in his chair, glancing back at me.

But it was Soph's reaction I wanted to see. Her eyes went off Dad and onto me, a smile spreading across her face- like seeing me, had made her night.

“Do you want something to eat?” Mom asked, already up and heading for the kitchen.

Still I couldn't look away from Soph. Did she have any idea how crazy she was driving me? I was taking my temper out on my club brothers. Small things got a huge reaction out of me. I knew I was doing it. I knew why I was doing it. I also knew I wouldn't be able to stop doing it until I heard or saw Soph.

“Here take a seat, Josh.” Kyle's voice was a threatening hiss as he pushed out the chair next to him, making a point to take the seat, where it was and not move it to Soph.

I guess I couldn't just sit next to her, for all I knew it was me she was avoiding and was the reason she had basically moved out.

“So, Sophia, you were saying... family friends?” Dad's attention was back on Soph.

Soph's eyes went off me and onto my dad. “Yeah, more like family to be honest.”

“Oh, any family I'd know? Last time I checked I know all of your

relatives.”

Soph took her eyes off him and reached for her water. “Nope, you wouldn’t know them, not close. They are only in town for a short period.”

“We should have them around for dinner. You can introduce us.” Kyle leaned forward, he wasn’t hiding his glare, which was locked on her. “Unless you’re lying?”

I saw Kayla roll her eyes. Kyle should really redirect his attention to who is currently sleeping with and off Soph. As far as I was concerned Kyle was her past, and if I could make it happen, I was her future.

Soph didn’t even answer him, her eyes back on her untouched plate.

Was she still not eating?

“Kyle, don’t be rude,” Dad told him off, cause Kyle wasn’t using the manners that Dad had installed on him. Kyle was basically the robot Dad programmed.

“What? We are all thinking it! We all know Soph’s family. So who could this new relative be that just appeared?” Kyle looked around the table, and then his eyes were back on Soph. “Let’s face it Sophia, your family were going to be my family. So you still want to spin that lie to us that we don’t know whoever is in town?”

“Kyle, enough!” Mum told him off, placing a plate of food in front of me. “Sophia’s parents reassured us she was with family. Now who that family is doesn’t matter.” Mum took her seat again, and

even though she said that, you could hear in her tone she wanted an explanation as well.

Soph sighed and dropped the knife and fork she wasn't even using to eat to begin with. Her eyes did a round of the table and then she locked eyes with Kyle.

"It's Uncle Kane." Her eyes went off Kyle and did a round of the table again. "So like I said, not family you all know."

"You've been staying with the country's worst drunk?" Kyle scoffed. "No wonder you wouldn't share who you were with. That man is never sober!"

"You've never met him so you have no right to judge him." Soph's eyes narrowed on him.

"No but we have all heard your dad's opinion of him." Kyle glanced at his dad. "Even Dad's heard the stories!"

"That's all they are, stories." Soph had gone into pit bull mode almost, like Kyle speaking bad of her uncle was a personal attack. I didn't know much about her family.

"The world's worst drunk." Kyle wasn't dropping the subject, his eyes still on Soph. "Why don't you admit it, you are lying! You haven't been with your Uncle! Cause he wouldn't be sober enough to hold a sentence!"

I saw it immediately. What Kyle just said hurt Soph, no, beyond that, it looked like he had just taken a knife to heart. I didn't know who or what type of relationship she had with her uncle, but by her expression right now I knew she cared a hell of a lot for him.

“Soph, can I talk to you?” I got up. “In private?” I watched the tears swelling in her eyes. “Soph?”

I had never seen her so hurt. And any second those tears were going to fall. Just as I thought maybe she hadn't heard me at all, she pushed herself away from the table. I shot Kyle a glare and put my hand on Soph's back as I walked us into the lounge room.

“You ok?” I asked softly.

She didn't stop in the lounge, she kept walking. I wasn't sure where she was heading. But I stopped her when we got into the foyer. My hands dropped on her shoulders and turned her around.

“Soph?” I sighed, and my hands went her face, my thumbs running under her eyes, wiping away the tears. “You've got to stop letting Kyle upset you.”

She nodded her head, but the tears were still falling.

“I need to go.” She got out and went to brush my hands off her. “You, um... don't have to comfort me. I'll be fine.”

“Where you going?” I asked and kept my hands cupping her face. I wasn't sure if I should say anything, but at the same time I knew better. “You are lying about your uncle, aren't you? Or at least partly.”

I didn't want to completely pull apart her story.

“Uncle Kane is in town.” Her tear-filled eyes locked with mine.

“But I haven’t been with him.”

At least she was honest with me. “You have to go out?” I asked.

Confusion ran through her eyes. “Aren’t you heading out? I’m guessing you weren’t planning on staying home on a Friday night?”

“I’ll cancel. Trust me, the guy I had plans with tonight deserves to be cancelled on.” I would love to cancel on Ryan. “He’s a dick deserves to be stood up. So how about you and I spend the night together?”

She was hesitating and then bit her bottom lip. “What about your plans? I don’t want you standing anyone up.”

“Trust me, I’d pick you over him any day.” I smiled. Now, if only I could get her to crack a grin.

Her hands went to mine. “And what do you suggest we do?”

Hell my mind went wild immediately and all my visions had a common theme—they all involved her in my bed.

I took her hands, linking them with mine. “How about we test out my electric blanket? Last time I checked we haven’t used it together.”

Would I get that lucky?

“You really want to stay in with me?” She stepped in closer to me. “Your friend won’t mind?”

“Trust me he isn’t a friend.” Ryan was anything but a friend. He wasn’t even a club member. “Is the Young Ones on? Cause we can watch that.” I saw her frown. “Unless you have plans you can’t get out of?” I had a feeling someone was expecting her tonight.

Then she shook her head. “No. Um, he has plans tonight.”

That pissed me off, cause I knew she was talking about Bax. And yeah, he did have plans tonight. A meeting with Ryan and me, which I was about to back out of.

“So you’re mine tonight?” I pulled her in closer until she was firmly against me. My hand going onto her back.

“Yeah, I’m all yours.” She smiled and then went up on her toes. “Plus I really want to test out the electric blanket.”

And just like that, I had scored one night with her. Now I had to see if tonight was the right time to open up to her and tell her the truth about my life.

I had to admit my life would be easier if I told her the truth. For one thing, I would be able to ride my bike here and wear colors, that is, once the news of being Vice President dropped. And I had feeling that wasn’t going to be far away.

So I needed a chance to tell her about me before she ended up at the club, or worse, Bax made the connection.

Yeah, she needed to hear it from me. But I wasn’t sure if tonight, my first night getting her back, was the right time to tell her.

