



Far Away Hearts

Rebekah's Rosette

Part I

Sherice Drake





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Dedicated to my best friend
and eternal love, Steven





Prologue

Once inside, he has to push back terrible fears and focus, finding it very difficult..., as he sees the wreckage and bodies lying on the ground. Most are alive and receiving help from other responders. Others, thankfully not many, are pronounced dead and tagged to be identified. Finally, they get to the eighth floor. As they walk through the eighth floor, they begin looking for people to assist when they hear a call for help.





Chapter 1

Briskly, Rebekah walks into Grif's café and looks at the clock on the wall, then thinks to herself, "*Made it!*" Letting out a sigh of relief, she looks around for her friends and finds that Rion and Maggie have already arrived. Happily, she watches them, as Maggie wipes the whipped cream off his brown face, before he tucks her curly Polynesian hair behind her ear. Blissfully, they kiss, as Rebekah timidly walks toward them. Not wanting to interrupt, she waits, until they stop and Maggie exclaims, "Hi Bekks!"

"Hi, Maggs!" states Rebekah, sitting down at the booth across the table from them, as Rion quickly taps Maggie's hand. Feeling flustered, Maggie puts her hand under the table as fast as possible, trying to hide it. "What's going on, guys?"

Quickly, they respond, "Nothing!"

"Okay?" utters Rebekah, before looking at the menu, then notices Maggie grinning from ear to ear. "Are you sure nothing is going on, guys?"

Looking over at Maggie's beaming face, Rion says, "Maggie is just really excited, because she ordered you a hot chocolate, which should be cooled down by now."

"Thanks, Maggs," Rebekah states, still thinking there's more going on.

After a moment, Maggie says, "I can't wait, Ri!"

"Maggie, Darrick and Madeline aren't here yet," Rion rebuttals. "You know how mad she'll be. She's after all your sister, your twin sister."

“But Bekks is my best friend,” Maggie counters, “Besides you, of course. And you know how those two are; they are always late. Neither of them take anything seriously.”

“Yeah, you’d think they’d be together,” Rion remarks, smiling.

“They’ve already tried, remember?” Maggie declares, smiling as well.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Rion replies, rolling his eyes.

Just then, Madeline plops down on the booth, nudging Rebekah over and says, “Sorry, I’m late.” Hearing this, they all laugh, confusing Madeline. “What’s so funny?”

“Can I tell them now, Rion?” pleads Maggie. “I know Darrick isn’t here, but he won’t care.”

“Tell us what?” Madeline asks, frowning her brow.

After Rebekah takes a sip of water from one of the cups that was just put on the table, she utters, “They’re getting married.”

As Rebekah looks back at her menu, Rion and Maggie look at her confused, while Madeline exclaims excitedly, “What?”

“Bekks, how did you know?” Maggie asks Rebekah, frowning her brow.

“Yeah, we didn’t say a word,” adds Rion in disbelief.

While laughing, Rebekah explains, “Oh come on guys. Maggs was chomping at the bit to say something, and she even hid her hand the moment I sat down. It was obvious. I would have said something sooner, but it was more fun this way. Now, can we see the ring, please?”

“Yeah, Maggs!” Madeline agrees, enthusiastically.

“Of course!” Maggie exclaims, as she pulls her hand out from under the table to reveal the diamond and pearl ring on her

finger. Once they see the ring, Rebekah and Madeline squeal along with Maggie, while Rion rolls his eyes.

“Darrick’s here!” Rion interjects, causing them all to look back and see him kissing a blonde woman, who caresses his subtle beard with her French manicure, then moves her fingers to his slick brown hair.

Seeing him, Rebekah quickly looks at her reflection in the window next to her, before pleading, “Hey, Madds, do you want to sit on the side of the table?”

“Why?”

“That way you can sit across from Maggs,” says Rebekah, fiddling nervously with her bangs.

“Uh-huh, sure!” enthuses Madeline, as she moves to a chair on the outside of the booth, pulling her silky blonde hair out from the seat.

Finally, Darrick walks over and sits down next to Rebekah, who feels butterflies and says timidly, “Hi, Darrick.”

“What’s up?” queries Darrick, picking up a menu, while Rebekah makes googly eyes at him.

“Nothin’ much,” replies Rebekah, sighing happily.

“So, who’s the blonde, Darrick?” petitions Rion.

“Oh, that’s-” Suddenly, he stops and states, “I saw her leaving a hair salon.”

“Don’t you get your hair done at the most expensive barber in town?”

“I was riding my bike,” Darrick explains. “I saw her leaving, and her legs got my attention.”

“Her legs?” exhorts Rion in disbelief. “That’s all you care about?”

“She has nice legs.”

“What’s her name?” questions Rion.

“I don’t remember,” Darrick confesses, causing Rion to roll his eyes, “But to be fair, that didn’t matter last night. She may not remember mine either, unless she recognized me.”

“I’m sure she remembers you, Darrick,” Rebekah interjects, compassionately. “Who could forget you?”

After furrowing his brow at her, Darrick changes the subject, by uttering, “Anyway... I thought I heard squealing. What was that about?”

Happily, Maggie shows him her ring, while Rion announces, “I proposed. We’re getting married.”

Seriously, Darrick asks, “What? What do you mean you’re getting married?”

“What’s your problem, man?” Rion asks angrily. “We’ve been together since high school. Isn’t it about time?”

“You guys are only 21!” Darrick barks back. “We all are. I know I’m certainly not thinking about doing something that crazy.”

“Darrick,” Madeline snaps, glaring at him. “It’s their choice, and it doesn’t matter how old they are. It’s always going to be a risk. Why can’t you just be happy for them?”

Looking at Madeline with her deep brown eyes, Darrick remarks, “I’m still not happy about this, but whatever. Let’s just e-”

“Hang on!” Maggie interrupts. “There’s more. We were wondering if you, Madds and Bekks, would be my maids of

honor. Honestly, it's too hard to choose between my only sister and my best friend, who I see like a sister."

"Of course!" they both exclaim in sync, then laugh.

"I know you're not too happy about this," Rion tells Darrick, "But I really would like it if you were my best man. I mean, who else could throw me a bachelor party as epic as you could?"

"This is true!" Darrick happily states, causing everyone to laugh.

"No strippers, though!" Maggie commands.

"Now, where's the fun in that?" Darrick sarcastically responds, causing everyone else to roll their eyes, before they all order their food and have an enjoyable meal, talking and laughing.



"Everyone is finding love around me," Rebekah tells Madeline, while they pick up their lunch at the college cafeteria. "One of my best friends is getting married, and my brother is getting married."

"I'm not in love," Madeline declares.

"But you go out on dates all the time," Rebekah rebuttals, "And I can't even get a date."

"Is there anyone you like?" Madeline asks, knowing the answer. Immediately, Rebekah blushes, so Madeline pressures her. "Who is it, Bekks?"

"Darrick," Rebekah confesses, then looks away, blushing more.

"I knew it!" exclaims Madeline, making Rebekah look at her curiously, wondering how she figured it out. "It's obvious!"

"Do you think he knows?"

“If he doesn't, he's even stupider than I thought.”

“I don't even know why I like him,” Rebekah states, filling up a cup with water.

“Because he's hot!” Madeline declares, getting a soda. “He can be very charming too, not to mention a really good kisser! So many girls want to date Darrick. I mean, he and his brother, Darron, are two of the most eligible bachelors in all of L.A. County, and he's got that whole roguish bad boy look, which is super attractive. Plus, as a bonus, he's incredibly wealthy, or at least his dad is, but he has access to pretty much all of that money.”

Feeling awkward, Rebekah pleads, “Let's talk about something else.” After that, they pay for their food, then go to find a place to sit. Not watching where she's going, Rebekah runs into a security guard, causing her water to spill on his shirt and some of her food onto the floor.

Quickly, he stoops down and starts cleaning up the food, then asks, “Are you alright, ma'am?”

Feeling very embarrassed, Rebekah kneels down to help pick up the food and states, “Yes. I'm fine. I am so sorry, Officer.”

Once she's down to his level, he looks up from the floor to look at her and say, “It's Jared.” Quickly, she notices that he's probably around her age with broad shoulders and smooth, short hair that's combed to the sides, parted on the left, and the color of brown sugar. Noticing her green eyes and wavy hair that looks like milk chocolate, Jared smiles at her, causing her to linger her gaze.

Realizing she is staring, she looks away and says, “Sorry. I'm Rebekah. This is Mads.”

“Mads is an interesting name,” declares Jared, after he and Madeline wave. “Never heard that one before.”

“Sorry. It’s a nickname,” clarifies Rebekah, blushing a little, “For Madeline or Maddie. Her sister and I are the only ones who call her Madds. Everyone else just calls her Madeline, except her dad, who calls her Maddie, and her mom who calls her by her Polynesian name.” Suddenly, she stops and states, “Sorry. You probably didn’t need that much of a description.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Jared says, smiling, as they finish cleaning up, then stand. “It’s nice to meet you both. Can I buy you something else to eat, Miss?”

“No,” she responds. “Most of it is fine. Thank you though. What about your shirt?”

Laughing, Jared remarks, “It’s just water.”

Still embarrassed and looking down, Rebekah expresses, “I’m still sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Jared reassures her with a smile. “It’s fine. You’re not in trouble. I’m just a normal guy. This is just my job. And you’ve done nothing wrong, okay? Is there anything else I can do for either of you?” Silently, they shake their heads, while Madeline tucks her hair behind her ear and raises her eyebrows, flirtatiously, making him clear his throat. “Well, in that case, ladies, have a good day and enjoy your meal.”

“You too,” Rebekah says, as he starts walking away. “Well, on the good day part. Not the meal, since you’re not eating.” Laughing a little, Jared looks back for a moment, while she feels even more embarrassed. “What is wrong with me, Madds? I can’t even talk to a stranger. How can I ever talk to Darrick?”

As Rebekah and Madeline walk to a table to sit down, Madeline replies, “Maybe you just had a difficult time talking to the security guard ‘cause he’s hot!”

“Madds, you think every guy that moves is hot,” Rebekah remarks, rolling her eyes.

“Am I wrong about him?”

“Well, no, but that just proves my point. If I can't talk to a handsome stranger, how will I ever be able to talk to Darrick, who has girls throwing themselves at him?”

“I'll figure something out,” vows Madeline.



The next morning, Darrick and Madeline are talking in his penthouse apartment, until another blonde woman walks out of the bathroom. Quickly, Darrick kisses her before she leaves, then rushes back to buttoning up his police uniform shirt, while Madeline continues talking to him.

“Come on, Darrick,” requests Madeline. “It's just one date. I have four tickets to *A Christmas Story* tonight. Leo is going with me, and Bekks really wants to go.” She stops for a moment, realizing she just told a little white lie, but moves on. “But you know she'll feel awkward if it's just the three of us.”

“Listen, Madeline,” vocalizes Darrick. “I don't have time for this. I'm going to be late for work.”

“Since when do you care?”

“Since Chief already reprimanded me.”

“That wasn't even a formal reprimand. He's not even over your department. Isn't he over organized crime?”

“I can't risk disappointing him. Chief gave me this chance. I can't screw it up. Besides, I am still just a rookie. I can't lose this job. You know Mac told me I had to do something or no apartment and no trust fund.”

“Wow!” exclaims Madeline in disbelief. “I've never seen you so dedicated. But I need you to tell me if you will go, please.”

“Take Maggie!”

“She’s busy with Rion. Please, Darrick.”

“Madeline, Bekka is just not my type, okay,” explains Darrick. “I mean, yeah, she’s easy on the eyes and those curves... hmmm, even if her hips are slightly on the larger side.”

Hearing this, Madeline glares at him and remarks, “Her hips are not! She and Maggs wear the same size of clothing, Darrick. The only reason I’m even remotely smaller is because I love to work out. But both of them are still beautiful. You could be a little nicer, Darrick.”

“I was,” Darrick disputes. “I did say she was easy on the eyes, and I definitely enjoy eyeing her curves. Either way though, she’s just too quiet for me. Plus, you know I’m more into blondes and the occasional redhead, not brunettes.”

“You’re brunette!”

“That’s different!”

“I’m naturally a brunette,” she confesses, tousling her hair a little. “This is just dye, and you dated me.”

“Why do you think I never dated Maggie?” asks Darrick, smirking. “She kept her brown hair.”

“No! She was with Rion! That’s why! Please, Darrick! Say you’ll come... for me.”

Looking at Madeline revealing her puppy eyes and pushing her lower lip out, Darrick sighs and submits, “Fine.” Giddily, Madeline gets excited and hug him, then kisses him on the cheek, before he states, “You’re welcome. Now, can I go to work?” Nodding, Madeline lets go of Darrick, and they both leave.



“I can’t believe you convinced me to do this,” Rebekah states, as Madeline finishes doing Rebekah’s makeup and hair. “I don’t even like *A Christmas Story* that much.”

“Who cares? Darrick will be there.”

“But that’s even worse. I’m going to make a complete fool of myself.”

“You’ll be fine, Bekks,” Madeline assures her. “Just be yourself.”

Just then, they hear a knock at the door, so Madeline runs to the door and opens it to see her boyfriend, Leo. “Hey, Leo!” she squeals, before they throw their arms around each other and kiss.

While they are still kissing, Darrick walks in, shaking his head, and utters, “Hey, Madeline!” While still kissing Leo, Madeline waves, before Darrick sees Rebekah and is taken back. “Bekka? Is that you?”

“Yeah,” she responds, blushing.

“Wow!” Darrick declares. “You look different! Did you dye your hair red?” Nervously, Rebekah nods. “I like it!”

“Thanks,” Rebekah timidly tells him.

“Let’s go,” says Madeline, smiling, after she finally stops kissing Leo. “We’ll take my car.”



At the show, Madeline and Leo just make out the entire time, making Rebekah feel really awkward. Eventually, Darrick puts

his arm around Rebekah, trying to get more comfortable, which makes her feel nervous, but happy.

After the show, they go bowling. In between Leo's and Madeline's turns, they return to kissing. During Darrick's turns, he continually gets strikes and spares, while Rebekah struggles and starts getting embarrassed. Realizing Rebekah is struggling, Madeline stops kissing Leo and tells Darrick to help Rebekah. So, Darrick gets up and goes behind Rebekah. Immediately, Rebekah quivers when he stands so close behind her and even more when he puts his arm and hand on hers to show her how to hold the ball and stand. After he explains, while she listens intently, he helps her throw the ball and she ends up knocking them all over. Feeling excited, Rebekah jumps up and down, then turns around and hugs Darrick. Immediately, she feels embarrassed and apologizes.

"Don't worry about," Darrick expresses, laughing a little. When they finish their game, they head back to Rebekah's and Madeline's apartment, where Madeline and Leo go inside and make out on the couch.

Awkwardly, Rebekah stands there, until Darrick says, "You know, I haven't gone on a date ever without kissing the girl at the end."

"Okay," utters Rebekah, nervously, as Darrick gets closer to her, puts his hand around her waist and kisses her fiercely.

"I got to go to work tomorrow," states Darrick after the kiss.

"On Thanksgiving? That sucks. I'm sorry."

"Perks of being a rookie. I guess I will see you the day after at Grif's." With that, he charmingly kisses her hand, then walks away backwards, eyeing her before he opens the door and leaves.



The next day, Rebekah shows up to her Brother Garrett's house for Thanksgiving dinner. She is always in awe when she gets there, because ever since he became a successful TV producer, his house has been so shocking. He went from a tiny dorm with his best friend, Kevin. Then he moved home before he moved into this huge house, or at least it seems huge to her, even though it's only one level, but the yard is very large. Kevin and Garrett still remained best friends, though. Kevin had since divorced Chandra, the twin of Cherise, Rebekah's soon-to-be sister-in-law. Unlike Madeline and Maggie, who are identical, minus the fact that Madeline dyes her hair blonde and straightens it, Cherise and Chandra have a lot of differences in their appearance. Even the shades of their brunette hair is different, despite the fact that they're twins. Still, just like with Madeline and Maggie, nothing could keep them apart. So even after the divorce, Chandra and Kevin would see each other a lot. And they would be extra cordial for their son, Ben. He had just turned four before their divorce, which was still fresh even now. Only two months had passed since the divorce was finalized, and no one could figure out what caused the divorce, not even Cherise and Garrett. Everyone can tell that Chandra and Kevin are still in love, and they still show each other affection. They act like a married couple and never had a custody battle. Plus, right after they filed for divorce, they also announced they were having a baby, who is his and he still helps her with the pregnancy, going to every doctor's appointment.

It was nice at family gatherings because they never cause drama. Cherise and Garrett might. Cherise and Chandra might. But Kevin and Chandra always calm everyone down. Rebekah always enjoys seeing them, as well as everyone else. It usually is only Cherise, Garrett, Chandra, Kevin, Ben, Kevin's brother, Josh, Cherise's and Chandra's younger brother, Nathan, Rebekah's and Garrett's dad, Arthur, and Rebekah. Occasionally, Cherise's and Chandra's parents, Nigel and Paulene, show up. And every other year, Kevin's other brother, David and his wife, Daisy, show up. But there is usually more drama when they are there. They are reporters, which because of Garrett's and Cherise's careers, Cherise being a fashion designer for Hollywood, there are many arguments over the right to press

and honoring people's privacy. Daisy is especially vocal and passionate about being a reporter. Thankfully, Daisy and David were going to be at her parents' place this year. Finally, Rebekah comes back to reality when Cherise opens the door to let Rebekah in and gives her a hug, then asks her, "You alright?"

"Yeah," Rebekah replies, "Just lost in thought."

"Cute hair!" Cherise exclaims, grinning.

"Thanks."

"Come in," Cherise commands, then yells to Garrett, "Garrett, Bekka's here."

After all the guys yell at the game on the television, Garrett tells Rebekah, "Hey, Bekk!"

"Hey, little Rose!" Arthur calls out.

"Hey, Garrett! Hey Dad!" Rebekah says, then walks in and hands a casserole dish to Cherise. "Sweet potato casserole, as requested."

Just then, Chandra walks in, smiling, and says, "Mmmm... I love your sweet potato casserole. Hey, Rebekah."

"It's actually my mom's recipe," Rebekah declares. "I don't do it as good as she did."

"I think it's delicious when you make it," Chandra exclaims.

"Me too," concurs Cherise.

"Is everyone here?" asks Rebekah.

"Still waiting on our cousin," Chandra replies.

"Cousin?" queries Rebekah.

“Yeah,” Chandra confirms. “He said he might be a little late getting off work.”

“And then he’ll only be here a couple of hours,” Cherise adds. “He’s a new rookie at the Santa Monica Police Department, so he gets all the, not so great, shifts.”

“At least we get to see him,” Chandra states, then takes the casserole from Cherise and heads into the kitchen.

Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. When Cherise opens it, she exclaims, “You made it!” After hugging and kissing the cheek of the person standing there, she requests, “Come in. Rebekah, this is our cousin...”

“You!” Jared exclaims, with a stunned smile.

“You’re Cherise’s cousin?” asks Rebekah, smiling and blushing a little.

“You two know each other?” Cherise queries.

“Yeah, sort of,” replies Jared, as Rebekah blushes more and looks down. “We ran into each other, literally, on my last day working security at the college.”

“You don’t work there anymore?” Rebekah asks. “Oh right, they said you were a cop now.”

“It was only a part time thing,” explains Jared, “Until I got more settled.”

“Hey, Jared,” Garrett says, after he walks in and kisses Cherise.

“Hey, Garrett,” Jared replies, shaking his hand.

“Did I hear Jared and Bekk finally met?” Garrett inquires.

“Yes,” Cherise answers.

“Hey, Dad!” shouts Garrett. “Jared and Bekka finally met.” Showing his approval, Arthur smiles and gives a thumbs up.

“What do you mean ‘finally?’ Rebekah asks. “Wait. Jared, you know my dad too?”

“Mr. Redd?” inquires Jared.

“Arthur!” yells Arthur, correcting Jared, causing everyone to laugh.

“Your dad’s hearing never ceases to amaze me,” remarks Cherise.

“Only when it suits him,” adds Garrett.

“I heard that!” announces Arthur, making everyone laugh again.

“So, how do you know my dad, Jared?” Rebekah asks.

“I met Arthur when Cherise and Garrett invited me over for dinner a few times,” Jared explains.

“We tried to get you here too, Bekka,” explains Garrett, “But you’re always too busy. We wanted to set you two up.”

“Seriously, Garrett?” Rebekah snaps, making Jared hide a smile that escaped. “Are you trying to embarrass me?”

“What, Bekk?” argues Garrett. “I was just trying to help you, since I never hear you talking about going out with anyone.”

“For your information, Garrett-,” counters Rebekah, but is interrupted by Chandra walking back in.

“Jared!” squeals Chandra, as she hugs him and kisses his cheek.

“Hey, Chandra,” says Jared, stifling his laughter. “Sorry I didn’t bring anything. With all these hours, I haven’t really had time to cook. Plus, my apartment has kind of a sad excuse for a kitchen.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Chandra assures him. “We are just glad you’re here.”

“Is there anything I can do?” Jared asks.

“Rebekah, why don’t you and Jared set the table?” Cherise suggests, smiling.

Nervously, Rebekah nods, then walks with Jared into the kitchen, where she grabs some plates and hands them to him. After she grabs some glasses and they start setting the table, Rebekah notices Jared is staring and inquires, “Is everything alright? Do I have something on my face?”

“No,” he answers, shaking his head to stop himself from staring. “I was just wondering. Didn’t you have brown hair the last time I saw you?”

“Yeah, but I thought I’d try something new. Does it look bad?”

“Not at all, but I’m partial to brunettes myself.” Flirtatiously, Jared smiles at her, making her blush. Clearing his throat, he changes the subject. “So, how’s school going? Are you a student or...?”

“School’s fine, and yes, I’m a student.”

“What are you studying?” Jared beseeches, then suddenly stops. “Sorry, it must seem like I am interrogating you.”

“No, you’re fine,” she assures him. “I am studying communication and obviously still have a lot to learn.”

Hearing his, Jared laughs, making Rebekah blush, so Jared apologizes, “I’m sorry for embarrassing you.”

“You didn’t. I embarrass myself.”

“By being funny?” he queries, feeling very amused.

"I guess," she states, which makes Jared smile and Rebekah blush again.

"Got any plans for the break?" Jared inquires, while they set the table.

"Tomorrow, I do. I'm going out with my roommates, doing some black Friday shopping. I really didn't want to, but my best friend wants to pick out her wedding dress tomorrow at this big sale. After that, some more wedding planning, and then I am hanging out with my group of friends for dinner." For a moment, there is silence, until Rebekah suggests, "You could come if you want."

"That's kind of you to offer, Rebekah, but I'm actually hanging out with a buddy of mine from work."

"Oh," she utters, awkwardly.

"You know," Jared says, breaking the awkward silence, "Cherise and Garrett have told me a lot about you."

"Oh great! Like what?"

"Don't worry," he assures her, noticing her nervousness. "They were all good things, and so far they all seem pretty accurate, like you're smart and funny and kind."

"Right," Rebekah remarks sarcastically.

"There was just one thing your brother said that doesn't quite do you justice."

"What's that?"

"Your b-"

Just then, everyone else walks in, carrying food, stopping Jared from continuing, making him feel really awkward. After all the food is brought in, and they say grace, Garrett carves the turkey. All the while, Cherise tells him he's doing it wrong. They argue a little, then follow up with a kiss, which makes Jared and

Rebekah both smile. Distracted by the kiss, Rebekah hands the mashed potatoes to Jared and accidentally knocks the spoon out and onto his shirt, covering his shirt in mashed potatoes, which makes everyone laugh, but Rebekah, who blushes and states, "Not again." With that, she gets up and leaves the table.

"Sweetie!" exclaims Cherise.

"Bekk," Garrett chimes in.

"Rebekah!" Arthur calls out, shaking his heads.

"Excuse me," Jared requests, as he stands up, then goes down the hallway to the bathroom and sees Rebekah sitting and burying her face in her hands in the hallway.

"Hey," says Jared, startling Rebekah.

When she looks up, she utters, "Oh, it's you!"

"Sorry?"

Remorsefully, Rebekah responds, "No, I'm sorry. I am just such a clutz, and this is the second time I threw food on you."

As Jared cleans his shirt up, he tries to assure Rebekah, "It's really okay. After the day I've had today, this was actually nice. Besides, I'm just grateful to be with family and be having Thanksgiving dinner. A little bit of potatoes can't ruin that."

"Do you... do you not normally get to spend time with family or have Thanksgiving dinner?" Before he answers, she adds, "I'm sorry. That's a personal question."

"It's alright."

"Sorry I freaked out so much. You must think I'm crazy."

"Maybe a little," Jared expresses, smiling, then laughs, causing Rebekah to laugh. After a moment, Jared asks, "Would you like to go back to eat and maybe throw some more food on me?"

Feeling silly, Rebekah smirks, then nods, as he offers his hand to help her up, which she cautiously accepts. Gently, he helps her stand up. Once she is standing, she kisses his cheek.

“What was that for?” Jared queries, smiling slightly.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Rebekah states, feeling embarrassed again. “I was just thanking you, and I figured since Cherise and Chandra kissed you on the cheek when they saw you, you’d be used to it. They do that with a lot of people, though. My best friends do that kind of thing too. I guess I was just... I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable. I-”

“Rebekah, you didn’t,” he interrupts her, laughing a little. “I didn’t mind. I was just surprised, is all. I know Cherise and Chandra are like that. They’re just like their mom. I just didn’t expect it from you.”

“I won’t do it again.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable.”

“I told you it didn’t,” he assures her. “It was actually nice.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Jared responds, nodding. “Tell you what, Rebekah. Maybe this will help you feel better.” Curiously, Rebekah looks at Jared, as he leans closer and kisses her cheek, making her smile. “That better?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah replies, grinning and blushing, as he smiles at her.

Suddenly, Cherise walks in and implores, “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah says. “Jared was just trying to make me feel better.”

“Well, if you’re done, doing whatever it is you’re doing” Cherise remarks, smiling, “Would you like to come back to dinner?”

“Sure,” Rebekah and Jared state in unison, making them both laugh.

“We should probably get back in there,” Jared points out, “Before more family shows up, wondering what we’re doing.”

“Yeah,” Rebekah agrees, before Jared offers his arm to escort her back into the dining room. Taken by surprise, Rebekah interlocks her arm with his, then walks back to the dining room with him behind Cherise. When they get back, Jared pulls Rebekah’s chair out. “Thank you,” she says, shyly, as she sits down.

“You’re welcome,” Jared states, then sits down next to her, while Cherise, Garrett, and Arthur watch in amazement that someone was able to get her to come back after being embarrassed. Once everyone gets settled again, they all enjoy the food and conversation, and Rebekah is relieved that things didn’t get worse.



The next day at Grif’s, Rebekah, Madeline, Maggie, and Rion are hanging out. As usual, Darrick is the last one to arrive. When he finally walks in, Darrick says, “Everyone, this is…”

“Jared?” exclaims Rebekah, as she sees Jared walk in behind Darrick.

“Rebekah?” questions Jared, his eyes lighting up.

“You two know each other?” Darrick asks them.

“We’ve met a few times,” states Jared, smiling. “Usually food is involved.” This statement makes Rebekah and Jared laugh,

before he adds, "And it looks like we might be going for a third time."

"I promise I will do whatever I can to not spill food on you," announces Rebekah, smiling, then laughs along with Jared, while Darrick stands there awkwardly, noticing that Rebekah is giving Jared more attention than him.

Suddenly, Darrick chimes in, "How do you two know each other?"

"Jared is my brother's fiancé's cousin," Rebekah explains. "And you two work together at the Santa Monica Police Department?"

"Ye-"

Interrupting Jared, Darrick announces, "We are both rookies with the SMPD. We also went to the academy together. And Jared, this is my girlfriend."

At the same time, everyone asks Darrick, "Girlfriend?"

"What about-?"

Interrupting Jared again, Darrick bluntly declares, "Bekka is my girlfriend!" Sitting down, Darrick puts his arm around Rebekah's shoulders, making her smile, while Jared looks at them, bewildered.

"Isn't he that hot security guard from the college, Bekks?" interjects Madeline, as Jared gets chairs for them to sit on outside the booth.

While Rebekah nods, Jared clears his throat and says, "Hi. Madeline, right?"

"That's me," Madeline confirms, grinning at him, flirtatiously, before licking her lips.

Clearing his throat, Jared looks at Maggie and Rion and states, "I'm guessing you must be related to Madeline. Other than your hair, you look a lot alike."

"We're identical twins," Madeline announces.

"My name's Margaret," Maggie divulges. "You can call me Maggie."

"Hi, Maggie," Jared tells her, then looks at Rion's fireman identification tag and queries, "Ree-on Willaims?"

"No," Rion rebuttals, laughing a little. "I get that a lot. My parents took a traditional name but chose a more unique spelling. It's pronounced just like Ryan."

"Nice to meet you all," Jared declares, as he shakes hands with Rion and Maggie.

As Jared goes to shake hands with Madeline, she turns her hand and moves her hand up towards his lips. Awkwardly, he barely touches her hand with his lips, before she queries, "You want to do that to my lips now?"

"Madds!" Rebekah shouts, while Jared clears his throat and looks away. "Jared, I'm sorry. Madeline just really likes to flirt."

"What's wrong with that?" interjects Darrick. "A little flirting never hurt anyone."

"But asking him to kiss her?" exhorts Rebekah.

"I just am asking if he wants to," Madeline reveals, smiling.

Clearing his throat, Jared stammers, "Look, Madeline. You're... you're a very... you're an attractive woman, but we basically just met, and... I'm not... I'm not exactly looking to be in a relationship."

"Why not?" enthuses Madeline.

Once again, Jared clears his throat and stammers, "I... My family's life is... it's complicated."

"Too complicated to allow you to be in a relationship?" leers Madeline.

"Yeah," Jared utters, clearing his throat once more.

Compassionately, Rebekah imparts, "I'm sorry, Jared. Seems rather lonely to never have the hope of finding someone to share your life with."

Silently, Jared nods, while there is an awkward silence filling the air, until Madeline breaks it and interjects, "Well, you don't have to worry about that with me, Jared. I'm already in a relationship, and I'm a one-man gal, but Bekks is right. I really do enjoy flirting."

"She sure does!" enthuses Darrick, grinning from ear to ear.

"Well, Jared," Rebekah chimes in again. "You don't need to worry about that here. I guess we're all taken now, but everyone could use a friend or two, right?"

"Right," Jared says, before clearing his throat again.



"Wow!" Rebekah exclaims, after opening the door to her apartment and seeing Darrick wearing a suit and holding a bouquet of peach roses. "I think I'm underdressed." Feeling discouraged, she looks down at her simple floral dress that falls just below the knee.

"You look gorgeous, Bekka!" he declares, offering her the bouquet of flowers.

"Thank you." Nervously, she takes the flowers and turns to walk into the kitchen. After Rebekah in the kitchen, Darrick follows

and shuts the door, then pulls her back and kisses her. "What was that for?"

"No reason. I just really enjoy kissing, if you haven't noticed." Nervously, she nods. "You ready to go?"

"Sure," she responds, setting the flowers on the counter and grabbing her purse. "I guess I can take care of the flowers later. Where are we going? You said dinner, but now that I'm seeing you in a suit, I'm wondering if the restaurant has a dress code."

"I guess it is a formal restaurant. If you want, we can stop and buy you something else to wear."

"Are you serious?"

"Absolutely!"

"You know what? I can wear the dress for my Garrett's and Cherise's last attempted wedding. Just give me a minute to go get changed." Quickly, Rebekah goes into her room and changes.

When she emerges in a pink elegant gown, Darrick declares, "You look stunning, Bekka!"

"Thank you," Rebekah says, nervously, before Darrick kisses her, then escorts her outside to his car and drives her to the restaurant. While driving, Darrick keeps looking at Rebekah. "Darrick, don't you think you should keep your eyes on the road?"

"Sorry, Bekka," he says. "You're just distracting! That hair looks so good on you!" Blushing, Rebekah pulls her hair to the side and starts playing with it, which she continues to do, during their entire date, except when she's eating her five-course meal.

"I've never had a five-course meal before, Darrick," confesses Rebekah, "Or been to a restaurant this fancy. I hope I'm not embarrassing you with how awkward I am."

“No, Bekka,” Darrick assures her. “Just relax.”





Chapter 2

When Christmas Eve arrives, Rebekah is celebrating with Cherise, Garrett, and Arthur by watching *The Santa Clause* movies at Garrett's house before going to bed. Hoping Darrick will call, Rebekah keeps looking at her phone, then jumps when Cherise's phone rings. Kissing Garrett on the way out, Cherise answers her phone and goes into the other room, before Garrett asks Rebekah why she keeps looking at her phone.

"No reason," Rebekah utters.

"You're waiting for that boyfriend of yours to call, aren't you?"

"He probably is still at work," she tries to assure him, as well as herself.

Just then, Cherise walks back in, kisses Garrett again, and sits next to him, while he wraps his arm around her, as she announces, "Jared won't be joining us. Everyone was asked to stay later."

"See," states Rebekah, "And I'm sure he got so busy he forgot to text or call." While Garrett shakes his head, Rebekah stands up and asks to be excused, then walks into the bathroom. When she gets in there, she cries a little and talks to herself. "Rebekah, relax. You've just been going out for a short time. He's probably just adjusting. Besides, his relationships usually don't even last more than a few days." She becomes more concerned, then shakes her head, wipes her tears, and walks back out to watch the movie. When she gets back to the living room, she sits next to Arthur, who puts his arm around her and kisses her head, making her feel a little better.

Throughout the rest of the movie, she continues to look at her phone, but she never hears from him. Eventually, Arthur tells

them he is too tired and goes to bed. Just as they begin *The Santa Clause 2*, there is a knock at the door. When Garrett answers the door, he announces, "its Jared."

"You made it!" Cherise exclaims, as Jared walks in and Garrett shuts the door. "I thought you said you had to stay late."

"We finished earlier than expected!" Jared declares, then sees Rebekah and smiles. "Hey, Rebekah! Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas, Jared," she responds, kindly.

"Nice pajamas," Jared tells her.

"Thanks," Rebekah says, blushing. "They were a gift from my dad, Garrett, and Cherise."

"We exchange pajamas every year!" Garrett reveals. "It was something our mom used to do, and Dad wanted to keep the tradition going."

"That's cool!" Jared exclaims.

"Hey, did you see Darrick?" Rebekah asks, changing the subject. "Did he get off when you did?"

"Actually, I haven't seen him all day," Jared discloses. "I guess his dad had some important event going on, and Darrick had to be there. I kind of expected you to be there. That's why I was surprised to see you." As Garrett and Cherise look at Rebekah with worry, Rebekah tries to fight back tears. Not being able to hold back her sadness, Rebekah runs into a guest room.

"Bekk!" Garrett calls out.

"Was it something I said?" asks Jared.

"No, Jared," Cherise assures him.

"It's that boyfriend of hers!" growls Garrett.

“He has a name, Garrett!” Cherise points out, annoyance in her voice.

“I’m sorry,” Jared says, regretfully. “I didn’t even think. When Darrick said he had a date, I assumed it was her. Then, I figured she must have canceled because it was Christmas Eve. Uh, I feel like a jerk.”

“Darrick’s the jerk,” states Garrett, feeling even more annoyed. “What does she even see in him?”

“Garrett,” Cherise says, trying to calm him.

“No, Cherise!” barks Garrett. “He’s probably out with another girl right now. And I know what you’re going to say. You’re going to tell me that it’s her life and her choice, but she doesn’t even realize the jerk he is. She is so blinded by whatever”.

“Um, guys,” Jared interrupts, cautiously. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to clean up a little bit.”

“Yes, of course,” Cherise tells him. “Sorry, Jared. Go ahead. You know where the bathroom is.”

“Yes. Excuse me,” Jared says, then leaves the room. Just before he reaches the bathroom, he hears some quiet crying coming from one of the nearby rooms. Hesitantly, he walks toward that door and knocks.

“Go away!” Rebekah yells from inside the room.

Cautiously, Jared states, “Rebekah, I just wanted to say how sorry I am.”

Suddenly, the door opens, and Rebekah, who is out of breath from running to the door, exclaims, “Jared, I am so sorry. I thought you were my brother.”

“It’s alright,” Jared assures her. “I’m the one who should be sorry, Rebekah. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No. I’m glad you did. As upset as I am, it’s not at you.”

“Still, I didn’t mean to upset you with what I said. Besides, someone should apologize.”

“Thank you,” she says, smiling, then kisses his cheek. “That’s very thoughtful of you.”

“It’s nothing,” he tells her, while smiling, then looks her in the eye. “You deserve to have a good Christmas, Rebekah.”

After a moment, Rebekah says, awkwardly, “You must think I’m the craziest person you’ve ever met.”

“Maybe not the craziest,” he states, sarcastically, then smiles coyly at her.

After laughing at Jared’s remark, she says, “Thank you.”

“For what?” he inquires, his brow furrowing, while still smiling. “For calling you crazy?”

“No, not that. Well, sort of. Thank you for making me laugh. I needed a laugh.”

“Well, I know in the other room there is a funny movie going on,” Jared explains, smiling. “I bet that would help you laugh too.”

“Okay,” she accepts. “I’ll go back in. Just give me a minute.” As she walks over to a duffle bag, he walks to the bathroom, loosens his tie and washes his hands and face, then smooths his hair. When he finishes, Rebekah walks up to him, wearing a sweater and carrying a blanket, and asks, “Ready?”

“Yeah,” he replies, before they walk back into the living room, which amazes Cherise and Garrett that Jared was able to help her once again. As Garrett resumes the movie, Cherise and Garrett cuddle on the sectional, while Jared and Rebekah sit with a couch cushion in between them on the other end of the

sectional. After finishing the second movie, they move on to the third, during which Rebekah and Jared fall asleep.

At the end of the movie, they wake up and see Cherise and Garrett smiling at them, then realize she is laying on his lap. Quickly, they jump up and state in unison, "I am so sorry. I-" Immediately, they stop talking and start laughing.

"Bekka, it's okay. Don't worry about it," Jared assures her, then yawns heavily. "Sorry about that."

"Jared, you really shouldn't drive home," Cherise points out. "Why don't you spend the night here? I'd hate for something to happen to you on your way home."

"I don't know," he utters, awkwardly. "I don't want to barge in on your guys' Christmas."

"Its fine," Garrett states. "Besides, you don't want to argue with this beautiful woman. She always wins."

Smiling, Cherise kisses Garrett, then declares, "That's right!"

"Okay," Jared submits. "But I do have to work early in the morning."

"You can at least stay for hot chocolate," Rebekah chimes in. "That's Mom's other Christmas tradition we carried on... delicious hot chocolate every Christmas morning."

"Sounds perfect!" Jared exclaims, smiling at Rebekah.



Later that night, Jared gets up to use the bathroom, wearing his police uniform pants and his undershirt. On his way back to his guest room, he sees Rebekah walking out of her room, which is right next to his. "Hey," he says to her, smiling.

“Hi, Jared.”

“Can't sleep?”

“No,” she replies. “I guess I'm just upset about Darrick and decided to do some emotional eating.”

“Care if I join you?”

“You need to emotionally eat?” Rebekah queries, frowning her brow.

“No,” he answers, stifling a chuckle, “But one should never emotionally eat alone.”

Hearing this makes Rebekah laugh, until she accepts, “Okay. But don't you have to work in the morning?”

“I'll be fine,” he assures her, then motions her to go in front of him. Hesitantly, she walks to the kitchen, while he follows her. Immediately, she goes to the freezer and pulls out some cookie dough ice cream. “Good choice!”

“Its rock hard,” Rebekah announces, upon opening the ice cream carton. “Sorry, Jared. I guess we'll have to wait.”

“Here, let me see what I can do,” Jared suggests, taking the ice cream carton from her and putting it in the microwave for a few seconds.

“Oh, Cherise is going to be so mad at you,” Rebekah enthuses, laughing.

“I'll replace it,” Jared states, taking the ice cream out of the microwave and grabbing two spoons, “Or we can just finish it.”

“Straight out of the carton?”

“Isn't that the best way to emotionally eat?” questions Jared. “Unless that makes you uncomfortable.”

“No. I think it bothers Cherise, but if we’re going to finish it, we should do it right.” Smiling, she tries to hop up onto the counter.

“Let me help you, Bekka,” says Jared, then sets down the ice cream and lifts her up onto the counter gently.

“Thanks.”

“No problem,” he tells her, then jumps up onto the counter and grabs the ice cream. “Here, you can have the first bite,” he declares, offering her some ice cream on a spoon.

“Thank you,” she states, then eats the ice cream, while he holds the spoon. Then, she takes the spoon from him, and they both begin eating the ice cream.

Part of the way through, Jared points above her mouth with the spoon and tells her, “You got something right there.”

“Seriously?” she shrieks, wiping above her mouth. “How embarrassing.”

Laughing, Jared states, “You missed a spot!”

“Where?” she asks, nervously.

“Right there,” he answers, as he taps her nose with the spoon, leaving ice cream on her nose, then jumps down from the counter and runs to the other side.

“Jared!” she squeals, as she hops off the counter and chases him around the kitchen. Finally, she catches up to him and tries to put ice cream on him with her spoon, but he pushes her hands back, while they both laugh. Eventually, he eats the ice cream off the spoon, and they stop laughing, while he stares at her. Out of breath, he leans in, until the light turns on, and Cherise and Garrett walk in from different directions, causing Jared to leap away from Rebekah.

“What’s going on in here?” inquires Garrett, grinning.

Just then, Cherise notices the ice cream carton and queries, "Eating straight out of the carton?"

Immediately, Rebekah declares, "It was Jared's idea!" For a moment, there is silence, until everyone starts laughing.

"We'll finish it off, Cherise," Jared assures her.

"Okay, But could you two keep it down? Some of us are trying to sleep." Again, they all laugh, as Cherise and Garrett walk back to their rooms.

"Way to throw me under the bus, Bekka," exclaims Jared.

"Sorry, but Cherise is scary when she's angry," Rebekah announces.

"That's alright," Jared says, smiling. "I was just kidding. You can throw me under the bus anytime." Joyously, Rebekah smiles back at him, then jumps when her phone chirps on the counter. Quickly, Rebekah picks it up and looks at it, then smiles. "Good news at two in the morning?" asks Jared, as he takes another bite of ice cream.

"It's Darrick," states Rebekah, causing Jared to sigh, "Apologizing for last night. He wants to make it up to me today after he gets off work."

"I'm happy for you, Bekka," Jared tells her, then begins eating the ice cream again. After a couple of bites, he confesses, "You know what? I'm kind of tired. I think I'll go to bed, since I have to be up for work soon."

"Okay. You don't want anymore?"

"You finish it. I don't think you're emotionally eating anymore. You can just enjoy it."

"Thanks, Jared," exclaims Rebekah, "For emotionally eating with me."

"No problem," he tells her. "Good night."

"Good night," she states, then smiles after he leaves.



The next morning, Rebekah walks into the kitchen and asks, "Where's Jared?"

"He said he needed to get to work," Cherise discloses. "He apologized for not being able to stay for hot chocolate."

"I should have woken up sooner," confesses Rebekah.

"It's okay," Garrett assures her. "Jared said you couldn't sleep last night."

"Good morning, little Rose," states Arthur, as he walks in and hugs Rebekah, while kissing the side of her head. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Dad," Rebekah tells him.



"Hey, Jared," Rebekah states after walking into the police station. "What are you still doing here? Didn't you work at the same time as Darrick?"

"Yeah," Jared answers. "Just finishing up some paperwork."

"Is Darrick?"

"No," Jared replies. "He left a while ago." Feeling embarrassed, Rebekah turns away, trying to push tears back. "Bekka, are you okay?"

"I'm fine," she says, struggling to keep the tears away. "I need to go. Good luck with your paperwork. Merry Christmas!"

“Bekka?” Jared calls out to her, but she keeps walking and leaves.

After she's gone, Jared tries calling Darrick, who answers right away, “Hey, Jared. What's up?”

“Rebekah, just showed up here,” announces Jared, who suddenly hears giggling from the background. “Darrick, are you with someone?”

“Shhh!” Darrick says away from the phone. “Sorry, Jared. Were you saying something?”

“You know what?” Jared exhorts. “Never mind.” With that, Jared hangs up the phone, then quickly turns in his paperwork and leaves. When he walks outside, where it's raining, he sees Rebekah on the ground, trying to get up. “Rebekah?” he calls, rushing to her side. “Are you okay?”

As Jared bends down to help her get up, she tells him, “I'm fine. I just slipped. I shouldn't have worn these shoes.” When Jared helps her stand, he notices blood exposed from a hole in her pants where her knee is, then looks over and sees a fellow rookie of his, who is flirting with a woman, and yells, “Hey, Crane! What's the deal? You couldn't help her get up?”

“I was a little busy, Bentley,” Officer Crane admits, smiling, making Jared roll his eyes in annoyance. “I was going to get to her after I got this fine lady's number. Then, I was going to get her number, but you've ruined that now, Bentley. Thanks a lot.”

“Come on,” Jared requests, shaking his head and wrapping his jacket around Rebekah, then escorts her back inside, before asking an officer at the front desk for a first aid kit. While they wait, Jared takes Rebekah over to a chair and helps her sit down, just as a first aid is brought to him. Silently, Rebekah sits there, while Jared tends to her wound. After some silence, he inquires, “Are you alright, Rebekah?”

“I don't know,” she answers, tearing up. “I feel so stupid.”

“You’re not stupid,” Jared assures her, as he finishes putting a bandage on her wounded knee.

“Yes, I am,” Rebekah rebuttals. “First, I fell for Darrick’s charm... again. Then, I slipped. I am such a clutz and not just physically, but socially too.”

Smiling slightly, Jared assures her, “You’re not a clutz, especially socially. You’re awesome.”

“Thanks,” expresses Rebekah. “If only I could believe that!”

“Would you like a ride home?”

“No,” Rebekah says, sighing. “My car is parked outside.”

“Still, you’re pretty upset and rightfully so. This isn’t really turning out to be a good Christmas for you. Why don’t you let me drive you to Garrett’s so you can spend the rest of Christmas with your family? I’m sure they would love to help make the day better for you. Then, I’ll help you get your car tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Rebekah submits, before Jared escorts her back outside and to his car, then helps her get inside. Once he shuts the door, Jared walks around to the driver’s side and gets in.

Throughout the entire drive, they are silent, while Rebekah tries to push more tears away. Jared feels the need to comfort her but isn’t sure how to.

When they arrive, Garrett notices on the security camera and announces, “Hey, Jared’s back.”

“Really?” Cherise queries, then walks outside with Garrett to greet him. When they get outside, Jared is helping Rebekah out of the car.

“Bekka, what happened?” asks Garrett, nervously, when he sees Rebekah wrapped in Jared’s jacket. “Where’s your car?”

“Back at the police station,” Rebekah explains. “Jared gave me a ride.”

“But why?” Garrett presses, anxiously. “Did you get hurt?”

“I’m fine,” Rebekah responds. “Can I just go inside?”

“Of course, sweetie,” Cherise states, as she wraps her arms around her and guides her to the door.

“Bekka, wait,” Jared requests, stopping Rebekah and Cherise. “What time would you like me to help you tomorrow?”

“With what?” asks Rebekah. “Oh, yeah, my car.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” Garrett assures them. “I’ll just arrange to have it towed here.”

“It’s not a problem,” Jared remarks.

“Don’t argue with him, Jared,” commands Cherise. “Just let him do it.”

“Okay,” Jared submits.

“Thanks anyway, Jared,” Rebekah tells him, then walks inside with Cherise.

“What happened?” Garrett asks Jared, after Cherise and Rebekah are inside.

“She slipped outside,” Jared discloses. “I offered to drive her home. I didn’t think it would be safe for her to drive in the rain, especially since she was so upset.”

“Because of Darrick?”

“I really don’t think it’s a good idea for me to talk about this,” Jared tells him. “It’s not my business.”

“It is about Darrick!” declares Garrett. “I really wish she’d stop seeing him. He’s just going to break her heart, even more than he already has! He’s just like his brother and his dad!”

“You seem to know his family pretty well.”

“You could say that,” Garrett states. “His brother, Darron, and I went to elementary school together. We were best friends, actually, and we remained friends, even after he switched to prep schools, but then during our senior year, we ended up liking the same girl, Stephanie Cooper. She was beautiful, funny, and a really good friend to both of us. Well, she chose him, which at first I was fine with. I mean, he was my friend, and I didn’t want to stand in the way of his happiness, especially after everything he had been through with his parents’ divorce, his mom abandoning them, and Mac, his dad, always dating a new woman every week. But then, he started acting like his dad, except he didn’t break up with Stephanie. He strung her along, all while dating other girls. I told him he needed to break things off with Stephanie or I would tell her, but he wouldn’t. So, I told her. And not only was she heartbroken, she was furious with both of us.”

“She was upset at you?” queries Jared, furrowing his brow.

“Yeah,” Garrett answers. “Cause I also told her that I liked her. She said I was just like him, because I wanted her while she was with Darron. So, she cut ties with us both, and Darron and I haven’t spoken to each other since. We’ve seen each other in passing a handful of times, but we don’t exactly talk.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Garrett assures him. “I have a great life now. I have Cherise, who I am madly in love with, and Kevin is a much better friend than Darron ever was. That was just typical high school drama, right?” Sighing, Jared nods, before Garrett clears his throat and suggests, “Hey, why don’t you come in and celebrate Christmas with us?”

“I don’t know.”

“Cherise would be furious if you didn't,” Garrett points out. “Besides, you took care of Bekka.”

“It was the least I could do,” admits Jared. “I'd hate it if something happened to her, especially if I could do something about it.”

“Well, thank you,” Garrett exclaims. “You're a good guy, Jared. I really wish you were the one she's dating.”

“I can't.”

“Why not?” exhorts Garrett.

“I think you know why,” Jared remarks. “I'm sure Cherise has told you some.”

“Yeah, but that doesn't make you a bad guy.”

Sighing, Jared tells him, “Look. I'd like to stay, but I'm actually really tired, and I have to work again tomorrow.”

“Alright,” Garrett submits, sighing as well. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas,” states Jared, as he gets in his car.

After he drives away, Rebekah comes running out of the house, dressed in her pajamas, yelling, “Jared, you forgot your-”

“What is it, Bekka?” Garrett inquires.

“He forgot his jacket.”

“Don't worry about it. Cherise and I will make sure he gets it back. Besides, you'll probably see him again the day of the wedding.”

“Right,” Rebekah utters. “I guess I'll give it back to him then, unless you think he'll need it.”

"I'm sure he'll be fine, Bekka," Garrett assures her, resting his arm on her shoulder. "Come on. Let's go back inside and talk."

"I don't want to talk," Rebekah rebuttals, after they walk inside. "I already know what you're going to say."

"Are you going to listen to me for once, Bekka?"

"I don't think I'm going to have much a choice," confesses Rebekah. "Darrick's not interested in me, anyway. At least not how I thought he was. He just texted me and told me he had another date first. Then he wants to take me out."

"Seriously?" Garrett barks. "Please tell me you aren't going to go out with him, Bekka."

"No, Garrett," Rebekah assures him, as Cherise walks in the room. "If he wants to be with me, I have to be his only girl."

"Did you tell him that?" inquires Garrett.

"No," replies Rebekah, sighing. "I think I'm done talking to him for a while. The only problem is we're in a group of friends, and I don't want to make them choose between the two of us."

"Give it some time," Cherise tells her. "I'm sure things will work out."

"I hope so," Rebekah states, then feels her phone buzz in her hand and looks at it. "It's him again. He's calling now. What do I do?"

"Just ignore it," Garrett tells her.

"I can't do that," Rebekah declares, then answers her phone. "Hi, Darrick."

"Why haven't you responded to my texts?" asks Darrick over the phone. "Aren't we going out tonight, Bekka?"

"I don't think so, Darrick," Rebekah responds, while pulling away from Garrett, who is trying to take the phone from her.

"Why not?" inquires Darrick.

"Well, you have that other girl," Rebekah answers, anxiously, as Cherise pulls Garrett out of the room.

"Our date is over now."

"Well, I don't really want to be just another girl," Rebekah states, nervously. "I'd like to be your only girl, Darrick."

"Oh, I see," remarks Darrick. "Well, Bekka, I date a lot of girls."

"Well, I'm not like that," Rebekah reveals, quivering, then takes a deep breath. "So, it's either me or them, and please don't hate me for requesting that."

"I don't, Bekka," Darrick assures her, "But I'm going to need some time. I do like you. I just am not sure if I'm willing to give up my lifestyle for you."

"Okay," Rebekah says, tearing up.

"Are you okay, Bekka?"

"Yeah," Rebekah responds, clearing her throat. "I'm just tired. I didn't get a lot of sleep last night."

"Why don't you get some rest then," requests Darrick, "And I'll call you later."

"Okay," utters Rebekah, as she fights back more tears.

"Merry Christmas, Bekka."

"Merry Christmas, Darrick," Rebekah states, then hangs up the phone and begins sobbing into Jared's jacket. When she realizes there are tears on his jacket, she wipes them off and wipes the tears from her face, then walks into her room and shuts the door.



“Come on, Bekks,” pleads Madeline. “It’s New Year’s Eve. We are going out tonight.”

“And we really want you to come with us, Bekks,” adds Maggie.

“I’m not really in the mood,” confesses Rebekah.

“Come on, Bekks,” Madeline presses. “The quickest way to move on from a guy is to get out there and meet new people and hang out with your best friends.”

“Fine,” Rebekah reluctantly agrees.

“Yay!” Madeline and Maggie exclaim and hug Rebekah, before they all get dressed up and go out to a party with Rion and Kai, Madeline’s boyfriend. At first, they all have a good time dancing to some upbeat music, until a slow song begins playing. After Rebekah assures them she is alright, Madeline goes to dance with Kai, and Maggie goes to dance with Rion. Feeling awkward, Rebekah walks over to the punch table, gets some punch and starts wandering the dance floor. Suddenly, she sees Darrick and decides to go over to him. Just before she reaches him, she realizes he’s dancing with another woman, who he starts kissing, causing her to sigh. Once they stop kissing, Darrick and the woman turn while they dance, and then Darrick sees Rebekah behind the woman.

“Bekka?” Darrick stresses, rushing past the woman to Rebekah, who is turning to leave. After pulling her back to look at him, Darrick questions, “Are you okay?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” snaps Rebekah. “We haven’t talked since Christmas. I should have known this was your answer. It’s all you know, Darrick. You, your brother, and your dad all do this. I don’t know why I thought you would be different.”

Sighing, Darrick beseeches, “Can’t we still be friends?”

“A friend would have called,” Rebekah points out. “You didn’t. You didn’t have the guts to tell me that you didn’t want to be with me. You could have at least texted. I never should have gone out with you in the first place. I knew what kind of guy you were. I guess I just thought... I don’t know. I guess I was hoping you’d like me enough to want to be with me only.” With that, Rebekah turns away from him to leave.

Sighing again, Darrick pulls her back and pleads, “Bekka?”

“Let me go,” Rebekah requests, pushing back her tears, “Please.” Feeling regretful, Darrick lets go of Rebekah, who immediately leaves.

“Bekks?” Maggie and Madeline both call, watching her leave, then notice Darrick.

“Darrick, what did you do?” Maggie barks, as she and Madeline storm toward him with Rion and Kai following them.

“Oh, I see what happened!” Madeline snaps, seeing the woman with Darrick.

“What’s going on?” questions Rion.

“Tell him, Darrick!” demands Maggie.

“Yeah, Darrick!” agrees Madeline. “Tell him how you didn’t even have the decency to tell Bekks you weren’t interested in dating her anymore, after announcing to every one of us she was your girlfriend. Then, you ignore her and go out with some other girl. What is wrong with you, Darrick?”

“Really, Darrick?” queries Rion, annoyance in his voice. “I get that this is how you treat every woman you date, but this is Bekka. She’s our friend. She’s Maggie’s best friend. What is the matter with you?”

“Come on, Mads,” commands Maggie, still looking at Darrick, who is looking down in shame. “We’re better go make sure she’s

safe. It's well after dark." Quickly, Madeline and Maggie rush to the entrance of the hotel, where the party is, to find Rebekah right outside, allowing both of them to let out a sigh of relief. "She's still here."

"Bekks?" calls Madeline, as she and Maggie get outside, where a few ushers are standing.

"What?" Rebekah queries, pushing back her tears.

"We had to make sure you didn't walk home alone," Maggie explains.

"I know better than to do that," Rebekah declares, wiping a stray tear.

"What are you doing out here then?" implores Maggie.

"Waiting until the party's over," Rebekah reveals, finding it more difficult to hold back her tears. "I can't be in there anymore."

"Would you like Rion and I to walk you home?" beseeches Maggie.

"Or Kai and I?"

"No," Rebekah replies. "I want you to enjoy your evening. Please go have fun."

Just then, a car pulls up, and the passenger window rolls down, revealing Jared, who asks, "Rebekah? Is that you? Madeline? Maggie?"

"Hi, Jared," Rebekah says, timidly. "What are you doing here?"

"I was on my way to Cherise's and Garrett's party," Jared announces, "When I saw the three of you. I just wanted to make sure you were all okay."

"Maybe Jared can give you a ride," Maggie suggests, smiling in relief.

"That's a good idea," Madeline enthuses. "Jared, would you mind?"

"Not at all," Jared responds, getting out of the car.

"What do you say, Bekks?" questions Madeline, as Jared opens the passenger door for her. "You could go to the party with him."

"You sure it's okay, Jared?" Rebekah asks timidly.

"Of course."

"Alright," accepts Rebekah, before Madeline and Maggie hug her. "Have fun, you two."

"You too, Bekks!" Maggie tells her, as Jared helps Rebekah get in the car.

Once Jared drives away, he asks Rebekah, "You alright?"

"Not really. It's kind of hard to be alright being the only one of your friends at a party without a date, while your ex-boyfriend is making out with another girl."

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, Jared."

"Still. Christmas and New Years have both kind of sucked for you."

"What about you? Have you had a good New Years? I know you worked Christmas."

"Perks of being a rookie," Jared reveals. "We all have to take a shift on pretty much every holiday. In fact, I just got off work. I would have been off sooner, but I had a lot of paperwork today. I almost decided to text Cherise and tell her I wasn't going to

come, 'cause I'm beat, but it's also hers and Chandra's birthday, so I figured I should go. And I'm glad I did. Otherwise, I wouldn't have found out you needed a ride."

"That's where I should have gone," Rebekah confesses, smiling slightly, "But I was too busy feeling sorry for myself that I decided I wasn't going to any party, until Maggs and Madds begged me too." After some silence, she adds, "Sorry. That was really personal. I don't know why I shared that. It's just really easy to talk to you, Jared."

Smiling, Jared remarks, "It's easy to talk to you too, Rebekah."

"That's odd."

"Why?"

"I just thought you had this magic power that made it easy to talk to you." Hearing this, he chuckles, followed by her, before she states, "Thanks, Jared."

"For what?"

"For the ride," she replies, "And for making me laugh... again."

"I didn't do that," he rebuttals, smiling. "You did."

"Only 'cause it's so easy to talk to you," Rebekah reveals, "And be myself around you. Normally, I'm too shy to show certain sides of myself."

"That's unfortunate."

"Why do you say that?"

"I like those sides of you."

"You do?"

"Yeah," he confirms. "And I'm sure plenty of other people would too."

“Thanks,” Rebekah says, tucking her hair behind her ear and smiling. Following some more silence, she asks, “Jared, can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

Nervously, she requests, “Please, don’t read anything into this. I’m not exactly the kind of girl to make a move. Did I just say that out loud? I know you and I are friends, and I’m not asking for something more. I just got out of a relation-”

Stifling a laugh, Jared interrupts, “Rebekah, what is it?”

“I was just going to say that I know you said you didn’t want to be in a relationship, but-”

“I never said that,” imparts Jared. “I said I couldn’t.”

“Why not?” she implores with concern. “I know you said it had to do with your family, but you seem like a really good guy, who deserves happiness and could make someone really happy. Why would your family stop you from having that?”

“I can’t really talk about it,” Jared admits.

“Why not? I mean, it sounds like you probably should talk about it with someone.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to,” Jared divulges, feeling exasperated. “It’s just... it’s complicated.”

“How so?”

“Let’s just say that I have a lot of skeletons in my closet that I don’t want someone I care about to have to live with.”

“Oh,” Rebekah utters, sadly, realizing she probably shouldn’t push anymore. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“It’s alright,” he assures her, clearing his throat. “We’re here.” Once he parks, he requests, “Let me get your door.”

“Alright,” accepts Rebekah, as she waits for him. Once he opens her door and helps her out, she says, “Thank you, Jared.”

“No problem,” he tells her, before she kisses his cheek, making him smile. “What was that for?”

“I just want you to know that I’m here for you,” Rebekah states, smiling slightly. “If you’ll allow me, I can be your friend. You don’t have to tell me anything, unless you want to. And I may not know what secrets you have, but I believe you deserve to at least have a friend.”

“I would like that.”

As they walk away from the car, Rebekah adds, “By the way, Jared, I need to return your jacket to you.”

“I’m alright,” he assures her. “Take your time. It’s not too cold here, even by the pier. It’s nothing like where I’m from.”

“Where are you from?”

“A few different places, all of which had snow.”

“I love snow!” Rebekah enthuses, looking dreamy-eyed, making Jared smile, “Even though I’ve never seen it in person. It’s just so pretty.”

“Maybe on the first day,” Jared remarks. “After that, it gets kind of gross.”

“But isn’t the first day when everybody builds a snowman? I would love to build a snowman.”

Grinning, Jared exclaims, “Tell you what, Bekka. If we ever get a chance to build a snowman, we can together.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Jared states, smiling over her enthusiasm.





Chapter 3

January 2nd, the day of Cherise and Garrett's wedding finally arrives. In the bridal suite, Rebekah is assisting Chandra in helping Cherise with her hair and makeup. When Rebekah looks at Cherise, she expects to see a smile, but instead she sees fret in Cherise's eyes.

"What's wrong?" Rebekah asks Cherise.

"She's worried because she thinks something will stop this wedding too," Chandra tells Rebekah, who feels remorse. She has been so upset about the situation with Darrick, but the agony of truly loving someone and having life constantly get in the way must be so much worse.

Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. From the other side, they hear, "It's Kevin." After Rebekah walks over and opens the door, Kevin tells Cherise, "You look beautiful, Cherise."

"Thanks, Kevin," Cherise says without any enthusiasm.

"Would it be alright if I speak to Chandra and Rebekah for a moment, Cherise?" Kevin inquires.

"What's wrong?" Cherise asks, nervously.

Calmly, Kevin responds, "Nothing. I just need them to clear up some confusion with the ceremony." After Kevin, Chandra, and Rebekah leave and shut the door to the bridal suite, Kevin turns to them and asks, "Have either of you seen or heard from Garrett?"

"What do you mean have we seen him?" Chandra queries with a hint of annoyance in her tone. "Isn't he with you?"

“He never showed up,” Kevin whispers, causing Rebekah and Chandra to become increasingly worried, as Kevin explains, “I was at his house this morning. He said he was working on a wedding present for Cherise and as soon as he was done, he’d come. But he’s still not here. I’ve called him. I’ve texted him, and nothing.”

Panicking, Rebekah starts to look around, then sees Jared in the audience and suggests, “Maybe Jared can call help.” Without hesitation, Chandra motions for Jared to come over.

Immediately, Jared walks over and asks, “What’s up?”

“We were wondering if you could help us out with something,” pleads Chandra.

“Anything,” Jared states. “What’s going on?”

“Garrett isn’t here,” Rebekah declares, trying to keep her voice down.

“Do you know where he is?” he questions them. After they all shake their heads, Jared says, “Okay, let me call the station and see what I can do.”

“Thank you, Jared,” says Chandra, as he pulls out his cell phone and dials.

“Jared, wait,” Rebekah requests, before rushing back into the bridal suite and grabbing his jacket. Then, she runs back out and hands it to him, while he’s holding the phone to his ear. “I’m sorry. That probably could have waited. You need to be focusing on finding-”

“Don’t worry about it,” Jared interrupts her. “Hello?” he says into the phone. “Yes, this is Officer Jared Bentley, badge number 1029.”

Chandra then turns to Rebekah and suggests, “Let’s not say anything to her, unless we have to, okay?”

Nodding, Rebekah follows Chandra back into the bridal suite, while Jared walks to the front of the church and waits on the phone. Finally, someone starts talking to him, and Jared's eyes get big. "Thank you very much," he says, then goes to leave.

After Jared leaves, Darrick walks in, wearing his police uniform, with his training officer, Alex Blake. Once inside, they ask for directions and head towards the bridal suite. Once at the bridal suite, Darrick knocks and announces him and Alex.

Feeling extra anxious, Rebekah opens the door and sees Darrick, causing her to question, "Darrick, what are you doing here?"

"How may I help you, officers?" Cherise implores, trembling, as Darrick looks away from Rebekah and over at Cherise.

After looking at Alex, Darrick announces, "We regret to inform you-" For a brief moment, Darrick stops and looks at Rebekah, concerned his news will just upset her more. Still miffed at him, Rebekah looks away, so Darrick continues. "Your fiancé, Mr. Redd was in a car accident." Fearing what he might say next, Cherise, Rebekah, and Chandra look at Darrick with dread.

"Where?" Cherise firmly asks.

"About a block from here," Darrick responds. Hearing this, Cherise runs out of the church, without saying a word, with Chandra and Rebekah following her, trying to get her to stop. Outside, Cherise finds where the accident is and runs toward police tape and what appears to be Garrett's car upside down, while Chandra and Rebekah continue following her. When she gets there, Jared sees her and runs to her, stopping her from crossing the police tape.

"No, Jared! Let me go! I need to see him!" Cherise yells. Just then, Rebekah and Chandra catch up and see the car. Immediately, Rebekah gasps and covers her mouth, as tears swell in her eyes, causing Chandra to hug her.

Meanwhile, Jared explains, "Cherise, trust me, you do not want to be over there. You do not want to see him. The accident... it was horrible. He is not doing good."

Absorbing all Jared says, Cherise questions, "Is he alive?" At first, Jared doesn't answer, so Cherise questions again, "Jared, is he alive?"

Finally, Jared replies, "Yes, as of right now, he is. But I have to be honest, Cherise. It's going to take a miracle."

Angrily, Cherise tries to move Jared, who makes himself immovable, even after she starts screaming, "No, Jared! Don't tell me that! Don't tell me that it's going to take a miracle! Don't you get it? He was coming to marry me! We were supposed to be getting married! We were finally going to be husband and wife!"

Despair finally takes hold of her, as she begins sobbing and hugs him, while Jared holds her tightly and says in a soothing voice, "I know. I know. I'm so sorry." After a while, he pulls her away to look at her, then suggests, "Why don't you let me take you to the hospital?"

"Go ahead," Chandra tells Cherise. "I'll meet you there with a change of clothes. Rebekah, why don't you go with them? We'll find your dad and meet you there."

"Is that alright, Jared?" Rebekah asks.

"Of course," Jared responds, then shows Cherise and Rebekah to his car.



"Daddy?" Rebekah cries, as Arthur walks up and hugs her gently at the hospital. "Not him too. Not Garrett."

"He'll be alright, little Rose," he consoles her. "He'll be alright."

“How do you know, Dad?” Rebekah asks, pulling away and looking at him.

“Did you pray?”

“Yeah,” she replies, wiping a tear.

“But I prayed when Mom and-”

“Bekka, just have faith,” he suggests, then hugs her again and kisses her forehead, while pushing away his own fears. “Just have faith.” Just then, Jared walks up with two cups of water and offers them to Rebekah and Arthur, who both graciously accept. “Thank you, son.”

“No problem, sir,” states Jared, as Rebekah and Arthur sit down. “Is there anything else I can get you?”

“No, Jared,” replies Arthur, then takes a sip of water. “Thank you.”

“Bekka?” Jared asks.

“No, thank you, Jared,” Rebekah says, then drinks some water.

“May I sit here?” Jared queries.

“Of course,” Rebekah replies, letting out a shiver.

“Oh, here,” Jared says, removing his suit jacket, then wrapping it around her, making Arthur and Rebekah smile.

“Thanks, Jared,” states Rebekah.

“Beat me to it, son,” Arthur states, making Jared smile.

“No problem, sir,” Jared tells him, as he sits down.

“I don't even know why I'm shivering,” Rebekah confesses.

“It's probably the nerves,” Jared tells her.

“Yeah,” Rebekah agrees. “And hospitals aren’t exactly the warmest place. I should know.”

“Have you spent a lot of time in hospitals, Rebekah?” inquires Jared.

“After the car accident that killed her mother and brother,” announces Arthur, sighing and releasing a tear.

“Brother?” Jared implores. “You had another brother?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah answers. “Levi. He was driving. I was in the back seat.”

“You were hurt?” Jared queries.

“Pretty badly,” confesses Rebekah.

“For a while, we didn’t think she was going to make it,” Arthur tells him. “Garrett and I thought we were going to lose her too.”

“Yeah,” Rebekah cries, as Arthur wraps his arm around her and kisses the side of her head.

“At least we didn’t,” declares Arthur. “She was so young.”

“How old were you?”

“11,” Rebekah replies, wiping a tear.

“I’m sorry,” Jared tells them. “Having gone through that, this is probably even more terrifying for you both. Well, I’ll be praying for Garrett.”

“Thanks, son.”

“Yeah, thank you, Jared,” Rebekah states. “And don’t let me forget to give you back this jacket. I kept your other one for a week.”

“Don't worry about it,” Jared assures her. “You can hang on to my jacket as long as you'd like.”

“Thanks, Jared,” Rebekah says, smiling, then sheds a tear of guilt for being happy.

“No problem,” Jared expresses, noticing her sadness. “I'm here for you.”

“Thank you,” she states, as she wipes another tear, then kisses his cheek.

“Of course,” Jared tells her. “It's already worth it.”

After Rebekah laughs a little, she admits, “I am such a horrible person.”

“What? Why?” Jared inquires.

“Here my brother could be dying,” she explains, “And I'm laughing.”

“Bekka, that doesn't make you a bad person,” Jared assures her.

“He's right, Bekka,” Arthur agrees. “Garrett would still want you to find reasons to smile. After you were hurt, he'd do anything just to get you to smile, because sometimes that was the only thing that got us through our day was seeing you smile, Bekka.”

“Really?” Rebekah asks, wiping a tear.

“I can see why,” Jared confesses. “You have a beautiful smile, Bekka, if you don't mind me telling her that, sir.”

“Of course not,” Arthur states, letting out a chuckle. “She does have a beautiful smile. It makes the whole world brighter.”

“I can agree with that,” Jared divulges, “So I will do whatever I can to make you smile right now, if it'll help you and your dad.”

Smiling and blushing, Rebekah states, "Thanks, Jared."

"My pleasure," Jared tells her.

For the rest of the time while they wait, Jared keeps his promise, and not only makes Rebekah smile, but Arthur as well. Finally, the doctor returns and tells everyone Garrett is out of surgery and should make a full recovery, relieving everyone's stress. Cherise and Chandra hug, while Kevin puts his arms around them both. Enthusiastically, Rebekah hugs Jared and kisses him on the cheek, causing Jared's jacket to fall on the ground. "I'm sorry, Jared," she tells him, as she goes to pick it up, but he stops her.

"Don't worry about it," he says, smiling, as he picks his jacket up. "Do you still need it?"

"No," Rebekah answers, before hugging Arthur. Then, Arthur walks over and hugs Cherise, as Rebekah hears a voice behind her, causing her to turn around to see Darrick with a bouquet of flowers, still wearing his police uniform. To give them some privacy, Jared walks over to Cherise and hugs her.

"Hey, Bekka," Darrick says, cautiously.

"What are you doing here, Darrick?" Rebekah asks, irritably, folding her arms.

"I wanted to check on you and your brother," Darrick answers. Surprised, Rebekah studies Darrick's face and sees some sincerity, which she rarely sees. "I also wanted to bring you these," he says, handing her the flowers, "And apologize for my behavior lately."

Not sure how to respond, Rebekah takes the flowers, and tells him, "Garrett is going to be okay."

"Good."

He then goes to kiss her, but Rebekah stops him and remarks, "I'm not sure that is a good idea."

Still trying to listen to Cherise, Chandra, and Kevin's conversation, Jared becomes distracted from Darrick's voice raising a little, when he states, "I said I was sorry, Bekka."

Confounded by his response, Rebekah tells him, "It's going to take more than an apology and some flowers, Darrick. I need an explanation. First, you say that I'm your girlfriend, but then you start acting like you didn't say it. Then, you don't even call me or text me to let me know your decision about us."

Frustrated at first, Darrick remains quiet. Reluctantly, he tells her, "Look, Bekka! I've never really had a relationship, alright? I've never dated only one woman before. It's all I've ever really known. My dad... my brother... we all are that way."

"What about your mom?" beseeches Rebekah. "I know your parents are divorced, but do you remember her or how she was with your dad?"

Bitterly, Darrick discloses, "I don't exactly remember her. She left when I was three."

"Do you know why?"

"No," Darrick responds, clearing his throat.

"I'm sure that makes you feel like all women will just leave you," Rebekah points out, stunning Darrick. "I can see why you would never want to invest in someone if that person is just going to leave you." Silently, Darrick stands there, contemplating her words. Eventually, she adds, "Look, Darrick. I get it. At least, I think I do... to a point. My parents were different though. They were only with each other. They were devoted to each other. I have never believed in being with more than one guy at the same time as another, and I would not just leave the guy I'm with, unless there was a very good reason. Now, I don't know why your mom left, but your dad must not be all bad, because he raised two boys on his own. But I can promise you that not all women are like your mom. There are plenty that will stay. I can prove that to you, if you'd like."

“You’d do that?” beseeches Darrick.

“Do you want that?”

“Honestly, I don’t know,” Darrick admits. “I never thought about it.”

“Then, why are you here?” exhorts Rebekah. “Why are you here with flowers, trying to kiss me?”

Taking a deep breath, Darrick explains, “Because you’re a friend. We may not be as close as everyone else in our group. But it matters if it ends badly. I mean, Madeline and Maggie would never forgive me.” For a moment, he laughs, but sees Rebekah look away, and stops laughing. “And then I saw you look at me today. No woman has looked at me that way before. I was taken back. I would like to try and fix it, if you’ll give me a chance.”

“So, you want to date me?” beseeches Rebekah. “And only me?”

“Yeah,” Darrick responds, hesitantly. “I may have no idea what I’m doing, and I may not even know what I want, other than the fact that I don’t want to lose all my friends because I hurt you.”

For a moment, Rebekah looks at him and ponders his words. Finally, she steps closer to him and says, “Okay.” This makes him smile and kiss her, happily, which Jared sees out of the corner of his eye and gives a forced smile when he sees how happy Rebekah looks, but then feels awkward and looks away.

When Rebekah and Darrick walk over to the group, she announces, “Darrick and I are going to go get something to eat, and I’m going to change. We’ll be back. Let me know if anything changes, please. Also, thank you, Jared for being there for me.” Hearing this, Darrick puts his arm around Rebekah and pulls her close, as she adds, “You should come and hang out with us again at Grif’s, Jared. I’ll have Darrick give you the details.”



“Hey, Garrett,” Rebekah says when she answers her phone, while having dinner at Grif’s with Maggie, Madeline, Rion, and Darrick. “What’s up?” There is a long pause, as Rebekah’s face lights up. “You’re kidding?” “No, I think that’s amazing! When?” “Tomorrow on Valentine’s Day? How romantic! Where?” “Really? Why not at yours? Your house is a lot bigger than her loft.” “That makes sense. It is more intimate and less chance for paparazzi.” “Ok, well I am so happy for you!” “Love you too. Hang on. Can I bring a date?” “Yes. Darrick.” “Yes, Garrett. I know you don’t, but he’ll be good.”

Hearing this, Darrick’s eyes perk up, and Rion queries, “Does she not even know you?” After this remark, Darrick, Rion, and Madeline laugh, as Maggie jokingly smacks Rion. “What?” Rion asks, still smiling.

Finally, Rebekah finishes her conversation, saying, “Thank you, Garrett. Love you. See you tomorrow.” After hanging up, Rebekah announces, “Guess what, guys? Cherise and Garrett are getting married tomorrow!”

Having just taken a drink, Darrick starts choking on it. As soon as he clears his throat, he asks Rebekah, “Is that where you want me to go with you tomorrow, Bekka? A wedding? Really?”

As everyone else looks away, Rebekah responds bluntly, “Yeah. Why?”

Clearing his throat again, Darrick inquires, “Isn’t that kind of a bit soon for us? I mean, we haven’t been dating that long.”

“Oh, come on, Darrick,” Madeline interjects, while Rebekah looks away, feeling sheepish. “It’ll be fun! Besides, Bekks said it was going to be an intimate gathering, so it’s not like you’ll be announcing anything to the world. You could just be there as friends.”

After looking at Madeline and contemplating for a while, Darrick sighs and finally concedes, "Okay, Rebekah. I'll go."

Happily, Rebekah kisses his cheek, and exclaims, "Thank you!"

"You're welcome," he says, smiling, feeling bewildered that he's happy for making Rebekah happy. While Rebekah rests her head on his shoulder under his chin, he thinks to himself, "Maybe a monogamous relationship isn't so bad."



The next day, Rebekah and Darrick show up to Cherise's and Garrett's wedding before the ceremony starts. While they wait, they walk in and begin mingling, then see Jared and walk up to him.

"Hey, Jared!" Rebekah exclaims.

"Hey, guys!" Jared states.

As Darrick nods, Rebekah enthuses, "Isn't this great? I really hope it works out this time for them!"

"Me too!" declares Jared.

Suddenly, Garrett walks up and hugs Rebekah, saying, "I'm so glad you could make it, Bekk, and you too Jared."

"I'm just glad you and Cherise are trying again!" Jared declares.

"Me too!" Rebekah agrees. "And I have a really good feeling this time. By the way, I know you two haven't officially met. Garrett, this is Darrick. Darrick, Garrett." As Garrett and Darrick shake hands, Garrett firmly stares Darrick in the eye. "Garrett, please calm down."

"I'm sorry," Garrett states, sighing. "I'm just nervous. Is the fourth time ever the charm?"

“It will be this time!” Rebekah assures him. “Where’s Cherise?” After Garrett points up to Cherise’s room, Rebekah excuses herself, then walks up the stairs and knocks on Cherise’s door.

After walking in and seeing Cherise standing in a beautiful white Victorian style wedding dress, Rebekah tells her, “You look beautiful, Cherise! Honestly, I think this is the prettiest one!”

“It’s actually one of my designs,” Cherise reveals. “Iris was going to wear it in Garrett’s show.”

“Really?” implores Rebekah. “Wow! I forget how talented you are sometimes. You said Iris was going to wear it? What happened?”

While scoffing, Cherise explains, “The dimensions were not made right. It was a little big on her.”

“Well, she is only skin and bone,” explains Rebekah, making them both laugh. “Well, I think it’s perfect on you!” Finally, Cherise lets out a smile. “Speaking of Iris, is she coming to this one? I mean, she is after all Garrett’s and my cousin, not that she ever acts like it.”

“She’s an only child, who was raised as a child star,” Cherise explains.

“Yeah, I guess. Did you invite her?”

“We did, but I know that if she shows up, Rick won’t like it.”

“Really?” asks Rebekah. “They don’t like each other? It certainly doesn’t look that way in the show. At least, they can act.” Laughing a little, Cherise nods, before Rebekah announces, “I should probably go back downstairs. I just wanted to wish you luck and congratulate you.”

Sighing, Cherise utters, “Let’s hope luck will be enough.”

Before leaving, Rebekah gives her a hug and assures her, "It will be this time. I have a really good feeling today."

As Rebekah reaches the living room, where chairs have finished being set up, Garrett implores, "How's she doing?"

"Nervous," Rebekah answers. "But she looks really beautiful! Her wedding dress is spectacular!"

"Maybe I'll actually get to see her in a wedding dress this time," states Garrett, as he motions Jared to come over. As soon as Jared arrives, Garrett announces, "By the way, Bekk, Jared is going to be walking you down the aisle today. Is that going to be alright?"

"Of course," replies Rebekah. "But can I ask why? Not that I'm complaining. Just confused."

"Kevin is performing the ceremony," Garrett declares.

"He can do that?" inquires Rebekah.

"Apparently!" responds Garrett, smiling.

"That's cool!" Rebekah states. "Do you have a problem with it, Jared?"

"Of course not!" Jared assures her, smiling at her. "Why would I?"

Just then, the guests are asked to take their seats and those in the wedding party to take their places. Once everyone is situated, Rick, a somewhat muscular man with a ponytail, starts playing a white grand piano, and the wedding begins. First, Kevin walks down the aisle to a beautiful arch, covered in white roses, and stands where the officiant would stand. Garrett then follows him. Then, Ben walks down the aisle carrying a tiny pillow, holding two rings. After Ben, since Kevin is officiating, Nathan escorts Chandra down the aisle. And lastly, Jared escorts Rebekah down the aisle. No one is in very fancy clothes, mostly suits and nice dresses. Garrett is the only one in a tux, but no one seems to care

there is no fanciness. The simplicity doesn't matter. Everyone there is eagerly waiting for this wedding to happen.

As "Pachelbel's Canon in D" begins, being played by Rick, Kevin requests for everyone to stand. Anxiously, everyone looks toward Cherise's door, but the door doesn't open, so Rick stops and starts over. Suddenly, the door opens, but only Nigel, Cherise's dad, is standing there shaking his head, so Rick stops again. Sighing, Chandra moves to go talk to Cherise, but Garrett stops her and walks up the stairs. Cautiously, he opens the door and walks in, then shuts the door behind him.

After several minutes, Garrett opens the door and gestures to Rick, who prepares to play again, as Nigel walks back inside Cherise's room and Garrett heads back to the altar to watch Cherise walk down the stairs with Nigel. Finally, Cherise arrives at the altar and joins hands with Garrett. Then, Kevin announces, "We are gathered here today to join Cherise Catherine Channing and Garrett Stephen Redd in holy matrimony." Hearing these words, Cherise and Garrett let out sighs of relief, while Rebekah prays silently that they will finally be able to be married. The ceremony seems really long, even though Kevin seems to rush through it to make sure nothing stops the wedding this time. Finally, Kevin pronounces them husband and wife and tells them to kiss, causing Cherise and Garrett to look at each other in disbelief before they finally kiss, while everyone claps. As Cherise and Garrett continue to kiss, Jared and Rebekah look at each other, grinning, feeling grateful that Cherise and Garrett finally succeeded.

After the ceremony, they have a small reception. They start with toasts, then do the bouquet and garter toss. When Cherise throws the bouquet, Rebekah catches it. Everyone claps, but Darrick, who appears nervous. Then, Garrett takes off Cherise's garter and throws it, which Jared ends up catching. Afterwards, Cherise walks up to Rick and whispers in his ear, peeking everyone's curiosity.

When Cherise walks away, Rick asks into a microphone, "Would everyone kindly make space in the center of the room for

dancing? Cherise has just informed me that Jared, the man who caught the garter for those who don't know, was given dance lessons by his mother when he was younger and is quite the dancer." People start cheering, as well as Rebekah, while Jared rubs the back of his neck, feeling slightly embarrassed. "Jared, would you mind showing us some of your moves by dancing with the girl who caught the bouquet?"

"I don't know how to dance," Rebekah confesses, nervously.

Everyone waits, while Jared and Rebekah ponder what to do. Finally, Jared takes a deep breath and walks up to Rebekah, offers his hand to her and queries, "May I have this dance, Rebekah?"

Nervously, she looks at Jared, who has an encouraging smile, while there is silence in the room as everyone waits for Rebekah's response. After pondering for a while, Rebekah takes a deep breath, closing her eyes for a brief moment. Finally, she opens her eyes, and cheering erupts when she rests her hand on his, then lightly smiles and nods. With jealous eyes, Darrick watches Jared and Rebekah walk to the dance floor and wait for the music to start.

While they wait, Rebekah tells Jared, "I hope this isn't too awkward for you. Garrett and Cherise are very energetic and a little odd sometimes."

"Not at all," Jared declares, smiling. "Isn't the first time Cherise has put me on the spot. At least this time, I have the most beautiful dance partner here." Hearing this causes Rebekah to blush and laugh a little.

Finally, Rick announces he's found a song for them to dance to, and they hear on the speakers, "Two is Better Than One," by Boys like Girls and Taylor Swift. While the intro is playing, they get into position, and Jared prepares himself mentally, while she looks at her feet. After taking a deep breath, Jared takes Rebekah's hand again, then places his hand on the small of her back and moves closer to her, then tells her, "Don't look at your

feet, Rebekah. Look at me.” When the intro is over, she looks up, and he takes a deep breath, then starts leading Rebekah around the dance floor, starting with twirling her slightly a couple of times, until she steps on his foot.

“I’m so sorry,” she says, trying to pull away.

“Don’t worry about it,” he states, pulling her back. “Just follow me.”

“I don’t know if I can,” she confesses, nervously. “There are so many people watching.”

“I believe in you, Bekka,” he tells her, while looking her directly in the eye, then spinning her so her back is against his chest. “All you have to do is believe in yourself.” Feeling more confident, Rebekah smiles and begins swaying with the music, just like Jared was before they stopped, making him smile again. “That’s it,” he encourages her, then takes her by surprise by spinning her out, causing her to gasp and laugh. When he pulls her back in, they look at each other smiling, causing Darrick to feel envious. Throughout the dance, Jared continues spinning her, twirling her and also dipping her, and she comes out of her shell, by getting into the mood of the music, while Darrick goes to the bar to get a shot of alcohol.

As they approach the end of the song, Jared queries, “Ready for the big finish?” Wondering what he means, she laughs at his remark, when suddenly he spins her out and back in a few times, alternating sides, then twirls her and finishes off the move by lifting her up in the air and back down. “See!” Jared exclaims, as he sets her down on the floor. “You are an excellent dancer, Rebekah!”

“Thank you,” she states, laughing. “You’re not so bad yourself, Jared.”

Cheering roars after the song ends. Then, Rick applauds them vocally, then changes the song and announces that it’s time for Cherise and Garrett’s first dance as husband and wife. “After

you,” Jared says to Rebekah, as they leave the dance floor. Then, they watch Cherise and Garrett dance and feel so happy for them.

Once Cherise and Garrett finish, the father and daughter dance commences, before Rick invites more people to dance on the dance floor and plays the song, “When I Fall in Love,” by Celine Dion and Clive Griffin. Seeing Darrick at the bar, Jared feels concern for Rebekah, as she watches everyone dance, making him contemplate asking her to dance again. “Umm... Rebekah... wo... Enjoy the party,” Jared stammers, then turns around, sighing and starts to walk away, leaving Rebekah confused. After he’s a few feet away, he turns back around and contemplates again, while Rebekah looks at him curiously. Finally, he walks back to her, nervously, and asks, “Rebekah, would you like to dance again?”

Hearing this, Rebekah smiles a little, looks over at Darrick, realizing he’s probably not going to ask her to dance, so she replies, “I’d love to.” Smiling, Jared escorts her out to the dance floor, where they slowly dance. Occasionally, he dips her and spins her, but most of the time, he keeps her close, while they talk about how beautiful the wedding is and how amazing it is that Cherise and Garrett were able to pull it off so quickly.

“They must really love each other,” Jared remarks, smiling over at them.

“They really do,” exclaims Rebekah, wondering if she’ll ever find love like that. “How would it be to find that kind of love?”

“Yeah,” Jared agrees, while smiling at Cherise and Garrett, then back at Rebekah, until she realizes he’s gazing at her, so he shakes his head away quickly.

After they’re silent for a while, Rebekah suggests, “You know, Jared. I should give you my number, not for a relationship. I’m with Darrick, and I know that-”

“Bekka, stop!” he interrupts, smiling. “What is it?”

"I was just thinking since Darrick keeps forgetting to talk to you about it, this would be better, so you could come by Grif's again and hang out with us."

"That'd be great!" Jared exclaims. "I had a lot of fun last time. I would have already, but Darrick never told me when."

"Awesome!" Rebekah states. "We usually meet on Fridays."

"Sounds good," Jared says, smiling at Rebekah, who smiles back, before he surprises her by spinning her.

Laughing, Rebekah confesses, "I wish I knew how to do this better. I've wanted to know how to dance like this my whole life."

"I could teach if you'd like."

"I would," Rebekah admits, grinning, before Jared surprises her with another kind of spin.

Meanwhile, at the bar, Darrick is watching them dance, talk and laugh. Not being able to handle watching them anymore, Darrick takes another shot, marches up to them, and asks, "May I cut in?"

"Of course," Jared answers. "She's all yours."

"Thank you for the dance, Jared," Rebekah states, as Jared pulls away and nods.

When Darrick pulls Rebekah into his arms, he declares, "Finally. I haven't had a chance to dance with my girl yet."

"I didn't know you liked to dance," Rebekah tells Darrick.

"There's many things you don't know about me, Bekka," explains Darrick, "Like the fact that my father had me take dance lessons as well, so I could impress the ladies."

"Oh, really?" Rebekah exclaims.

“Care to be impressed?”

“Okay,” she says, smiling, just as the song ends. “I’ll guess you’ll have to show me during the next song.”

“Yes, I will,” Darrick agrees. “And believe me, Jared’s got nothing on me.”

Hearing this, Rebekah rolls her eyes, as “Never Gonna Give You Up,” by Rick Astley turns on, and Darrick immediately shows off his dance moves to Rebekah, which takes her completely by surprise. During the dance, he is so energetic that Rebekah has a difficult time keeping up with him, but just laughs.

“Hang on, Darrick,” she requests after they have been dancing for a while. “I need a moment to catch my breath.”

“See,” Darrick exclaims, after dipping her, “I told you I can dance.”

“Oh, you can dance!” she tells him, before he kisses her, then pulls her up, and they both go to the bar to get a drink together. Upon reaching the bar, Darrick stops her, pulls her close and kisses her passionately.

“Two shots straight up!” Darrick requests of the bartender after the kiss.

“No, thank you,” Rebekah states, hastily.

“Oh, you must be a wine or champagne girl,” Darrick points out, smiling. “Bartender, bring my girl a-”

“Nothing,” Rebekah interjects. “I don’t drink, Darrick.”

“Wha... Wha... What?”

Have you never noticed that I never drink with the rest of the group?”

"I always thought it was because you wanted to make sure there was a designated driver," Darrick points out.

"Partially," Rebekah discloses, hesitantly, concerned he will not accept her for this, since he loves to drink. "But the truth is, I never drink."

"Why not?"

"It's a long and kind of heartbreaking story," Rebekah explains, "Which I don't want to get into right now, especially since it's my brother's wedding. Let's just say it's for safety reasons."

"Alright," Darrick accepts. "You don't mind if I drink though, right?"

Briskly shaking her head, Rebekah replies, "No. Go ahead, and enjoy yourself."

"You're the best, babe," Darrick exclaims, before kissing her, then drinking his shot of alcohol and requesting another. As Rebekah watches him, she can't help but feel saddened and a little worried, but doesn't want to mess things up with him, so she remains quiet.





Chapter 4

“Jared, you should have been in our group forever ago,” remarks Rion at Grif’s.

“He wouldn’t have been able to in high school,” Darrick divulges, as everyone looks at him confused, so he explains, “He’s older. Jared is 24. He graduated shortly after we started high school.”

Following a long pause, Rion holds up his glass and says, “Still, it’s great to have you here, man.”

“Here, here!” everyone exclaims, then clink glasses together, before they all drink and get up to leave.

Following a kiss he gives to Rebekah, Darrick tells her, “Babe, I just got a text from my brother. Apparently, I’m needed at a family meeting. You going to be okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” she assures him, before he kisses her one more time and leaves, followed by Madeline with her new boyfriend.

Just before Rion and Maggie leave, Maggie asks Rebekah, “Are you going to be okay, Bekks? Remember Ri and I are going to a movie. I thought Darrick was going to walk you home.”

“He had a sudden meeting come up with his family,” Rebekah reveals.

“Must be getting close to his dad’s next charity event,” Rion discloses.

“What are we going to do, Rion?” queries Maggie.

“I could walk her,” Jared announces.

“You don’t need to do that, Jared,” Rebekah argues.

“Bekks, please,” Maggie demands. At first, Rebekah hesitates, then finally nods, causing Maggie to let out a sigh of relief and hug Rebekah. “See you later, Bekks. Thanks, Jared.”

“No problem,” Jared states, as Maggie and Rion leave, with their arms around each other.

After a moment, Jared opens the door for Rebekah and asks, “Shall we?” Smiling a little, Rebekah nods and walks out, as Jared follows her. When they arrive outside, Jared asks, “Which way?”

After Rebekah points to the right, she tells him, “Thank you for walking me home. You really didn’t have to.”

“Of course, I did,” Jared disputes, adamantly. “These streets can be very dangerous, especially at night. Trust me, I know.”

“I do too, since I’ve lived in the L.A. area my entire life, and this area of Santa Monica isn’t exactly known for less crime, just less rent. I just don’t like putting people out.”

“You’re not,” Jared assures her, sincerely. “Besides, Cherise and Garrett would never forgive me if I allowed something to happen to you.” Smiling, Rebekah looks away before Jared adds, “Neither would I.”

Surprised, Rebekah looks back at him and implores, “What do you mean?”

Feeling flustered, Jared quickly expounds, “You’re just such a kind person. You make the world a better place for everyone around you, and you’re my friend.”

“You’re my friend too,” Rebekah concurs, then accidentally lets out a shiver.

Immediately, Jared takes off his jacket and wraps it around her. "Here."

"Thank you, Jared." Following this, she is quiet for a while.

Finally, Jared breaks the silence and beseeches, "Is something wrong?"

Shaking her head, Rebekah states, "It's nothing."

"Are you sure?"

After some hesitation, Rebekah remarks, "It's silly." Then, she looks at Jared, who is patiently waiting for an answer, so she rolls her eyes and explains, "Darrick just never gives me his coat, but you always do. I guess I shouldn't be surprised, though. He is rather protective of his authentic leather jackets. He's rather protective of all of his clothing actually." As Jared stifles his laughter, Rebekah stops and announces, "This is it." Kindly, Jared opens the door for her, and they walk in and up the stairs. On the third floor, Rebekah goes to 305 and says, "This is me. Thank you again, Jared."

"Not a problem. Have a good night. And don't forget to lock the door."

As Jared turns to leave, he hears Rebekah say, "Hang on, Jared. Your jacket."

After turning around to see her pulling off his jacket, he takes it from her, drapes it over his arm and tells her, "Thank you."

Again, he turns around and starts to walk away, until Rebekah requests, "Hang on." When he turns back to face her, Rebekah stammers, "I know this is silly. It's just... Maggs is with Rion. Madds is with her boyfriend. I was expecting to be with mine." Feeling anxious, Rebekah pauses, while he stares at her, patiently waiting for her to continue. Finally, she confesses, "I could just really use a friend, unless you're busy, of course."

“No.”

Nodding, Rebekah expresses, “I understand.”

As she goes to walk in, he gently touches her arm to stop her and clarifies, “What I mean to say is I’m not busy. I am completely free. I can stay, if you’d like me to.”

“Okay,” she utters quietly and walks in, with him following her. When they get inside, Rebekah closes the door, locks it, then asks, “Can I get you anything? A drink?”

“No, thank you. Nice place.”

“Thanks,” she says, “Madds, Maggs, and I share it. They’re so nice to share a room, because we couldn’t afford a three bedroom. We struggle paying for this.”

“I understand. I have a studio with a fridge and microwave.”

“No stove?”

“Nope.”

“Do you like that?”

“No. I actually love to cook. I miss having a home-cooked meal. That’s why I loved Thanksgiving. And your sweet potato casserole was perfection.”

“Thank you,” she states, smiling. “It’s actually my mom’s recipe. She made it so much better than me. I miss her sweet potato casserole.”

“I’m sorry,” Jared says, sincerely.

“Thank you.”

“My mom passed away too when I was a teenager,” Jared discloses, wanting to let her know he understands.

"Really? I'm sorry," she consoles him. "And your dad?"

"He died when I was a kid."

"I am so sorry," Rebekah states, sadly. "Do you have anyone?"

"My mom remarried after my dad passed away," he explains, "But he's not a good guy. He's actually in prison."

"Oh."

"I'm sorry," he says, regretfully. "I probably shouldn't have told you that."

"It's okay," she assures him. "I won't tell anyone."

"Thank you," he tells her, smiling. "I do have Cherise and Chandra, Garrett, Kevin, Nathan, Ben, you... and everyone else, so I would say I'm pretty blessed."

"Who raised you?"

"I had a foster mom," Jared admits, then sighs and looks down.

"Is she okay?"

"Um... she... well," Jared stammers, awkwardly. "I haven't seen her in a long time."

"Did you have a falling out?"

"Not exactly," Jared answers, sighing. "I just lost contact with her after I moved out here."

"I'm sorry," Rebekah states, sorrowfully. "You know, if you want a home-cooked meal, you can always come over here and use our kitchen or I can cook you something. It's the least I can do since you walked me home. Although, I'm not the greatest chef."

"I wouldn't say that," Jared counters, smiling. "Remember I've tasted your casserole."

"That was only good because I helped my mom make it so many times."

"Well, I'd like to taste some more of your cooking," requests Jared, still smiling. "I have a feeling you're an excellent cook."

After laughing at his positive attitude, she submits, "Okay. I'm going out with Darrick tomorrow for my birthday, but I'll cook dinner for you the day after—"

"Wait! Tomorrow is your birthday?" Jared interrupts her. "The others said your birthday was coming up. I didn't realize it was tomorrow."

"Yup! March 1st."

"Then I should cook for you the day after tomorrow," suggests Jared, "As a birthday gift."

"No, it's alright," she tells him. "I told you I would cook for you. Just don't blame me if you are disappointed."

"I won't be. I look forward to eating whatever you make. How about I cook for you the day after that then?"

"I actually have class. I have to leave here by five."

"Well, I don't work that day. I could come over earlier, if that would work."

"Alright."

"Alright," he says, smiling. "Well, you should have your favorite food, since it's for your birthday. What's your favorite food?"

"I love Fettuccine Alfredo!" she confesses, enthusiastically, making him smile, "But I can never find a good recipe."

"I think you'll like mine," he tells her. "I'll make that for you."

"Alright."

"So, what do you want to do now?"

"Actually, since you're here," utters Rebekah hesitantly.

"What?" petitions Jared. After no response, he adds, "You can ask me anything, Bekka."

"I was just wondering," Rebekah tells him, hesitantly, "Back at Cherise's and Garrett's wedding, you said you wouldn't mind teaching me how to dance, unless you're too tired."

Grinning, Jared enthuses, "I would be happy to, Bekka."

"Thanks," Rebekah says, shyly with a smile.

"No problem," Jared tells her, then offers his hand. "Care to dance, Rebekah?"

"Of course," she states, taking his hand and walking into the dining room.

"Well, you've got the first part right," Jared praises her after they stand in preparation to dance, making her laugh. As he prepares to move, he looks around, before questioning, "Is it okay if I move the table?"

"Of course," Rebekah responds. "Would you like some help?"

"I got it," he assures her, then moves the table and chairs, before getting back into position. Before they start to move, he sees her looking at her feet as before and reminds her, "Bekka, remember to look at me, not your feet."

"Right," accepts Rebekah, looking up at Jared, who begins teaching her some dance moves.

After a while, Jared exclaims, "You're a natural!"

“You’re just saying that!”

“I am not.”

“I think I’m tired,” Rebekah confesses, a little out of breath. “Stupid asthma. Would you mind teaching me more later? Maybe when you come over to eat?”

“I’d be happy to!”

After a pause, Rebekah inquires, “So, do you have to leave now? Or can you stay a while?”

“I can stay.”

“What would you like to do?” queries Rebekah. “Would you like to watch a movie?”

“Sure.”

“What movie?” she asks, walking over to their cabinet of movies. “We don’t have a collection like Garrett’s, but we have some good ones. *The Italian Job*.”

“Good one,” states Jared.

“*The Princess Bride!*”

“Hello!” bellows Jared, causing Rebekah to laugh all the way through the quote. He joins her laughing once he finishes, then declares, “Great movie!”

“Madds has the whole *Twilight* series. Not really my favorite, though.”

“Me neither,” says Jared. “From what I’ve seen, it just seems so overrated.”

“Right?” exclaims Rebekah, making them laugh again, until she continues. “We have all the *Star Wars* movies, pretty much all the Steven Spielberg movies. We have several Disney movies,

the best ones. And I don't know if you know this one. *Serenity*? It's based off of—

“*Firefly*?” Jared beseeches, as he gets really excited and stands up to look closer at the case. “You watch *Firefly*?”

“Oh yeah. Hulu has the whole series.”

“No one watches that,” Jared remarks, smiling at her in disbelief.

“I know!” Rebekah enthuses, grinning in amazement. “Maggs and Madds don't even like it. In fact, this whole time I've been the only one in the group who watches it.”

“I'll watch it with you,” promises Jared.

“Really?”

“Yeah!”

“Okay,” says Rebekah. “Want to start with the pilot?”

“Sure.”



A couple of hours later, Madeline walks in and sees Jared and Rebekah on opposite ends of the couch. Feeling curious and amused, she queries, “What are you doing here, Jared?”

“We're watching *Firefly*,” announces Rebekah, enthusiastically.

“You made him watch that show?” Madeline scoffs.

“She didn't make me watch anything,” he disputes. “It's a great show.”

“Someone as crazy as you, Bekks,” states Madeline, making Jared and Rebekah laugh.

After they quit laughing, Jared announces, "I should get going. I do need to get up in the morning for work. We can watch this some other time, if you still want to."

"Of course!" Rebekah exclaims. "I finally have someone to watch *Firefly* with, who likes it as much as I do." Silently, Jared smiles and nods, then walks to the door. As Jared opens the door, Rebekah requests, "Don't forget your jacket, Jared." Jumping up, she grabs his jacket from the back of the couch and rushes to him, offering him his jacket.

Quickly, Jared turns around, grabs his jacket, and says, "Thanks." As he takes the jacket, Jared kisses her cheek, then stops and gazes at her for a moment, before telling her, "I really should get going. Good night."

"Good night."

On the other side of the door, Jared looks up and utters to himself quietly, "What am I doing?"



"Happy birthday, Bekks!" Madeline and Maggie squeal, startling Rebekah awake.

"Oh, my, you two," she states, trying to catch her breath. "You scared me."

"Well, if someone hadn't overslept-"

"Wait!" Rebekah interrupts Madeline. "What time is it?"

"Eight in the morning," announces Maggie.

"Oh, no!" Rebekah says, jumping out of bed and running to her closet. "I'm supposed to be meeting my dad, Garrett, and Cherise for breakfast like right now before my class at nine."

“Bekks, it’s Saturday!” declares Madeline. “Calm down.”

“Right,” Rebekah says, calming down. “See, this is why you two shouldn’t wake me up like that! I’m still late for breakfast with them though.”

“Are we still on for lunch, Bekks?” inquires Maggie.

“Of course,” Rebekah replies, as she picks up her phone to text Garrett and let him know she’s going to be late. “But I need to get ready, so can you please-”

“We’re going, Bekks,” Madeline says, rolling her eyes.

After Maggie and Madeline leave her room, Rebekah gets dressed for breakfast and leaves.



“Sorry, I’m late,” Rebekah exclaims, as she hugs Arthur, who is sitting in a café with Cherise and Garrett, eating some fruit off an appetizer plate, sitting in the middle of the table.

“It’s alright, Bekka,” Cherise assures her. “It’s Saturday. We had a difficult time getting out of bed this morning too.”

“Yeah,” agrees Garrett, who is grinning and eyeing Cherise, “But that was for a different reason.”

“Garrett!” Cherise snaps, playfully.

“Eww!” Rebekah utters, as she picks up the menu. “You two may be adorable, but there’s still certain things I don’t need to know about. Plus, I don’t think Dad wants to either.”

“Tell me more,” Arthur suggests, smiling.

“I’m good,” Garrett admits, uncomfortably.

"I know my son well," Arthur exclaims. "Happy birthday, little Rose!"

"Thanks, Dad."

"You got any other plans for today?" Arthur asks.

"Yeah, a lot actually," Rebekah announces. "Maggs and Madds are taking me to lunch and a movie. Then, Darrick is taking me to his dad's charity event."

Rolling his eyes, Garrett queries, "You're still with that guy?"

"Yes, Garrett," Rebekah states, adamantly.

"Why?" Garrett growls.

"Because I like him," Rebekah defends. "Besides, he's not all bad."

"Enough of him is!" Garrett argues, frustrating Rebekah.

"Garrett!" Cherise snaps. "Just leave it alone. It's her birthday."

"Why don't we talk about something else?" suggests Arthur. "Like Venice."

"Yeah," Rebekah agrees. "How was your honeymoon?"

"It was amazing!" Cherise proclaims. "We didn't want to leave."

"The hotel room," Garrett adds, while smirking.

"Garrett!" Cherise states, smiling, while smacking the back of his head.

"Ow!" Garrett exclaims, laughing.

"Garrett, your dad will ask again for more details," Cherise points out.

"I know," Garrett concedes. "Sorry."

Just then, Jared walks up to their table and says, "Hey, guys."

"Hey, Jared," they all respond.

"What are you doing here?" Rebekah queries, smiling.

"Nothing serious going on here, I hope," adds Arthur.

"No, sir," Jared responds, then notices Raquel Iglesias, his training officer, motioning for him to come back. "We just have to talk to one of the employees here, which I need to get back to. I just wanted to say 'hi' to you all and wish Rebekah a happy birthday."

"Thanks, Jared," Rebekah states, smiling, taking some grapes.

After nodding at Rebekah, Jared goes to walk away, then hears Rebekah start coughing quite a bit and turns around to check on her. "Bekka, are you okay?" Apprehensively, everyone watches, waiting for Rebekah to respond.

"I think she's choking," Cherise announces, as Rebekah stands up, struggling. Instantly, Jared walks up behind her and wraps his arm around her, while using the other one to smack her back. After no success, Jared wraps both arms around her stomach, while Raquel calls dispatch for an ambulance and Cherise, Garrett, Arthur, and everyone in the restaurant watches anxiously. After a few abdominal thrusts, Rebekah finally coughs out a partially chewed up grape, allowing everyone to let out a sigh of relief.

"You okay, Bekka?" questions Jared, while Rebekah takes several deep breaths in.

"I'm fine," Rebekah assures everyone. "Just embarrassed."

"You don't need to be embarrassed," Jared counters.

“Yeah,” Cherise concurs, while she, Garrett and Arthur get closer to Rebekah and comfort her. “We’re just glad you’re okay.”

“Drink some water,” requests Arthur, handing Rebekah her water.

“Thanks, Dad,” expresses Rebekah, before taking a large swallow.

“Is there anything I can do for you, Bekka?” beseeches Jared.

After taking another deep breath from drinking so much, Rebekah replies, “No. Thank you, though. And thank you for doing that.”

“Are you feeling okay?” implores Jared. “I hope I didn’t hurt you.”

“Jared, you were just trying to help,” Rebekah expounds, “And I’m fine.”

“She should probably go to the hospital,” Raquel tells Jared, “To get checked out.”

“That’s not a bad idea, Bekk,” Garrett points out.

“No,” Rebekah rebuttals. “It’s my birthday. I don’t want to spend it at the hospital.”

“I understand, ma’am,” expresses Raquel. “But you could have been injured, not just from what Officer Bentley did, but also from choking.”

“We could take you, Bekka,” Jared urges, “Quickly, if that’s alright with my training officer.”

“It’s fine with me,” Raquel announces. “Although, an ambulance is on its way.”

“Please,” Rebekah begs. “I really don’t want to.”

Just then, Kevin walks in with another paramedic and utters, "Officers?"

"It's this table here," Raquel announces.

Seeing everyone, Kevin sighs and asks, "Are you guys alright?"

"I just choked on a grape," grumbles Rebekah, "And I'm fine."

"At least let the paramedics check you out, Bekk," pleads Garrett.

"Alright," Rebekah submits, sighing.

"How are you feeling, Rebekah?" questions Kevin, bending down to her level. "Any pain?"

"Yeah," Rebekah responds, "From embarrassment, and I guess a little from the choking."

After they examine her, Kevin declares, "It doesn't appear that you have any sustainable injuries from this. However, it wouldn't hurt for you to go get checked out."

"I really don't want to," Rebekah admits again.

"Okay," Kevin accepts. "We won't force you. Although, if you have any trouble breathing or swallowing, any wheezing or any other concerns, please go."

"I hate to tell you this, Kevin," Rebekah states, "But I could wheeze from an asthma attack. But I will go if I feel out of the ordinary. I promise."

"Good," Kevin remarks, before gathering up his equipment with the other paramedic.

"See you, Kevin," Garrett says.

After Kevin nods at everyone and leaves, Raquel motions to Jared they need to get back to work, so Jared tells Rebekah, "I'm

glad you're feeling alright. I'll text you later, Bekka, and check on you."

"Thanks, Jared," Rebekah states, watching Jared leave with Raquel. "He's such a good guy. I wish he could see that he deserves happiness. I can't imagine that he's done anything so horrible that he wouldn't."

"He hasn't," Cherise confirms.

"You're his cousin," Rebekah points out. "Do you know what happened with his family?"

Sighing, Cherise confesses, "I do, but I can't tell you. I haven't even told Garrett everything. He knows very little, because I'm not supposed to talk about it."

"Why?" questions Rebekah. "You make it sound like it could be dangerous."

"Some people from his past are dangerous," Cherise reveals. "However, you are right, Rebekah. He does deserve happiness, and he hasn't done anything that would make it so he doesn't deserve it. If anything, he's done the opposite. He just feels that if his past caught up with him, the people closest to him could get hurt."

"But you know," Rebekah rebuttals. "Does that mean you're in danger?"

"I shouldn't be," Cherise assures her, as Garrett rubs her back. "As far as I know, the dangerous people from his past don't know much about me, where I live, or who I'm associated with."

"But you're kind of famous."

Laughing a little, Cherise counters, "I'm not that famous, and besides those people didn't pay much attention to my side of the family anyway, so I should be fine."

“Do these dangerous people know where Jared is?” Rebekah asks, nervously.

“No, thankfully,” Cherise confirms, “Because if they did, Jared really would be in danger.”

“I hope they never find him,” Rebekah states, sadly.

After some silence, Garrett changes the subject and inquires, “So how did Jared know it was your birthday?”

“Oh, Jared hung out with my friends and me at Grif’s last night,” Rebekah announces, “Then walked me home, and we talked for a while.”

“Oh, he walked you home, did he?” Garrett exclaims, while grinning from ear to ear.

“Yeah,” Rebekah responds, feeling very confused. “Darrick couldn’t walk me home, and Jared and Maggie didn’t think it would be safe for me to walk home alone, so Jared offered.”

“Well, that makes me like him,” states Arthur, “Since he was willing to protect my little girl.”

“He’s a cop, Daddy,” explains Rebekah. “Protecting others is his job.”

“So is Darrick’s,” says Garrett.

“I told you he wasn’t able to,” Rebekah states again. “So, Jared did.”

“Did you guys do anything after he walked you home?” Garrett asks, playfully.

“I told you,” Rebekah declares. “We talked and then we watched *Firefly*.”

“He watched *Firefly* with you?” inquires Cherise.

“Yeah.”

“Well, now I know he’s a keeper!” exclaims Arthur.

“Yeah, since he was willing to watch your favorite show with you,” adds Garrett.

“He likes it!” Rebekah tells them.

“Even better!” Garrett enthuses.

“Can we talk about something else?” Rebekah requests.

“No,” Garrett states, adamantly, making Rebekah rolls her eyes. “Your private life is better than most soap operas. Besides, Cherise and I need this. Hearing about your love life reminds us what it was like when we-”

“Garrett, there is no love life when it comes to Jared,” Rebekah interjects. “There is with Darrick, but you don’t want to hear about that.”

“Because Jared’s better for you,” Garrett points out.

“Even if I wanted to or if I was free,” Rebekah rebuttals, “He has made it perfectly clear he can’t be with anyone.”

“We’ll see!” remarks Garrett, grinning, as the waiter shows up to take their order.



“Surprise!” scream Madeline and Maggie when Rebekah walks in the front door after finishing breakfast with her family.

Trying to catch her breath from laughing, Rebekah looks at them, then notices there is something behind them on the couch. “What’s that?”

“Do you remember that purple dress you wanted when we went shopping to find a dress for you to wear tonight?” Maggie asks, smiling.

“You didn’t,” utters Rebekah.

“Yes, we did!” Madeline squeals, as she and Maggie move out of the way to reveal an elegant purple mermaid style gown with short sleeves.

“Oh, my goodness, you two!” Rebekah exclaims, walking up to the dress. “How? It was too expensive.”

“Well, we pulled some money together,” Maggie expounds, delightfully. “Not just between the two of us. Last night while you were in the bathroom, we told the guys there was a rather expensive item you wanted for your birthday, and they all wanted to help, even though Darrick already had a gift planned for you. Even Jared wanted to. After you left this morning, we rushed to buy it, but we didn’t have enough time to wrap it. And before you say that it’s too much and you can’t accept it, it’s not returnable, so you have to accept it.”

“You guys are amazing!” Rebekah declares. “I have the best friends in the world.” Happily, they all hug, feeling so blessed, then leave to go out for their afternoon plans before coming back to help Rebekah get ready for her evening with Darrick. When Rebekah finishes getting ready, they hear a knock at the door, causing Rebekah, Maggie, and Madeline all to squeal.

“How do I look?” asks Rebekah.

“Amazing!” Madeline tells her, grinning.

“Yeah,” Maggie agrees. “Darrick is going to be blown away. Now go. Better not keep him waiting.”

Giddily, Rebekah rushes out to the living room and opens the front door to see Darrick. “Hey, you,” Darrick says, alluringly, when he sees Rebekah. “You look exquisite, Bekka.”

“So do you!”

“Oh, this old tux?” Darrick queries, sultrily, then kisses her hand. “You’re too kind. Happy birthday.”

“Thank you.”

“I got you something,” he announces, as he pulls a small box, wrapped in ribbon, out of his inside pocket.

“You didn’t need to do that!”

“Now what kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn’t get my girl a gift on her birthday?” he enthuses, making her smile more, before she pulls the ribbon and unties it.

After she opens the box, she gasps when she sees an aquamarine and diamond bracelet. “Darrick, it’s beautiful, but I can’t accept this. It must have cost a fortune.”

“Which I have,” Darrick points out. “Besides, no amount of money is too much for my girl.”

Once again, she smiles, then asks, “Are you sure?”

“Of course,” he exclaims, then kisses her. “I know it doesn’t match your dress, but I know aquamarine is your birthstone-”

“I would love to wear it tonight,” Rebekah imparts.

Smiling, he wraps the bracelet around her wrist and clasps it, then kisses her again. “Ready to go, then?”

“I guess,” she responds, nervously.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. It’s just, I’ve never been to a party as fancy as this one. I’m not sure what to say or do.”

Flirtatiously, Darrick smiles, then suggests, “Then how about you just stand there and look beautiful, just like you are right now.” Smiling, she rolls her eyes, as he wraps her arm around his, before they leave the apartment together and go down to see a limo.

“Oh, my!” Rebekah states, as she stops walking.

“What?”

“A limo?”

Laughing, Darrick tells her, “You deserve the best on your birthday, Bekka, which is why I’m here with you. My father wanted me to meet with him before his charity ball, but I refused. I told him it was my girl’s birthday that this is where I wanted to be.”

“Did it go that smoothly?”

“Oh, no,” he replies, laughing. “My father can be quite stubborn, but so can I.”

“Oh, that I know,” she exclaims, making them both laugh, before entering the limo.

All the way there, they kiss in the back of the limo. Once they’re there, Darrick helps her out of the limo and begins escorting her towards a mansion.

“Oh, my!” she states, stopping again.

“What now?”

“This is your house?”

“Correction,” he states, as they walk up some stairs. “This is my father’s house.”

“But you grew up here?”

“Yes,” he responds, smiling, looking at her, then back at the house. “I guess it is pretty glamorous, isn’t it?”

“Yeah!”

“Well, then, you’ll fit right in,” he states, smiling, making her grin, as he walks her to the entrance, where they are announced before entering. When they enter the ballroom, Rebekah is amazed at how extravagant everything looks, that it takes her breath away. The architecture of the room is the most elegant she has ever seen in real life. All the people there are dressed in the finest clothes, even those who are serving drinks and appetizers and those playing music in a small orchestra.

“Would you like to dance, my lady?” Darrick asks, bewitchingly, when they reach the crowd of people dancing.

“Sure,” she responds, apprehensively. “I just hope I can keep up with you.”

“Don’t worry,” he assures her. “I won’t rush you tonight, Bekka.”

Happily, Rebekah smiles again before he escorts her to the dance floor and dances with her. Throughout the rest of the evening, Darrick treats her like a princess, before he takes her home.

At the doorstep, she tells him, “I had an amazing time, Darrick. Thank you.”

“Anything for my girl!”

“You are quite the charmer, Darrick,” Rebekah points out, before he kisses her, then gently nudges her inside and shuts the door behind him.

“Are your roommates home?”

“No,” Rebekah replies. “They both had dates tonight as well. Why?”

"Time for your other birthday present," Darrick declares, before kissing her again.

Pulling back, Rebekah nervously asks, "And what is that?"

"Me," he enthuses, "Of course. Would you like to unwrap me?"

"Kind of losing your charm there, Darrick."

"Sorry," he expresses. "Surprisingly, I'm nervous, probably because you and I have been friends so long, but I think it's time we take the next step in our relationship. Don't you?"

"Umm... well," Rebekah stammers, anxiously, trying not to make eye contact with him. "Darrick, I... No."

"No?"

"I don't think we're ready."

"I am."

"Well, I'm not," Rebekah confesses.

"So, we can't drink together?" Darrick exhorts. "And we can't do an even more fun activity together?"

"Are you mad?"

"Not mad," he clarifies. "Disappointed, but like I said, this is all new to me, and I am committed to you and whatever this is, so I'll wait. Just please don't make me wait too long."

"Alright," Rebekah utters, anxiously.

"I should probably get going then," Darrick announces, before kissing her passionately. Pulling back, he takes a deep breath and states, "Good night, Bekka. Happy birthday!"

“Good night,” she tells him, as he turns around and leaves. Tearing up, she feels herself trembling and says to herself, “I should have known that was coming. Hopefully, he won’t hate me for this.”



“Hey, Jared,” Rebekah says, after she opens the front door at her apartment. “Come on in. Dinner isn’t ready yet though.”

“No worries,” he states, walking in her apartment. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Maybe,” she tells him, as she shuts and locks the door, then walks back into the kitchen. “Could you take the salmon out of the oven please?”

“Of course,” he declares. “Salmon? Sounds and smells delicious. Do you mind if I wash my hands in here first?”

“Please do,” she requests, making him smile.

Just as Jared finishes washing his hands, he hears Rebekah yelp, “Ow!”

“What’s wrong?” he asks, concerned, watching her suck on her fingertip.

“Nothing,” she responds. “I just burnt my finger on the pan.”

“Come here,” he suggests, as he turns the water back on and feels the temperature. As she walks closer and goes to put her finger in the water, he says, “Hang on.” Once the water is cool enough, he grabs her hand and puts her fingers under the water. “There. Now, do you have some ice?”

“Of course,” she answers, adamantly. “I couldn’t live without ice. It’s in some trays in the freezer.”

Quickly, he gets some ice from the freezer and places some on her finger, while it's under the water. "There. How's that?"

"Better," she declares, as he stares at her and gets caught in her eyes.

"Sorry," he states, looking away quickly. "The salmon. Hot pads?"

"In the drawer next to the stove," she says, as she shuts off the water and resumes cooking. Once he pulls out the salmon, she confesses, "This is why I'm a bad cook."

"What? Why?"

"Because I'm a clutz," she divulges, "Especially when it comes to food."

"Just because you're a little clumsy in the kitchen," explains Jared, "Doesn't mean you're a bad cook."

Hearing this, Rebekah smiles, then requests, "Go ahead and sit down. I'll bring everything over."

"I can help, Rebekah," he counters.

"I know that, but you're a guest, and I'm sure you've had a rough day. So let me, okay?"

"Okay," he submits, sitting down, while she prepares some plates.

When she places a plate of food in front of him, he eyes the food and exclaims, "Wow! Salmon, rice, and a veggie medley. This looks amazing!"

"Thank you," she says, going back to get her food.

"You're welcome," he tells her, while she prepares her plate, then sits down.

“Ready to eat, Bekka?”

“I guess,” she replies, hesitantly.

“Bekka, I’m sure it’s delicious!” he says, picking up his utensils and cutting some salmon. Nervously, she waits for his reaction to the food. As he chews, he starts saying, “Mmmm... wow!”

“You’re just saying that!”

“No. This salmon is the most amazing I’ve ever tasted. Whoever said you’re not a good cook is crazy!”

“No one said I wasn’t a good cook!” she confesses, causing him to look at her curiously. “I don’t cook for anyone besides myself. I haven’t since my mom passed away, and I didn’t exactly cook then most of the time. Usually, I just watched and learned a few things, but never felt confident enough to cook for anyone.”

“Well, she must have been a good teacher,” he points out.

“She was,” Rebekah discloses, smiling lightly.

“And I may not have known her, Rebekah, but I think she would have loved this food and been really proud of you for making it.”

“She would have liked you Jared,” she exclaims, smiling, “How respectful and kind you are. You’re a really good friend, Jared.”

“So are you.”

“I guess so,” she states, awkwardly. “At least I didn’t kill you with my cooking.”

“I never thought you would. Although, I am beginning to wonder if you are indeed the craziest person I’ve ever met.”

While smiling and glaring at the same time, Rebekah remarks, "Very funny!"





Chapter 5

“Hey, Chief,” says Darrick to a middle-aged man with a receding hairline.

“MacDonald, nice to see you,” he states, shaking Darrick’s hand, after Darrick quickly puts his cell phone away. “Hard at work I see.”

“Of course,” Darrick assures him, causing Chief to roll his eyes and stifle a chuckle. “What are you doing here, Chief?”

“Apparently you have a suspect in custody who my department has been looking for... A Mark Sparks.”

“Bentley made that arrest,” announces Darrick, then looks toward Jared.

“Hey, Bentley! Come here.” Instantly, Chief looks at Jared, who nods, and furrows his brow, as he begins running over. While they wait, Darrick looks at some irritation on Chief’s chin and tells him, “You know, Chief, you really should get a shaving waver, like me. We have the same condition. You would-”

“I’ve lived with this my whole life, MacDonald,” Chief interjects, as Jared approaches them, “And I’m fine.”

While Darrick shakes his head, Jared asks, “What’s up, MacDonald?”

“Bentley, this is Lieutenant Rylee Dawson from organized crime,” exclaims Darrick, then adds, “Although, everyone just calls him Chief, because he looks like Perry White from the Superman movies. Chief, this is Officer Jared Bentley.”

“You’re the spitting image of your father, Jared,” declares Chief, as he shakes Jared’s hand.

“Jared?” Darrick inquires. “That’s pretty informal. How well do you two know each other?”

“I don’t think I do know him,” confesses Jared, then asks Chief, “You knew my father?”

“Yes, and you and I have met,” Chief answers. “Although, I’d be surprised if you remembered me. You were only two when I had to move out here. But your father and I were partners for ten years. He was the one who gave me the nickname originally. I was also his best man when he married your mother. I’m really sorry about what happened to your parents.”

“Thank you, sir,” states Jared, clearing his throat.

“What happened to them?” asks Darrick.

“They were both killed,” Jared announces, then clears his throat again.

“How?” inquires Darrick. “Like in a car accident or by people?”

“The second one,” replies Jared, clearing his throat once more. “My dad was killed in the line of duty, and my mom was murdered.”

“Did they find the killer?”

“Yes,” responds Jared. “Thankfully, at least for my mother’s murder.”

“How old were you?”

“I was 10 when my dad died,” Jared discloses, “And 15 when my mom died.”

“I’m sorry, man,” Darrick says. “That sucks.”

"It was a long time ago," Jared declares, then clears his throat once again.

"I made it to your dad's funeral," Chief announces. "But with everything that happened around your mom's death, I wasn't-

"It's alright, sir," Jared interrupts him, then clears his throat again. "Now, what was it that you needed me for, MacDonald? Was it just to meet Lieutenant Darby?"

"Chief," he corrects him. "I only request being called sir when I'm reprimanding someone, which I am not here to do. MacDonald was just saying that you arrested Mark Sparks."

"Yes," confirms Jared, "Along with my T.O."

"Would you mind taking me to him?"

"Of course not, sir," states Jared, but just before Chief corrects him, he corrects himself. "Chief. Right this way," On the way to holding, Jared inquires, "So Chief, how much do you know about my family? If you were at my dad's funeral, then you know-

"Yes," Chief imparts. "I know your whole family, and I know what really happened to your mom. I kept track of you and your family after I moved out here, at least until after your stepfather went to prison, but I know why I wasn't able to then." Nervously, Jared clears his throat, so Chief assures him, "Don't worry, Bentley. Your secrets are safe with me."

"Thank you, Chief."

"How would you like to interrogate the suspect with me, Bentley?"

"Sure, Chief."

"Good. Let's see if you interrogate like your dad," Chief declares, making Jared feel nervous, until Chief adds, "I think

it's great you followed in his footsteps. He would be very proud."

"Thanks, Chief."



"Man!" Rion shouts, putting his Xbox controller down that he's using. "You got me again, Darrick!"

"Haha, I told you I'm better at this!" declares Darrick.

"Only 'cause you have more time to goof off," Rion rebuttals.

"Not since I started working at the station," Darrick counters. "The hours are brutal." Just then, there is a knock at the door. As Darrick gets up to answer the door, he announces, "That must be Jared or the girls." When he opens the door, Jared is standing there.

"I guess I found the right place," Jared says, as Darrick invites him in. "Quite the bachelor pad you've got here, Darrick."

"I know, right?" Darrick exclaims.

"Hey, Rion," says Jared, waving at him.

"Hey, Jared. You want to play some Apex with Darrick and me before the girls get here? Darrick's got another Xbox you can use."

"Sure," answers Jared. "Although, I have to admit I haven't played video games since I was 15."

"Do you not like video games?" Darrick asks, as he gets his other system set up.

"It's not that," Jared states. "It's just, after my parents died, I didn't exactly have the money for stuff like that anymore."

“Well, pull up a chair, Jared,” says Rion. “We’ve got you covered, right Darrick?”

“Yeah!” Darrick exclaims, just as there is a knock at the door.

“Ugghhh. I guess we’ll have to play Apex some other night,” declares Rion, while Darrick walks begrudgingly to the door, hanging his head down. “The girls don’t exactly like that one.”

“Evening, ladies,” Darrick states, as he opens the door and sees Madeline, Maggie, and Rebekah. After they walk in, Darrick and Rebekah kiss, and Maggie runs to Rion and kisses him.

“Hey, babe,” says Rion after kissing her.

“Hey, Ri! You guys are playing Apex? I thought we were playing Mario Kart.”

“We are, babe,” Rion assures her. “Don’t worry. We were just killing time until you got here.”

“Good,” she remarks, then kisses him again, before they all sit down to play. After they play and enjoy themselves for a while, Rebekah gets frustrated because she can’t get the controls right and continues to lose multiple times.

“This is pointless!” Rebekah grumbles. “You’d think I’d never played this before. But I have, at Garrett’s house many times. Of course, I’ve never been good at this game. It’s just so irritating!”

“Hey, babe,” Darrick tells her. “Calm down. I got you.” He then wraps his arms around her and places his hands on her hands, holding the controller, then guides her on the racecourse. Eventually, she passes everyone but Jared, until right at the end when Jared subtly slows down, allowing Rebekah to win the race. Enthusiastically, she jumps up, then hugs and kisses Darrick, while everyone cheers and smiles at her, even Jared, who has the thought that he wishes Rebekah was hugging him and not Darrick. Feeling incredibly guilty, Jared pushes the

thought out of his mind and just smiles at her, feeling so pleased she is happy.



“Hey, Jared,” Rebekah says, walking into the police station, with a trench coat covering a long purple dress and carrying a garment bag. “Is Darrick off yet? He and I are going to a party at the college, and we’re going to be late.”

“He should be,” Jared states. “Let me see if I can find him. You can wait in here, if you’d like.” As he says this, he opens a door to a room with some couches and a coffee table. “Can I get you anything?”

“No, I’m fine. It’s just a little warm,” she states, taking off her coat to reveal the elegant purple dress from her birthday, causing Jared to take a double take and clear his throat. “Are you okay, Jared?”

“Your outfit!” he declares, then clears his throat again. “Your dress... It’s very nice.”

“Yeah?” she exclaims. “This is the dress you and everyone else bought for me for my birthday. I thought it would work for tonight. It’s a costume party. I’m going as Inara. Do you think it works?”

“Umm,” he stammers, not able to take his eyes off of her. Finally, he states, nervously, “Yeah, you look great! I should go find Darrick.” While walking backwards, Jared almost falls over. Quickly, he rushes out, feeling embarrassment pour out of his cheeks. Once he is out of sight, Rebekah smiles, sits down and waits.

A few minutes later, Jared comes back in, and Rebekah asks, “Did you find him?”

“Apparently, he left already, Bekka,” Jared announces. “I’m sorry.”

“What?” she questions, frustration in her voice.

“I’m really sorry, Bekka,” he repeats, then walks out to finish some paperwork. While he’s gone, Rebekah tries calling Darrick multiple times, with no answer. She sits down in defeat when Jared walks back in. “Can’t get a hold of him?” Jared queries.

“No,” she states, then tears up and turns away. “I’m sorry, Jared.”

“You don’t need to apologize, Bekka,” he assures her. Despite her efforts, she cries more. Overcome with compassion, Jared sits down next to her, grabbing a tissue from the box on the coffee table and starts wiping her tears with the tissue, then uses his hands to finish. Suddenly, he realizes his hands are cupping her face and pulls them away, then quickly apologizes.

“It’s alright,” she assures him, still weeping a little. “None of this is your fault.”

After a moment, he holds his arms out to hug her and says, “Come here.” Feeling distraught and in need of comfort, she dives into his embrace and weeps on his shoulder.

After a few minutes of him consoling her, she pulls away and wipes her tears, while telling him, “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to be sorry,” he assures her. “What are friends for?”

“You’re a really good friend, Jared,” she states, smiling. “Thank you.”

“No problem, Bekka.”

“I better get going. I guess I’m going to the party alone,” she announces, grabbing her coat and the garment bag, then standing up and heading to the door.

Just before she reaches the door, he states, "I could go with you."

"Oh, Jared, you don't need to do that."

"Its fine," he assures her. "Unless you don't want me to."

"It's not that," she clarifies. "I just don't want to make you do anything that would make you feel uncomfortable."

"It doesn't," he exclaims, "Unless it makes you feel uncomfortable."

"No."

"Well, then if that's the case, I'm done with my paperwork, and I have no plans."

"You really want to?"

"Sure," he responds, smiling. "I just don't have a costume. I guess I could just wear my uniform."

"You could wear Darrick's costume," she announces, shrugging her shoulders, "Since he's not going to use it, unless you're not comfortable with that. We were dressing up as a couple."

"Wait, Bekka. Was Darrick dressing up as Malcolm Reynolds? I thought he didn't like the show."

"He said I could pick out the costumes, as long as I took care of everything," she explains, then pauses, while he smiles. "So do you want to use his costume or-?"

"Right," he responds. "I'm fine, if you're okay with it."

"I offered, didn't I?"

"Okay," he says. "I guess I better go get changed then."

"Right," she vocalizes, handing him the garment bag. "Here you go!" Jared then takes it and walks out to go change, while she

waits patiently in the room, until he returns. When he walks in, he is wearing everything but the brown coat, causing her to stare at him, until she blurts out, "Wow!"

"What?" he asks, concerned.

"Nothing," she responds, awkwardly. "You just look really good in that costume, like it was made for you."

"Thanks," he says, feeling slightly embarrassed. "Ready to go?" Happily, she nods, as he helps her put her trench coat back on.

"Thank you," she tells him, as he puts the brown coat on.

"No problem. Ready to go a 'shindig?'" Jared asks with a smile, making Rebekah laugh, as he offers his arm.

"Yes, Mal," she responds, kissing his cheek, then linking her arm with his before they leave.



When they arrive at the party and walk inside, they see a photo booth for people to use before joining the party. "A photo booth?" queries Jared, smiling.

"We don't have to," Rebekah assures him.

"Yes, you do," states Madeline, walking up to them from the party, wearing a beret, skirt, sweater, and scarf. "Where's Darrick?"

"I'm not sure," Rebekah confesses, sighing. "Jared offered to bring me, so I wasn't alone. I knew you would be here with your boyfriend, Zack."

"Don't you remember, Bekks?" exhorts Madeline. "We broke up last month. I'm here with my new boyfriend, Alex."

Just then, Alex, Darrick's training officer, walks up, wearing an old-fashioned suit and fedora, then snaps, "What are you doing here, boot?"

"Sir, I didn't know you were going to be here," Jared confesses. "I was just bringing my friend, since her boyfriend, MacDonald, couldn't make it."

"Very well," Alex accepts. "Just don't tell anyone about this."

Stifling a smile, Jared promises, "I won't, sir."

"So, who are you guys supposed to be?" queries Madeline, changing the subject.

"Mal and Inara," Rebekah enthuses, "From *Firefly*."

Rolling her eyes, Madeline remarks, "Of course!"

"Who are you guys?" asks Rebekah.

"Bonnie and Clyde," answers Madeline.

"Really?" Jared smirks.

"What's so amusing, Bentley?" exhorts Alex.

"Nothing, sir," Jared replies. "Just a little surprised. I know how seriously you take the job. I didn't expect you to dress up as a criminal."

"Trust me, he has a loose side," Madeline discloses. "Even still, Bonnie and Clyde was my idea. I thought it would be ironic, and he didn't seem to mind, did you babe?"

Rolling his eyes, Alex confirms, "No. It's actually kind of funny." With that, Alex kisses Madeline.

"Wow, sir!" exclaims Jared. "Seeing this side of you I have to say is a little unnerving."

“Like I said before,” Alex states, “Don’t tell anyone.”

“Your secret’s safe with me,” Jared assures him, before Alex walks away with Madeline.

“So... the photo booth?” Rebekah utters.

“Let’s do it,” Jared suggests, then gets in line with her. When it’s their turn to go in, they both clear their throats after getting incredibly close. “You okay, Bekka? I’m not making you uncomfortable?”

“No,” Rebekah responds. “Am I making you uncomfortable?”

“Not at all,” Jared admits, then sets up the photo preferences with Rebekah. For their first photo, they just smile. Then, they choose to do a silly one. Nervously, Rebekah tries to be silly, then notices Jared making an angry fish face, while crossing his eyes, making Rebekah laugh uncontrollably. For the third picture, Jared kisses Rebekah’s cheek. In turn, Rebekah kisses his cheek for the final picture. After the pictures are printed, Rebekah hands Jared’s copy to him, while they both look at them, laughing.

Just before they get out, they hear a gunshot, so Jared commands, “Stay here.” Once Jared puts his picture in the inside pocket of his jacket, he pulls his gun out from his ankle and peeks out of the photo booth, seeing the guests, but is unable to determine what’s happening. Sighing, Jared leans against the inside of the photo booth.

“What’s going on?” whispers Rebekah, sliding her photos into her purse.

“I don’t know,” Jared answers, quietly.

“That sounded like a real gunshot,” Rebekah points out, softly.

“I know,” Jared agrees, speaking just loud enough for Rebekah to hear. “I’m going to call for backup, just to be safe.”

As Jared pulls his phone out and starts dialing 911, he hears someone urge, "I wouldn't do that, if I were you." When Jared looks to his side, he sees a man holding a gun to his head, terrifying Rebekah, making her breathe heavily.

"Trust me, sir," Jared beseeches, "You don't want to do this."

"Give me your phone!" demands the suspect. "And your gun!"

"I can't do that, sir," Jared expresses.

"Then, I'll kill your girl here," the suspect states, pointing the gun at Rebekah, who starts wheezing slightly.

After Jared contemplates, he submits, "Fine." With that, Jared hands the phone to the man, then unloads his gun before dropping it on the ground.

"Whatever," scoffs the man. "I don't need the bullets." After bending down and picking up Jared's phone and gun, the man turns to Rebekah and requests, "Give me your phone, too, ma'am, and don't say you don't have one, or you will regret it."

"Alright," Rebekah accepts, then opens her purse and slowly pulls out her phone, accidentally knocking out the pictures onto the floor.

Bending down to pick up the photos, the suspect smirks, "Cute pictures! Although, man you really could have kissed her better than that."

"We're just friends," Jared divulges, as the suspect takes Rebekah's phone.

"With that kind of kiss," remarks the suspect, "That's all you'll ever be."

"I have a boyfriend," Rebekah announces, adamantly.

“But you’re here with him,” the suspect points out. “Do you have plans to be with him too? ‘Cause that would make you a two-timing whore!”

“Leave her alone!” shouts Jared.

Angrily, the suspect yanks Rebekah over and aims the gun at her head, while using his other arm to restrain, causing her to whimper. “Good job,” remarks the suspect, sarcastically, as he starts pulling Rebekah out of the photo booth. “Now, we have to do our backup plan.”

“Who is ‘we?’” implores Jared, as the suspect pulls Rebekah out of sight. “What back up plan?”

Panicking, Jared thinks about what to do and decides to follow the man out of the booth, where he is apprehended by a man and a woman. Looking around, he sees Madeline and Alex being restrained as well, then hears on a speaker, “Sorry to disrupt your evening, ladies and gentlemen. Unfortunately, our plans were disrupted by a few of the guests here, and as such we have to go through with our backup plan.”

“And what’s that?” shouts Alex, looking at the performer, who made the announcement into the microphone.

“As many of you may have noticed,” explains the performer, “Some of your valuables are missing, courtesy of my crew here.” With that, Jared and Alex notice over a dozen people, dressed in costumes and campus security uniforms, pulling out guns, causing everyone to start screaming. “Oh, calm down. This will all be over before you know it. But first, we have to punish those who interrupted our operation here.” Nervously, Jared looks at Rebekah, as the performer speaks to his crew, commanding, “Bring up the dates of those responsible.”

“No!” cry Rebekah and Madeline, as they are taken up to where the performer is.

Fretting more, Jared tries to come up with a plan, while the performer requests, "And bring those responsible up here to watch." While Jared and Alex struggle to get away, they are taken up to the front of the crowd, where Jared sees the setup for a magic show.

"What is going on?" Jared asks Alex.

"I think I know," Alex admits. "I've heard about these people. They're magicians. During their bullet catching act, they have other members of their crew blend in and steal the guests' valuables. They're suspected in more than a dozen robberies, but we can never pin anything on them, because we don't know what they look like, since they use makeup, wigs, and other such. Most of the time, they get their robbery done without being detected. The only time they didn't, two people died."

"How did they die?" implores Jared, anxiety building.

"Drowning," answers Alex. Just then, the performer reveals two water torture cells, used for water escape tricks, then has those restraining Rebekah and Madeline bring them over.

"No!" Jared panics.

"Let them go!" shouts Alex.

"Too late!" declares the performer, as Rebekah and Madeline start being forced to enter the cells, causing Jared and Alex to fight more to get free. Frantically, they work together, until they are able to knock two of the restrainers' heads together, then pull them over their shoulders and pick them up, putting each of them in a chokehold, while knocking the other restrainers aside. When the others try to stop Jared and Alex, Alex urges, "Don't! Or we'll break their necks."

"You're willing to kill them?" questions the performer.

"To protect those two and everyone here," Alex utters. "So, what's it going to be?"

“Sir, we need to hurry,” Jared pleads, seeing Rebekah and Madeline struggling to breathe.

“Sir?” queries the performer. “Who are you people? Cops? Military?”

“We’re police officers,” Alex declares. “And a whole lot more officers will show up here real soon. And sure, you could probably escape before they get here, but not before we kill these two people. Do you want to take that chance?”

Looking at the female suspect Jared is restraining, the performer reveals a look of distress, before finally submitting, “Okay.”

“What?” shouts another suspect.

“Put your guns down,” commands the performer.

“Why?” barks the suspect.

“She’s carrying my kid,” the performer announces, surprising everyone. “Now, drop your weapons. It’s over.”

“No!” bellows the suspect, as he shoots his gun at the performer, then goes to shoot Jared and Alex, just as the performer shoots him in the head. Finally, all the suspects drop their weapons.

After sighing, Alex demands, “Everyone who is a suspect, go into the men’s bathroom now. Then, I need some people to block the door with some furniture until help arrives.” Quickly, the suspects go to the bathroom, while Jared and Alex rush to pick up some weapons and shoot the water cells, carefully, so they don’t hit Rebekah or Madeline. As they run to Rebekah and Madeline who have fallen, Alex tells a guest, “Call 911!” Upon reaching Rebekah and Madeline, they notice Rebekah unconscious, but Madeline taking a deep breath in. “How are you not unconscious, Madeline?” asks Alex.

“Swimmer,” announces Madeline, trying to catch her breath. “Bekks on the other hand-”

"Has asthma," Jared finishes, as he holds Rebekah and carries her to a flat surface, before starting CPR. Desperately, Jared continues CPR, while pleading, "Bekka, come on. Breathe. Just breathe. Please, breathe." Finally, Rebekah starts coughing, so Jared lifts her head to help her cough out the water, causing Jared, Madeline, Alex, and all the other guests to sigh in relief. Once she finishes coughing, Jared asks her, "Are you okay?"

Still trying to catch her breath, Rebekah tells him, "I think so." After a pause, she adds, "Thank you, Jared."

"You don't need to thank me," Jared assures her, touching her cheek, while she lays on his leg trembling and starts sobbing. Feeling embarrassed she's crying, Rebekah turns her face toward Jared and covers her face with her hands. Compassionately, he lifts her into his arms and holds her, allowing her to bury her face in his chest, while assuring her, "It's alright, Bekka."

While Jared continues to comfort Rebekah, the guest, whom Alex told to call 911, rushes up and declares, "Police and paramedics are on their way, Officer."

"Thank you," states Alex.

"If you don't mind me asking," adds the guest, "Why did you tell them officers were already on the way?"

"It was a bluff," Alex admits.

"That's where MacDonald gets it from," Jared points out, then notices Rebekah's sobbing stopping and looks at her to see her falling asleep. "Bekka? No, Bekka. You need to stay awake. Sir, we need to find out where those paramedics are." Suddenly, some campus security officers, who Jared recognizes, run inside. "Carl, I need your help."

"Jared, what are you doing here?" questions Carl.

“I came here with my friend,” Jared explains. “She needs to get to the hospital as soon as possible.”

“You and I can take her in the campus car,” Carl tells Jared, then looks at the other security officers and commands, “Take care of the situation here.”

After standing and lifting Rebekah, Jared queries, “What about you, Madeline?”

“I’ll wait for the paramedics,” Madeline tells him. “Just take care of Bekks.”

Nodding, Jared rushes outside and sits in the back seat of the campus car with Rebekah laying on his lap, before texting Cherise and Darrick to tell them what happened. After they are driving with the lights on for a little bit, Rebekah begins to stir. Excitedly, Jared implores, “Bekka, can you hear me?”

“Jared?” utters Rebekah.

“I’m here,” Jared assures her, smiling.

“Where am I?”

“In a car,” Jared replies, kindly. “We’re taking you to the hospital.”

“Who’s ‘we?’”

“My friend, Carl, and I,” answers Jared, causing Rebekah to look toward Carl briefly. “We used to work campus security together.”

“Where’s Mads?”

“She’ll be right behind us,” Jared responds, then notices Rebekah starting to have some anxiety. “Bekka, listen to me. Madeline is okay. She was able to hold her breath long enough. You were the only one who needed CPR. Then, you fell asleep. You might be experiencing secondary drowning, which I’m sure

sounds and feels terrifying, but we're going to take care of you. I promise."

"Why did they do that to us?"

"I don't know," Jared states, sympathetically. "But it's over now. They're not going to hurt you anymore."

"Did they hurt you?"

"No. They just hurt my friend... both of my friends. That's all they did to me."

"I'm sorry you came," Rebekah expresses, weeping.

"Don't be," Jared requests, compassionately, rubbing her forehead. "I am glad I was there."





Chapter 6

“Hey, Bekka,” Jared says, after walking into Grif’s and seeing her sit alone with a book.

“Hey, Jared,” she states, as he pulls up a chair and sits on the side.

“How you feeling?”

“Much better. Thank you.”

“Where is everyone? Usually, Maggie and Rion are here before anyone.”

“Maggs said they were finishing up some wedding stuff,” Rebekah announces, as she starts putting her book away in her backpack. “They’re still going to be here. They’re just going to be a little late.”

“Sorry for interrupting your reading.”

“Studying,” Rebekah corrects him. “Trying to catch up after missing all that school.”

“Oh, even worse,” he declares, smiling a little, making her laugh. “I remember those days. Studying, the theme of college.”

“Don’t worry about it, Jared,” she assures him, laughing even more. “It’s fine. I’m tired of studying. I feel like I’ve read the same paragraph 20 times. I think I need a break, so let’s talk. How was your day?”

“Not bad.”

“What’s that?” she inquires, noticing a food stain on his police shirt.

“Oh, that,” he says, taking a napkin and making it wet to clean the stain. “I thought I had got it all. We were at a school today, sponsoring and serving breakfast. A little girl spilled her tray on me.”

“I thought I was the only one who did that,” she states, smiling.

“Oh, don’t worry,” he exclaims with a grin. “I’ll never forget the first girl to spill her food on me.” Hearing this, Rebekah starts laughing, as does he, until he notices her starting to blush and just smiles at her.

“So, what did you study in college, Jared?” questions Rebekah. “I don’t think you ever even told me you went to college.”

“Criminal justice,” answers Jared. “I know it’s stereotypical for law enforcement, but what can I say? I always wanted to be in law enforcement.”

“That’s cool!”

Suddenly, Darrick puts down a chair for Madeline, who sits next to Jared. After Darrick sits next to Rebekah, he puts his arm around her, kisses her and asks, “Hey, babe, how are you feeling?”

“Fine,” Rebekah states, smiling.

“Good,” Darrick remarks, caressing her opposite cheek with his knuckle, making her smile. “I’m still sorry I wasn’t there that night. I can’t believe I forgot. If something had happened to you, I never would have forgiven myself. Thank you again, Jared, for saving her.”

“It’s no problem. I’m glad I was there.”

“Where are Maggie and Rion?” Darrick asks Madeline.

“With the wedding planner and our parents,” Madeline discloses, bitterly.

“Still?” asks Rebekah.

“Yeah,” Madeline answers, even more annoyance in her tone. “They said to just start without them. I would still be there with them, but my mom and I got into an argument, so I left.”

“Is Maggs upset?”

“Just stressed,” Madeline tells her, sighing. “I left to relieve some stress for her. It’s a good thing you had class, Bekks. It was horrible.”

“Still, I feel bad,” confesses Rebekah, compassionately.

“This is why they should just go to the courthouse,” remarks Darrick, smiling. “Less stress.”

“You just don’t get it Darrick,” Madeline counters, shaking her head.

“Yeah,” Rebekah agrees, nodding. “Maggs has been dreaming of her wedding day since she was a little girl.”

“We all have,” Madeline declares, smiling. “Bekks, do you remember that one time we all had pretend weddings to our imaginary boyfriends in elementary school?” Immediately, Rebekah blushes, Darrick laughs, and Jared smiles.

“Yours wasn’t imaginary, Madds. Remember?” Rebekah exclaims, grinning.

“Oh yeah,” Madeline states, revealing a smile mixed with a frown. “Poor Darron!”

“Wait. Darron, as in my brother?” Darrick queries with a smile and furrowed brow.

“Yeah,” Rebekah answers, while Madeline and Rebekah laugh, and Jared and Darrick continue to smile, listening to their amusing story.

“What did you do?” Darrick asks, feeling very intrigued about the idea of his older brother being tortured.

“Madds planted a big wet one on him after begging him to ‘marry’ her,” Rebekah announces, trying to stifle her laughter.

“Are you serious, Madeline?” Darrick exhorts, while everyone laughs. “How old were you?”

“Six,” Madeline confesses, happily.

“He probably was about 14 or 15 then, so you were probably his first kiss, Madeline,” states Darrick, surprising Madeline a little. “And since I know how you kiss, all the girls he’s been with since have had a lot to live up to.” This makes everyone laugh even more before they order and enjoy their meal, while waiting for Rion and Maggie.

When Rion and Maggie finally arrive, they rush in, completely out of breath and not even smiling. “Hey guys,” Rion says, as they sit down.

“Is everything okay?” Rebekah asks with concern.

“No!” Maggie answers, angrily.

“Is it Mom?”

“Yes!” Maggie tells Madeline, more frustration seeping through her tone. “Ugh... she just never takes a break. She is so picky about everything. Do you know how many venues she has turned down that both Rion and I loved? I swear nothing makes her happy. And today was just about flowers. We should have been done in about one or two hours, at the most. But no. Mom turned it into five hours.”

“Did you figure it out?” Madeline asks, hesitantly.

“Yes, finally,” announces Maggie. “But planning this wedding is turning into a nightmare. I wanted to enjoy planning the wedding, but Mom is making it horrible. And did you know she wants to move the wedding to Hawaii now? She says it will be more authentic. But then most everyone we know and love won’t be able to make it. And I want to have it here. Rion, I know this would upset my parents. But can we just go to the courthouse and get this over with?”

“That’s what I’ve been saying!” Darrick points out.

“Shut up, Darrick!” snaps Madeline.

“Honey, listen to me,” Rion says, softly. “As easy as that sounds, I know you won’t be happy doing that, and your dad would kill me if he didn’t get to give you away.”

“He’s right, Maggs,” Madeline states, while everyone snickers about his comment, knowing her father wouldn’t actually kill him.

“We can make this work,” declares Rion. “I promise.” Tearfully, Maggie smiles, then enjoys a tender kiss from Rion. After they get done, Rion looks at Jared and requests, “By the way, Jared, I was wondering if you would like to be one of my groomsmen.”

“I’d be honored, Rion,” Jared exclaims, taken back by his request.

“Cool!” Rion states, then rubs Maggie’s arm and kisses her again.



“Ugh!” Rebekah growls, as she opens the door to her apartment. “Darrick, I told you I don’t-” Just then, she realizes Jared is on her doorstep. “Jared, it’s you. I’m sorry.”

“No worries.”

“Come on in,” Rebekah states, moving out of the way. “I didn’t realize it was lunchtime already.”

“I can come back another day,” announces Jared. “I can just go grab a sandwich somewhere or something. I don’t need to use your kitch-”

“No,” she interrupts him. “I told you that you could use my kitchen anytime.”

“Alright,” Jared submits, then walks in and shuts the door. As he locks the door, he notices she is anxiously running her fingers through her hair. “Are you okay, Bekka?”

“No,” she snaps, then glares at him. “Do I look okay?”

“I’m sorry. I really can go, if you don’t want me here.”

“No, Jared,” she says, sitting down. “I’m sorry. Please stay. I really don’t want to be alone right now. I’m just so angry and hurt.”

“What’s wrong? Did something happen between you and Darrick?”

“Don’t you want to eat?” Rebekah asks, looking up at him.

“My stomach can wait,” he says, holding his arms out for her. “Come here.” After she takes his hand, he pulls her up and into his arms, then embraces her, as she starts crying.

“Thank you, Jared,” she tells him.

“No problem,” he expresses. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“You want to listen?” she queries, as she pulls herself out of his arms.

“Of course.”

“Okay,” she states, then sits down, as he follows. “So, this morning Darrick and I went out for breakfast and came back here afterwards. Then, as soon as we got here, he asked for some of Madds’ stash, her hard liquor. I told him he was on his own, but he wanted me to join, but first of all, it was still morning. And second of all, I don’t like drinking the hard stuff. I really don’t like drinking. I don’t like to get drunk. Granted, I’ve never been drunk-”

“You’ve never been drunk?”

“No,” she answers, abruptly. “Why is that so shocking?”

“It’s not. Honestly, I don’t think I’ve ever been drunk either. My parents always advised against it. They told me, ‘You’ll end up doing something you’ll regret.’”

“That’s what my parents said too,” she states, then begins to tear up. “Plus-”

“Plus, what?”

“That’s how my mom and Levi died,” Rebekah announces, causing Jared to feel concern for her. “Levi had just turned 16 and got his driver’s license, so we all went out for dinner to celebrate his birthday and him getting his license. As you know, Levi was driving, and my dad, being the gentleman he is, let my mom have the front seat, which he later regretted, but he had no way of knowing what was going to happen that night.” Stopping for a moment, Rebekah takes a deep breath, while Jared reaches out and holds her hand to console her. “We were headed to meet Garrett, who had just finished class. He was 20 at the time and was very busy with school and work. On the way to the restaurant to meet him, a drunk driver, driving a big truck, drove into our lane, coming from the opposite direction, and hit our car head on, going about 60 miles an hour in a 35. Levi tried to move out of the way, but there wasn’t enough time for him to react.” Trying to catch her breath, Rebekah stops again. “The accident was horrible. His truck smashed the front of our little sedan... killing Levi... and my mom instantly.” Unable to control her

emotions anymore, she begins weeping, so Jared pulls her into his arms and comforts her.

“Bekka, I am so sorry.”

“Thankfully, my dad wasn't too badly hurt,” Rebekah says, pulling herself out of Jared's arms. “Just some bumps and bruises, and his hip hasn't been the same since.”

“What about you? You and your dad said you were hurt pretty bad, that you almost didn't make it.”

“I broke an arm and a leg and some ribs, and one of my ribs punctured a lung. For a while, I couldn't breathe on my own. But after a stay in the ICU and sometime in the hospital, I was fine.”

“I bet that was terrifying and painful,” Jared states, wiping her tears, his eyes filling up with concern for her, then adds, “Especially since you were so young. Your dad said you were 11, right?”

Tearfully, Rebekah nods, then confesses, “Honestly, I don't remember much of the hospital stay or the pain. I just remember crying a lot from losing my mom and Levi. He and I were really close, and my mom—” As she starts to develop crying hiccups, she stops for a moment again to catch her breath. “It hasn't been the same without her for any of us. Thankfully, Garrett met Cherise shortly after, who was very supportive and helpful to our whole family. She was like a sister and another mom to me, even though she could never take the place of mom, which she never tried to do. And honestly, if not for her, I'm afraid Garrett would have spiraled after losing my mom and Levi and seeing me in the ICU. It was after that Garrett got super protective of me. He even moved home to help my dad with me.”

“That's good,” Jared tells her, gently wiping a tear from her face. “You're worth taking care of and protecting, Bekka.”

“Thanks, Jared,” Rebekah says, tearfully. “And thanks for listening.”

“No problem,” Jared assures her, as he pulls her in to hold her and kiss her forehead. After they hug for a while, Jared inquires, “Does Darrick know about this?”

“Darrick and I don’t exactly talk,” Rebekah explains, pulling away from the hug. “Sometimes we do. He’s just more interested in kissing. Don’t get me wrong! I enjoy kissing, but sometimes it’s nice to have a conversation.”

“I don’t want to tell you what to do, Bekka,” says Jared, “But I think it’d be a good idea to tell him. Maybe then he won’t drink as much around you or try to get you to drink.”

“You’re right,” Rebekah submits. “I guess I’ll go call him. You can go ahead and help yourself. If you need any other ingredients than what you brought, feel free to use anything we have.”

“Thanks, Bekka. I’m making a chicken bacon wrap. Would you like one?”

“That sounds amazing,” Rebekah declares, as she pulls her phone up to her ear, then walks into her room.

After she shuts her door, Darrick answers the phone. “Hey, Bekka,” he says, annoyance in his voice.

“Hey, Darrick. Can we talk, please?”

“What about?”

“I feel I owe you an explanation as to why I don’t like to drink and why I was so bothered about you trying to get me to drink.”

“Okay?”

“It has to do with my mom and my brother, Levi,” she announces, then tells Darrick what she told Jared, who listens intently.

“I understand, Bekka,” Darrick tells her. “I’m sorry. I won’t ask you to drink again.”

"Thank you. See you later?"

"Yeah. Bye, Bekka."

"Bye," utters Rebekah, smiling, before she hangs up the phone and walks out of her room with a small smile. "How did it go?" Jared asks, as he hands her a plate with a wrap on it.

"Thanks, Jared," she says, taking the plate and sitting down at the table. "It went well. Thanks for suggesting I talk to him."

"No problem," Jared states, as he sits down to the table with Rebekah. "Darrick's not a bad guy. He's just a little clueless sometimes. All guys are some of the time. That's why we like having women in our lives to keep us in line." Hearing Jared say this, Rebekah laughs a little, then takes a bite of her wrap.

"Oh, my goodness, Jared!"

"What is it?"

"This is amazing!" Rebekah enthuses. "And I know I've already told you this, but your Fettuccine Alfredo that you made me for my birthday is by far the best I've ever had. Can you cook for me more often?"

"Of course," Jared says, laughing a little. "I'm glad you like it, and it's the least I can do since you so graciously offer the use of your kitchen, so I'm not always eating take out and microwavable meals."

"It's no problem," Rebekah assures him, "Especially if I get a delicious meal out of it."

"I'll cook for you anytime, Bekka," he promises. "Just say the word, and if you ever want to cook together-"

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"Nonsense," Jared argues. "I've tasted your cooking. You're a really good cook, and maybe cooking with someone else might help you feel more confident."

"Okay," she submits, smiling. "Next time you come over, I will cook with you."

"I look forward to it!" Jared declares, smiling as well.



"Hello, gentlemen," Jared says, as he and Raquel walk up to a group of four men. "I am Officer Bentley. This is Officer Iglesias. Mind telling us what's going on here?"

"Nothing, officer," answers one of the men, as he tries to hide something behind his back.

"What's behind your back there, sir?" asks Jared.

"Nothing," he replies, just before gunshots are fired from a black SUV toward the men, who bolt immediately.

"Bentley, call for backup!" shouts Raquel, picking up a bag of drugs and tossing them to Jared. "And take care of this."

While Raquel chases the suspects, Jared puts the drugs in the evidence box and calls for backup, then goes back to chasing the suspects. Just as he catches up to them, he hears Darrick yell, "SMPD!"

Looking over at Darrick, Jared sees him and Alex aiming their gun at the suspects, who stops abruptly, while Alex shouts, "Put your hands behind your head and interlace your fingers!" Immediately, Jared and Raquel go to arrest them, then hear several gunshots and glass breaking from the back window of the patrol car. Quickly, Jared and Raquel keep the suspects subdued, as Alex and Darrick look back and begin shooting at the three vehicles, which have several gunmen shooting machine

guns. While Darrick and Alex are in their gunfight, Jared and Raquel handcuff the men, when suddenly Darrick kneels to the ground and grabs his arm.

“MacDonald!” Jared panics and freezes, realizing Darrick has been shot, which allows the man in his custody to wiggle free. “No!” As the man is running away from Jared, he gets shot by a suspect in the SUV and falls to the ground, making it so Jared can catch up to him, while he hears Raquel calling for more back up over the radio. Then, Jared flips the man over and realizes he has been shot in the head and is dead. Without hesitation, Jared crouches over to Darrick and notices blood coming from his arm. “MacDonald?”

“I’m fine, Bentley,” Darrick stammers, while Jared pulls him to the other side of the door to shield him from the gunfire. As Darrick leans up against the car, while sitting, Jared apologizes, then puts pressure on the wound, causing Darrick to scream. Suddenly, the shooting stops, and Jared looks to see that the vehicles have driven away and Raquel is hauling the other man away, while Alex is running over to Jared and Darrick.

“MacDonald, you alright?” Alex asks, bending down.

“Yes, sir,” Darrick answers, fighting the pain.

“I’m going to check and see how far out the ambulance is, okay?” Alex announces.

As Alex walks away, Darrick looks at Jared and requests, “Don’t tell anybody I said this Bentley, especially Blake and Iglesias, but getting shot hurts like he-”

“Ambulance will be here in a few minutes, MacDonald,” Alex declares. “Just hang in there. And Bentley, Iglesias is waiting for you in your patrol car with the suspect.”

“Sir!”

“Bentley! Go do your job!” demands Alex, angrily. “I will take care of MacDonald.”

“Yes, sir,” Jared accepts, as he pulls his hands away from Darrick’s gunshot wound, allowing Alex to take over putting pressure on the wound.



“Jared, what are you doing here?” queries Rebekah when Jared walks in the hospital. “Are you here about Darrick?”

“How did you find out about him?”

“Maggs texted me,” Rebekah answers. “Rion’s his emergency contact. He told Maggs.”

“Do you know how he’s doing?”

“They won’t tell me anything,” she states, trying to push back her tears.

“Come here,” Jared suggests, while opening his arms. Without hesitation, Rebekah walks into his embrace. “It’s okay, Rebekah. I’m sure he’s fine. The gunshot wound wasn’t that bad.”

“You knew?” Rebekah inquires, pulling away from him.

“I was there when it happened,” Jared confesses.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I can’t tell you details, Bekka,” Jared explains, “Because it’s an open investigation. I have to uphold the law. I’m sorry. I wish I could have.”

“It’s okay, Jared,” she assures him. “I just wish I knew how he was doing.”

"I'll find out," he tells her. When he walks up to the front desk, Jared states, "I'm Officer Bentley. Another officer was brought in here today with a gunshot wound, Officer Darrick MacDonald."

"Yes, Officer," rests the nurse. "He's fine. He's in his room recovering right now."

Overhearing this, Rebekah storms up and questions, "Why wouldn't you tell me about him?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the nurse states, "But Officer MacDonald requested that you not be told about him or where he is."

"What?" Rebekah shouts, more tears building up.

"Bekka, calm down," Jared requests, gently touching her shoulders.

"Why would he do that, Jared?" Rebekah cries.

"I don't know. Let me go find out. You just stay here and try to relax, okay?" Begrudgingly, Rebekah nods, not making eye contact with Jared, as he helps her sit down and asks, "Would you like some water?"

"Sure."

"Could she have some water, please?" Jared asks the nurse, who nods. As she rushes to get her some, Jared adds, "And make sure she gets ice." When the nurse comes back with the water, she hands it to Jared, who hands it to Rebekah. "I'm going to go check on Darrick now. I'll be back, okay?"

"Thank you, Jared, and thank you for the water as well."

"No problem," Jared tells her, as he bends down and quickly gives her a hug, pressing the side of his lips against her head gently, then finds out where Darrick's room is and leaves. When he finds Darrick's room, he knocks and announces himself.

"Come in, Jared," Darrick requests.

"How are you doing?" Jared asks after walking in and seeing him, Rion, Maggie and Madeline.

"I'm great!" Darrick exclaims. "Morphine is great stuff!"

After everyone laughs, Madeline queries, "Did you see Bekks? I thought she would have been here before I got off work."

"Yeah, actually," Jared answers. "She would be in here, but for some reason Darrick put her on the list to not be told or be allowed to visit."

"What?" all the others stammer.

"Why would you do that, Darrick?" exhorts Madeline.

"I didn't want her to worry," Darrick confesses.

"She was going to find out," Rion points out.

"And now she's going to worry about two things, Darrick," adds Maggie. "You getting shot and you not wanting to see her."

"You're right," Darrick submits. "Madeline, can you go get a nurse so I can change that? And Jared, would you go get her, please?"

"Of course," Jared says, then walks out.

When Jared gets back to the waiting area, Rebekah jumps up and queries, "How is he?"

"He's fine," Jared assures her. "Just hopped up on morphine, and he's asking for you."

"Really?" Rebekah implores. "I thought he didn't want to see me."

“He just didn’t want you to worry,” Jared reveals, “But since you know already-”

“Okay.”

“Come on,” Jared requests. “Let’s go see him.” Solemnly, Rebekah follows Jared to Darrick’s room. When they arrive, Jared knocks again, then walks in with her.

“Bekka!” Darrick exclaims, smiling.

Seeing everyone, Rebekah tries not to cry and asks, “You were okay with everyone seeing you, but me?”

“No, Bekka,” Darrick states, reaching his hand out to her to come closer. Hesitantly, Rebekah walks over to Darrick, who pats on the bed, so she sits down. “I really just didn’t want you to worry. You tell me all the time that you have nightmares about me, Jared, or Rion getting hurt or killed on the job. I didn’t want to upset you.”

“Just because I’m afraid of you or Jared getting hurt out in the field or Rion in a fire,” Rebekah points out, “Doesn’t mean I don’t want to know when it does happen. You’re my boyfriend, and Jared and Rion are my friends. I deserve to know if anything happens to any of you.”

“You’re right,” Darrick concedes, sighing. “I’m sorry, Bekka.”

“It’s okay,” Rebekah states. “Are you okay?”

“I am now,” Darrick declares. “I have my beautiful girl, my awesome friends, and these amazing drugs making me not care about the pain.” Hearing this, everyone else laughs and rolls their eyes, before Darrick adds, “There’s only one thing that could make it better.”

“And what’s that?” Rebekah asks, smiling.

“A kiss from my beautiful girl,” exclaims Darrick. After rolling her eyes, Rebekah leans closer and kisses him.





Chapter 7

“What are you doing here, Jared?” asks Rebekah at Garrett’s house when he walks in behind Garrett.

“Garrett said he needed my help with something,” Jared announces.

“I do,” Garrett confirms. “He’s helping with the snow you requested.”

“Snow?” queries Jared. “I didn’t realize we got some snow.”

“We didn’t,” Rebekah says, laughing. “Garrett ordered some fake snow for Maggs’ bachelorette party, but don’t you dare tell her. It’s a surprise.”

Smiling, Jared vows, “Your secret’s safe with me. Maybe when Garrett and I are finished, you and I can test it out.”

“Really?” exclaims Rebekah.

“I did promise you when I had the chance, I would help you build a snowman,” he reminds her.

“Yes, you did,” Rebekah states, smiling. “I’ll get the carrot and accessories, while you help Garrett.”

“I look forward to it,” Jared enthuses, smiling.

“Come on, Loverboy!” Garrett smirks. “Stop making googly eyes at my sister.”

While Jared stands there feeling sheepish, Rebekah rebuttals, “Garrett, we’re just friends.”

"You keep telling yourself that," Garrett leers.

"I'm also with Darrick, remember?"

"Don't remind me," Garrett commands. "Come on, Jared."



"Congratulations, ladies!" Rion declares, as the group of friends all clink glasses at Grif's.

"I just can't believe we finally graduated!" exclaims Rebekah.

"And we each start our new jobs in less than two weeks," Madeline adds, taking a deep breath.

"Not me," argues Maggie, smiling at Rion. "I will be on my honeymoon. I don't have to start until after I get back."

"Lucky you," grumbles Madeline.

"I'm the lucky one," declares Rion, just before he kisses Maggie.

"I can't believe in just a couple of days," Maggie exclaims, grinning at Rion, "I will be Mrs. Maggie Williams!"

"I still think you should keep your maiden name in there, Maggs," requests Madeline. "You don't have to not take Rion's name, but I think if you went by Maggie Malala-Williams, it would make Dad super happy. I plan on doing that when I get married. At least use it as your middle name."

"Considering I don't have an actual middle name," utters Maggie. "What do you think, Ri?"

"I like it!" Rion exclaims. "You know I love your Hawaiian background."

"Dad's Samoan," Madeline corrects Rion. "Mom is Hawaiian."

“My apologies, Madeline,” Rion states, smiling. “Your Polynesian background, Maggie, your culture, your beauty, everything.”

“Isn't he the best?” Maggie enthuses, before kissing Rion.

“Now on to your bachelorette party tomorrow,” announces Madeline.

“You're going to tell me where we're going yet?” Maggie asks.

“No,” Rebekah and Madeline respond in unison.

“You girls are so secretive,” remarks Darrick, “I told Rion weeks ago where we're going.”

“Chimera!” Rion and Darrick chime, while wiggling their fingers together.

“No strippers, right?” demands Maggie.

“Well, I can't make any promises,” jokes Darrick.

While Rion and Jared shake their heads, Rion assures Maggie, “Honey, strippers aren't allowed at Chimera.”

“Unfortunately,” remarks Darrick, making everyone else roll their eyes.

Turning to Jared, Rion asks him, “Hey, man, you making it tomorrow night?”

Regretfully, Jared replies, “No, I was able to get the wedding off when you guys told me about it, but I have to work a double tomorrow. Sorry, man.”

“You're going to miss quite a party!” Darrick declares, grinning. “Only thing that would make it better is more skin.” Once again, everyone else rolls their eyes, before they all get up to go and Rebekah goes to kiss Darrick, who stops her. “No good night kiss yet, babe. I am walking you home tonight.”

“Yay!” exclaims Rebekah. “Hey, Jared, is it okay if we watch TV some other time?”

“Of course,” Jared replies with a smile, then tells her good night, before Darrick pulls Rebekah toward the door, as she tells Jared good night as well.

Once they're gone, Jared sits down at the bar and sighs, while Darrick and Rebekah walk happily outside, with their arms resting on each other's backs. After they get outside, Rebekah pretends to shiver, and Darrick asks, “You cold?”

Hoping he'll give her his jacket, Rebekah replies, “Yeah.”

“Come here,” Darrick tells her, pulling her closer and rubbing her arms briskly. “Come on. Let's hurry and get you home, where I can warm you up some more, by holding you in my arms, and we make out for a while. Would that help?” Forcing a smile, she nods. “Then, maybe we can do something else... if you're ready.”

“Not yet.”

“Very well,” submits Darrick, feeling a little miffed, then starts moving again to her apartment with her, until he gets a phone call. When he answers, they stop walking. “Hello?” “Yes, this is he.” “What do you mean there's a problem with the reservation tomorrow?” “No, that can't be right!” “Alright, I'll be there soon.” With a distressed look on his face, he hangs up the phone and utters, “Hey, Bekks, that was the nightclub-”

“Go.”

“I should at least finish walking you home,” he presses.

“No, your bike is right across the street,” she argues. “Just go.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!” Rebekah demands, enthusiastically. “I’ll be home in no time. You go save Rion’s bachelor party.”

Sighing, Darrick tells her, “I promise I’ll make it up to you.” Then, he quickly kisses her and runs across the street to his motorcycle, leaving Rebekah feeling disappointed and sad.



Back at Grif’s, Jared finishes a drink and puts a bill on the table. “Thanks, Josh.”

“No problem.”

“Say hi to Kevin for me,” Jared requests, then walks out. Just as he gets outside, he hears a scream coming from the direction of Rebekah’s apartment. Without hesitation, Jared pulls out his gun tucked in his shoe and runs down the street toward the scream. When he gets to the alley before Rebekah’s apartment, he sees a man standing over Rebekah, who has just fallen to the ground, crying. Trying to contain his anger, Jared aims his gun, while firmly yelling, “Police!”

“Jared?” Rebekah cries, as the man throws his hands in the air.

“Turn around!” Jared barks. Slowly, the man turns around, with his hands still raised. “Bekka, are you alright?”

“I think so,” she sobs, still nervous to move.

“It’s gonna be okay, Bekka,” Jared assures her, while still aiming his gun at the man. “Did he hurt you?”

“Not... yet,” she quivers. Feeling the need to comfort her, he becomes distracted, so the man charges Jared, knocking him on to the ground before running away.

“Jared!” Rebekah screams, finally moving towards him.

"I'm fine," he assures her, while standing up and putting his gun away, then shakes his head and remarks, "Rookie move. But at least you're safe now." After rushing to Rebekah's side, he helps her up. Instantly, she buries her face in his chest and sobs, while Jared holds her and tries to calm her down through soft shushes. "It's okay. I'm here," he repeatedly says to her, trying to reassure her she is safe, then asks again, "Are you sure you're not hurt?" Silently, she nods her head, which is still buried in his chest. "Where's Darrick?"

"He had... to go," Rebekah replies with crying hiccups.

"What do you mean he had to go?" he snaps. "He knows how unsafe this neighborhood is."

Pulling back and wiping her tears, Rebekah reveals, "I told him to. He had to deal with a problem with the bachelor party."

"Still," argues Jared, "He shouldn't have left you. I never would have left... I mean, if anything would have happened to you--"

"I know now it was stupid," states Rebekah, who starts crying again.

Compassionately, Jared looks at Rebekah and brings her back in to hold her, saying, "No, no, it wasn't stupid. Shh... Shh... Shh... Come on. Let's get you upstairs." After pulling his jacket off and wrapping it and his arm around her, he walks her upstairs to her apartment. Once they walk inside, Jared turns around and locks the door, then asks Rebekah, "Can I get you anything? A drink?"

As Rebekah sits down on the sofa, she argues, "I'm supposed to ask you that."

"No, Rebekah," he states, kneeling in front of her. "Let me take care of you."

"Okay," she accepts, then reveals a small smile.

“Okay,” he says, smiling back at her. “Now, what can I do for you, Bekka? What do you need?”

“To feel safe,” she says, tearing up. “Could you just hug me again?”

“Of course,” Jared responds, then sits on the couch next to her and wraps his arm around her.

In between sobs, Rebekah confesses, “You know... I am glad... you were the one... who found me.”

“Really?” Jared implores, his heart racing a little. “Why is that?”

“I can never... cry around Darrick.”

“Why not?” Jared asks, his heart calming down a little.

“He doesn't like crying,” she says, sitting up and wiping away a tear. “He told Madds once that it's a sign of weakness.”

“That's crazy!” Jared scoffs. “Guys only say that, 'cause they are afraid to cry themselves. They don't want to show that they have emotion too.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Jared says, wiping a tear from her face. “You're not weak. You can cry in front of me anytime. I'll be your shoulder to cry on, Bekka.”

“Thanks,” Rebekah states, smiling, as Jared smiles back at her, rubbing her arm. “Hey, Jared, can I ask you a favor? A couple of favors, actually.”

“Of course.”

“First, would you mind staying here 'til Maggs and Madds get back?”

“I can do that,” he promises her. “What else do you need?”

“Could you, maybe, I don't know... it's silly!”

“What Bekka?” he implores. “Tell me.”

“Could you teach me how to defend myself, you know just in case you're not around if this happens again?”

Smiling, Jared exclaims, “Of course. I'd be happy to. Come here.” After standing up, Jared helps her stand, then walks over to the dining room with her. In the dining room, he moves the table to give them more room, before explaining, “Okay, so the first thing you need to know is it's all about believing in yourself, even though you might be afraid.”

“Wait. Were you afraid when you stopped that guy?”

“Of course, I was, Bekka,” he declares, gently holding her arms. “I was terrified I was too late or that I wasn't going to be able to stop him. I was terrified something horrible was going to happen to my best friend.”

“I'm your best friend?”

“Of course, you are Bekka,” he discloses. “You are the best friend I have ever had. It terrified me thinking about what that man was trying to do to you.”

“How'd you face it?” she says, tearing up, noticing the anger and sorrow in his eyes.

“By turning that fear into a commitment,” Jared announces, “A commitment to do whatever it took to keep the woman that I care about safe. My friend, who I care about.”

Turning around, Rebekah queries, “What next?”

Feeling stupid about how he phrased his comment, Jared rolls his eyes, then clears his throat, before suggesting, “Why don't we just start with some simple moves? Punch my hand.”

“What?” she asks, turning back to him.

“Punch my hand,” he repeats, pointing at his hand.

“I don't want to hurt you, Jared,” she counters, feeling sheepish.

“You won't hurt me, Bekka,” he states, smiling at her. For a moment, he continues to smile, then commands, “Just punch it, but don't close your fist.” Lightly, she hits his hand. “Harder,” he requests, so she hits a little harder. They repeat this multiple times before he says, “Well done.” Then, he shows her some more moves over the course of a half hour before saying, “Let's take a break. I can teach you more later. But for now, I think it's time to relax.”

As he moves the table back, Rebekah thanks him, before they sit down on the couch together. Once they choose a show to watch, Rebekah moves closer to Jared, still feeling shaky. After putting his arms around her, he assures her, “You're safe, Bekka. I promise I will protect you.” Hearing this makes Rebekah smile and feel secure, so she leans down onto his chest, while they watch TV for a while and fall asleep.



The next morning, Jared wakes up first and looks down to see Rebekah laying on his chest. Smiling, he leans down to kiss the top of her head when he hears Madeline clear her throat, causing him to jump up and turn around to see her standing in the kitchen stirring coffee, making Rebekah jolt awake.

“This isn't what it looks like, Madeline!” Jared insists, anxiously.

“Uh-huh, sure,” Madeline says, sarcastically.

“Last night, I found her being at-” Jared stutters, then stops, realizing it's not his business to say anything.

“What?” Madeline questions.

“Some guy attacked me in the alley last night,” Rebekah announces. Just then, Maggie walks in, and both Maggie and Madeline panic and rush to her, asking if she’s okay. “Jared saved me and brought me home. I asked him to stay. After that, we got tired and fell asleep on the couch.”

After Madeline and Maggie thank him, he tells them, “It was nothing. I’m just glad I was there.”

“We are too!” exclaims Maggie.

“Is there anything else I can do for you, Bekka?” Jared queries.

“No, thank you, Jared,” she responds, so he turns to leave, until he hears Rebekah say, “Jared, wait.” When he turns back, she states, “Thank you again for everything.”

“Anything for you, Bekka!” he exclaims, then leans forward and kisses her cheek, making her smile, before he turns around and leaves, while Madeline watches him curiously.

“Does Darrick know?” asks Maggie.

“I didn’t want to bother him,” confesses Rebekah. “Besides, it’s not his fault. I told him to leave.”

“I’m calling him!” declares Madeline, pulling her phone out of her pocket.

“No!” Rebekah snaps, but Madeline ignores her and calls Darrick anyway.

“He doesn’t need to know,” Maggie points out, trying to take away Madeline’s phone.

“He needs to know he screwed up... again,” Madeline remarks, just as she hears Darrick’s voice on the phone. “Hi Darrick.”

“Please, Madds,” begs Rebekah. “Don’t tell him.”

"It's about Bekka." "Yeah, she's okay, but something happened last night." While Madeline explains, Rebekah shakes her head and goes into her room.

After several minutes go by, Maggie comes into Rebekah's room and declares, "Madds says that Darrick is on his way over."

"Maggs, he has to work,"

"He said he would be fine to come see you first, Bekks," Maggie assures her, as Madeline walks in, carrying a coffee mug. "I'm sure he's really worried about you."

"Really?" Rebekah exclaims, as her eyes fill with happiness and a little guilt.

"Here," Madeline says, handing Rebekah the mug she brought in. "Some hot cocoa."

"Thanks, Madds," Rebekah utters, sighing, before taking the hot cocoa and taking a sip, burning her tongue in the process. "Ow. Hot!"

"I'm sorry, Bekks," Madeline states. "I made it as hot as I make my coffee. I should have warned you."

"It's fine, Madds," Rebekah assures her, then sets the hot cocoa down on her nightstand to let it cool, while Maggie and Madeline go to get ready for the day.

Once the cocoa cools enough, Rebekah begins drinking it, then goes to take it into the kitchen, where she sees Madeline opening the door, to reveal Darrick, who rushes past her and over to Rebekah, while panicking, "Bekka, are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Darrick," she assures him, as he hugs her.

"I knew I shouldn't have left you last night, Bekka," Darrick confesses, before holding her cheeks and kissing her, then hugging her again. "I am so sorry."

"It's really alright, Darrick," Rebekah tells him, as he faces her again. "I told you to leave."

"I still shouldn't have left," he counters. "If something would have happened to you--"

"Hey, Darrick," Rebekah imparts, hugging him again, noticing his guilt and anxiety. "I'm okay. Jared saved me. Thankfully, he hadn't left Grif's yet. He heard me scream, just as he walked out."

"But it never would have happened," he argues, pulling away from Rebekah, "If I hadn't left you. Never again. If I can't walk you, then--"

"I will have Jared walk me," Rebekah promises, "Or Rion, okay?"

"Okay," Darrick states, then kisses her again, before announcing, "I'm sorry, but I actually need to get to work. I'm going to be late as it is. I told my boss, but--"

"It's okay," Rebekah interrupts him. "Go."

"I'll see you later?"

"I have Maggs' bachelorette party tonight and I have to get ready for that," she answers, regretfully. "Speaking of which, did you figure out Rion's bachelor party?"

"Yeah," he says, nodding his head. "Unfortunately, we won't be having it at Chimera. We'll be having it at Mac's."

"Isn't that your dad's pub?" questions Rebekah.

"Yeah," replies Darrick. "And you can call him Mac, Bekka. Everyone else does. Even Darron and me. Thankfully, he updated the place, so it's a bit more mine and Rion's speed. Plus, since Mac's the owner, he shut down the place. Only those invited will be allowed to enter."

“That’s cool,” Rebekah declares, smiling. “So, is that how your dad... how Mac made all his money? With a pub?”

“No,” Darrick answers, chuckling. “It’s more of a hobby for him and so he could have part of Scotland with him after he left. Let’s just say Mac is really smart when it comes to money. He has a very successful business, outside of the pub, and makes smart investments and follows the stock market as well.”

“He sounds like a Ferengi!” remarks Rebekah, snickering a little.

“A what?”

“Never mind. You better get going.”

“Yeah,” he states, smiling, then kisses her before leaving.



When Darrick arrives at the station, roll call is already going on. Not noticing Jared is glaring at him, Darrick sits down and nods at his boss, Sergeant Smith, who nods back. When roll call is over, Darrick walks up to Jared and says, “Hey man, I wanted to thank you for protecting Bekka last night.”

“Of course,” Jared says, annoyance in his voice. “I’m just glad I was able to get to her before she got hurt.”

“Me too,” agrees Darrick.

“Course it never would have happened,” Jared states, angrily, “If you hadn’t left her in the first place.”

“Excuse me,” Darrick growls.

“You heard me!” barks Jared, anger building up in his eyes. “You never should have left her. I never would have left her alone. What kind of man could leave a woman, especially his girlfriend, alone like that?”

Even though Darrick knows Jared is correct, he can't help but defend himself. "You don't think I feel bad, Bentley?"

"I don't know, MacDonald," Jared retorts. "I'm not sure if you can actually feel remorse, especially when it comes to Rebekah."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean," explains Jared, his tone becoming more furious. "Since being with Bekka, you've gone out with other women. You've stood her up. You've pushed her away. Then, you just show up with flowers and act like it's no big deal, but it is a big deal. Rebekah deserves better than that." Unable to control his temper anymore, Darrick shoves Jared against the wall. Then Jared, filled with rage, shoves him back, and they grapple each other's arms, trying to knock the other one over, until their boss storms in, and Raquel and Alex pull them away from each other.

"What's going on here?" Sergeant Smith bellows, while Jared and Darrick struggle to get away from their T.O.'s to continue brawling. "MacDonald! Bentley! Stand down!"

"Yes, sir," Jared begrudgingly states.

"Yes, sir," Darrick submits as well, still glaring at Jared.

Finally, Raquel and Alex release them, and Sergeant Smith asks again, "Now, what is going on?"

"Ask MacDonald, sir," Jared suggests. "He's the one who left an innocent unprotected last night."

"Does this have anything to do with why you asked if you could come in a few minutes late, MacDonald?" Sergeant Smith inquires.

"Yes, sir," Darrick answers. "It was my girlfriend. She was attacked last night. Thankfully, she wasn't hurt."

“No thanks to you!” Jared snaps, causing Darrick to charge him again, but Alex stops him.

“What is your problem, Bentley?” Darrick questions. “Why do you care so much?”

“Because I’d do anything for her,” Jared declares. “She is my best friend, and I am loyal to her. I am also loyal to my badge and protecting and serving this community. What about you, MacDonald? Are you loyal to anything or anyone but yourself?”

Once again, Darrick is stopped from lunging toward Jared by Alex and when Sergeant Smith declares, “Okay, I want you both to take the rest of the day and cool your heads off. And don’t even think about bringing this back to work, or I will be forced to put you both on suspension, which I will remind you does not bode well for a rookie. Understood?”

Both Darrick and Jared sigh, then state in unison, “Yes, sir.”



“Come on, you two! What is going on?” Maggie presses, as Madeline and Rebekah blindfold her after getting in Madeline’s car.

“It’s your bachelorette party!” declares Rebekah, smiling.

“And it’s a surprise,” adds Madeline. “So, no peeking!”

After a long drive, they arrive at Cherise’s and Garrett’s house, and Rebekah and Madeline get out of the car, then help Maggie get out of the car. Then, they lead Maggie into a garage and remove her blindfold to reveal what looks like a field of snow.

“What is this?” Maggie asks.

“Instasnow!” enthuses Rebekah, “Compliments of my brother.”

“What?” Maggie asks, very confused.

Giddily, Madeline explains, "Come on, Maggs. Remember when the three of us were growing up and we always used to say how much we wanted to play in the snow and build a snowman. Well, now we can."

"And we are going to build a snowman," Rebekah declares, grinning. "We even brought gloves and coats."

"Maggs, are you alright?" asks Madeline, after Maggie is silent for a long time.

Finally, Maggie responds, "Am I alright? You guys, this is amazing! When you two said it was a surprise, I never thought it'd be something like this. This is so much better than anything I imagined. I love you both so much!" Joyously, they all hug, until Madeline suggests, "Well, shall we get started?" Enthusiastically, Rebekah and Maggie cheer, and they all bundle up and begin playing in the snow. After they build a snowman, they put a bowtie and hat on him, then start throwing snowballs at each other. At the end of the party, they hug and cry, knowing that things won't be the same once Maggie marries Rion, but they are still very happy and grateful for their friendship and sisterhood.



"Hey, Jared!" shouts Rion over the loud music and people at Mac's Pub. "You made it!"

"Yeah, I ended up getting the day off after all," Jared yells, "But I don't think I am going to be able to stay that long."

"Why not?" inquires Rion, loudly, as Darrick walks up to them, glaring at Jared, who just shakes his head.

"What are you doing here?" Darrick asks Jared, sharply.

"Remember I got the day off," explains Jared trying not to sound too annoyed, "Just like you."

“Hey, Darrick,” interjects Rion. “This is awesome! I knew you were the right guy for the job!”

“That’s me!” declares Darrick.

“Unfortunately, Jared says he’s not going to be able to stay that long,” adds Rion.

“That’s probably for the best!”

“Why?” queries Rion, while Darrick and Jared stare at each other angrily.

Before anyone answers, an employee calls out for Darrick, who states, “I’ll be right back.”

“Is everything okay with you two, Jared?” Rion asks, after Darrick walks away.

“Don’t worry about it!” Jared assures him. “Tonight’s your night, man!”

“Your surprise is here!” Darrick announces, as he walks back up.

“My surprise?” Rion inquires, frowning his brow.

“Yeah, after I found out we couldn’t have it at Chimera,” explains Darrick, “I wanted to make it up to you.”

“How?” asks Rion, as Darrick drinks a shot of alcohol, then walks over to a platform used for entertainment.

“How’s everyone enjoying Rion’s bachelor party?” Darrick queries into a microphone, enthusiastically. Cheering explodes, while Rion and Jared look at Darrick, curiously. “Well, tonight, I have a little surprise for the groom. Let’s hear it for the beautiful and mysterious lady of the night, Mistress Jade.” Just then, a half-dressed woman walks on the stage, receives a kiss on the hand from Darrick, and begins dancing, while several guests cheer. Then, Darrick goes back to Rion and Jared, who

are not cheering. "Another!" Darrick commands, slapping the bar.

"Darrick, please tell me you didn't get a stripper," beseeches Rion, while he and Jared look at Darrick angrily, "After you promised Maggie you wouldn't."

"What's the big deal?" Darrick exclaims, rolling his eyes and smiling, before requesting another shot of alcohol.

As Jared shakes his head, Rion angrily asks, "The big deal? You promised, Darrick. Maggie would be furious, and how do you think Bekka is going to feel when she finds out?"

"I'm not going to tell her," Darrick states, after drinking another shot of alcohol.

"Maggie will," explains Rion, "After I tell her."

"Why do you have to tell her, Rion?" Darrick queries, feeling irritated.

"I'm not starting my marriage with a secret, Darrick," announces Rion.

"Nor should he," adds Jared.

"No one asked you, Bentley," Darrick barks, then asks for another shot of alcohol.

"Bentley?" inquires Rion. "What is going on with you two?"

"Bentley won't stay away from my girl!" Darrick growls, before taking another drink, while Jared glares at him.

"Bekka?" Rion asks. "What happened with you and Bekka, Jared?"

"I was just trying to protect her," Jared admits. "Something you should have done, MacDonald."

“Oh, that?” questions Rion. “Maggie told me she got attacked last night and that Jared protected her. Shouldn't you just be grateful to him, Darrick?”

“I was,” Darrick states, drinking another shot of alcohol, “But that wasn't enough for him.”

“What do you mean?” Rion asks. “Why?”

“It's your party, Rion,” says Jared. “Why don't we talk about something else?”

“I'll tell you why,” Darrick announces, before requesting another shot of alcohol.

“Darrick, I think you should slow down,” Rion suggests. “How many shots have you had tonight?”

“Or in the last five minutes?” Jared adds, causing Darrick to charge him and tackle him to the ground.

“Darrick!” Rion shouts. “What the he-”

“Get off of me, MacDonald,” Jared commands, pushing him off of him, when suddenly Darron and an employee come over and lift them both up, pulling them away from each other.

“What's going on here?” bellows Darron. “You know Mac would be pissed if he knew you were having a bar fight here. That was part of the agreement you made with him in order for you to have the party here.”

“I want him out of here,” Darrick requests, ignoring Darron.

“Fine by me,” Jared states, adjusting his jacket and stretching his neck a little, before walking away.

“Don't ever show your face here again, Bentley!” Darrick yells after him.

After Jared walks out the door, Darron beseeches, “Do I need to call Mac, Darrick?”

“No!” replies Darrick. “The problem just left.”

“Fine,” accepts Darron, before walking away.

Once Darron is out of sight, Rion looks at Darrick and sternly asks, “What is your problem, Darrick?”

“Bentley is the problem!” Darrick expresses, fiercely. “He’s just so noble and self-righteous.”

“He protected Bekka last night,” Rion snaps, “And you threw him out over that.”

Bewildered, Rion watches Darrick go over and order two more shots of alcohol, when suddenly Darron walks back up and declares, “You’ve had enough, Darrick. Clyde, cut him off. He’s done!”

“What?” yaps Darrick.

“You’re already going to have a massive hangover,” Darron points out. “Its better you have it here than in the hospital.”

“Fine!” Darrick submits, angrily, before Darron walks away again.

After some silence, Rion announces, “I think I’m done for the night. You’re not all that fun to be around when you’re this drunk, Darrick.”

“Yeah? Well, you’re no fun now that you’re getting married, Rion.”

Rolling his eyes and shaking his head, Rion utters, “Call me when you’re sober, Darrick. Thanks for the party.” With that, Rion leaves, while Darrick goes up to dance with the stripper.



The next day at the wedding, Madeline and Rebekah walk outside onto a beach, wearing identical peach Hawaiian dresses, and walk toward Jared and Darrick wearing formal Hawaiian attire, waiting to escort them down the aisle. As they walk toward them, Jared stares at Rebekah in awe.

“Ready?” Madeline asks them. After they all nod, Darrick takes Madeline’s arm and walks her down the aisle.

While they wait, Jared takes Rebekah’s arm, then leans over and whispers, “You look beautiful!” Hearing this, Rebekah blushes, as Jared leans over and kisses her cheek, before walking her down the aisle. Upon arriving at the altar, he drops her off by Madeline, then stands next to Darrick, who appears agitated. Hearing the Polynesian music change, they look to see Maggie being escorted by her father and feel so happy for her and Rion, while they watch the rest of the ceremony.



Later at the reception luau, which is inside a Polynesian hut, Rebekah walks up to Jared and asks, “Wasn’t that a beautiful ceremony?”

“Yes,” Jared replies. “I’m glad I got to be a part of it and walk you down the aisle.”

“Me too,” she states, smiling, then sees Maggie motioning her to come over. “Excuse me,” she says, gently touching his arm before walking away, causing Jared to smile and stare at her as she walks away.

Just then, Darrick walks up behind him and questions, irritation in his voice, “You’re more than just loyal to her, aren’t you, Bentley?”

“We are friends!” Jared bluntly states, not looking at him.

“Oh, come on, Bentley,” Darrick rebuttals, after taking a deep swallow of his drink. “I see the way you look at her. You definitely see her as more than a friend.”

“You’re drunk!” Jared points out, looking back at him, before trying to walk away.

“Hey!” Darrick snaps, pulling Jared back. “I want you to stay away from my girl.” Noticing the tension between the two of them, Madeline rushes over, while trying not to draw too much attention.

Quietly, Jared barks back, “Maybe I would if you actually treated her like she was your girl, like not leaving her alone on a dark street late at night.”

As soon as Madeline reaches them, she tries to make some space between them and whispers, “Guys, now is not the time.”

“I told you already that something came up!” Darrick growls.

“Something that couldn’t wait five minutes to make sure she got home safe?” Jared disputes, creating more tension between the two of them.

While Madeline tries to keep them apart, Rebekah notices, then marches over and snaps, “What is wrong with you two? Today is about Rion and Maggs! So, whatever is going on between the two of you, just drop it!” With that, Rebekah turns around and storms off.

Immediately, Jared calms down and remorsefully says, “Bekka, I’m sorry.”





Chapter 8

“Now that you two are back from your honeymoon,” says Madeline, “Jared and I have an announcement to make.”

“What’s that?” Maggie asks, not able to take her giddy eyes off of Rion, who is staring back at her the same way.

“Gees, you two,” remarks Darrick, sarcastically. “Get a room! You’d think after a week-long honeymoon, you’d be sick of each other.”

“Nope,” Maggie states, as everyone is smiling and shaking their heads. “The honeymoon just made us want to be around each other more.”

“That’s right,” Rion agrees, before he kisses Maggie. “All I want to do is stay in bed with her all day and all night long. But since I can’t do that, I’ll have to settle for just kissing her every chance I get.”

“Wow!” Darrick interjects, after Rion kisses Maggie again, making everyone smile. “You two are disgusting!”

“Look who’s talking, Casanova!” remarks Rion, removing his lips from Maggie’s and turning to the rest of the group.

“I think they’re adorable!” declares Rebekah, grinning.

“Of course, you would, babe,” says Darrick, then kisses Rebekah.

“Really, Darrick?” Maggie scoffs. “We’re disgusting, but it’s okay for you to kiss your girl!”

“Duh!” Darrick exclaims, making everyone laugh.

While still laughing and shaking his head, Rion suggests, "How about we change the subject? Madeline, you said you and Jared had an announcement. What's up?"

"Right, yes," says Madeline, as she pulls Jared's arm around her shoulder. "Jared and I are dating!"

"What?" Rebekah, Darrick, Maggie, and Rion blurt out in unison.

"What do you mean you're dating?" Rebekah inquires, feeling surprisingly agitated. "When did this happen?"

"At Maggs' and Rion's wedding," declares Madeline, causing Rebekah to look down wondering why she feels disappointed, as Jared looks at her with concern. "Are you okay, Bekks?"

"Of course, I am," answers Rebekah, trying to hide her disappointment and confusion. "Why wouldn't I be? This is great! I'm really happy for you both. I'm just really surprised. Jared said that he couldn't be with anyone. What changed your mind?"

As Jared tries to come up with a response, Madeline tells her, "Come on, Bekks. Everyone knows that dating me doesn't really involve a long-lasting commitment. It's all for fun. Right, Jared?"

"Right," utters Jared, hesitantly, clearing his throat.

"Besides, with everything going on his life, he could use a distraction," expounds Madeline.

After some silence, Maggie enthuses, "This is amazing! We have three couples in the group. Do you know what we should do? We should do a couple's night out!"

"Isn't that what we're doing right now, babe?" queries Rion, smiling.

“No,” Maggie counters. “This is a friends’ thing we do every week, almost every week. But I’m talking about doing something romantic.”

“What do you have in mind, babe?” Rion asks, not realizing that Jared is looking at Rebekah remorsefully and Rebekah is looking down, trying to force a smile.

“Well, we could go dancing,” Maggie answers. “Or we could play board games together but be on couple teams.”

“I love all those ideas!” exclaims Madeline.

“Oh, and Grif is doing a karaoke night tomorrow,” announces Maggie. “We could totally do that and sing love songs as couples.”

“That would be so much fun!” squeals Madeline.

“Uh, Madeline,” interjects Jared. “I don’t know about that. I have to work tomorrow, and I think Darrick does too.”

“Yup!” declares Darrick.

“Will you be off before it ends?” Madeline asks.

“Yeah,” Jared replies, begrudgingly, while Darrick nods.

“Then it’s settled!” Madeline states, adamantly. “Let’s all meet here tomorrow night. Well, guys should probably pick up the girls and bring us. It is, after all, a date.”

As they all sit there eating and talking, Rebekah remains silent most of the time, thinking to herself, “Why would he be with Madds? He said he couldn’t be with anyone. I know Madds doesn’t date people for a long time, but why would he take the risk of falling for her? And why her? They don’t seem to have much in common. I mean, she dates guy after guy and goes home with them, sometimes on a first date. Jared doesn’t seem like the kind of guy to do that, but what if-? No, I don’t want to think

about them doing that together. Why do I care though? It's not like I have feelings for Jared. We're just friends. 'Course, we couldn't be more anyway, because he said he can't be, but now he's with Madds. Ugh! I've got to quit thinking about this. Rebekah! What are you doing to yourself? You're with Darrick. Why do you care about Jared's love life?"



"Hey, Jared," Darrick states, while they wait for their equipment to go out on patrol. "I just wanted to apologize. I really did appreciate you protecting Bekka that night, and you were right in being angry at me. Truthfully, I was furious with myself. If she had been hurt, I would have never forgiven myself for leaving her. But when you accused me, I became super defensive, even though I knew you were right."

"Look, Darrick," Jared expresses, "I know you're not a bad guy and that you do care about Bekka. I was just furious. When I saw that guy standing over Rebekah, it infuriated me. I wanted to kill him."

"I would have to," Darrick confesses. "At least, I know that you'll do anything to protect my girl, Jared. And you and Madeline, that's awesome! I'm really happy for you guys, even though I have to admit, I'm a little surprised."

"Me too," Jared concurs, as they pick up their equipment, before heading to their patrol vehicles. "I don't expect it to go anywhere, but she's a lot of fun to hang out with."

"Have you kissed her yet?"

"No. Just taking things slow."

"You don't know what you're missing! Trust me. She is a really incredible kisser!"

“But we started out as friends,” Jared points out. “We don’t want to ruin our friendship by rushing.”

“Just don’t take it too slow, my friend,” Darrick suggests, “Or another guy’ll snatch her up. Trust me. I know. A lot of guys have their eyes on Madeline. She is a very beautiful woman.”

“I know.”

“Well, only two more days of being rookies,” Darrick announces, changing the subject. “Good luck out on patrol. Don’t want to mess up now that we’re this close.”

“You too,” Jared conveys, chuckling a little. “Stay safe out there, too.”

“You as well,” Darrick utters, walking away, before Raquel walks up and checks the patrol car with Jared. When they finish, Raquel gets in the passenger seat, while Jared gets in the driver’s seat and drives away.

Meanwhile, Darrick and Alex check their car, before Alex gets in the driver’s seat and Darrick gets in the passenger seat. Once they’re prepared, they head out on patrol as well. While out on patrol, Darrick and Alex respond to a robbery at a museum, while Jared and Raquel respond to another robbery in another museum in the city. When each team arrives, they are told that no one there called the police, frustrating them. After heading back out on patrol, they respond to two more crimes, where the same thing happens, frustrating them even more. Throughout the day, this happens several more times, in between getting actual crimes that they respond to. When they finish their shift, they are exhausted and befuddled.



The moment karaoke night starts, Madeline jumps up and urges, “Come on, Jared! Let’s you and I go first!”

“Okay,” accepts Jared, as Madeline pulls him toward the microphone. “Let’s get this over with.”

“It’ll be fun!” declares Madeline when they reach the microphone. “What do you want to sing?”

“You choose,” suggests Jared, yawning.

“Alright,” she states, then looks at the list of songs. “How about—ooh! This is a good one.” Happily, she walks over to Josh, who is controlling the karaoke equipment, and tells him, “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough.” Yawning again, Jared doesn’t even notice that the music has started, until Madeline is motioning for him to join her. Finally, he begins singing, with very little enthusiasm. When Madeline sings, she is very energetic and confident, which makes Rebekah smile, so Jared perks up and sings with more vivacity. Throughout the rest of the song, both Jared and Madeline enjoy themselves and put on a very entertaining performance, making their friends get into it with them.

When the song ends, Maggie and Rion sing, “My Endless Love.” Seeing how happy and in love Maggie and Rion are, all of their friends smile, while Rebekah and Madeline tear up at the sight.

At the end of the song, Madeline announces, “It’s your turn, Bekks and Darrick. And it better be good after Jared’s and my performance and that lovely number by the newlyweds.”

Smiling, Darrick and Rebekah shake their heads, then walk up to the microphone and look at songs together, while Rebekah tries to push back her anxiety about performing in front of everyone. As they look at the songs together, Rebekah suggests, “What about this one?”

“That’s a good one,” Darrick agrees, then says loud enough for their friends to hear, “We can dance as well to that and show these loser friends of ours who the king and queen of karaoke are.”

“Okay,” Rebekah says, nervously, knowing how energetic Darrick can be when he dances, especially if he is feeling the need to show off. “Can we do the unique one by Michael Bublé please? I like that one more.”

“Whatever you want, babe,” Darrick declares, smiling at her. After Darrick tells Josh the song, he goes back and stands by Rebekah, but just before the music starts, he gets a text message and regretfully states, “Bekka, I’m sorry. I have to go. It’s Darron. He’s in the hospital.”

“Oh no!” Rebekah remarks, compassionately. “I hope he’s okay. Would you like me to come with you?”

“No,” Darrick tells her. “You stay here and have fun. You can show everyone here what a beautiful voice you have.”

“You’ve heard me sing?” Rebekah panics.

“Yeah,” Darrick answers, smiling. “You don’t even realize you start singing when you hear a song you like, do you?”

“I do?” Rebekah queries, feeling the fire of embarrassment in her cheeks.

“Yeah,” Darrick responds, laughing.

“You think my singing is beautiful?” implores Rebekah.

“Yeah, babe. So, sing for me.”

“I don’t know,” Rebekah expresses, hesitantly.

“Please babe, for me,” Darrick begs with puppy eyes, so Rebekah nods. “Hey, guys, will you film it? I want to see my girl show all of you who’s the best.” As everyone else shakes their heads and laughs, Darrick kisses Rebekah, then tells her, “I’ll call you later, okay babe?”

“Okay,” Rebekah says, as he kisses her hand, before leaving. Once he’s gone, Josh asks if Rebekah’s ready to sing, to which

she replies, "Wait, Josh. This is a duet. Maybe I should sing a song that's actually a solo or at least one that can be sung as a solo. Just give me a minute to find one I think I can sing."

Nervously, Rebekah tries to find a song from the list, while feeling heat pour out of her bright red cheeks, knowing that everyone is watching her. Unable to hold back his desire to be there for her, Jared rushes up next to her and requests, "Just play the song she was going to sing, Josh." Looking at Rebekah, who is stunned, Jared assures her, "I'm here for you, Bekka."

Quietly, Rebekah tells him, "Thanks, Jared."

"No problem," he expresses, grinning at her, as the music starts playing. "Oh, it's this song? 'Baby, It's Cold Outside.'"

"Having regrets?"

"Not at all," he replies, just before Rebekah begins singing and he joins in. At first, she is very shy and not sure where to look, until Jared pulls her head up by her chin to look at him, giving her a very reassuring smile. Gratefully, she grins back at him and starts singing and dancing, as if no one else is there, causing everyone in the audience to cheer, watching them perform. Per Darrick's request, Maggie also films it, which makes Madeline a little nervous when she thinks about Darrick's reaction.

When Jared and Rebekah end the song, he spins her, then pulls her close and kisses her cheek, as she says, "Thank you, Jared."

"No problem, Bekka," Jared remarks, out of breath.

"Are you okay? You're out of breath."

"Yeah," he replies. "That was just exhilarating! I mean fun. It's just been an exhausting day."

"Oh, sorry," she expresses. "Should we let some other people sing now?"

“Yeah,” he answers, laughing, then offers his hand to help her walk down off the small platform stage and escort her back to her seat, which he moves next to Madeline, so she’s not sitting alone.



After they finish at karaoke night, Jared walks Rebekah and Madeline home, where Rebekah goes into her room to call Darrick. When she’s done, she comes out of her room, just as Jared is telling Madeline a joke, saying, “A Russian man came to the U.S. and became a citizen. He read the constitution and became excited. He was arrested at the zoo with a machete. When questioned, he said ‘I have right to bare arms. I was getting bear arms.’”

Hearing this, both Rebekah and Madeline laugh. When Jared and Madeline realize Rebekah is standing outside her room, Rebekah beseeches, “Am I interrupting?”

“Not at all,” Jared responds, smiling. “How’s Darrick’s brother?”

“He’ll be okay,” Rebekah announces. “He got shot, working a case today.”

“He’s FBI, right?” Jared inquires.

“Yeah,” Madeline replies. “Was it bad, Bekks?”

“Darrick said it could have been worse,” explains Rebekah. “He was really lucky.”

“That’s good to hear,” Jared declares. “I’ll text Darrick later, make sure he’s doing okay.”

“You know, Jared,” Rebekah says, “I’m glad you and he were able to fix whatever was going on with you two.”

“Darrick and I are friends, Rebekah,” Jared exclaims. “We may have our differences, but we surprisingly have a lot in common.”

“Like you’re both cops?”

“It’s more than us just being law enforcement, Bekka,” Jared clarifies. “We both are police officers for the right reasons to serve and protect others. Not all officers do. That’s why I was so surprised he left you that night. I see him when he’s out in the field. He’s almost like a different person than what we see a lot of the time. He goes out of his way all the time to protect and serve people. He may make mistakes in his personal life sometimes, but when he’s on the job, he is very dedicated to doing everything right.”

“You know, I’ve noticed since becoming a cop,” Madeline adds, “Darrick is actually serious about things. He never used to be serious about anything. Now he’s serious about a lot of things. Honestly, I thought he would quit shortly after he started. I know when Mac, his dad, told him he wanted him to do something with his life, he was hoping he would get more involved with his business. He did the same thing with Darron, who also decided to go into law enforcement.”

“It’s surprising they both stuck with it,” Rebekah points out. “So, what else do you have in common with Darrick, Jared?”

“Oh,” Jared utters. “Well, we both had similar lifestyles growing up.”

“Seriously?” Madeline scoffs. “How is that possible?”

“My stepdad was really wealthy and threw a lot of fancy parties, like Darrick’s dad,” Jared explains. “At least, his dad’s parties are for a good cause, though. But let’s just say, my stepdad had a lot of money that he basically threw around. Essentially, I could have anything I wanted. I could have multiple video game systems and the best stuff money could buy. I also went to the best prep schools, like Darrick, which reminds me; I’ve always wondered how you all met, if you didn’t go to school together. I

know Garrett knew Darron, but I thought Darrick went to prep schools from the beginning. And you both went to public school, right?"

"Yeah," answers Rebekah. "We did."

"Before Mac made all his money, Darrick lived across the street from Rion," Madeline expounds, "And became friends, then somehow stayed friends, even after Darrick and his family moved and Darrick was forced to go to prep school, which didn't happen until I believe second grade if I remember correctly. We all lived in the neighborhood."

"Garrett said that their dad didn't start out rich," Jared remarks.

"No," Madeline says, shaking her head. "Did your stepdad start out rich or was your dad rich?"

"No," Jared declares. "My dad was a police officer, and my stepdad made his money through... illegal means."

"Do you miss it, Jared?" Rebekah queries, feeling concern for him. "Having all that wealth?"

"It may have its appeal," Jared admits, "But I'd rather be out of my stepdad's life than have all the comforts in the world."

"I'm sorry, Jared," Rebekah consoles him.

"Me, too," Madeline declares. "I had no idea."

"I'm fine, you two," Jared assures them. "I have a really good life now. I have you and our friends. My family. And I am a police officer, which I wanted to do my entire life, like my dad. I can't complain, especially because I know things could be so much worse."

"How do you stay so positive, Jared?" Rebekah asks him.

"How could I not be?" Jared exclaims. "I have you in my life."

“Me?” queries Rebekah.

“Both... of you,” Jared stammers, causing Madeline to stifle a laugh. “I have really good friends.”

Feeling awkward, Rebekah asks Madeline, “Hey, Madds, are we still going to bake cookies tonight? Or would you rather tomorrow since Jared is here?”

“You’re cooking for other people now?” Jared inquires, happily.

“You encouraged me to, and you were right.”

“About what?” Jared queries.

“Cooking with you gave me more confidence,” Rebekah declares.

“I’m glad,” Jared states, smiling “Well, I don’t want to ruin your plans, so I can go ahead and go home.”

“No,” Rebekah counters. “I don’t want to make you leave.”

“Bekka, it’s fi-”

“Guys, stop,” Madeline interrupts Jared. “Why don’t you stay and make the cookies with us, Jared? I mean, you’ve cooked here many times before. You know your way around the kitchen.”

“Only if it’s okay with Bekka,” Jared remarks.

“Of course, it is,” Rebekah enthuses, making him smile.

“Okay,” Jared accepts, then follows them into the kitchen.

After they begin baking the cookies, Madeline ends up spilling almost a whole bag of flour on herself, causing Rebekah and Jared to laugh. “You think this is funny?” Madeline exclaims. Noticing Madeline is smiling, Rebekah and Jared nod. “Well, let’s see if you think this is funny.” With that, Madeline takes

some of the remaining flour out of the bag and throws some at Rebekah and then at Jared. Immediately, they take cover behind the counters and grab some flour as well from the counter and another bag, then throw some at Madeline and at each other, until they are all having what seems like a snowball fight in the kitchen. Finally, they stop, and Madeline announces, "Considering, I'm a white flour beast, I'm going to go get cleaned up. Why don't you two finish the cookies? That is if there is enough flour left." As Madeline brushes herself off, they all laugh, before Madeline goes into her room.

Once she is in her room, Jared and Rebekah brush themselves off too, and Jared declares, "I can buy you some flour, Bekka."

"Don't worry about it, Jared," she says, while grinning from ear to ear. "It was worth every spec of flour. In fact, I think I'm going to use the rest, but not for cookies."

"What are you going to use it for?"

"Who said the fight was over?" Rebekah smirks, causing Jared to smile at her curiously, then realizes what she is thinking when she picks up some flour. Laughing, he rushes to the other side of the kitchen and grabs some flour, while trying to duck for cover, as she throws flour at him. Eventually, there is no flour left to throw, so they just sit on the floor next to each other and laugh. "That was fun!" Rebekah exclaims, trying to catch her breath from laughing.

"Yeah, it was," Jared agrees, also trying to catch his breath, then gazes at her. Breaking his gaze, Jared states, "I'll help you clean up the kitchen, Bekka."

"You don't need to do that," she assures him.

"Sure, I do," he exclaims, standing up, then offers his hand to help her stand. Happily, she grabs his hand and allows him to help her up. Then, they both clean up the kitchen.

As they're cleaning, Rebekah asks, "Can I ask you a question, Jared? Why are you dating Madds? I know what she said, but you said you couldn't commit to anyone."

Sighing, Jared states, "What she said was the truth. She suggested I needed some distractions in my life."

Anxiously, Rebekah beseeches, "Does that mean you're-?"

Hastily, he responds, "No, and I don't plan to. I don't plan on this going anywhere. I can't commit to her, and I would never be with someone like that without being committed to them. Does that make sense?" Pushing back some tears, she nods. "Did it... are you... bothered by us being together?"

"Well," utters Rebekah, nervously, then sighs. "No. Jared, I want you to be happy. If she makes you happy, then who am I to stand in your way?"

"That's how I feel about you and Darrick."

"Me and Darrick?" questions Rebekah, as Jared closes his eyes in disbelief over his comment. "Do you have a problem with Darrick and me being together?"

"No. I don't know why I said that. Just tired, I guess."

"You should go get some rest then, Jared," Rebekah suggests. "It's mostly cleaned up."

"I do have to work tomorrow," he announces. "Hopefully, it's not another day like today."

"What was so bad about today?"

"I can't really talk about it. It was just a difficult day."

"I'm sorry, and I'm sorry for asking such a personal question. It's just you don't seem like the kind of guy to do that with someone, unless you're serious with them, which I respect a lot. Darrick and I don't do... that... either. I know he's used to doing

that, but I'm not. That's why I asked you, because I know Madds does, but that is kind of a personal question."

"No worries," he assures her, before kissing her cheek, making her smile. "I'll see you later, Bekka."

"See you," Rebekah says, looking at him, as he starts walking away, then notices all the flour on him. "Oh, no!"

"What is it, Bekka?" Jared implores, turning back.

"You're covered in flour," Rebekah points out, causing Jared to laugh. "It just dawned on me that you have to go home looking like that. I'm so sorry, Jared."

"It's okay, Bekka," he assures her, stifling his laughter. "I think I'll survive."

"At least let me help you get some of it cleaned off," pleads Rebekah, as she begins patting his clothes trying to brush the flour off, then laughs. "This isn't doing any good."

"Its fine, Bekka."

"Here," utters Rebekah, placing her hands on his head. "At least let me try to get it out of your hair." With that, she swishes his hair around. "Great! Now I've messed up your hair even more. Why don't we try some water?"

"Bekka, it's really..." Before Jared finishes his statement, Rebekah has the sprayer on from the kitchen sink and ends up spraying him in the face.

"Oh, no!" Rebekah shrieks, shutting off the water. "Jared, I am so sorry."

After wiping his lips and the watery flour from his eyes, he enthuses, "You know, Bekka, I'm starting to think you're doing this on purpose."

“No, I’m not,” she argues, feeling her cheeks start to heat up. “I promise.”

“Well, either way I think I know a way to make up for it or at least help you not feel so embarrassed,” exclaims Jared.

“How?” she asks, as he smiles coyly at her, then quickly grabs the sprayer from her and sprays her back, causing her to shield her face and squeal, “Jared!” Finally, she grabs the sprayer to try to get it back from him and ends up slipping on the water that’s on the floor.

Immediately, Jared puts his hand around her waist to try to catch her but ends up falling and landing on top of her. “Bekka, are you okay?” panics Jared. “Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m fine,” she answers. “Are you?”

“I’m fine,” he states. “Are you sure you’re okay? You didn’t hit your head or-”

“I’m fine, Jared, really,” she interrupts him. “I’m just embarrassed. I’m such a clutz. I ruin every good moment.”

“What are you talking about, Bekka?” he exhorts. “You don’t ruin anything.”

“Well, first I ended up spraying you, which I promise you was an accident.”

“I believe you.”

“Then, when you were trying to make me feel better,” she adds, “I go and slip, spoiling all the fun.”

“Bekka, you didn’t spoil anything. There’s no way you could. You’re too amazing! You make everything better, not worse.” While Jared gazes down at her, Rebekah smiles lightly at him, until Jared vocalizes, “I should get off of you. Sorry, Bekka.”

“It’s alright,” she assures him, as he stands up.

When she tries to stand up, he stops her and suggests, "Let me help you."

"Okay," she accepts, as he bends down and holds her arms with his to gently lift her. Just before she stands up all the way, she slips trying to get her footing, but he catches her and notices she is biting her lip to deal with her anxiety at almost falling again. Seeing this, he begins to breathe heavily and, without thinking, slowly leans in closer, until there is a knock at the door.

Quickly, he shakes his head to focus, then asks her, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," she responds. "Thank you, Jared."

"Of course," he states. "Why don't you get the door? And I'll clean up the water in here, okay?"

"Okay," she says, then walks to the door, while Jared starts cleaning.

When the door opens, Jared hears Darrick say, "Hey Bekka." Hearing Darrick, Jared closes his eyes and sighs with guilt, thinking about how he almost kissed Rebekah, just because she bit her lip. "Bekka, why are you—" Darrick goes to ask, as he walks in, but stops when he sees Jared. "Jared? What are you doing here? And why are you both covered in water? And what is this? Flour?"

Anxiously, Jared tries to think of an explanation, until Rebekah explains, "We were making cookies with Madds and ended up getting into a flour fight, I guess. Now, we're all covered, except Madds. I think she went to take a shower."

Just then, Madeline walks in and utters, "Hey, Darrick. How's Darron?"

"Is this true, Madeline?" Darrick inquires, bitterly. "Were you all making cookies and got covered in flour and water?"

“You don't believe me, Darrick?” Rebekah queries, feeling hurt.

“Madeline,” Darrick presses.

“Yeah, Darrick,” Madeline answers. “At least about the flour. I'm not sure about the water. It must have happened when they cleaned up the kitchen. I can see Jared is still cleaning it up. Thanks Jared.” With that, Madeline walks over to Jared and kisses him, taking him and Rebekah by surprise. “But you should probably get going, babe. You have to work tomorrow, right?”

“Right,” Jared states, trying to wrap his head around the kiss.

“I'll walk you out,” Madeline says.

“In that?” Rebekah remarks, looking at Madeline's short silk pajama bottoms and tank top.

“I'll just walk him to the door downstairs, Bekks,” Madeline assures her, as she takes Jared's arm and pulls him out of the apartment.

Once the door shuts, Rebekah suggests, “Darrick, I think it's best if you leave too. Don't you have to work early in the morning?”

“Yeah,” Darrick confirms, then gets closer to her. “But what if I stay here?”

“Why?”

While wrapping his arms around her, he explains, “So I can be with my girl.”

“What do you mean?” exhorts Rebekah, then smells alcohol on his breath. “Have you been drinking?”

“Maybe a little,” Darrick tells her, pulling her closer.

“You promised!”

“Bekka, come on.”

“No, Darrick,” contends Rebekah. “I really think you should leave.”

“Why?”

“You’re not acting like yourself,” Rebekah points out, “And I don’t like it.”

“Bekka, please don’t make me leave. I need you.”

“For what? Because if you’re going to tell me that you need me for that, then the answer is no. I’m still not ready, and I would never want to be with someone, while they’re too drunk to make a rational decision. Now, do I need to call someone to come get you?”

“You could take me home,” he suggests, smiling.

Tearing up, Rebekah begs, “Darrick, please just go, and leave me alone.”

Suddenly, the door opens, and Jared storms in and charges Darrick. After pulling him away from Rebekah, Jared shoves him up against the wall and punches him in the face.

Meanwhile, Rebekah and Madeline shout, “Jared, stop!”

Not listening to them, Jared punches Darrick in the stomach, while Madeline pleads, “Jared, stop it! You’re going to kill him.” Furiously, Darrick tries to punch back, but Jared ducks, dodging the punch. Still enraged, Jared hangs on to Darrick by his shoulders and goes to knee him in the groin, as Rebekah and Madeline work together to pull him away.

“Please stop, Jared,” Rebekah cries, while Madeline stands between Jared and Darrick.

“Why?” Jared asks, angrily. “He deserves it! I guess I was wrong about him. The Darrick I thought I knew would never do this.”

“He wouldn’t,” Rebekah confirms.

“Jared, Bekks is right,” Madeline explains. “Darrick wouldn’t. You must have misheard. We only heard what Bekks said, not Darrick, who would be furious at himself if he did.”

“He should be furious at himself,” Jared states, “For even attempting.”

“You don’t understand what happened, Jared,” Rebekah persists. “He’s just drunk and not acting like himself, but Darrick would never. I can promise you that.”

“How do you know?” implores Jared, still feeling infuriated.

“Because he stopped a guy from doing the same thing to me when I was in high school,” Rebekah reveals. “He protected me.”

“Bekka, I had no idea that happened to you,” Jared says, softening and letting go of Darrick. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Rebekah assures him, as Darrick stumbles to the floor. “I don’t exactly talk about it, because it was terrifying, and I had to go through therapy because of it.” Still looking at Jared, who still looks somewhat enraged but has tears forming in his eyes, Rebekah requests, “Madds, could you please take Darrick home?”

Silently, Madeline nods, then rushes into her room, grabbing some pants and her purse. As soon as she finishes, she runs back in and pulls Darrick out of the apartment, as he asks with a slurred speech, “Did I win?”

“Shut up, Darrick!” demands Madeline, as she yanks him out the door and shuts it, before he has a chance to say or do anything else.

“Are you alright, Bekka?” Jared asks after the door shuts.

"I'm fine, Jared," she responds, a little annoyance in her tone. "I'm only upset because he was drunk and not acting like himself."

"I'm sorry," Jared says, regretfully.

"Why were you so angry?" beseeches Rebekah. "I know you and I are friends and you're a protective person, but there's more to it. I can see it in your eyes."

After some silence, Jared reveals, "Someone from my past, who meant a lot to me, was forced to—"

"Oh, Jared, I am so sorry," Rebekah imparts, seeing his glossy eyes. "Who?"

"I can't tell you that," Jared says, not looking her in the eye.

Full of compassion for him, Rebekah pulls him in for an embrace and assures him, "You don't have to. I'm sorry that your past has such heartbreak in it."

"I'm sorry yours does too, Bekka," Jared points out, looking at her. "Would you like to talk about it?"

"It's just like I said. My prom date wanted more than just a dance. Thankfully, my friends were nearby, and Darrick was the one who made sure I got out of there safely, before anything happened. I think I knew in that moment that I wanted to be his girlfriend."

"I am sorry. That must have been terrifying."

"It was," she confirms, sniffing. "Look. I think I'm emotionally spent for the night. Do you think we could call it a night?"

"Of course. Good night."

"Good night," she states, as Jared walks out. Then, she shuts the door and locks it, before she starts sobbing, which Jared hears

through the door. Even though he wants to comfort her, he chooses to respect her wishes and leaves.



“What do you want, Darrick?” Rebekah asks with agitation when she opens her front door the next morning and sees Darrick standing there with a bouquet of roses.

“Bekka, I am so sorry,” he states. “My behavior last night was inexcusable.”

“You were drunk!” Rebekah states. “And you promised me you wouldn’t be like that around me anymore.”

“I know,” Darrick confesses. “I have no excuse. I’m just so glad I didn’t do anything. I didn’t hurt you, did I? I didn’t try to-”

“No. You wanted it, but you didn’t push. ‘Course I didn’t really give you an option to.”

“Good.”

“You want to tell me why were you drinking last night?” Rebekah asks, as she takes the flowers and walks inside with them. “I thought you were at the hospital with Darron.”

“I was,” he tells her, as he shuts the door behind him. “But when I left, I don’t know. I just felt the need for a drink or several actually.”

“Because of Darron getting hurt?”

“I don’t know,” Darrick states, causing Rebekah to roll her eyes. “Bekka, is something wrong?”

“Yes. This. Us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look, Darrick, if you want this to work,” she says, trying to remain calm, “You have to open up to me and talk to me about what’s bothering you. Stop turning to the bottle for answers, because it’s not going to give you any. Instead, it’s just going to make you do things you’ll regret.”

“You’re right. I’ll work on it.”

“Good,” she says, while putting the flowers in a vase she just filled up with water. “So, about Darron. Were you upset last night?”

“I guess,” he replies, making her roll her eyes again. “I’m sorry, Bekka. I’m not good at this, but I will try for you. Yes, I was upset. And so was Mac. He was so angry. He yelled at us both, saying we should have just joined him at work, so we could take over the business one day. But we both enjoy being in law enforcement. And honestly, I can’t tell you why. It’s not easy, and we’ve both been shot. Darron’s been shot twice. Granted, the first time was before he joined the FBI, but that didn’t stop him from joining. We both have kept going back for more. It’s like we’re a glutton for punishment.” Hearing Darrick finally open up, Rebekah lightly smiles, until he adds, “There’s something else too.”

“What?” implores Rebekah.

“Maggie sent me the video of you and Jared singing,” announces Darrick. “I have to admit when I saw you having such a good time, it really upset me, not because I don’t want you to have a good time. But you were having a good time with another man.”

“Darrick, listen to me,” she pleads, placing her hand on the back of his neck. “Jared and I are just friends. I am your girlfriend, and I am a loyal girlfriend. Sure, you make mistakes, but I’m not going anywhere. I promised you I wouldn’t. Plus, you stopped dating other women for me. Why would I go out with other men?”

“You really aren’t just going to take off?”

“No.”

“Thanks, Bekka.”

“For what?”

“For listening,” he answers, “And for reminding me that I have the most amazing girlfriend in the world. How could I not see how amazing you were before?”

“You charmer,” Rebekah smirks, lightly touching his cheek, before he pulls her closer by the waist and passionately kisses her. After they kiss for a while, Darrick lifts her up onto the counter, then continues kissing her, while she wraps her arms around his neck. A few moments later, Darrick wraps her legs around his waist, then lifts her up and carries her toward her bedroom. Still kissing her, Darrick opens the door and walks in, shutting the door behind him, before laying her on the bed.

“Darrick!” Rebekah shouts, as he lays on top of her.

“What, Bekka?”

“What are you doing?”

“What do you think I’m doing?” asks Darrick, smiling down at her and resting his hand on her waist. “We’ve been together for months. I’ve never dated a woman this long without doing this. To be honest, I’ve never dated a woman this long. You’re special, Bekka, and I want to show you that. Wouldn’t you like me to show you?”

“Darrick, you said you’d never make me do this,” Rebekah reminds him, sitting up, making him sit up as well.

“I’m not, Bekka,” he states, placing his hand on her cheek, kindly. “I’m only asking if you want to.”

Standing up, Rebekah utters, “Listen to me, Darrick. I really like you... a lot.”

“I know,” he says, playfully, causing her to smile and roll her eyes. “I like you a lot too, which I have to say took me by surprise. I really thought you would have left me by now.”

“Darrick, I’m committed to you, but the thing is, I’m not in love with you... yet. Maybe someday, but I want to be in love and preferably married, Darrick, before I do that with a man. Can you please respect that?”

Feeling frustrated, Darrick sighs, but then nods his head and replies, “Okay. I’ll do that for you, Bekka.”

“Thank you, Darrick.”

“Well, I would say that it’s not a problem,” he smirks, “But-”

Blushing a little, Rebekah tells him again, “Thank you.”

“What are you thanking me for?” questions Darrick, smiling.

“You said you wanted to show me that I’m special,” Rebekah remarks. “And you did that by respecting my wishes, even though you clearly want to.”

After clearing his throat and standing up, Darrick confesses, “I do care about you, Bekka. You just can be a little bewildering at times.”

“Do you not like that?”

“I never said that,” he states, then kisses her delicately, but pulls back afterwards. “However, would you mind if we did something to distract ourselves?”

“Not at all,” she replies. “Movie?”

“Sure,” he answers, before they walk out to the couch and sit together. After grabbing the remote, Rebekah scoots closer to Darrick and tries to cuddle with him, which seems to make him uncomfortable, so she stops and just turns the TV on.





Chapter 9

“Hey, Jared,” says Darrick, breaking the silence at work the next day, while they’re waiting for their equipment.

“Hey.”

“I wanted to thank you for what you did last night.”

“Punching you in the eye?”

Laughing a little, Darrick confirms, “Actually, yes. I don’t really remember a lot about last night. All I know is you thought I was going to hurt Bekka, and you stopped me. Since I don’t remember much, I have no idea what I would have done. If I had forced her-”

“Yeah,” Jared utters. “Honestly, that’s what I thought you were doing, and I have to say if you had been and I had gotten there too late, I don’t think I could have stopped myself-” For a moment, Jared stops, then adds, as quietly as possible, “From killing you.”

“And you’d have every right,” Darrick concurs.

“If you believe that, why do drink so much knowing that it changes your behavior?”

“I don’t know,” Darrick stammers. “All I know is when I drink that much, I become a different person, and I hate the man I become.”

“Then why do it?” Jared queries, his voice raising.

“I don’t know,” Darrick replies, sighing. “I guess it makes me forget.”

“About what? Your life is amazing! You can have anything you want, any woman you want. You have a beautiful girlfriend, who is loyal and kind and practically worships the ground you walk on. You have more money than you know what to do with. What is so bad that you want to forget about?”

“Look, my life isn't as glamorous as it looks, okay?” Darrick exclaims, testily. “I have problems, just like everyone else does.”

“Like what?”

“Like the fact that my mom left my brother and me when I was only three,” Darrick blurts out, unintentionally, “And Mac, my father, even though doesn't act like one, is more interested in women, parties, and money than his own sons. Then, there's my brother, Darron, who stays out of our lives as much as he possibly can, because of it. I don't have a family. I thought you, of all people, would understand that, having lost your family.”

“You're right, Darrick,” Jared states, calming down. “I do get it, but I don't turn to alcohol to deal with that or any of my other problems. Look, I'm sorry for what I said about you having problems. The truth is your drinking-”

“I know,” Darrick imparts. “I just, sometimes I need to forget, but I'll avoid being around others, at least Bekka, when I do.”

“I guess I can live with that. Have you talked to Bekka about last night?”

“Yeah,” Darrick replies. “She is so amazing, so forgiving. I thought she would have been long gone by now, but she sticks by me no matter what. I don't even know how to describe-”

“Are you in love?”

“I don't believe in love,” Darrick confesses.

“You don't?”

“No,” Darrick responds. “To be honest, it’s just- this is the first serious relationship I’ve ever been in, and the woman I’m with is so incredible. I can’t believe I never saw it before.”

“I’ve known it from the moment I met her,” Jared declares, happily. “She’s the best friend I have ever had. If someone were to hurt her-”

“Same.”

Just then, Raquel walks up with Alex, who barks, “What’s taking so long?”

“Sorry, sir,” Darrick says, picking up his equipment. “Just finishing up.”

“Same here, sir,” Jared states, picking up his equipment as well.

“Are you two fighting again?” Raquel asks.

“No, ma’am,” Jared answers.

“In that case,” Alex bellows, “To the shops, boots! Chop! Chop!” Immediately, Jared and Darrick rush to their two patrol cars with their equipment, while Alex and Raquel smile and shake their heads. Sighing, Alex remarks sarcastically, “They grow up so fast.” Hearing this, Raquel laughs and walks with him, following Jared and Darrick.



“Not again!” Alex barks, as he and Darrick walk outside of a convenient store.

“That’s the fifth false report this morning, sir,” Darrick points out.

“I know!” Alex snaps. “What is going on?”

Just then, Jared and Raquel pull up in their patrol car, then get out, before Alex inquires, "You guys getting false reports as well?"

"Yup!" yaps Raquel.

"Just like yesterday," adds Jared, "And the day before that."

"What is going on?" Darrick asks, then hears the radio again. "You think that's real, sir?"

"Whether it is or not, boot," Alex states, "We have to check it out." Pulling his radio up, Alex responds, before another crime is reported over the radio, which Raquel responds to. As Raquel and Alex go to get in their cars, they see Jared and Darrick just standing there. "You stuck, boot?" shouts Alex.

"No, sir," Darrick replies. "It's just, those crimes are really close to each other."

"So?" snarls Alex.

"Listen to the radio again," Jared suggests. After they listen, Jared points out, "There's another one in the same area. All of the crimes reported have gotten closer to that area of the city."

"Something's going to happen there," announces Raquel, to which Jared and Darrick nod.

"Only we can't call it in over the radio," Alex contends, irritably. "We can barely get a word in. Besides, whoever is behind this might have access to our radios."

"I'll call Chief," Darrick announces. "He knows everyone. He'll know how to get the help we need."

With that, they all get in their cars. As each new crime is reported, Jared marks on a map where it is, since Raquel is driving. After hearing several crimes, Jared notices a circle and

states, "I know where it's going down, ma'am. Whatever is happening, it's happening at the promenade area."

"That's going to be filled with tons of people," Raquel divulges. "Call MacDonald. Tell him what you found, so he can update Chief."



Once Jared and Raquel arrive at the promenade along with Darrick and Alex, they see hundreds of people, eating and shopping, causing Alex to declare, "We need to get these people out of here!"

Suddenly, Darrick panics, "It's the girls! What are they doing here?"

"It's lunchtime," Jared tells him. "This promenade is in between Bekka's and Maggie's work and the hospital Madeline works at."

"I'll go talk to them," Darrick says, nervously.

"Stay calm," Alex implores. "Don't give a lot of information away either. The last thing we need to do is cause a panic."

"I understand, sir," Darrick utters, then starts walking toward Rebekah, Madeline, and Maggie, while Jared reluctantly walks away to escort others out of the promenade.

"Darrick, what are you doing here?" queries Rebekah, smiling when she sees him.

"Hey, Bekka," says Darrick. "Madeline. Maggie."

"Hey, Darrick," expresses Maggie. "Bekks was just telling us how sweet you were yesterday. I have to say I'm impressed."

"Me too," adds Madeline.

Nervously, Darrick remarks, "That's great! Hey, don't you think it's time to get back to work, girls?"

"No," smirks Madeline. "We've only been here a few minutes, and we just got our food."

"Still," Darrick presses. "It's probably best if you guys leave."

"Why?" exhorts Rebekah. "Is something wrong?"

"I can't tell you that," Darrick states, anxiously. "But please leave."

Nervously, Rebekah, Madeline, and Maggie look at each other, then notice several people being escorted out, when suddenly Rion walks up in his firefighter gear and pleads, "You girls need to leave."

"What's going on, baby?" implores Maggie, standing up and walking closer to him.

"We're not sure," Rion states, "But something might happen, which means we need you to leave, until we know for sure the area is safe."

"Alright," accepts Maggie. "Let's go, girls." Apprehensively, Rebekah and Madeline walk over to Maggie, leaving their food behind. Looking back at Rion, Maggie begs, "Please be safe, honey."

"I will," Rion promises, before Maggie kisses him, while embracing him.

Pushing back her tears, Rebekah walks up to Darrick and goes to hug him as well, but Darrick stops her by pushing her arms away and tells her, "I'm sorry, Bekka. I can't, not while I'm working."

"Okay," submits Rebekah, struggling more not to cry. "Just be safe, okay?"

"I will," Darrick vows, then feels his phone buzz and quickly looks at it, then sees a text from Chief, causing his eyes to widen.

"What is it, Darrick?" beseeches Madeline, causing Maggie and Rion to stop kissing and look back at him.

"Rion," utters Darrick, causing Rion to rush over and look at the text on Darrick's phone.

Silently, Rion reads, "Bomb squad found a bomb at the North end of the promenade."

As dread paints Rion's face, he pleads with more intensity, "Girls, you need to get out of here now!"

Rapidly, Rebekah, Madeline, and Maggie run off together, before Jared walks up and inquires, "Did you get the girls to leave, MacDonald?"

"Yeah," Darrick responds. "They just left. How's the rest of the evacuation going?"

"Slowly," Jared answers. "There's so many people here."

"We need to hurry," Darrick remarks. "Apparently, there's a bomb at the North end of the promenade."

"Let's focus on that area-"

Interrupting Jared, Darrick commands, "Stop! They found more bombs."

"Where?" petitions Jared.

"The South end," Darrick replies, reading texts as they come in. "The West end, which is where we are. And the East end. They have every area covered on the promenade." Just then another text comes in, causing Darrick's face to go white, before expressing, "Oh no!"

"What, Darrick?" implores Rion.

“They found another bomb,” Darrick announces, “In the parking garage.”

“Is that where the girls went?” Jared panics, seeing terror cover Darrick’s and Rion’s faces, then sees both of them nod. Without hesitation, the three of them run toward the parking garage, just as Alex and Raquel run up.

“Boots, where are you going?” yells Alex, who Darrick and Jared ignore, as they continue running with Rion.

“Blake, we’ve got to get these people out of here!” Raquel reminds him. “Chief said that there were bombs all over the place.”

“At this point, we’re going to have to start a panic,” declares Alex.



Meanwhile, Jared, Darrick, and Rion arrive at the parking garage, where Jared exhorts, and “Do either of you know where they parked?”

“No,” Rion replies, all of them out of breath from running. “I’ll call Maggie. Jared, you call Madeline. Darrick, you call Bekka.”

After they all call, Jared announces, “No answer.”

“Same here,” Darrick adds.

“Maggie didn’t pick up either,” Rion tells them.

“Let’s split up,” Darrick suggests. “Text the others if you find them.” After they all nod at each other, they run off toward different sets of stairs.

On the third floor, Rion sees Maggie’s car in between two sets of stairs and sighs, then runs up to the car to see Maggie sitting in the driver’s seat, with the door open, appearing like she’s

struggling. “Maggie, what are you still doing here?” Rion implores.

Startled, Maggie looks back and tells him, “We got back to the car, but then Bekks realized her locket, her mother’s locket, had fallen off. I tried to stop her, but she said she had to go find it. She promised she’d be right back. I tried to go after her, but I had already buckled my seat belt, and now I can’t get it unbuckled.”

“What?” panics Rion, then looks around to see several cars blocking the way for Maggie to drive, some of them abandoned and others with drivers honking. “We need to get you out of here, baby.” Immediately, Rion leans over and attempts to unbuckle Maggie’s seatbelt, without messaging Jared or Darrick.



Simultaneously, Jared frantically looks for Rebekah, Madeline, and Maggie, when he spots a piece of familiar jewelry on the ground in front of the stairs. As he gets closer, he believes it's Rebekah’s locket. After picking it up, he opens to see a picture of Rebekah’s family from when she was little before her mom and brother died. Trying to remain calm, Jared starts heading up the stairs. Upon reaching the second floor, Jared hears moaning coming from further up the stairs. Nervously, he continues walking up the stairs, until he finds someone kneeling, going through a purse, in front of a body he can’t see very much of. Pulling out his weapon, Jared yells, “SMPD!” Hearing Jared, the suspect turns around and shoots a gun at him, knocking him down the stairs.



Back at Maggie’s car, Rion is still frantically trying to get her seatbelt undone, sweat pouring from him, despite the fact that his firefighter tunic is on the ground. Sighing, Maggie cries,

“Rion, you need to go find Bekks. She should have been back by now.”

“I’m not leaving you,” Rion rebuttals, adamantly.

“Rion, she could be hurt,” Maggie argues.

“And if I leave you, Maggie,” Rion contends, “You could die.”

“Why?”

“Because,” Rion says, out of breath from panicking, “Because there’s a bomb in the garage and a few more all over the promenade.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” exhorts Maggie.

“We didn’t want to worry you,” Rion declares.

“Well, I am worried now,” Maggie announces, angrily, “Especially for Bekks. Something must have happened to her. And if there’s a bomb, she’ll probably die. So, you need to go find her. I’ll keep working with the seatbelt.”

“I’m sorry, Margaret,” Rion expresses. “I know she’s your best friend, but you’re my wife. I’m not leaving you.”

“Then what are we going to do?”

“I have an idea,” Rion discloses, “But you’re not going to like it, because I don’t.”

“What?”



At the same moment in time, Jared is still laying on the ground, waking up from falling unconscious. Pushing past his pain, Jared gets up and heads back up the stairs to find Rebekah is the one laying on the ground. “Bekka!” Jared panics, rushing to her. As

soon as he reaches her, he kneels down and rubs the side of her face and forehead. "Bekka, are you okay?"

Moaning a little, Rebekah moves her head back and forth, trying to wake up, before uttering, "Jared?"

"I'm here," Jared tells her, still rubbing her face, as she opens her eyes. "What happened?"

"I ran back to look for my mom's locket, which fell off. Anyway, I think I tripped or slipped and fell down the stairs."

"I found your locket," Jared tells her, pulling her necklace out of his pocket to show her.

"Thank you, Jared, but I can't see it. My vision is too blurry, and ugh... my head is killing me."

"You probably have a concussion," Jared points out, before putting her necklace back in his pocket. "I'll hang on to your necklace for now. In the meantime, we need to get you out of here and get you to a hospital." With that, Jared lifts her into his arms, struggling from the pain, but he perseveres and heads back down the stairs.

Finally, Rebekah's vision clears to see Jared's bullet proof vest, causing her to panic, "Jared, you're bleeding!"



At the same time, Rion takes an ax out of the trunk of Maggie's car before walking back up to her. "You ready?" Rion asks Maggie.

"Are you?"

"No," Rion admits.

Noticing his anxiety, Maggie assures him, "I trust you, baby. You got this." After Maggie moves as far away from where the belt plugs in, Rion takes a deep breath before bending down.



In the meantime, Jared is still standing, holding Rebekah in his arms. Looking down at his vest, Jared sees blood dripping down onto it from where the bullet missed his vest, hitting his shoulder close to his neck. "I was wondering why it hurt so badly," Jared confesses.

"Jared, you need to put me down," Rebekah urges.

"No," he counters. "You hit your head. You may not be able to walk."

"And you're suffering from a gunshot wound. If you continue to carry me, you could pass out or die from blood loss."



Back at Maggie's car, Rion lets out a sigh of relief when he finally slices the seat belt without injuring Maggie, who also lets out a sigh of relief, as Rion drops the ax and rushes to help her move the seat belt, before pulling her up into his arms to embrace her. "We really need to get you out of here now," Rion states.

"And find Bekks," Maggie adds, as they hold each other's hands.



Meanwhile, Jared and Rebekah are still arguing. "Jared, you need to put me down!" Rebekah demands, trying to get out of his arms, causing him to hold tighter.

"Bekka, I can't," Jared contends, just as Rion and Maggie run down the stairs, stopping when they see them.

“What’s going on, guys?” Rion implores.

“Jared’s been shot,” Rebekah declares.

At the same time, Jared announces, “Bekka fell and hit her head.”

“Okay?” utters Rion.

Feeling his phone buzz, Jared tells everyone, “My phone’s going off. Rion, can you take Bekka?”

“Yeah,” Rion replies, as he carefully takes Rebekah from Jared.

Once Rion has Rebekah in his arms, Jared stumbles to the ground, causing Rebekah to shriek, “Jared!”

“I’m alright,” Jared struggles to say. “I’m just starting to feel weak.” Feeling his phone buzz again, Jared vocalizes, “My phone’s buzzing again. It might be Darrick. Maybe he found Madeline.”

“Where’s your phone, Jared?” question Maggie.

“In my right pant pocket to the side of my knee,” Jared responds, before Maggie pulls his phone out.

“It’s Darrick,” Maggie confirms. “Can I answer it?” After Jared nods, Maggie answers the phone. “Hey, Darrick. It’s Maggie. Did you find Madeline?”

“Yeah,” Darrick affirms. “She got out of here. I made sure of it.”

After letting out a sigh of solace, Maggie proclaims, “He found her. She’s safe.” Hearing this, everyone else sighs as well.

“Did anyone find Bekka?” implores Darrick. “And is Rion there?”

“We’re all here,” Maggie tells Darrick on the phone. “Bekks hit her head, and Jared’s been shot. We’re going to need some help.”

“Where are you?” Darrick beseeches.

“Middle of the parking garage,” Maggie explains. “Right by the middle stairs.”

“I’m on my way,” Darrick vows, earnestly, before hanging up and running to the middle of the parking garage. When he reaches them, he asks, “Is everyone alright?”

“Other than Jared getting shot,” Rebekah remarks.

“And Bekka falling and hitting her head,” adds Jared, feeling slightly woozy.

“Come on, buddy,” Darrick tells Jared, rushing to his side and helping him stand, while Maggie stands on the other side of Jared, assisting.

After the three of them are standing, Maggie looks at Darrick and exhorts, “Darrick, is that lipstick on your face? I’m pretty sure that’s the same shade Madds was wearing. Did you and Madds kiss?” Hearing this, everyone looks over at Darrick in shock, while he tries to hide his lips.

“What?” Rebekah cries.

“Why would you do that?” Jared beseeches.

“I’m sorry,” Darrick expresses. “It just happened. We both feel terrible. We don’t know what came over us. It probably was the intensity of the situation.”

“Seriously, Darrick?” barks Rion. “That’s your excuse?”

“How could you?” snaps Maggie.

“Guys, I’m sor-”

Interrupting Darrick is the sound of someone on a megaphone, stating, “Everyone needs to get out of the parking garage now!”

“We’re going to have to talk about this later,” Rion declares.

“And we will,” adds Maggie, before they all rush to an exit with Rion carrying Rebekah, while Darrick and Maggie help Jared walk.

Upon reaching the man with the megaphone outside, Darrick asks him, “Sir, what’s going on?”

“All the bombs have timers,” the man explains. “So far, we have been unsuccessful in our attempts to disarm them. The priority is to get everyone out.”

“How much time is left?” questions Rion.

“Less than three minutes,” announces the man, causing everyone’s eyes to widen.

Immediately, they all rush away, not stopping, until suddenly they hear an explosion and are pushed onto the ground. Looking back, Darrick watches with terror in his eyes, seeing the amount of destruction and fire. Finally, he utters, “Is everyone alright?”

Once everyone but Rebekah confirms they’re alright, Jared calls, “Bekka?”

After rushing to Rebekah, Darrick bends down, then turns her over and pleads, “Bekka, talk to me. Are you alright?”

“Is she alive?” panics Jared, while Rion attends to Maggie before watching Darrick and Rebekah, apprehensively.

Leaning down to check for a pulse and breathing, Darrick sighs upon feeling both, then confirms, “She’s alive.”

“We’ve got to get her to a hospital,” Jared urges.

“Yeah,” Darrick concurs.

“You too, Jared,” adds Rion, just as Alex and Raquel run up to them.

“Bentley! MacDonald!” shouts Raquel. “You two alright?”

“I’m fine, ma’am,” Darrick affirms. “Bentley’s been shot, and my girlfriend hit her head. She’s unconscious. They both need immediate medical attention.”

“Come on,” requests Alex, as he and Raquel rush to help Jared stand, then lead Darrick to where some ambulances are.

As Darrick gets in the ambulance with Rebekah, Jared pleads, “Let me know, MacDonald, and give her this.”

“I will,” Darrick promises, taking Rebekah’s locket, before sitting down in the ambulance and holding Rebekah’s hand. Once all the paramedics are inside, they shut the doors and head to the hospital. All the way there, Darrick frets, while trying to wrap his head around what just transpired.



Meanwhile, Jared is put in Kevin’s ambulance. When Kevin sees him, he asks, “How you feeling, Jared?”

“To be honest,” Jared utters, “Like death.”

“Gunshot wounds can feel that way,” Kevin remarks. “At least that’s what I’ve heard.”

“I wasn’t referring to the gunshot,” Jared contends. “I was talking about everything. Today really sucked, and Bekka... she’s hurt.”

“What?” yaps Kevin. “Is she alright?”

“She’s on her way to the hospital,” Jared announces. “She was unconscious. I have no idea. All I know is she was alive when they put her in the ambulance.”



A while later, Darrick walks out into the waiting room and notices the news on the TV, showing a giant ruby with blood dripping from it, near where the bombs went off, with a message, stating, “This is just the beginning.” Just then, he sees Madeline and inquires, “How’s Jared?”

“He’s doing good,” Madeline replies. “He’s in recovery. I just saw him. He’ll be getting out of recovery and into a room soon.”

“Good,” remarks Darrick.

“How’s Bekks?” asks Madeline.

“I’m not sure,” Darrick divulges. “Her brother won’t let me see her.”

“Seriously?” scoffs Madeline. “Let me talk to him.” With that, Madeline finds out where Rebekah’s room is, then rushes there, with Darrick following her. When they arrive, Garrett and Cherise are outside the room arguing, while Arthur shakes his head at them.

“I don’t care, Cherise!” Garrett barks. “Dad and I know what’s best for her.”

“Son,” Arthur interjects, “We may not like him, but she is an adult, not a little girl, and we have to respect her wishes.”

“He’s right, Garrett,” Cherise expresses. “She wants to see him.”

“Does that mean she’s awake?” beseeches Darrick.

“Yes, she is,” confirms Cherise, causing Garrett to roll his eyes. “The doctor wants her to stay overnight for observation, but he said she should recover soon.”

“Good,” Darrick states, letting out a sigh of relief.

“And she wants to see you,” Cherise tells Darrick, then stops Garrett from speaking, before adding, “And that’s her right.”

Begrudgingly, Garrett steps aside for Darrick to walk in, while Madeline proclaims, “My work here is done.” With that, she walks away, while Darrick cautiously walks inside Rebekah’s room, to see a few bandages on her head.

“Finally,” Rebekah remarks when she sees him.

Hearing her say this, Darrick sighs in relief, then shuts the door behind him, before walking up to Rebekah and hugging her, while asking, “How you doing, Bekka?”

“Fine,” Rebekah replies, then notices him trying not to look at her. “Sorry. I know this kind of knocked my prettiness out.”

“That’s not it,” Darrick rebuttals. “I just expected you to be mad at me after what happened with Madeline.”

“Darrick, we could have died today,” Rebekah points out, “And that made me realize that I can’t waste time being mad at some of the most important people in my life. I can’t be mad at you and Madds for kissing. I can’t be mad at Jared for refusing to listen to me earlier. And as much as I’d like to be mad at Garrett for his attitude toward you, I can’t, because life’s too short. Speaking of which, how is everyone?”

“Madeline, Maggie, and Rion are all safe,” Darrick expounds. “And I just found out that Jared is out of surgery and recovering well.”

“Good,” Rebekah says, softly, smiling slightly.

“Speaking of Jared,” adds Darrick, pulling out her necklace and handing it to her, “He asked me to give you this.”

“Thanks,” Rebekah exclaims, taking the locket. After some silence, Rebekah requests, “Can I ask you a question, Darrick?”

“Sure.”

“Would you rather be with Madds than me?” questions Rebekah, causing him to sigh. “Because if you do, I don’t want to stand in your way. I know you two have a lot of chemistry, as well as history-”

“If you’ll stop telling me about high school classes,” Darrick interrupts, making Rebekah laugh, “And let me answer, I will tell you that despite everything Madeline and I have been through- Actually, because of everything Madeline and I have been through, I wouldn’t rather be with her. As much as it looks like we work on the surface, we really don’t. In some ways, we’re too much alike, so no, I don’t want to be with her. That kiss didn’t mean anything, alright?”

“Alright,” accepts Rebekah. “So do you still want to be with me?”

“If you still want to be with me.”

“I’d like that,” Rebekah admits, shakily. “That is if you can look past all these bandages and marks on my face.”

“It’s not like they’ll be there forever, beautiful,” Darrick smirks, before kissing her.





Chapter 10

“Hey, Bekka,” says Jared, when she opens the door to her apartment.

“Hey, Jared,” utters Rebekah. “What are you doing here? Mads is working. Oh. Never mind. I forgot. You’re here to cook. You asked yesterday. Sorry. Come on in.”

“Is everything alright, Bekka?” questions Jared, as he walks in. “Would it be better if I came another day?”

“No,” replies Rebekah, while shutting and locking the door. “You’re fine. I just forgot.”

“Okay,” accepts Jared, who starts walking toward the kitchen, then notices Rebekah pacing slightly. “Bekka, are you sure you’re okay?”

After a pause, Rebekah concedes, “No, I’m not.”

“What is it?” implores Jared, walking up to her.

“I can’t tell you,” Rebekah confesses, sitting down on the couch. “I would if I could, but it’s not my news. How do you do this, Jared? How do you keep secrets all the time between work and your past?”

“It’s not always easy,” he admits, sitting next to her. “Is there anything you can tell me? You seem like you need to get something off your chest. If there is something you can talk about, I’m here for you.”

“Have you ever thought about children, Jared?” queries Rebekah.

“What do you mean?”

“Do you want children?” Rebekah clarifies.

“I’d love to have children one day,” Jared confesses, “But-”

“I know,” Rebekah imparts. “Let’s say you didn’t have the past that you did, and you were able to share your life with someone.”

“Okay?”

“What if you were told that you couldn’t have children?” implores Rebekah.

“Did you find out that you’re unable to have children, Bekka?” petitions Jared.

“No. This isn’t about me. I just know people who can’t, and it’s got me thinking, ‘What if I couldn’t for any number of reasons? What would I do? How far would I be willing to go? How much would I be willing to do?’ Have you ever thought about any of that?”

“To be honest,” states Jared, “As much as I would love to have a family, I don’t know if I ever will.”

“I know,” she says, sighing. “Maybe you aren’t the right person to ask. You’re just so easy to talk to.”

“You can talk to me, Bekka.”

“Thanks,” Rebekah expresses, tucking her hair behind her ear. “So, if you did find the right girl and married her, and you both decided you wanted children, but then found out you couldn’t, would you adopt? Would you consider surrogacy? Would you-”

“Bekka,” Jared interrupts, noticing Rebekah’s breathing getting shallower, “I honestly don’t know for sure. It would depend a lot on the woman. Would she be okay raising a child who wasn’t hers biologically? I would, but some people aren’t.”

“But what if you and your wife wanted a child of your own?”

Taking a deep breath, Jared explains, “If we had a friend we could trust, who would be willing to do that, which would be a miracle, because I’d be able to have a child with the woman I love.” After saying this, Jared clears his throat and states, “Sorry. That probably sounded really corny.”

“It didn’t,” Rebekah rebuttals, tearing up. “That was actually the perfect thing to say.”

“Why is this bothering you so much?” Jared implores. “Did something happen with you and Darrick?”

“I haven’t talked to Darrick or hardly anyone about this for that matter,” Rebekah confesses. “But on the subject of Darrick, I really don’t think he’s interested in a family.”

“Have you guys talked about it?”

“No,” replies Rebekah. “I think I’ve told you this before. Darrick and I don’t exactly talk that much. He was getting better, and then the attack on the promenade happened. He has been pretty distant since then. I’m wondering if he’s scared about progressing in our relationship.”

“He could be,” Jared concurs. “But to be honest, that day was very trying for everyone. All of the officers involved had to undergo mandatory counseling.”

“That makes sense.”

“So, is there anything else bothering you?” questions Jared.

“No. I’m good. Thanks for talking to me about it.”

“I’m always here for you, Bekka. You’re my best friend. You can talk to me about anything.”

“You can too,” Rebekah tells him, “If you want.”

"Thanks," Jared says, smiling, then stands up. "So, you hungry?"

"Actually, yes," Rebekah admits. "What you making?"

"Chicken pesto," announces Jared.

"Sound delicious!" enthuses Rebekah. "Want some help?"

"Of course," Jared tells her, as she stands up, then follows him into the kitchen.

While they're cooking, Rebekah inquires, "How's the apartment hunt going? Madds said you were trying to find a place, since your lease is almost up."

"I've found a few promising places," Jared states, "With excellent kitchens."

"That's cool," Rebekah exclaims. "So, does that mean you won't becoming over to cook?"

"Only if I'm not wanted," contends Jared.

"You are always welcome, Jared!"



"We're having a baby!" announces Maggie at Grif's with Rion, Darrick, Jared, Madeline, and Rebekah.

Rolling his eyes, while playing on his phone, Darrick questions, "Already?"

"Congratulations!" Jared declares, then realizes Madeline and Rebekah are both surprisingly quiet. "What's going on?"

"Bekka is actually carrying our baby!" Rion announces.

"What?" Darrick snaps, putting his phone down.

“Come again,” Jared presses.

“Did you sleep with my girlfriend, Rion?” Darrick barks.

When Rebekah hears how angry he is, she turns away to hide a stray tear escaping her eye, as Rion smirks, “Yup! Maggie would totally be okay with me sleeping with other people. You’re an idiot! It’s called in vitro, dude. Maybe you’ve heard of it.”

While Darrick looks at him with a stern look on his face, Maggie points out, “If you had shown up when we wanted to talk to you and Bekks, you would know what’s going on.” Trying to calm Maggie down, Rion rubs her back, while she takes a deep breath, before explaining, “When I was younger, I found out that, like my mom, I can’t have children without a lot of help. Madds has the same problem.” Looking over at Madeline, Jared notices she is looking down sad, so he hugs her from the side. “A doctor was able to help our mom, but it almost killed her. So, when Rion and I decided we wanted to have kids, we knew we’d have to adopt or have a surrogate. After the promenade attack, we decided we wanted to start and decided to try surrogacy, so we asked Bekks. Knowing how it could affect her life, she still selflessly agreed. So, Bekks is carrying our child.”

Hearing this, Jared sighs, and Darrick stands up angrily, as he speaks loudly, “Did no one think to ask me? Bekka is my girlfriend. Everyone’s going to think I wasn’t careful and knocked her up.” Unable to hide her heartbreak anymore, Rebekah’s eyes swell up with tears. Immediately, Jared reaches over to touch her hand, while Darrick continues ranting, “I have a reputation to uphold, which you have now blown to bits.”

“Yes, Darrick. I’m sorry we didn’t think of your reputation when we decided to have a baby!” Maggie barks back.

“Yeah, Darrick,” Rion adds, “You’re being an a-!”

“Guys!” Madeline interrupts. “I think you need to quiet down. People are staring.”

Just then, Grif walks up to them and asks them to be quiet or he'll have to ask them to leave. Everyone apologizes, except for Darrick, who storms out. After Darrick is gone, Maggie asks Rebekah, "Are you alright, Bekks?"

"I wish I could say, 'yes,'" Rebekah states, as she starts sobbing. "But I'm really not. It's not your fault though. I didn't think he'd be so upset."

"You don't need to apologize, Bekks," Maggie assures her, as she moves around to sit by Rebekah to hug her. "This isn't your fault. Maybe we shouldn't have asked you to-"

"No, Maggs," Rebekah interrupts her. "I told you I would do this, and I'm happy to help you both. I just wish I had my own boyfriend's support. He's just so angry lately, since the bombing, and this isn't going to help matters."

"He'll come around, Bekks," Rion declares. "Just give him some time."

Tearfully, Rebekah nods, as Madeline adds, "In the meantime, Bekks, we're all here for you. Right, Jared?"

"Of course, Rebekah," Jared states, smiling softly at her.

"Thank you," Rebekah cries, as Jared reaches across the table to hold Rebekah's hand again.

"I'm happy to help all of my friends," Jared declares, revealing the utmost devotion in his eyes, looking at Rebekah.

"Thanks, Jared," Madeline says, noticing how he's looking at Rebekah. "You're a good friend to everyone, but especially to Bekks."

"I'd do anything for her," Jared announces, gazing into Rebekah's eyes.



“Bekka, we need to talk!” Darrick bellows from outside her front door.

After Rebekah opens the door slightly, she asks, “What do you want, Darrick?”

“Bekka, I can’t believe you went through with this without my permission!” Darrick shouts, pushing his way into her apartment.

“Your permission?” she inquires, shutting and locking the door. “Why would I need your permission?”

“Because you’re my girlfriend!” he declares, agitation in his voice.

“Okay? But-”

“I’m not finished!” he interrupts. “You need to tell Maggie and Rion to get someone else to carry their baby!”

“What?” yaps Rebekah.

“You heard me! Get some-”

“Darrick!” she interrupts him, angrily. “I can’t do that! That’s not how it works! I’m already pregnant! I can’t just go back!”

“Then get an abortion!” he demands.

“What? There is no way I am getting an abortion!”

“Don’t you want us to be together?”

“Not if you’re demanding I commit murder of Rion and Maggie’s baby!” she bellows, furious tears building.

“Bekka,” he pleads, placing his hands on her arms. “I am begging you.”

Smelling alcohol on his breath, Rebekah asks, “Darrick, are you drunk? I thought you were going to stop drinking around m-”

“Don’t change the subject!” he interrupts, viciously.

“We will talk about this later,” she argues, angrily, “When you’re sober!” With that, she tries to walk away, but Darrick grabs her arm and pulls her back.

“No, Bekka!” Darrick demands, holding tightly to her arm.

“Darrick, you’re hurting me!” she screams, trying to pull away and ends up losing her balance, causing them both to fall.

Suddenly, Garrett runs in, finds Rebekah on the floor with Darrick trying to help her get up, and pushes him out of the way. “Rebekah, are you okay?” Garrett implores, then looks back at Darrick, lividly, before interrogating, “What did you do?”

“It was an accident!” Darrick declares, adamantly. “She just fell back.”

“I heard her say that you were hurting her!” Garrett barks, vicious anger in his eyes. “Did you push her?”

“Of course not!” Darrick retorts, while Garrett helps Rebekah sit up. “How did you even get in here? She locked the door.”

“I have a key, jacka-”

“Garrett!” Rebekah interrupts. “Calm down, okay? He was just holding on to me. I tried to back away and tripped. The only thing he’s guilty of is being drunk and clumsy.”

“You’re drunk?” Garrett asks, angrily. “You idiot! Do you have any idea how much you could have hurt her and the baby? Come on Bekk. We need to get you to the hospital.” As Garrett helps her stand up and walk to the door, Darrick tries to stop her,

causing Garrett to charge him and shove him up against the wall, then demand savagely, "Back off! And if you ever touch my sister again, I swear I will!"

"Garrett!" Rebekah shouts, after grabbing her purse off the counter. "Let's just go!"

Reluctantly, Garrett lets go of Darrick, who tells Rebekah, "Bekka, we're not done!"

"Yes, we are Darrick!" persists Rebekah. "And let me tell you, if anything happens to this baby because of this, Maggs and Rion will never forgive you! And if you don't stop this, you and I- We will be done."

"Why?" barks Darrick. "You were the one who fell!"

Hearing this, Garrett shoves Darrick out into the hallway, and demands, "Get out of here, and stay away from her!"

"Bekka?" Darrick presses.

"Just go, Darrick," she requests. Finally, Darrick gives in and leaves, followed by Rebekah and Garrett, who go to the hospital.



When they arrive at the hospital, Garrett demands Rebekah sit in a wheelchair and wheels her into the emergency room. Inside, Madeline sees them and rushes over after asking another nurse to take over her patient. "Bekks, what happened?" Madeline panics. "Are you okay? Is the baby okay?"

"Her loser boyfriend pushed her!" Garrett announces, angrily.

"Darrick?" Madeline questions, while getting Rebekah checked in.

“He didn’t push me!” Rebekah argues, when suddenly Rion and Maggie run in.

“Bekks, are you okay?” Maggie cries.

“Maggie got your text, Bekka,” states Rion. “What happened?”

“Darrick and I got into a fight,” Rebekah explains. “I’m sorry.”

“Bekka, this isn’t your fault,” Garrett assures her. “He pushed you.”

“He pushed you?” Rion barks, while Maggie gasps and grabs Rion’s arm.

“He didn’t push me,” Rebekah counters. “He grabbed my arms, and I tried to pull away and fell.”

“Why did he grab you?” inquires Maggie.

“Was he drunk, Bekka?” queries Rion, furiously.

“Yes,” Rebekah answers, sighing.

“I keep telling him he’s got to stop drinking so much,” Rion declares.

“He’s been drinking a lot more ever since that day the new mob attacked the promenade,” explains Madeline. “Plus, I know he’s unhappy about the pregnancy. That’s probably why he got drunk.”

“Is that what the fight was about, Bekks?” Maggie implores. As tears fill up her eyes, Rebekah nods. “Oh, I’m so sorry, Bekks. We never meant for this to-”

“It’s not your fault,” Rebekah imparts.

“She’s right,” Madeline agrees. “You guys have every right to have a baby, and it’s better to trust the person carrying your baby.”

“Hey, guys,” Jared says, having just arrived with Raquel and someone needing medical attention. “What’s going on?” As he walks closer to them, he sees Rebekah in the wheelchair and rushes to her. Bending down to her level and gently touching her arm, he anxiously asks, “Bekka, are you okay? What happened?”

“She and Darrick had a fight,” announces Madeline.

“What?” Jared snaps, looking at Madeline, then back at Rebekah. “What did he do? Did he hurt you?”

“He pushed her!” states Garrett again.

“What?” Jared inquires, more anxiety and anger building up.

“Quit saying that, Garrett!” Rebekah demands. “He didn’t push me! I fell when he wouldn’t let go of me.”

“He may as well have pushed you, Bekks,” declares Madeline. “Darrick was way out of line. This is his fault, not yours.”

“Yeah,” Maggie agrees.

“They’re right, Bekka,” says Rion. “And when I see him, I’m gonna give him a piece of my mind, and if something happens to our baby, he can consider our friendship over.”

“Rion, it was an accident,” Rebekah states. “He was drunk.”

“I’m with Rion in this one, Bekka,” announces Jared. “What Darrick did to you- it’s inexcusable. I know how loyal and forgiving you are, but what you are doing is enabling his bad behavior.”

“I do it all the time, and I don’t know how to stop,” Rebekah confesses, sighing. “I know he’s hurting, and I want to help him-”

“But you can’t save him,” Madeline imparts, compassionately. “Only he can do that.”

Just then, Jared notices Raquel gesturing for him and sighs, before saying, “Bekka, I really wish I could stay, but I have to get back to work.” Hearing this, Rebekah looks down sad, causing Jared too long to stay with her, so he assures her, “I’ll be by to check on you later, though, okay? And as soon as I get off work, we can do whatever you want or feel up to.”

Looking back at Jared with a smile, Rebekah reaches out and puts her hand on his cheek, then states, “You are such a good friend, Jared.” When she says this, Jared stands up, looks at Madeline, sighing, then walks away, causing Madeline to feel concern for him, while the others stick around to support Rebekah, who thankfully finds out that the baby is alright, as is she. Hearing this news, Garrett decides to head home.

After he leaves, Darrick shows up to her room and calls out, “Bekka?” Hearing his voice, Rion and Maggie flip their heads around to see Darrick carrying a bouquet of flowers just inside the doorway.

“What are you doing here, Darrick?” Rion exhorts, sternly.

“Madeline called me and left a message earlier,” Darrick announces. “I just thought I could... Is the baby okay? Are you okay, Bekka?”

“What do you care?” Maggie cries, angrily.

“Maggie, please,” Darrick implores.

“No, Darrick!” Rion snaps. “You have no right to be here. You could have really hurt Bekka and the baby.”

“So, they’re okay?” Darrick asks, letting out a sigh of relief.

“You really do feel bad, don’t you, Darrick?” inquires Rebekah.

“I may not agree with you being pregnant, Bekka,” Darrick states, “But I do care about you, and I want Maggie and Rion to

be happy. I don't want to hurt them or you. If I had really hurt you, Bekka, I would have never forgiven myself."

"Well, it's a start," declares Maggie. "But you've got a long way to go before we trust you around our baby again."

"Starting with the drinking," Rion adds. "You really need to stop drinking so much."

"I know," Darrick agrees. "I will work on it, but I need my friends. Ever since that day on that promenade and with this new group--"

"We'll help you, Darrick," promises Madeline, walking in, causing Darrick to turn around and see her, as she walks up to him and hugs him, before pulling away and demanding, "But you have to promise to protect Bekks, not hurt her again or the baby."

"I promise," Darrick declares, then hands the flowers to Rebekah and kisses her hand, making her smile softly.

Just then, Jared walks in, sees this and goes to leave, but Rebekah sees him and exclaims, "Jared? You're off work?"

"Yeah," he replies, then clears his throat and confesses, "I tried to get my paperwork done as quickly as possible. I wanted to make sure you and the baby were okay. Madeline texted me and said you were still here, so I thought I'd stop by and check."

"We're both fine," Rebekah announces. "So, I want to go out and celebrate with all of my friends."

"Bekks, you need to take it easy," presses Maggie.

"That doesn't mean I can't go see a movie with my friends," Rebekah counters. "Besides, I am really craving popcorn right now, and not just any popcorn. I need movie theater popcorn."

“Well, we can't ignore the pregnant woman's cravings, can we?” Rion smirks, causing them to all to laugh and start walking out, but Jared, which Rebekah notices.

“You're coming too, right Jared?” Rebekah queries, then pleads with her eyes. “You said you'd do anything I wanted, so you have to come.”

“Okay,” Jared submits, reluctantly.

“Yes!” enthuses Rebekah.



As Rebekah walks out of her room one night, she notices Madeline with Jared at the front door and steps back inside, until Jared leaves. The moment the door is closed, Rebekah walks out and asks Madeline, in an uncomfortable voice, “Did you have fun?”

“Yeah. Did you and Darrick not go out?”

“No,” Rebekah answers, while getting some ice water. “That's tomorrow.”

“Oh, yeah,” Madeline states. “I must have forgotten.”

After taking a drink of water, Rebekah queries, “What did you guys do?”

“Who?” inquires Madeline.

“You and Jared,” responds Rebekah. “On your date.”

“Oh, we just went to see a movie,” Madeline announces. Just then, Madeline notices Rebekah has a somewhat agitated look on her face and implores, “Bekks, are you okay?”

“I'm fine,” Rebekah states sharply. “Why wouldn't I be?”

“Bekks, are you sure?” questions Madeline. “You don’t sound fine. You sound-”

“Moody?” Rebekah interrupts, testily. “It’s probably all the pregnancy hormones. What’s your excuse, Madds?”

“Me?” Madeline queries, feeling very confused. “What did I do?”

“Nothing!” Rebekah snaps, just as Maggie walks in the front door. “Don’t worry about it. I’ve got to go throw up, since this baby doesn’t allow me to have ice or water anymore.” With that, Rebekah growls, storms into the bathroom, and slams the door.

“What was that about?” Maggie asks. “Is Bekks okay?”

“I’m not sure,” Madeline answers. “What are you doing here, Maggs?”

“Girls’ night!”

“Right,” Madeline utters, sighing. “Well, it might just be the two of us. Bekks is a little peeved right now.”

“Hey, Maggs,” says Rebekah, as she emerges from the bathroom.

“Hey, Bekks,” Maggie states, while walking up to her and hugging her. “How you feeling? Is my baby giving you grief?”

“Your baby is fine,” Rebekah assures her. “Just doesn’t like ice.”

“Which you love,” Maggie points out, compassionately. “I am so sorry, Bekks.”

“It’s alright,” Rebekah states. “But would you mind if I sit girls’ night out tonight? I just want to go to bed. I’m really tired.”

“Of course not,” Maggie responds. “Do you need anything?”

“No, I’m fine,” Rebekah answers. “I just need sleep.”

“Okay,” Maggie accepts.

“Let us know if you need anything, okay?” pleads Madeline.

“I’m fine, Madds!” Rebekah snaps, not looking at her.

“Bekks, are you upset with Madds?” Maggie inquires.

“I don’t know,” Rebekah expresses, shaking her head. “If I am, I don’t know why.”

“I think I do,” Madeline announces. “I need to make a phone call.”

“Are you calling Jared?” Rebekah snaps again. “He was just here! Since when do you act like this with a guy, Madds? You never even have a boyfriend this long. Why are you still with him?”

“Bekks, what’s wrong?” Maggie queries with concern.

“Sorry,” Rebekah tells them both. “Honestly, I’m just mad all the time, not just because of the pregnancy. Darrick’s keeping his distance, because he’s really struggling with the drinking, and since he can only be around all of you and not me, I feel lonely. Plus, whenever Jared comes over, it’s just to see you, Madds. You took my best friend, who I need more than ever, since I don’t get to have my boyfriend around anymore.”

“Bekks?” implores Madeline.

“Don’t worry about it,” Rebekah snaps. “I think I really just need some sleep.”

“Bekks, wait,” Madeline requests, as Rebekah marches into her room and slams the door.

Once inside her room, Rebekah lays on her bed and cries to herself, “What is your problem, Rebekah?” For a while, she lays there sobbing. Eventually, she prays, “God, what is wrong with me? Is this because of the pregnancy? Should I have not done

this? I feel like my whole life is spiraling now. Darrick's not happy. I know he's trying, but I know he's not comfortable dating a pregnant woman. Should I just break up with him? And why am I mad at Madds? She hasn't done anything wrong. She's just dating Jared. Sure, I don't see him as often as I used to, but that's not Madds' fault. She should be allowed to be happy, and he should too. Maybe if I wasn't pregnant, I wouldn't be freaking out so much. Did I make a mistake choosing to carry Maggs' and Rion's baby? I want to help them, but what if I lose everyone else in my life, because of it?" Following this, she is quiet for a little bit, other than the sounds of her sobbing, until she starts rubbing her belly and saying, "Oh, you poor little one. I am so sorry that I'm such a mess. I bet Maggs wouldn't be like this. You're so lucky that she and Rion are actually your parents. They are so cool!" Suddenly, she realizes she's smiling and states, "Thank you, little one. I don't know how you did that, but you got me to smile, which I have not been able to do in a really long time, and I know I'm not really your mom, but I hope you and I will be really close. Love you, little one."



Meanwhile, Jared is sitting at the bus stop close to Rebekah's apartment when Cherise drives up in her car and rolls down the passenger window, then beseeches, "Jared, is that you? Still haven't found a car yet?"

"What are you doing here, Cherise?" Jared asks, clearing his throat.

"I was dropping off some stuff for Bekka," Cherise announces. "Why don't you get in and I'll give you a ride once I get done at Bekka's?"

"I'm fine, Cherise."

"Jared, get in the car," she demands. Not wanting to create a scene or upset Cherise, Jared begrudgingly gets in her car, before

she drives the last block to Rebekah's apartment and asks him, "You coming up?"

"No, I'm good."

"Okay?" Cherise utters, grabbing a bag of groceries. "I'll be back then."

As quickly as she can, Cherise goes upstairs, then returns moments later. Once Cherise gets back in her car, Jared is squeezing his eyelids together. Noticing, Cherise implores, "You okay, Jared?"

"Yeah," he answers, clearing his throat again. "Just tired."

"Okay," concedes Cherise. "I'll drive you home."

During the drive, neither of them say anything, but Cherise notices the agony he is in and wants to help but isn't sure how to. After a silent drive, Jared tells Cherise, "Thanks for the ride."

"Hey, Jared," Cherise vocalizes, as he gets out of the car before he shuts the door.

"Yeah?"

"Can I come in?" she asks. "I really could use a drink of water."

"Of course," he tells her, as he shuts his door, then walks around to hold her door open, while helping her get out of the car.

"Thank you," Cherise tells him, as he shuts the door and she locks the doors, before rubbing her pregnant belly. "Getting up is becoming more of a challenge every day the closer my due date gets."

"No problem," he says, walking over to the door of his building. "You want the stairs or the elevator?"

"After climbing the stairs at Bekka's apartment, I could use the elevator," she admits, noticing his eyes pain when he hears

Rebekah's name. After they ride up the elevator and go into his apartment, he locks the door and gets Cherise a glass of ice water. "Thanks, Jared."

"No problem," he tells her, as he hangs up his keys on the wall next to the front door.

After some silence, Cherise finally declares, "Jared, we need to talk."

"About what?"

"Bekka," she replies, causing him to roll his eyes.

"What about her?"

"Your feelings for her," she states, causing him to growl.

"Not you too! First, Madeline and Maggie. Now you."

"Jared, come on," she urges. "It's clear you've fallen in love with her, but you're refusing to admit it, even to yourself, and I know it's breaking your heart watching her be with Darrick."

"It doesn't matter!"

"Why not?" she counters. "Are you telling me you don't want to be with her?"

"Whether I do or not," Jared rebuttals, "She doesn't want to be with me. Besides, what do I have to offer her? A past full of secrets and the chance for Dagon to hurt her?"

"Jared, he's in prison!"

"So!" he snaps. "After everything he has done-"

"Jared, that's not fair!" she interrupts. "You deserve happiness. Don't let what he did to your family get in the way of that! I mean, isn't that why you came here and became a cop? Why you left-"

“Yes!” Jared cuts in. “And I’m starting to wonder if I ever should have, Cherise.”

“Because you’re hurting?”

“No!” Jared contends. “Because I hurt Bekka.” Hearing this, Cherise stops, as she sees utter remorse in his eyes. “Look. I don’t know if Bekka has feelings for me, but it doesn’t matter. I don’t deserve her, and she is happy with Darrick. He can offer her so much more than I can.”

“Because he’s wealthy?” questions Cherise. “Do you think that’s why I’m with Garrett?”

“No,” he answers. “And that’s not the only thing I’m talking about here. Darrick can give her safety. He doesn’t have some psychotic stepfather who would hurt her just to make him suffer. I do. That’s the real reason I can’t be with her, because she deserves a life of peace and happiness, which I can’t offer, and Darrick can. He makes her happy, just by being with her, despite the mistakes he makes, because he tries extra hard to be better for her. That’s what she deserves... a man who would do anything for her.”

“Which you would,” Cherise proclaims. “I know you would. You are exactly what she deserves, Jared. And you want to know why? Because she deserves love. That’s all she wants, and you and I both know Darrick doesn’t love her, nor does she love him. But I know that you love her. I can see it in your eyes and hear it in your voice. You love her more than life itself, and she could easily love you.”

“If she were in love with me,” Jared explains, “She wouldn’t be with Darrick. She wants to be with him, not me. And I won’t stand in the way of her happiness. Nor will I tell her to leave Darrick for me. What kind of man would I be if I did that?”

“That’s what this is really about,” Cherise points out. “Isn’t it? You’re afraid she will choose Darrick over you if she finds out about your past.”

"I just want her to be safe. I can't make allow myself to be in a relationship like that."

"Then, why did you start dating Madeline?" exhorts Cherise.

"Because I always knew that wouldn't go anywhere," Jared confesses. "But Bekka... I would go to the ends of the earth to make her happy."

"I know you would, Jared," Cherise exclaims. "That's exactly why you should tell her how you feel, because you would make her happy, simply by loving her."

"No," he persists. "I can't, and I am tired of arguing about this. I just want to be her friend and be there for her in any capacity she needs me. So please, just let it go."

"Okay, Jared," she submits. "I'm sorry. I just hope you know that you deserve so much more than you allow yourself to have. You're a good man, and any woman would be lucky to have you." Seeing his anguish, Cherise decides to not press the matter anymore and tells him, "I better get going, Jared. Thanks for the water."

"Don't mention it," Jared says, opening the door. "Thanks for the ride. Let me walk you to your car."

"Okay," she accepts, walking to the door. After shutting the door, Jared walks Cherise to her car, where Jared helps her get in the car, before Cherise adds, "By the way, the reason Bekka is upset is because she misses you."

"How do you know?" Jared asks, trying not to look Cherise in the eye.

"Because she told me," Cherise declares, surprising Jared, who feels hope but guilt at the same time. "I just thought you should know that. Good night, Jared."

“Good night,” he tells her, as he shuts the door. After she drives away, Jared walks back in his apartment. Once he locks the door, he grabs an orange from the counter and throws it at the wall, then walks into his bedroom and rubs his forehead, trying to control his feelings of anger and humiliation.





Chapter 11

“I really hope today is better than yesterday,” Darrick tells Alex in a patrol car. “I thought after I wasn’t a rookie, this would get easier.”

“Where did you get that impression?” exhorts Alex. “You certainly didn’t get it from me, boot.”

Sighing and smiling slightly, Darrick looks at his phone to read an incoming notification, before uttering, “That’s odd. Why does that address seem so familiar?”

“Texting while on duty, boot?”

“No, sir,” says Darrick. “Ever since the day of the promenade bombing, I’ve been paying close attention to social media and anything that would give me a clue to what they plan on hitting next.”

“Even on your time off?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You should be a detective,” Alex points out.

“Chief’s been trying to get me to join organized crime,” Darrick discloses. “And since that’s the department mostly focused on investigating them, I am considering it. Besides, Detective MacDonald does have a nice ring to it.”

Rolling his eyes, Alex asks, “What’s the address?”

After telling Alex the address, Darrick declares, “I’ll Google it.” Once he finishes, he panics, “Oh, no! Please don’t let them attack there.”

“Where?”

“Where my girlfriend and my best friend’s wife works,” Darrick announces.



“What are you doing down here, Bekka?” Rion inquires, after walking up to Maggie at work. “Aren’t you supposed to be upstairs?”

“Maggs asked me to stop by,” Rebekah answers. “Why are you here, Rion?”

“Since I’m on my lunch, I was just bringing my wife some lunch,” Rion announces.

“Did you remember this time, Ri?”

Rolling his eyes, Rion responds, “Yes, babe! I remembered to bring Bekka some lunch this time.”

“Is this why you called me down here, Maggs?” Rebekah queries. “Guys, I told you it’s fine.”

“Nonsense,” argues Maggie, then speaks in a childlike voice, while patting Rebekah’s stomach. “We have to keep you and our baby fed.”

“Maggie!” Rion snaps, making Maggie look back at him with confusion. “Don’t weird her out!”

“I’m not!” she counters. “I’m not, right Bekks?”

“No,” Rebekah replies, smiling. “You’d be surprised how much I talk to your little one just like that.”

Seeing her tear up, Maggie states, “Bekks, I promise you can be a part of this baby’s life as much as you want. You may just be the surrogate, but I’ve noticed how attached you’ve become to

our little one. I want you to know you'll always be a part of our baby's life. In fact, Rion and I were talking last night. We haven't talked to a lawyer about a will or anything, but if anything happens to us, you should be the one to raise our child, since you've done so much to bring the little one into this world."

Tearing up more, Rebekah implores, "Are you serious?"

"Absolutely," Maggie responds, while Rion nods.

"Well, I really hope nothing happens to either of you," Rebekah remarks, before hugging her, "But I'm honored that you would ask me, and I would love to be a part of your baby's life. I already love the little one."

"We know," Maggie exclaims.

"I have to go back upstairs before I take my lunch," Rebekah states, pushing back her tears, before walking away.

"Later, Bekka," Rion states, before Maggie takes Rion by the hand and pulls him down the hallway into a closet, then starts making out with him after they close the door.

In between kisses, Rion asks, "Are we... going to... do this... every time... I drop lunch off?"

"Gotta keep the excitement, right?" she enthuses, before kissing his neck.

As she's kissing his neck, he notices the number 19 on something digital and then the number 18 and then 17, causing him to become serious and sternly say, "Margaret."

"Margaret?"

"Margaret, get out now!" he shouts. Frantically, she opens the door, as he tells her to run, and they both run down the hallway.



Meanwhile, Darrick shows up with Alex at Rebekah's and Maggie's place of work, where Darrick asks, "What now, sir?"

"First, we need to just ask-" Before he finishes, they hear an explosion and get knocked down. Trying to get his bearings, Alex pushes himself up and calls, "Boot, you alright?"

"No!" Darrick panics, not answering Alex, as he jumps up off the ground and starts to bolt toward the building, until Alex stops him. "Let me go, sir. My girl and my best friend's wife is in there. I need to-"

"You can't!" Alex points out. "We need to call dispatch and tell them what happened. Then, we need to wait for the fire-"

"We can't wait for them, Blake!" Darrick yells, angrily, trying to push past him.

"MacDonald, stop!" Alex demands, as Darron runs up to them.

"What's going on?" questions Darron, out of breath.

"We don't know for sure," Alex declares, struggling to keep Darrick back. "All we know is there was an explosion."

"Have you called it in?" beseeches Darron, noticing Darrick's behavior.

"No," Alex replies, feeling frustrated. "I've had my hands full."

"I got him," Darron announces, before he restrains Darrick from behind.

"Let me go, Darron!" Darrick barks, trying to get away, as Alex runs to his patrol car.

"No!"

“You don’t understand!” Darrick bellows, still trying to get away. “My girlfriend is in there.”

“I’m sorry,” Darron expresses, still restraining him. “You will just have to wait to find out about her.”

“Darron, if you don’t let me go-”

“I’m not letting you go, not until you calm down.”

“You don’t understand!”

“I’m sorry, but-”

“Darron, she’s pregnant!” Darrick blurts out, causing Alex to overhear.

“What?”

“She’s carrying Rion’s and Maggie’s baby for them,” Darrick divulges in desperation. “I promised them I would keep her and the baby safe.”

“I understand,” Darron vocalizes, compassionately. “But the best thing you can do to do that is by following procedure. We have to do this right. Otherwise, you could put her and the baby in more danger.”

Finally calming down, Darrick questions, “What are you doing here, Darron?”

“I heard the explosion on my way to work,” discloses Darron, letting go of Darrick, “And came to see what was going on.”

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Darrick utters, pacing slightly. “These Raiders, I swear. They just don’t quit. Last time, they nearly killed my girl, and now they may have.”

“We don’t know anything yet,” Darron points out.

“Maybe I should try calling her,” Darrick states, to which Darron nods. Quickly, Darrick calls Rebekah. After it goes straight to voicemail, he grumbles, “She didn’t answer.”

“When was the last time you talked to her?”

“I... I don’t... I don’t know,” Darrick stammers. “I... I haven’t been spending a lot of time with her, since... she’s gotten pregnant.”

“How do you expect to protect her then, little bro?”

“I’m protecting her from me,” Darrick confesses, causing Darron to look at him curiously. “I almost hurt her and the baby when I was really drunk, and I don’t exactly... I still want to drink, so in order to keep my promise, I have to stay away from her. But right now, I’m sober, so... But, Darron if she dies... she’s the only woman who’s stuck around, and because I can’t give up my alcohol-”

Just then, Alex walks up and announces, “Firefighters and paramedics are on their way.”



A little later, Jared is in a patrol car with Raquel when they hear over the radio there’s a government building nearby that was hit by a bomb, courtesy of the new mob in town, the Ruby-Blooded Raiders, and are requesting assistance to get survivors out. Immediately, they respond and drive over there. When they get there, Jared realizes it’s where Rebekah and Maggie work. Anxiously, he and Raquel rush out of the patrol car and run over to talk to some firefighters.

When they reach the firefighters, Jared hopes to find Rion, but doesn’t see him, so he walks up to another firefighter and announces, “Excuse me. I’m Officer Bentley. This is Officer Iglesias. How can we-” Hearing the sounds of chaos around him, Jared loses his train of thought and stops.

“Bentley!” Raquel barks, then motions him to walk with her away from everyone.

“Yes, sir.”

“Look, I know this is hard but-”

“No,” he interrupts. “You don’t understand. My friends work here.”

“Okay,” Raquel states. “I’m sure they can really use your help here, but if you’re emotionally compromised and can’t do this-”

“No, sir,” he interrupts again. “I can do this.” After nodding, she motions him to follow her back to the firefighters, who are preparing to describe what’s going on and relay instructions to everyone who has just shown up. While listening, Jared looks around and sees Darrick and Alex there as well.

“Listen up, everyone,” one of the firefighters bellows, “It appears the explosion started from the fourth floor. It was a small explosion but managed to cause the building to become unstable. Please be careful while looking for survivors. Take it as quickly, but as safely as possible. The elevator looks like it has fallen and is stuck between the seventh and eighth floor. We aren’t sure if anyone was inside or not. Now, most of those on the first two floors have been able to walk out on their own with just a few bumps and bruises. But the rest of the floors are still needing to be searched. They are 12 floors in total, with at least 150 employees and at least 25 visitors. Each of you will be assigned a number. That is the floor you are assigned to help at. We have a lot of ground to cover, people. Just be safe and find as many people as you can.”

After that, all the responders receive a paper and walk toward the building. Looking down at his and Raquel’s papers, he sees the number eight and heads toward the building, when suddenly he hears Madeline squeal, “Jared?” Quickly, he turns toward her voice, as she runs up to him and hugs him.

“Madeline, what are you doing here?” he beseeches, as they stop hugging.

“I was going to surprise Bekka for her lunch hour,” announces Madeline. “Things haven’t been the same between us lately.”

“Yeah, same here,” Jared says, while sighing.

“I thought things would get better after you and I called it off, but it hasn’t,” Madeline confesses, as Jared notices a bruise on her forehead. “I’m fine. I just hit my head when I fell after the explosion. The paramedics said I’m fine. I’m just waiting for news about Maggs and Bekks. Can you let me know if you find them?” After nodding, he rushes inside, along with Raquel.

Once inside, he has to push back terrible fears and focus, finding it very difficult, worrying about Rebekah and Maggie, but the image of Rebekah’s smile keeps him going as he sees the wreckage and bodies lying on the ground. Most are alive and receiving help from other responders. Others, thankfully not many, are pronounced dead and tagged to be identified. Finally, after walking up several responds, Jared and Raquel get to the eighth floor. As they walk through the eighth floor, they begin looking for people to assist when they hear a call for help. Listening intently, Jared realizes it’s Rebekah and has a moment of hope, but still fears how he might find her. While following her voice, he calls out her name multiple times and waits for a response.

Finally, he hears, “Jared? Is that you?”

After letting out a sigh of relief, Jared closes his eyes momentarily before asking, “Bekka, where are you?”

“In the elevator,” she replies, causing him to panic a little. “I can’t move. Something fell on my legs.”

“Okay, Bekka,” he calls out, as he and Raquel rush toward the elevator. “I’m coming, alright?”

“Okay,” she says, tearing up.

Finally, Jared and Raquel reach the elevator, finding it almost completely halfway between the two floors and partially open. While Raquel calls for elevator assistance over the radio, Jared asks Rebekah, “Is anyone in there with you?”

“Yes, there was a man, pushing a dolly with a file cabinet,” Rebekah replies. “That’s what fell on me, but I don’t think he’s conscious. I can’t see him around the filing cabinet, but he hasn’t said anything since the fall.”

Worried the elevator might fall again, Jared asks Raquel, “How’s that elevator assistance coming?”

“They said to standby,” she replies, as the elevator creaks a little. Feeling concerned for Rebekah, Jared starts trying to think of a way to get her out if help doesn’t arrive in time.

“Are you there, Jared?” Rebekah queries, her voice cracking a little.

“Yes, Bekka,” he answers, sensing the fear in her voice, being only matched by his own fear. “I’m here.”

“Don’t leave me, Jared,” she pleads.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he vows. After a few moments of silence, he notices the elevator moving a little and becomes increasingly concerned, trying to quickly come up with a solution.

“Jared!” Rebekah screams.

“We need an ETA on that elevator assistance now!” Jared tells Raquel with more intensity in his voice.

“They’re still saying to stand by,” she tells him again, angering Jared. “They’re saying five to ten minutes, Bentley.”

“Ten minutes?” Jared sternly barks back. “She needs to get out now.”

“Bentley!” Raquel bellows.

“Sorry, sir,” Jared states. “It’s just if anything happens to her—” Desperately, Jared tries to come up with a solution when he hears Rebekah whimper, as the elevator shakes some more. Turning away from Raquel, he starts pleading quietly, “God, please don’t let her fall.” Just then, he sees a small piece of rope, peeking out of a box that has fallen to the floor, with other boxes. Quickly, he rushes to the box, looks inside to find paracord, removes it and feels its strength by pulling it. Closing his eyes momentarily, he whispers, “Thank you.”

“Bentley, what are you doing?” Raquel asks, as Jared removes his shirt and bullet proof vest and starts harnessing the paracord to himself.

“I’m going to get her out of there,” declares Jared.

“Bentley, if you go down there, you could make the elevator fall with you in it,” she tells him.

“And if I don’t,” counters Jared, “It could fall before she gets help. I’m not just going to stand by and watch. If that elevator falls, I’m going down with it and with her.” Seeing Jared’s dedication leaves Raquel speechless for a moment.

“Okay,” she begrudgingly accepts after he finishes tying the paracord. Once she takes the end of the rope, she calls over two responders to help and explains, “I need you to help me hang on to this rope, but we can’t let him put all of his weight on the elevator.” Nodding, the responders grab the rope with Raquel, as Jared carefully pushes the door open and looks down to see the man, who appears to be unconscious or dead, and Rebekah, relieved to see her.

“Rebekah, I’m coming,” announces Jared. “Just stay still until I tell you to move, okay?”

“Okay,” Rebekah utters. “But check the other guy first.”

“Rebekah!”

“Him first!”

Reluctantly, Jared agrees, then starts climbing down gently, while Raquel and the two responders hold tightly to the rope. As he gets closer, he falls a little but not too far and starts swinging to get over to the man on the floor. Finally, he manages to get over there when the elevator groans, then checks the man's pulse and shakes his head looking over at Rebekah, causing Rebekah to close her eyes, sadly. After taking a deep breath, Jared swings again to get in a better position to help Rebekah, causing the elevator to groan again, making Rebekah cry and close her eyes.

“Rebekah, Rebekah,” he urges, softly, “Look at me. Look at me.” Opening her eyes, Rebekah looks at Jared, who repeats, “Look at me, just me, okay? I've got you, alright?” Tearfully, she nods, trying to push back her fear, before Jared expounds, “I'm going to move the filing cabinet and then I need you to grab my leg and pull yourself out from underneath it, okay?” Seeing her nod again, he takes a deep breath, then strains to lift the filing cabinet, while the responders and Raquel up top struggle to lift him and the filing cabinet. Finally, Jared lifts the filing cabinet enough and exerts, “Now!” Even though she struggles, Rebekah clings to Jared's leg and manages to pull herself out, all the while ignoring all the moans and groans of the elevator.

“I'm out,” she declares, relieving Jared, who tries to let down the filing cabinet gently, but it slips and lands hard, causing the elevator to shake, making Jared and Rebekah freeze.

Once the shaking stops, Jared tells Rebekah, “Now, I need you to climb up my legs and grab my hand so I can lift you, okay?” Taking a deep breath, Rebekah starts climbing Jared's legs, straining the whole way. When she gets high enough, she reaches up, while he reaches down, and they grasp each other's hands. Then, he pulls her up higher, and they hold on to each other as tight as they possibly can, while they gaze at each other and

Jared says, "We're ready." Instantly, Raquel and the responders start pulling them up, while Rebekah lays her head on Jared's chest and Jared sighs, feeling familiar safety in his arms. Again, the elevator groans and shakes again, making Rebekah bury her face deeper in Jared's chest. "It's okay. I got you! I promise I won't let you fall, Bekka." Hearing this, Rebekah looks back up at Jared, who stares at her, with a reassuring gaze. Just then, the elevator assistance crew shows up and helps lift them to the door opening. Near the top, Jared makes sure Rebekah is closest, so she can get out first. When they finally reach the top, Jared and Rebekah hold on to each other tight, as they fall onto the floor, just as the elevator falls. Breathing heavily, Jared gazes down at Rebekah and implores, "You alright?"

"I think so," she replies, trying to catch her breath.

"We need to get you to the hospital," he tells her, before he moves off of her and kneels, still wrapping his arms around her.

"You're probably right," she agrees.

Gently, he helps her sit up, as Raquel declares, out of breath, "You two are really lucky!"

Looking at each other, Jared and Rebekah both exclaim, "Yes, we are."

Before standing up, Jared lets out a little smile. Once he's standing, Rebekah tries to get up but feels pain in her legs and starts wincing. Nervously, he asks her, "What is it?"

"My legs."

"Well, I was planning on carrying you out of here, Bekka," he announces with a smile.

"Jared, I'm pregnant," she argues. "I'm too heavy!" Ignoring her, he just smiles at her and picks her up, then carries her down the stairs. On the way down, she leans her head on his shoulder and says, "Thank you, Jared."

“For what?” he asks, gazing at her with a smile.

“Saving me... and the baby,” she answers.

“Bekka, I’d do anything for you,” Jared states, still staring at her, realizing in that moment he really has fallen in love with her, but can’t bring himself to say it, fearing that if his stepfather found out, he would hurt her. Instead, he tells her, “I couldn’t live without my best friend.” Curiously, she looks at him and realizes she couldn’t live without him either and probably would have died had it not been for him. Her thoughts are interrupted when Jared looks away and yells for some paramedics, who come running over with a stretcher. When they get there, Jared carefully lays Rebekah down on the stretcher and explains to the paramedics, “This is Rebekah Redd. She is 22 years old and around 19 weeks pregnant. She was stuck in the elevator, pinned down by a filing cabinet and may have injured her legs.”

Just then, Madeline sees them and comes running over, while crying out, “Is she okay?”

“Hey Madds!” Rebekah exclaims, looking over at her.

“I’m so glad you’re alive!” Madeline declares. “What about the baby?”

“I don’t know,” Rebekah quietly responds, causing them both to sigh, as Rebekah tears up, fretting for the baby’s life.

Seeing her fear, Jared grabs her hand, as Madeline implores, “You already love this baby, don’t you?”

“I really do,” Rebekah confesses, then thinks about Rion and Maggie. “Where’s Maggie and Rion? Rion was here visiting for lunch.”

“I have no idea,” says Madeline. “I don’t feel right.” Hearing this, Rebekah and Jared both get a face of dread.

“We’re ready to go,” announces a paramedic.

“Please take care of her,” Jared requests, as he lets go of Rebekah's hand.

“We will, sir,” one of the paramedics says, preparing to move the stretcher.

Suddenly, Madeline's phone rings, startling her. When she looks at her phone, she declares, “It's Darrick.”

“Stop!” Rebekah tells the paramedics.

“It's a video call,” announces Madeline. “I thought he was in the building.” Hearing this, Jared gets concerned and looks at Rebekah, then back at the building.

“Answer it, Madds!”

Finally, Madeline answers the phone, while Rebekah and Jared watch with anticipation and anxiety. On the screen, Darrick appears, but seems to be fighting some tears. “Hey, Madeline. Did someone find Bekka?”

“Yes!” Madeline exclaims, as she walks over to Rebekah to include her in the video call.

“Hey Bekka!” he says, trying to smile. “Are you alright?”

“I think so,” she answers, causing Darrick to let out a sigh of relief.

In the background, they hear Maggie utter, “Is the baby okay?”

Hearing her, Madeline and Rebekah light up, before Madeline questions, “Is that Maggs? Is she okay? Let us see her!” Looking over at Jared, Rebekah sees he has a look of dread on his face and realizes what Jared is thinking.

Struggling with every word, Darrick states, “Here's the thing! I found Rion and Maggie.” Hearing this, Madeline jumps up and down, while Rebekah and Jared continue to look at each other with concern. Suddenly, Darrick shouts, “Madeline, stop!”

Bewildered, Madeline stops, while Darrick explains, "You see, they were closest to the bomb when it—" Before he continues, Madeline gasps, and Rebekah begins to tear up, while Jared looks away. "Rion was right next to it," Darrick announces, then stops and looks down, trying to hold back tears. "He didn't make it."

Angrily, Madeline tells Darrick, "No, that can't be true. Darrick, Maggs can't live without Rion."

"Darrick, let me have the phone," Maggie's quivering voice is heard.

"No, Maggie," Darrick declines. "You need to save your strength."

"Dar... rick," she says, coughing. "I need to tell them goodbye."

"Goodbye?" Madeline cries, while Rebekah tries to hold on to her tightly, fighting to hold back her tears.

"Darrick!" Maggie presses, then coughs heavily and winces. Silently, Darrick hands the phone to Maggie. When Maggie's mangled and bleeding face shows up on Madeline's phone, Madeline and Rebekah gasp. Finally, Maggie begins, struggling to breathe, "I don't—" Coughing suddenly, Maggie stops for a moment, then reveals, "I don't have much time." While listening Rebekah and Madeline lean the sides of their heads together, trying to be brave for Maggie, who pleads, while coughing intermittently, "I need you all to make me a promise. If my baby survives, I need you to promise me you'll take care of... him or her. Bekks, you know I've already asked you to be my baby's... mom, since you're the carrying him or her." After saying this, Maggie starts to cry, causing everyone else to tear up more, as she looks at Darrick and divulges, "Darrick, Rion always saw the best in you. He never had any siblings, but he saw you... as a brother. He would have... wanted you to be... a part of... our baby's... life. I know that... babies... aren't really your... thing... but you'll have Maggs and Bekks... and Jared... if he's there. If he isn't—"

Softly, Jared imparts, "I'm here, Maggs."

"Hi, Jared," Maggie utters. "I just want... you to know... you are a part of... a part of this family. Please, stay with them."

"I will," he promises, staying on the opposite side of the phone, as a stray tear falls down his face.

Struggling, Maggie requests, "All of you, I know... you have your... differences... and don't always get along, but please promise... please promise me you'll give my baby... a fam... a family." Again, Maggie coughs heavily before looking back at the phone. "Madds, you are the best twin... a sister could ask for. Please help them... They're going to need... it. And please be happ... happy. I promise... our connection will always... be there. I... I promise... I'll never leave... I'll never leave you!" With that, she stops talking, drops the phone, and stares upward.

"Maggs! Maggs!" Madeline screams, while Rebekah hugs her from the side tightly. "No! No! Margaret! You can't die! Darrick, tell me she's okay!"

Nervously, Darrick checks her pulse, then announces, "She's gone, Madeline." After closing Maggie's eyes, he hangs up the phone and starts sobbing into his knee, hiding his face. Outside, Madeline cries uncontrollably and starts falling to the ground.

"Jared!" Rebekah cries out, causing Jared to come rushing over and catch Madeline before she falls, then hold her as she weeps. Distraught from the day, Jared and Rebekah look at each other, as she reaches out for his hand. Still holding Madeline in his arms, he reaches over and clutches Rebekah's hand. None of them can believe that Maggie and Rion are gone and hardly even see the chaos around them.





Chapter 12

“Isn’t she beautiful, Jared?” inquires Rebekah, as she looks down at her baby girl.

“Yes, she is,” Jared tells her, as he kisses her forehead, “Just like her mother.”

“I can’t wait until Mads, Maggs, Rion, and Darrick get here,” Rebekah declares, “So they can meet our baby girl.” Just then, Rebekah’s alarm goes off, and her eyes jolt open. “Our baby girl?” she thinks to herself, then shuts the alarm off on her phone. As she tries to get up, she feels pain in her legs, causing her to groan.

“Rebekah?” Cherise calls from the opposite side of the door. “Can I come in?”

“Sure.”

When Cherise walks in, she sees Rebekah falling to the floor and screams for Garrett, then rushes to Rebekah and remarks, “Bekka, you need help. What are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” counters Rebekah. “The pain is just really bad when I wake up.”

“Cherise?” Garrett yells from down the hallway. When he arrives at the doorway of Rebekah’s room, he inquires, “What happened?” Seeing Rebekah on the floor, Garrett growls, rushes to her and Cherise, and demands, “Bekka, you know you need to be more careful! What happened?”

“I had to go to the bathroom and get ready for-” Suddenly, Rebekah stops talking and starts weeping.

“Sweetie, come here,” requests Cherise, then pulls Rebekah in for a hug, as she sobs.

“This can't be happening,” cries Rebekah. “They can't be gone.”

“I know,” Cherise consoles her, as Garrett looks at her with compassion. After Rebekah cries for a while, Cherise suggests, “How about you let me help you get ready, okay, sweetie?”

“Okay,” Rebekah accepts, trying to stop her tears.

“Okay,” says Cherise, before Garrett carries her into the bathroom, then leaves, shutting the door behind him. Meanwhile, Cherise gathers Rebekah's outfit and waits until Rebekah calls for Garrett to come get her. Quickly, Garrett goes back in the bathroom and helps Rebekah, before setting her back on the bed, where Cherise helps her get dressed, once Garrett leaves.

Once Rebekah is ready, Garrett brings in a wheelchair, then pushes her to the kitchen in the wheelchair. When they arrive in the dining room, Rebekah sees a breakfast on the table and confesses, “I'm not really that hungry.”

“Oh, it's not for you, Bekk,” declares Garrett.

“Who's it for?”

“You still have to feed your baby,” Cherise tells her.

Tearing up, Rebekah submits, “Alright. I'll eat for the baby.” Slowly, Rebekah eats breakfast, then leaves with Cherise, Garrett, and Arthur to go see Madeline before Rion's and Maggie's funeral.



When they arrive at the funeral home, Rebekah requests to be taken to Madeline immediately. “Madds?” Rebekah calls from behind her.

“Bekks, you’re here,” Madeline cries, as she turns around, then leans down and hugs her.

“Of course, I’m here,” declares Rebekah. “Where else would I be?”

While they hug, they both sob heavily, until Jared walks up and cautiously says, “Hey, you two.”

“Jared, you’re here too,” Madeline exclaims, pulling him into hug her and Rebekah.

“Of course, Madeline,” Jared states. “What can I do?”

“You’re doing it,” Madeline announces. “You’re here.”

After they hug for a while, Madeline pulls away and tells them, “I need to go check on my parents.”

“Of course, Madds,” Rebekah states, as Jared stands up straight.

After Madeline is gone, Jared asks Rebekah, “How are you holding up, Rebekah?”

“I could be better,” Rebekah confesses. “But I could be worse. You?”

“Same,” answers Jared. “How are your legs?”

“They hurt,” Rebekah declares. “I can still walk, thankfully. But Garrett thought it would be best if I had a wheelchair today. I feel a little silly, though.”

“Don’t,” suggests Jared. “No one thinks less of you.”

“Thanks, Jared,” expresses Rebekah, then sees Darrick walking in. “He made it.”

“Darrick?” inquires Jared, turning around. “Of course, he made it.”

“Hi, guys,” says Darrick, quietly, as he walks up to them. Hoping for a kiss, Rebekah stretches upwards, until Darrick utters, “Bekka, what are you doing in a wheelchair?”

“She hurt her legs, remember?” Jared reminds Darrick. “Her brother thought it would be a good idea for her to be pushed in a wheelchair today, and I agree. Don't you?”

“Sure,” Darrick replies, his voice cracking a little.

“Darrick, are you okay?” Rebekah inquires.

“I'm fine,” Darrick answers.

“Is there anything I can do?” queries Rebekah.

“What could you do, Bekka?” exhorts Darrick, irritation in his voice. “You're in a wheelchair.”

Seeing Rebekah tear up, Jared tells Darrick, “Take it easy, man. She's just trying to be a good friend and girlfriend to you.”

“You're right,” Darrick states. “Sorry, Bekka, but you don't need to do anything. I'm fine.”

“Okay,” Rebekah accepts, trying not to cry.

“Do you know where Madeline is?” Darrick queries.

“She's checking on her parents,” Jared announces. After hearing this, Darrick immediately walks away. Once Darrick is out of sight, Rebekah is unable to hold back her tears and begins sobbing. Immediately, Jared notices and implores, “Bekka, are you alright?”

“No,” Rebekah states, as Jared bends down to her level. “I know I'm selfish for thinking this, 'cause he's hurting too, but I wish he'd be there for me.”

“You’re not selfish, Bekka,” Jared assures her, as he wraps his arms around her, causing her sobs to grow. “I’m here for you, okay? I’ll always be your shoulder to cry on.”

“Thank you, Jared,” Rebekah says, while she cries, grabbing onto his arm resting her head on it under his chin.

“No problem,” Jared tells her, then kisses the top of her head. “I’ll always be there for you, Bekka.”

After crying for several minutes, Rebekah pulls back and says, “At least I can cry in front of you. I still can’t in front of Darrick. So maybe it’s better you’re the one who’s there for me, at least until I’m not crying every few minutes.” Hearing this causes Jared to lightly smile, as he wipes Rebekah’s tears.



A while later, the funeral party is at the gravesite, while Darrick and Jared help carry each casket with the other pallbearers before the funeral. Then, they go to sit by Rebekah and Madeline, who are both crying, sitting next to Madeline’s parents. During the funeral, Madeline gets up to speak in front of everyone. Struggling with every word, Madeline says, “Thank you everyone for being here for Margaret and Rion today. They really- They really would have appreciated it. A lot of people tried to tell me not to speak today, but I knew I had to for Maggs. She was the best twin. She was always so much better than me. I’ve always been the one getting into trouble, while she’s always been the one getting me out of it. And Rion- he was just so perfect for her. They were so adorable together. She always would call him her dark chocolate, and he would call her his milk chocolate. They were so perfect for each other. Many of you may not know this, but they didn’t like each other when we were growing up. However, I have a tendency to play Cupid, as Maggs always said. And I just knew they were perfect for each other. So, I kept pushing, even when Bekks told me not to. And at first, it was a disaster, but they eventually fell in love. From that point on, they were inseparable. I had never seen Maggs so

happy. It was after that, she, Rion, Bekks, Darrick, and I all started meeting at Grif's and doing practically everything together. We became a family. Then, after several years, Jared joined our family and made it complete. I know I speak for all of us and everyone here that our lives will never be the same again without Maggs and Rion. But, as Bekks keeps telling me, they never will truly leave us. They will always be in our hearts and minds and will continue to guide us, keeping us out of trouble. We will miss you, Margaret and Rion. Thanks for always being there." With that, Madeline walks over to the caskets and takes off two flower leis from her neck, then places one on each casket. Seeing this, Darrick stands up and leaves.

"Darrick?" Rebekah calls out, but he continues to walk away, so she looks back at Madeline, who starts sobbing heavily and rushes away, as her parents walk up to hug her. Wanting to comfort Madeline, Rebekah tries to move her wheelchair towards her, unsuccessfully. "Jared, can you help me?"

"Of course," replies Jared, as he stands up, then pushes Rebekah's wheelchair to be right next to Madeline.

Taking everyone by surprise, Madeline's mother, Leilani remarks, "You don't need to be over here, Rebekah."

"I was just wanting to comfort Madds," Rebekah confesses, "And check on you and Mr. Malala, as well. We haven't talked, since this happened."

"I don't have anything to say to you," Leilani contends, then turns to her husband and commands, "Siakisoni, get her out of here."

"Not now, Mom!" Madeline barks, as Rebekah tears up.

"Now is not the time, Leilani," Siakisoni points out.

"May I ask why you're so upset at me?" implores Rebekah.

“You want to know?” exhorts Leilani. “I get that my daughter has been friends with you most of your life, but we are her parents, and she has... had a sister. Instead, she chose the surrogate. What did you say to her?”

“I did... I didn't,” Rebekah stammers, feeling her emotions rising.

Seeing Rebekah look away, pushing back tears, Jared interjects, kindly, “With all due respect, Mr. and Mrs. Malala, there are many reasons why Margaret would have chosen Rebekah over any of you. It has nothing to do with what Rebekah said or with how deeply Margaret cared for each and every one of you. Having said that, I believe she would have realized that the three of you would be grieving deeply. Rebekah may be grieving, but that is nothing compared to the loss of a child... or a sibling. True, Rebekah and Margaret may have felt like sisters, but Madeline was her twin sister. They shared a bond with each other that the rest of us can't understand, just like you shared a bond with them that the rest of us don't understand, except perhaps Rebekah. It may not be quite the same, but I'm sure Margaret knew that Rebekah had already bonded with the baby. I believe she asked Rebekah to help all of you.”

“He has a point, Leilani,” Siakisoni points out, then walks around her and stoops down in front of Rebekah, before asking, kindly, “Rebekah, would it be alright if we babysat every once in a while? We really would like to be a part of our grandchild's life.”

“You can do more than babysit,” Rebekah states without hesitation. “You can be the child's grandparents, because that is exactly what you are. If Rion's parents were still alive, I would tell them the same thing.”

“You're really alright with us being in our grandchild's life?” implores Leilani.

“Of course,” replies Rebekah. “I feel so fortunate to know you both, and I really hope you'll be a part of your grandchild's life.”

“We would be honored to,” Siakisoni declares, tearing up, “And if you need anything for that little one, just let us know. We know that you’re out of work right now, so if you need any help, please let us know.”

“Thank you,” expresses Rebekah, tearing up again.



The next day, Cherise opens the front door to let Jared in hers and Garrett’s home. “Hey, Jared,” she says, as she hugs and kisses his cheek.

“Hey,” Jared utters, looking at the house filled with birthday decorations. “House looks great.”

“If only the guest of honor would come out of her room,” Garrett announces, as he walks in, then kisses Cherise.

“How’s she doing?” Jared inquires.

“Her legs are still pretty sore,” Garrett answers. “I’m just glad they’re not broken. Being pregnant and having broken legs; that would have sucked. If that had been the case, I would have made her just live here. With her being jobless and becoming a new mom-”

“Rebekah’s really strong, Garrett,” Cherise interrupts him, “And she’s never liked taking advantage of others.”

“She wouldn’t be,” Garrett contends. “It would just be until she got back on her feet. No pun intended.”

“How’s she doing since yesterday?” queries Jared.

“She’s been crying a lot,” Cherise explains, “So much that she doesn’t even want to celebrate. How are you doing?”

“Don't worry about me,” Jared requests, then clears his throat. “I just need to be there for Rebekah. Can I talk to her?”

“Of course,” Garrett tells him.

Carrying a small present, Jared walks up to the room Rebekah always stays in when she's there and knocks on the door. “Who is it?” Rebekah asks from inside the room.

“It's Jared,” he answers. “Can I come in?”

“Of course.”

When Jared walks in, he sees Rebekah, dressed in her pajamas, sitting in bed, with her legs elevated on a pillow, and says, “There's the birthday girl.” Hearing this, Rebekah smiles a little, causing Jared to declare, “Hey, a smile.” Immediately, Rebekah quits smiling and tears up, so Jared shuts the door, rushes to the chair by her bed to sit, and tells her, “Bekka, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to make you cry.”

“You didn't,” she assures him. “I just feel guilty when I smile.”

“Why?”

“Because of Maggs and Rion,” she confesses. “They're not here anymore. Why should I be happy?”

“Because they'd want you to be,” he tells her, as he wipes a tear from her face. “Maggie and Rion loved you, love you still, and would hate it if you never smiled again.”

“Aren't you sad?”

“Of course, I am, Bekka, but today is your birthday, and I know Rion and Maggie would want it to be special and happy.”

“But why should I celebrate my life when they lost theirs?” Rebekah asks, sobbing more.

Lovingly, Jared sits on the edge of the bed to hold her and kisses the side of her head, then expounds, "Because they would celebrate your life, and they would want you to be grateful you still have yours, because your life is important. God kept you alive for a reason. One of those reasons is inside you, Bekka. You have a miracle growing inside of you. So, if it's too difficult to celebrate your birthday, celebrate the miracle that you're still alive for a purpose, and celebrate the life growing inside you."

"I guess you're right," Rebekah declares, looking at him. "Maggs and Rion would want me to be happy and celebrate all of that, especially the miracle of their legacy. I should feel blessed because I have a part of them with me all the time. Thank you, Jared."

"Anytime," Jared tells her, then sits back on the chair and hands her the present he brought for her. "Now would you like to open your gift?"

"Cherise said I had to wait until later," Rebekah announces. "I still haven't opened Madds' gift that she brought early this morning."

"Madeline came by?"

"Yeah," Rebekah replies. "But she was only able to stay a little while, because she had to get back to her parents' house. Have you talked to her lately?"

"Just a little."

"That's odd," Rebekah remarks.

"Why?"

"She's your girlfriend."

"You don't know, Bekka?" Jared implores, as she looks at him with confusion. "Madeline and I broke up a while ago."

In complete shock, Rebekah stammers, “Uh... I... I had no idea. I am so sorry. What happened?”

“I told you we weren't serious, Bekka.”

“Still. I am sorry. Is that why you hadn't been coming around?”

“No. I was trying to keep my distance. Madeline had mentioned that you were frustrated with us, so I thought it would be best to give you some space, but then when Rion and Maggie... I just... I want to be there for you, if you'll let me.”

“Jared, you are my best friend,” she declares, tearing up. “I never wanted you to stay away. Truth is, I was just frustrated, because I felt so alone. With Darrick keeping his distance, and Maggs having Rion, and you and Madeline being together, I felt like I had no one.”

“Oh, Bekka,” he consoles, wiping a tear, “You will always have me. I am so sorry for making you think otherwise. I'll stay in your life as long as you want me or need me.”

“I'll always need you, Jared, especially now with everything, and Madds... she needs to be there for her parents right now, so I don't have her. Then, there's Darrick. He's just hurting so much, or at least I think he is. I honestly don't know.”

“Has he at least been by to see you?”

“He texted me today to wish me happy birthday.”

“He texted you?” Jared queries, irritably. “On your birthday?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah answers, sniffing.

Compassionately, Jared wipes her remaining tears and assures her, “Well, you have me anytime you need, Bekka. I'm all yours... today and every day.”

“Thanks,” Rebekah says, smiling slightly and tucking her hair behind her ear, as he smiles at her.

“No problem,” he states, smiling at her. After some silence, he suggests, “Well, I think you should open my gift right now, and when Cherise asks, tell her that it was my idea. I told you once you can always throw me under the bus.”

“Okay,” Rebekah submits, laughing lightly. After taking the wrapping paper off, she sees a framed picture of her, Jared, Madeline, Maggie, Rion, and Darrick at Maggie's and Rion's wedding. Immediately, Rebekah begins to tear up looking at the picture.

“Oh, Bekka,” Jared says, remorsefully, “I am so sorry. I got this before, and I wasn't sure if you'd still want it, but-”

“I love it, Jared,” Rebekah imparts, smiling. “It's perfect. These are actually happy tears.”

“Really?” Jared asks, tearing up slightly.

“Yeah,” she answers, still smiling. “I always wanted a hard copy of this picture, but never got around to it. Thank you.”

“You're welcome,” he says, after clearing his throat.

Just then, they hear a knock at the door, and Rebekah yells, “Come in.”

When the door opens, they see Garrett, who leans against the door frame and says, “You're finally smiling.”

“It's because of what Jared got me,” Rebekah tells him, showing him the picture.

“That's really nice, Bekk,” Garrett declares, “But Cherise isn't going to be happy you started opening presents.”

“What?” Cherise snaps, then marches past Garrett inside Rebekah's room.

“I told her to,” Jared admits, adamantly, making Rebekah hide a smile, while Cherise glares at him.

“Honey, calm down,” Garrett pleads. “At least she’s smiling.”

“You’re right,” Cherise submits. “Does that mean you’re ready to come out for your party?”

“Sure,” Rebekah replies, as she tries to get up.

“Can I help, Bekka?” asks Jared.

“No, I’m fine,” Rebekah responds, so Jared backs up to give her some room, while Garrett shakes his head.

“You really should let us help you, Bekka,” declares Garrett.

“I’m fine,” states Rebekah, as she stands up, but then feels intense pain in her legs, causing them to lose strength and her to fall. Instinctively, Garrett and Jared lunge forward, and Jared catches her, causing her to smile. “Thank you, Jared. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Jared urges, as Garrett walks over. “I’m glad I caught you.”

“See, Bekk,” argues Garrett. “Now will you let me carry you?”

“I can carry her, Garrett,” Jared announces, smiling at Rebekah, then lifts her up into his arms to carry her.

“But guys,” Rebekah interjects, “The doctor said I don’t have to stop walking completely.”

“You’re still in a lot of pain, Bekk,” announces Garrett, “And it’s your birthday.”

“Yeah, Bekka,” Jared agrees, grinning at her. “Let us spoil you.”

“Okay,” accepts Rebekah, smiling lightly, as Jared carries her out of her room to the sectional and sets her down where she can put her feet up.

“Would you like a blanket, Bekka?” Jared asks.

“Yes, please,” Rebekah replies. Dotingly, Jared gets a blanket from a storage ottoman and lays it on Rebekah, making her smile. When he's done, Rebekah asks, “So what are we doing?”

“First, Jared suggested we have a *Firefly* marathon,” Garrett announces, making Rebekah smile at Jared, who is smiling as well. “Then, when Dad gets here, we are having some dinner and opening presents. See, simple. All you have to do is relax, Bekka.”

“Thanks, guys,” says Rebekah. “Hey, Jared, do you want to sit by me?”

“Sure,” Jared responds, smiling, then sits down next to her and rests his arm behind her on the couch, causing her to smile.

After several episodes, Garrett tells Jared, “Arthur's on his way.”

“Okay,” Jared says, standing up.

“Where are you going, Jared?” asks Rebekah. “I'm sure Dad won't mind if you sit next to me.”

Immediately, Cherise, Garrett, and Jared laugh, and Cherise assures her, “It's not that, Bekka. Jared's making your birthday dinner.”

“Why would you make him do that?” exhorts Rebekah, with a hint of frustration.

Laughing again, Jared confesses, “They didn't make me do anything, Bekka. I offered.”

“Really?” Rebekah squeals, making Jared laugh more, which makes Rebekah blush. “Sorry. I just really love your cooking.”

Smiling at her, Jared coyly states, “I know.”

“Thank you.”

“No problem,” he responds, as he pulls her hand up and kisses it, before leaving the room.

When Arthur arrives, he sits down next to Rebekah and kisses her forehead, while hugging her, then says, “Happy birthday, little Rose. How are you doing?”

“Better,” Rebekah responds. “Jared helped.”

Joyously, Arthur tells her, “Good.”



A while later, Cherise walks in and announces, “Dinner’s ready, and I just finished setting the table.”

“Good,” Garrett remarks, standing up and rubbing his hands together. “I’m starving, and I can’t wait to try Jared’s fe-” Suddenly, Cherise clears her throat to interrupt him.

“What?” Rebekah inquires.

“Nothing,” Cherise declares. “It’s a surprise.”

“Oh, yeah,” says Garrett. “Sorry about that, honey.”

“It’s fine,” Cherise tells him. “Just pick up Bekka and bring her in before she guesses, if she hasn’t already.”

“Alright,” states Garrett, as he leans down and lifts Rebekah, who looks at him curiously, while he carries her in and sets her down at the table, which is set elegantly with silver lids covering the plates.

Once everyone but Jared sits down, Rebekah declares, “This looks amazing, you guys. Thank you. Are you going to sit down, Jared?”

“Yes,” he answers, as he crouches next to her and places his hand on the lid of her plate. “But first—” Stopping for a moment, Jared lifts the lid to reveal Fettuccine Alfredo, then adds, “Your dinner, mademoiselle.”

“Fettuccine Alfredo?” Rebekah exclaims. “I love your fettuccine Alfredo. I haven’t had it in forever.”

“I know,” Jared proclaims, grinning. “That’s why I made it for you.”

“Thank you, Jared,” she says, tearing up, then kisses his cheek.

“You’re welcome,” Jared responds, joyously.



“Hello,” Rebekah says, smiling, as she feels herself being embraced from behind by the gentlest arms she’s ever felt. Then she looks down at her finger to see a ring with tiny white diamonds and still can’t believe it’s there. While she is imagining her wedding day, she starts feeling tiny nibbles on her neck, which causes her to giggle and declare, “I love it when you do that.”

“And I love you.” Every time she hears those words come from that mouth, her heart flutters.

“I love you, too,” she states, while turning around to look at the love of her life. “And I can’t wait to be Mrs. Rebekah Bentley.”

Suddenly, Rebekah’s eyes bolt open. “Bentley? Jared? Another?” Rebekah thinks to herself. Just then, her thoughts are interrupted by the sound of her phone ringing. Quickly, she picks her phone up and answers it, while yawning. “Hey, Darrick.” “No, I haven’t been asleep all morning. I was tired, so I laid down and must have fallen asleep.” “And it’s good I woke up. My appointment is in an hour. Are you on your way here?” While continuing on the phone, she picks up a cane and walks

out into the kitchen of her apartment, then hears a knock at the door, so she opens it and sees Jared standing there. "What do you mean you're not coming?" she asks Darrick, while motioning Jared to come in. After walking in, Jared shuts and locks the door, while Rebekah continues talking to Darrick. "Darrick, you promised." "Can't you just-" "Okay, fine. I'll see you later," she states, before hanging up the phone.

"Everything okay?" Jared asks her.

"No," Rebekah expresses, as she starts crying. "Today I have my ultrasound, and Darrick promised to be here. But he can't get away from work. He said he was going to try to get it off, but"

"I'm so sorry, Bekka," he consoles, then holds his arms open. "Come here." Sobbing more, Rebekah cozies into his chest, as his arms wrap around her. "Shh. It's okay. Would it help if I went with you? Just as a support?"

Hearing this, Rebekah quits crying for a moment and looks up at him, then implores, "You would do that?"

"I'd do anything for you, Bekka," he declares, gazing into her eyes.

"What are you even doing here?"

"Well, it's my day off," Jared explains, as Rebekah pulls away and dries her tears. "So, I thought I'd stop by and see if you needed anything."

"Thank you, Jared, and yes, it would help to have someone there. I'd ask Madds, but she's working too. You're sure you're okay with going?"

"Of course, Bekka," he replies, sincerely, as she walks into the kitchen and pulls a bottle of chocolate milk out. "When is it?"

“In an hour,” Rebekah reveals, before taking a drink of her chocolate milk and sighing in relief. “I swear chocolate milk is the only thing that settles my stomach now.”

“Well, if we leave now, we can stop and get you a chocolate milkshake. Do those work the same as chocolate milk for you and the baby?”

“I don't know,” she answers, putting her chocolate milk back in the fridge. “I haven't tried, but it sounds good.”

“Alright, then. If you're ready to go, we can go get some milkshakes, my treat.”

“Just let me grab my purse,” she requests, as she walks toward her room, but then stops right before the door. “And Jared.”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you,” she says, smiling.

“Anytime.”

After she grabs her purse, they leave and enjoy some milkshakes, before going to the doctor. When a nurse comes to get them from the waiting room, she asks Jared, “Are you the father?”

“Oh, no,” Rebekah blurts out, as her cheeks heat up and turn beet red.

“Oh, I'm sorry,” the nurse tells them. “Follow me, please.”

Once they're in the room, Rebekah is given a gown to change into, so Jared steps out for a moment to give her some privacy. “I'm done, Jared,” Rebekah announces through the door. After he walks in, Rebekah expresses, “I am so sorry, Jared, about the nurse. She must be new. She must not have even known this baby isn't even mine, technically.”

“It's alright, Bekka,” he assures her. “Don't worry about it.”

“Course no one here has met Darrick,” Rebekah confesses. “They probably think I’m making him up.” For a moment, there is silence, until Rebekah speaks again. “Hey, Jared. Would you mind-?”

“What Bekka?”

“Nothing,” she replies. “It’s silly.”

“Bekka, what is it?” Jared presses. “You know I’ll do anything for you.”

“What I was going to ask you is not necessarily appropriate,” Rebekah explains, causing Jared to become confused. “Okay, that just made it sound really bad.”

“Rebekah, what?” he pleads. “Please just tell me, so I can stop wondering and coming up with my own ideas.”

“Okay. Would you mind pretending while we’re here that you’re my boyfriend? It’s just that I told them my boyfriend was going to be here, and they don’t know Darrick’s name or what he looks like, so-” Suddenly, Rebekah stops and looks at Jared, who is smiling at her. “I can’t believe I just asked you that. I’m sorry, Jared. I didn’t mean anything by it. I know you said you couldn’t be in a relationship, but I just thought that since it was only here and it wasn’t real that-”

“Bekka, stop” he requests.

“You didn’t ruin our friendship. I ca-”

Before he finishes, the doctor walks in and says, “Good morning, Rebekah. How are your legs feeling?”

“Good morning,” Rebekah says. “They’re doing a lot better.”

“This must be your boyfriend,” the doctor announces. “I’m Dr. Carter. So glad you could make it.”

“Actually... he...” Rebekah stammers.

"That's me," Jared interrupts her, surprising Rebekah. "I'm Jared. Sorry, I haven't been here before. My work keeps me pretty busy."

"Yes, Rebekah said you were a police officer," Dr. Carter states. "I would imagine that would keep you busy. It's good you could be here today."

"Yeah," Jared confirms, looking at Rebekah's stunned smile. "I'm glad I could be here for her today too. She deserves all the support I can give. And I will make an effort to come every time from now on if she's okay with that." Timidly, Rebekah nods.

"That's really good to hear," Dr. Carter declares, then begins the ultrasound.

"Jared?" Rebekah inquires, nervously.

"Yes, hun," Jared says, resting his hand above her head.

"Would you hold my hand, please?" Rebekah asks, anxiously. "I'm a little nervous."

"Of course," he declares, as he reaches down and grasps her hand with his, then kisses her hand delicately. "Anything for you, my dear." As she sees him smiling at her, Rebekah's worries seem to fade away, and she can't help but smile back at him.

"You two make a sweet couple," Dr. Carter proclaims. "But I promise there is nothing to be worried about. Now, before I start, are we wanting to find out the baby's sex?"

"I'm not sure," Rebekah responds. "What do you think, Jared?"

"Whatever you want, beloved," he declares, smiling at her and kissing her hand again.

"It might be nice to know," Rebekah states. "Yeah. I want to know. We want to know."

“Good choice, honey,” Jared tells Rebekah.

When the ultrasound begins and Dr. Carter announces, “There’s your baby.” Seeing the baby, Rebekah and Jared both light up in amazement. “The baby looks really good so far.” While the ultrasound continues, Jared and Rebekah find themselves in awe watching this tiny figure move. “Alright, it’s time,” Dr. Carter declares. “I’m pretty sure I found what I’m looking for. Yup, that’s it. Rebekah, you’re having a boy.”

“A boy?” Rebekah exclaims, smiling from ear to ear, then looking at Jared, notices he is as well.

“That’s awesome, Bekka,” Jared states, rubbing her forehead. “And I promise, I will be there for you and your son every step of the way.” After saying this, Jared leans down and kisses her forehead. For a moment, Rebekah wishes this was her life, that how Jared is behaving and what he is saying was true, but then immediately feels guilty and pushes the thoughts away.

“Thank you,” Rebekah states, tearing up. “What would I do without you?”

“I ask myself that about you every day,” Jared exclaims. “I have no idea what I’d do without you in my life, Bekka.”

“He’s a keeper,” Dr. Carter remarks. “Hang on to that one, Bekka. He seems to really love you.” Hearing this, Jared clears his throat and gets nervous. “Oh, I’m sorry. I spoke out of turn. My apologies.”

“No, no,” Jared counters and clears his throat again. “I do... love her.” Suddenly, Jared feels himself getting sweaty and his heart racing, realizing what he just said, then looks at Rebekah, who is smiling lightly. “She’s my best friend.”

“Yeah, he’s my best friend too,” Rebekah states, again wishing this were real, but once again pushes it out of her mind and

decides to just play along. "I love him as well." Hearing this, Jared's heart races more, hearing Rebekah say this, and leans down to kiss her cheek. Then he calms down, thinking she's probably only saying it because she's pretending, and even if she does love him, it's just as a friend.

When the ultrasound is over, Rebekah gets dressed, and they leave, holding hands. Once they are in the car, Rebekah says, "Thank you, Jared for doing that. You really sold us as a couple, especially when you said you love me. I don't think Darrick could have even said that, and we're actually together. But I figured I better say it too, so she didn't think we had this one-sided thing going on."

"I understand," Jared remarks, trying to force a smile.

"Are you okay, Jared?"

"Yeah," Jared replies. "Is there anything else you have going on today you'd like help with?"

"I was just planning on going home and relaxing," Rebekah announces. "I am really tired. Pregnancy is no joke."

"I'll just drive you home then."

"You could stay if you want," Rebekah tells him. "We could watch something, like we used to."

"I'd like that," Jared declares, as he turns the car on and prepares to drive away.

"Wait, Jared," she requests, while grabbing her stomach.

"What is it, Bekka?" he asks, nervously.

"Quick, give me your hand," she states, then grabs his hand and puts it on her stomach. "Do you feel that? He's kicking."

At first, Jared doesn't feel anything but goosebumps from her touching his hand, then suddenly smiles and exclaims, "Wow! That's incredible!"

"I know, right?"





Chapter 13

“Madds, I can’t take this anymore,” confesses Rebekah, angrily, as she walks out of her room into the kitchen, hanging up the phone.

“He didn’t answer, did he?” inquires Madeline.

“No,” Rebekah replies, getting a cup out of the cabinet. “He never does anymore. He never calls. He doesn’t even text anymore, Madds. It’s over.”

“Well, that took long enough,” scoffs Madeline.

“What does that mean?” asks Rebekah, while opening the fridge to grab the chocolate milk.

“Bekks, you and Darrick have been together for over a year,” Madeline explains, “And your relationship really hasn’t gone anywhere in that time. I wish all the time that I hadn’t set you two up. That way you and-” Suddenly, there is a knock at the door, interrupting Madeline, who walks over to the door and opens it. “Look who’s here, Bekks,” announces Madeline, as she moves out of the way to reveal Jared standing on their doorstep.

“You made it!” Rebekah exclaims, then rushes over and hugs Jared, while kissing him on the cheek.

“I promised you I would,” declares Jared, shutting and locking the front door, as Madeline walks into her bedroom.

“You’re sure you’re okay coming today?” inquires Rebekah, as she walks back into the kitchen, while he follows her. “I’m sure you’re exhausted after working all week long.”

“Why do you think I did that?” asks Jared, picking up the chocolate milk and pouring it for her. “I promised you I would be available to go to all of your doctor’s appointments.”

“Still,” Rebekah says, then takes a sip of her chocolate milk. “Aren’t you getting sick of pretending to be my boyfriend?”

“It doesn’t bother me,” Jared assures her, then kisses her cheek. “I’ve told you time and time again I’d do anything for you, Bekka. This really is no big deal.”

“You pretend to be her boyfriend?” interjects Madeline.

“I asked him to, Madds,” Rebekah reveals, “So that I wouldn’t feel so awkward, but if you keep this up, Jared, they’ll expect to see you at the hospital when the baby’s born.”

“If that’s what I need to do for you Bekka,” Jared exclaims, while putting the chocolate milk away, “Then that’s what I’ll do.”

“It’s a good thing Darrick won’t be there,” Madeline points out.

“Yeah,” Rebekah concurs. “That would be difficult to explain to both Dr. Carter and Darrick.”

“Why won’t Darrick be there?” queries Jared.

“Bekks is breaking up with him,” answers Madeline, before Rebekah has a chance, surprising Jared.

“What?” utters Jared.

“I didn’t exactly say that I was breaking up with him, Madds!” Rebekah rebuttals.

“You said it was over,” Madeline contends. “Now, do you have something you want to tell Bekks, Jared?”

“What, Jared?” implores Rebekah.

After glaring at Madeline, Jared stammers, "Bekka, I just... wanted to say... I'm sorry. I'm sure that wasn't an easy decision." Hearing this, Madeline rolls her eyes and walks into her room.

"Thanks, Jared," expresses Rebekah. "To be honest, I don't know if I made a decision. I mean, yeah, it is over. But I don't know if I can break up with him. I know he's really hurting, and I don't want to hurt him more."

"I understand," Jared assures her. "And as usual, when it comes to Darrick, I don't want to tell you what to do, but if you plan on breaking up with him, it's not going to get easier, and he should know how you feel."

"Yeah," Rebekah says, sighing. "Do you mind if we talk about something else?"

"Of course not," Jared assures her. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Well, why you're early," Rebekah states, making Jared laugh.

"I wanted to check if you didn't need anything first," Jared announces.

"I don't," Rebekah tells him, then quickly finishes her chocolate milk before putting the cup in the sink. "But going out for milkshakes sounds good. We haven't done that in a while. It can be my treat."

"No, Bekka," he argues, confusing her. "It will be my treat. Let me spoil you, alright? You're going through so much right now between preparing to have the baby and the thing you don't want to talk about. You deserve some spoiling."

"Fine," Rebekah submits, as she picks up her purse and walks to the door, which he unlocks and opens for her. "But we're sharing this time, so you don't have to spend so much."

Playfully, Jared tells her, "If you insist."

"I do," Rebekah declares, then kisses his cheek before walking out of the apartment with him giddily following her.



After they go get a chocolate shake together, he takes her to the doctor. When they arrive, Jared opens her door and helps her out of the car. "You know, Jared, we're not even in there yet," Rebekah points out, "But you have been opening my door ever since we left. In fact, you always do. You don't have to do that when you're not needing to pretend to be my boyfriend."

"Being a boyfriend and being a gentleman are two different things, Bekka," he explains, as he takes her hand and walks her to the office door, making her smile. After opening that door, Jared allows Rebekah to walk in first. Once she checks in, they sit down together, where he kisses her hand while holding it, then puts his arm around her. All the while, she smiles at him, until she is called back.

During her examination, Dr. Carter announces, "Rebekah, I have some news for you."

"Is everything okay, doctor?" Rebekah asks, as she and Jared have a look of worry on their faces.

"Well, it just seems your baby is wanting to meet everyone sooner than he is ready," explains Dr. Carter. "Those sensations you have been feeling in your stomach are most definitely contractions."

"What does that mean, doctor?" inquires Rebekah, nervously, as Jared holds her hand. "Am I going to be having the baby too early?"

"Well, we're going to do everything we can to postpone the birth," Dr. Carter tells her, "Starting with keeping you off your

feet as much as possible. Let Jared here take care of you more. Don't do anything that might cause you to go into labor. You're also going to need to take some time off of work, since you work at a daycare, or at least make sure you don't lift any of the children. Plus, I want you to come in weekly for some non-stress tests, which you can schedule on your way out."

"For how long?" Rebekah queries, anxiously.

"Preferably, we would like you to make it to term," Dr. Carter replies. "However, if we can at least get you to 36 weeks, then I can rest easier."

"That's almost a month," Rebekah argues. "Jared works. I can't ask him to--"

"Hey, hey, honey," Jared interrupts kindly, rubbing her cheek and making her look at him. "I am here for you. Every chance I get, I will make sure I'm with you to help you out. And when I can't, Madeline will, and Garrett and Cherise will. Then, there's your dad. We'll make it work. I promise. You don't need to worry."

"Okay," Rebekah utters, calming down.

"You know Jared," Dr. Carter says, "You can kiss her. I won't judge. It's clear you want to, and I'm sure she could use some reassur--"

"Oh," Rebekah interrupts, as Jared's eyes get big, "We don't exactly do PDAs."

"Then what do you call all the affection you two show each other all the time here?" asks Dr. Carter, as she and Jared help Rebekah sit up. "I promise I won't tell anyone."

Looking over at Jared, Rebekah can tell he feels awkward and assures him, "You really don't have to, Jared. I don't want to make you feel uncom--" Suddenly, Jared interrupts her with a

peck on the lips, taking her completely by surprise, then stares at her, while she stares back at him.

Smiling lightly, Dr. Carter tells them, "Have a good day, you two. And I'll see you back here in a week. I'll just leave your chart at the appointment desk."

Once she's gone, Rebekah declares, "She's gone. Jared, I am so sorry. I never meant for that to happen."

"It's fine, Bekka," he assures her, reeling from the kiss.

"You didn't mind?" implores Rebekah.

"Of course not," Jared responds, surprising her. "Did you?"

"Well, I guess I'm still technically with Darrick," Rebekah points out, making Jared sigh, "So I kind of feel like I cheated on him. Granted, he has kissed other women, while being with me, including Madds. But that doesn't justify me doing the same thing."

"I'm sorry, Bekka."

"It's not your fault. You have been nothing but supportive, Jared, and you were right. Stringing Darrick along when I have no intention of staying with him isn't fair to either of us. So, I'm going to break up with him... right now."

"I never said you had to do it right this second."

"I have to before I talk myself out of it, Jared. The only thing is I don't know how I'm going to, since he never talks or sees me anymore. I could try to track him down, but I don't know where he is... ever. I guess I could go see him at work, but I don't know when he works. Do you?"

"Not since he transferred to organized crime," Jared answers, "Chief's department."

"He moved departments? When?"

"About a month ago," Jared announces. "I'm sorry. I thought you knew."

"I didn't," Rebekah divulges. "I haven't talked to him in at least two months. Not from lack of trying though. He just doesn't respond to my texts or calls anymore. I guess I'm going to have to just leave him a message. I know that sounds messed up, but I can't try to track him down, since Dr. Carter wants me to take it easy."

"You shouldn't have to," declares Jared, rubbing both her arms.

"I think I'm going to get changed out of my gown," Rebekah tells Jared.

"I'll be right outside," Jared says, then walks out.

As soon as Jared's out of the room, Rebekah takes a deep breath and decides to Darrick first, before changing, and of course, he doesn't answer. When she's able to, Rebekah begins saying, "Darrick, I've been trying to reach out to you for a while now, but you don't return my calls or texts anymore. I know you're hurting, but I have been too. It's not fair to us to continue in a relationship that neither of us are invested in anymore. Anyway, I don't think this is working out anymore, and I didn't want to do this over the phone, but since you won't let me see or talk to you anymore, I don't think I have much choice. So, here it goes. Darrick, it's over. I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me, and I hope you find happiness. I'll still try to let you know when the baby's born, whether you want to be around for that or not. But Maggs and Rion would've wanted you to meet their baby. Anyway, I guess I'll see you later... maybe." With that, Rebekah hangs up the phone, then changes back into her clothes, before opening the door and seeing Jared waiting there. Taking her hand, he escorts her outside to his car and helps her get in the passenger seat.

"You alright?" he implores, noticing she hasn't said anything since changing.

“Yes and no. I did it.”

“Did what?”

“I called Darrick,” Rebekah declares, “And broke up with him over a voicemail, because he didn’t answer.”

“Really?”

“Am I a bad person?” cries Rebekah.

“Absolutely not,” he assures her. “You are an amazing person. What makes you think you are?”

“I broke up with him over a voicemail.”

“Bekka, you’ve tried to reach out to him,” Jared points out, compassionately. “We all have, and he just isn’t interested.” Noticing she still looks distressed, he implores, “Is something else bothering you, Bekka?”

“I just thought when things ended between Darrick and me,” Rebekah expounds, “I would be heartbroken. But the truth is the only reason I feel bad is because of how I broke up with him. The thing is I don’t have feelings for him anymore. I haven’t for a long time. I also thought he’d be the one to break up with me.”

“He would have been stupid to do that,” Jared remarks.

“Why do you say that?”

“Anybody would be a fool to break up with you, Bekka. I’m just your fake boyfriend, and I would be a fool to fake break up with you.”

Hearing this, Rebekah laughs, then states, “Thank you, Jared. How do you do that?”

“What?”

“Make me laugh,” Rebekah responds, “When I want to cry.”

"I guess it's just part of my charm," enthuses Jared, making Rebekah laugh again.

"Just for me though," Rebekah points out. "I've never seen you have that kind of effect on anyone else."

"Well, you're special, Bekka," announces Jared, causing her to tear up. "Are you alright, Bekka?"

"Yes," Rebekah replies, crying a little. "I just feel so blessed that I have you in my life."

"Trust me, I'm the one who's blessed," Jared declares, pulling her into his embrace, then kisses her forehead. After they hug for a while, Jared questions, "Where to now? You want to go home?"

"I should probably go to my work and talk to them about what Dr. Carter said."

"Alright," Jared accepts, before driving away.

When they arrive at the daycare, Jared helps Rebekah get out of the car, before they walk up to the entrance of the daycare, where they see Garrett and Cherise. "Hey, guys," Rebekah calls out to them. When they turn around, she queries, "What are you two doing here?"

"Baby's not feeling well," Garrett replies. "Cherise and I were at lunch when they called us, so we came to pick her up."

"Poor M.E.," expresses Rebekah, sadly. "We can reschedule the baby shower, until after M.E. feels better."

"No," counters Cherise. "I'm still planning on throwing your baby shower today at our house. Besides, Madeline will be there to help. Neither of us want to postpone."

"Fine," submits Rebekah, as they walk inside. "There's no arguing with either you or Mads anyway."

“This is true,” Cherise exclaims.

“What are you doing here, Jared?” questions Garrett, after he and Jared stop snickering at Rebekah's remark. “I know Bekka works here, but that doesn't explain why you're here.”

“I was just giving Bekka a ride,” Jared explains.

“I have to talk to my boss,” Rebekah announces. “Dr. Carter told me to take it easy, so I either have to stop lifting and take it easy at work or stop working all together.”

“Is everything alright with the baby?” implores Cherise.

“Little guy just wants to come early,” Rebekah declares.

“Of course,” remarks Garrett, before he talks to the receptionist, and Rebekah goes to meet with her boss.

When Rebekah finishes, she walks back out to the front to see Jared, who asks, “How did it go?”

“She thinks it would be best if I just came back after the baby's born,” Rebekah replies. “Just start my maternity leave early.”

Noticing Rebekah's eyes moistening, Jared beseeches, “You alright?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah responds, as Jared opens the door. “I'm just going to miss these kids. They're so much fun.”

Smiling, Jared assures her, “Don't worry. You'll be back to work before you know it, Bekka. And just think, within the next couple of months, you'll have a little one of your own.”

“I can't believe it!” Rebekah exclaims, looking over at Garrett and Cherise, who wave as they arrive at their car and put the car seat in.

After Jared and Rebekah wave back at Garrett, Jared offers his arm to her and queries, "So what's your plans for the rest of the day?"

"My baby shower is tonight," Rebekah says, interlocking her arm with his. "I have nothing until then."

"We could hang out," Jared suggests, "If you want. Besides, you're supposed to be taking it easy, so I should be there to make sure you do."

"You don't have to do that," Rebekah assures him, smiling.

Turning toward Rebekah and making her face him, Jared grins and enthuses, "Now what kind of pretend boyfriend would I be if I didn't uphold my promises to my pretend girlfriend?" Hearing this, Rebekah smiles more, as she gazes at him. Gazing back at her, they both begin leaning toward each other, when suddenly they hear an explosion. Looking back at the daycare, they see a large fire and panic. As quickly as possible, Jared runs toward the building, not realizing that Rebekah is following him.

When Jared gets to the front of the building, several children and employees are running out, coughing. Rapidly, he helps direct them to keep going and get further away from the building. Seeing no one else running out, Jared asks one of the employees, "Is everyone out?"

"I don't see any of the babies," the employee answers, coughing, "Or employees taking care of them."

Without hesitation, Jared runs inside the daycare, as Rebekah asks nervously, "Kids, are you oka-" Suddenly, she stops when she notices Jared running inside. Panicking, Rebekah starts running toward the building, just as Garrett runs up behind her.

Stopping her from moving, Garrett urges, "Bekka, you can't go in there!"

"Jared's in there!" Rebekah cries.

"I know," Garrett states, not letting go of her. "But you can't go inside. It's too dangerous for you and the baby!"

Fretfully, Rebekah watches the front door, while praying, "Please, God. Please don't let him die." Eventually, they see some employees walking out, carrying the infants. Not seeing Jared, Rebekah begins panicking more, while Garrett hangs on to her. Finally, Rebekah sees Jared, carrying two infants, and lets out a sigh of relief along with Garrett, before Rebekah utters, "Thank you, God."

"That's everyone!" Jared announces, out of breath. Gratefully, Rebekah runs up to him and takes one of the infants, then embraces him, while also kissing his cheeks repeatedly. "I'm okay, Bekka," Jared assures her, just as firefighters show up and attend to the building.

"Sorry, I was just so scared," Rebekah confesses. "I thought—"

"I know," Jared states. "But I had to go in."

"You're such a good man, Jared," Rebekah declares, before hugging him again. "Do you want me to take the other baby?"

"I'm good, Bekka," he exclaims. "I do have some practice with babies."

"Really?"

"Yeah," he confirms, while they both bounce the babies to calm them. "I used to help my—" Suddenly, he stops, causing Rebekah to look at him curiously, until he states, "I used to help some neighbors with their baby my senior year of high school."

"That's nice of you," Rebekah tells him, smiling.

"So, I can help with your baby, too," Jared points out, "Without a problem."

"Thank you, Jared," Rebekah expresses, smiling even more.

“Of course!” Jared enthuses, then leans closer and whispers, “Like I said, what kind of fake boyfriend I would be if I didn’t help my fake girlfriend?” Hearing this, Rebekah giggles, as Jared kisses her cheek, grinning. Once again, she wishes this were real, and for the first time she doesn’t feel guilty thinking that way, since she’s not with Darrick anymore. The thing is she knows Jared can’t be with anyone, so she puts the dream of being with him out of her mind and decides to just enjoy having his friendship and company.



“Look who’s here again, Bekks,” announces Madeline, as she moves out of the way for Jared to walk into their apartment.

“Hey, Jared,” Rebekah says, while trying to get more comfortable on the couch and placing her Nintendo switch controller down.

“Hey, Bekka,” Jared tells her, smiling at her, as she smiles at him.

“Just in time for me to go to work,” declares Madeline. “Later, Jared.”

“Later, Madds,” he tells her, not taking his eyes off of Rebekah, making Madeline roll her eyes before she leaves.

“You want to play, Jared?” Rebekah asks him.

“Come again,” states Jared.

“My switch,” Rebekah announces. “The one Cherise and Garrett gave me for my birthday.”

“Only if we play together,” Jared declares.

“Well, I’m not that good,” Rebekah confesses. “You’d think after all this time I’d be getting better, but sadly, I’m not.”

“You are a lot better than you think, Bekka,” he assures her.

“Thanks,” she responds. “Would you like to sit down?”

“Sure,” he replies. “But first, do you need anything?”

“No, I’m fine,” Rebekah tells him. “Please sit.”

“Okay,” Jared submits, smiling, then sits down next to her after grabbing the other controller.

After they play for a while, Rebekah confesses, “I think I need a break.”

“Okay,” says Jared, taking the controller from her and putting them both away. “What would you like to do now?”

“You still want to stay?”

“I’ll stay as long as you need,” Jared replies. “I don’t want you to ever feel alone in this.”

“But Madds works the grave shift,” Rebekah declares.

“Then I’ll stay all night if I need to,” Jared tells her, “If you’re okay with that.”

“Yeah,” Rebekah responds. “You’re welcome to stay as long as you want. I think we have an air mattress somewhere or you can sleep on the couch.”

“I’m fine on the couch,” he remarks.

“There’s blankets in the closet,” Rebekah explains, anxiously.

“I’m fine, Bekka,” Jared assures her. “Are you ready to go to bed?”

“No,” she answers. “I should go to bed, but I’m not sleepy, and I don’t really want to be alone right now. Did you see the news today? ’Course you probably knew before I did, but that delivery

guy who was responsible for causing the fire, by leaving a match in the utilities closet, is a member of that group, the Raiders. He intended to start that fire.”

“I know.”

“I just can't believe they're targeting kids now,” Rebekah expresses. “It's so wrong.”

“Yes, it is,” Jared concurs. After a while, he beseeches, “Are you alright? Do you need anything?”

“I'm fine,” Rebekah assures him. “I think I'm going to go change into my pajamas. Do you think after I'm done we could watch a movie?”

“Sure,” Jared replies, as he helps her up.

“Thank you, Jared.”

“No problem, Bekka,” Jared says, just before she walks in her room and shuts the door. After a few minutes, Rebekah emerges from her room, dressed in her pajamas, and sees Jared sitting on the couch, looking at his phone, yawning. “Everything okay?” inquires Rebekah, startling Jared.

“Of course,” he replies, as he stands up. “Feel better?”

“Yeah,” she answers, then grabs her stomach.

“You okay?” asks Jared, apprehensively.

“Yeah,” she responds, grimacing slightly. “Another contraction.”

“You should sit down,” Jared suggests, then walks over to her and guides her to the couch, before helping her sit down. “What now?”

“Dr. Carter said drinking water helps,” Rebekah tells him. Immediately, Jared rushes into the kitchen and brings back a cup of water for her. “Thank you, Jared,” she tells him, then hands him a key before drinking.

“What’s this?”

“A key to the apartment. Madds and I talked, and since the doctor doesn’t want me getting up as much and you’ll be coming over to help, we figured you should have a key, so you can just walk in. Don’t worry. You won’t walk in on us walking around in anything inappropriate, except maybe Madds in some of her pajamas, but you’ve already seen some of those, since she doesn’t seem to have a problem dressing like that in front of everyone.”

“Okay,” Jared says, laughing, as he takes out his keys and attaches the new key to the keychain, then puts them back in his pocket. “Now, do you need anything before we watch a movie?”

“A blanket?”

“Of course,” Jared responds, then walks over to the closet and takes out a blanket, then lays it on Rebekah.

“Thank you, Jared,” Rebekah states, as he grabs the remote and sits down next to her.

“You’re welcome,” he tells her, then notices her shivering. “You still cold?”

“No,” she replies. “That’s not even why I need the blanket. I think its nerves. Do you think you could hold me? Your arms are very warm and comforting.”

“Of course. Come here,” he requests, holding his arm up. Happily, she relaxes in his arms, while he gently rubs them and asks, “Is that better?”

“Much,” Rebekah enthuses. “Thank you.”

“No problem,” Jared exclaims, then turns on the television before they end up falling asleep, rather quickly.





Chapter 14

“Oh, Bekka!” Rebekah’s heart begins to quicken from the sound of that voice. The nibbles from his lips on her neck tickles her very soul. Her heart is so full of love and desire, as she begins unbuttoning his shirt.

“The time is here,” she thinks to herself before exclaiming, “Oh, Jared!”

Suddenly, Rebekah bolts awake. “Oh, Jared? Again?” she utters to herself, knowing she’s the only one home. “Now I’m going to have those kinds of dreams about Jared? I don’t know why I am surprised though. I’ve been having romantic dreams about him for months. Not to mention, Jared and I have been getting so much closer. Still, we’re just friends, and Jared has already said he can’t be in a relationship. He probably doesn’t even feel the same way I do. How I wish we could be more, though? Seeing how he is when he’s pretending to be my boyfriend makes me want to have him as my boyfriend for real. And that one time when we kissed was amazing. I’ve wanted to kiss again, but every time I get the courage to try, something interrupts. A contraction. The phone ringing. Or he looks away awkwardly, which I guess I do sometimes too, because I suddenly get nervous. I just wish I knew if Jared was feeling the same way. That probably wouldn’t make a difference though, since he can’t or won’t commit.” Feeling discouraged, Rebekah walks out to the kitchen and grabs a cup from the cupboard, then sets it on the counter, before getting the chocolate milk out. As she’s pouring the milk, she hears the door unlocking. Putting the milk down, she looks up and sees Jared walking in.

“Hey, Bekka,” he exclaims the moment he walks in, before he shuts and locks the door.

“Hi, Jared,” she says, smiling.

“How are you this morning?” petitions Jared, walking toward her.

“Better now that you’re here,” declares Rebekah, causing him to look at her curiously. “You just always make me feel happier when you’re around. You’re the best friend I’ve ever had, Jared.”

Sighing, Jared concurs, “As are you to me, Bekka.” Hearing this, Rebekah sighs, then takes a sip of her chocolate milk, which makes her smile. Watching her, Jared smiles and asks, “Baby still likes chocolate milk?”

“Hey, baby likes what baby likes!”

“No judgment here,” Jared states, walking even closer to her. “Chocolate milk is good!”

“You want some?” inquires Rebekah, playfully offering him some from her glass.

“Sure,” he replies, then takes the cup and drinks a sip of her chocolate milk.

“Taste good?” she asks, flirtatiously, leaning against the counter.

“Delicious,” he declares, setting the cup down.

Hearing this, Rebekah looks at him coyly and bites her lip, as Jared moves very close in front of her and rubs both her arms, then leans in closer, until Rebekah looks away awkwardly and asks, “What are you doing here, Jared? Don’t you have to work today?”

“No. I work tomorrow, Bekka.”

“Sorry. Pregnancy brain,” Rebekah reveals, making him laugh. “What? It’s a real thing!”

“I know,” he states, stopping himself from laughing, but continues to grin.

“So why are you here?” she implores. “Not that I’m not happy to see you, Jared. I’m always happy to see you, but Dr. Carter said I’m clear to resume normal activities, so you don’t have to come over every day anymore, unless you want to or you need something. Do you need something?”

“Actually, Madeline said you needed something,” he announces.

“She didn’t?”

“She did,” he confirms. “But Bekka, why didn’t you just ask me? You know I would be happy to put the crib together for you, and I would have had plenty of time, considering how much I’ve been here in the last month.”

“I know,” she says, walking into the living room. “It’s just, you do so much for me. You go with me to all my doctor’s appointments and pretend to be my boyfriend there, so I don’t feel so embarrassed. You also attended all of my birthing classes. And when Dr. Carter said I had to take it easy, you came over every day. You have been there for me so much ever since-” Feeling sad, Rebekah picks up some baby blankets and starts folding them, which ends up causing her to weep.

“Bekka, what is it?” Jared asks, with concern.

“I miss Maggs and Rion.”

“Me too,” he adds, walking closer to her.

“He would have loved to put the crib together. Plus, every time I pick up a baby item, I think of how happy Maggs would be and how much of a better mom she would be.” Compassionately, Jared holds his arms out to hold her, causing her to sigh and glide into his embrace.

“Bekka, you are going to make a wonderful mother,” he declares, softly, while resting his head on hers, still holding her in his arms.

“How do you know?”

“Because I know you!” he states, pulling her away from his chest for a moment to look her in the eye. “You are the most amazing and selfless person I have ever met in my life.” Hearing this, Rebekah calms down, as he consoles her and pulls her back in for another hug. “Besides, you will never have to do any of this alone. You have Madeline, Garrett, Cherise, and you’ll always have me. You know I’d do anything for you, right Bekka?”

“Yeah,” she responds, wiping away her tears, still producing more. “But what am I going to tell the baby about his real parents?”

“You tell him everything! You tell him how cool his parents were and how they would be so proud of him, that they love him, and that they will be there for him, even if he can’t see them, and they are watching him grow up and be raised by someone they trusted would do an amazing job.”

“Do you really believe that?” she asks, looking up at him.

“Of course, I do,” he assures her, as he looks down at her, causing her tears to become joyful.

“Thank you, Jared,” she exclaims, hugging him tightly and resting her head on his chest, underneath his head.

“Always,” he says, kissing the top of her head. “Okay. So where is this crib?” he asks, pulling away and rolling up his sleeves before she leads him into her bedroom. Since they had met, this was the first time he had been inside her room. Looking around, he sees a car seat holding a diaper bag by a duffle bag sitting next to the bed that’s holding a few stuffed animals and a floral blanket, revealing sage green sheets from the bed being unmade. “Nice room,” Jared states, feeling slight discomfort from being in there, then notices crib parts in disarray from several attempts of trying to put it together. “This must be the crib. Okay, Bekka. You just relax. You are preparing to bring a baby into this world. I can handle this.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely,” he exclaims, helping her sit on the bed, then kisses her cheek, before he begins putting the crib together. At first, Jared has a rough start putting the crib together, making Jared and Rebekah laugh about the whole thing.

“If you don't mind, Jared,” says Rebekah, “I think I'm going to go get a bowl of cereal.”

“Of course, I don't mind, Bekka,” he states, then notices her struggling to get up off of her bed. “Bekka, stop.”

“What?” she inquires, as he jumps up off the floor.

“Let me help you,” he requests, pulling her arms onto his shoulders.

“Oh, Jared,” Rebekah says, “You really don't need to.”

“I want to,” declares Jared, as he lifts her up.

“Thank you, Jared.”

“No problem, Bekka,” he tells her, then kisses her cheek again, while smiling. “Now, let's go get you some cereal, unless you want something else.”

“I want cereal.”

Laughing, Jared declares, “Well, then. Cereal it is!” Still smiling, he rests his hand on the small of her back before walking her into the living room and helping her sit down on the couch. “Now you sit here, and I will get you your cereal. Then, while you eat and watch some *Firefly*, I will finish your crib.”

“Without you?” Rebekah exclaims. “You and I always watch *Firefly* together.”

"I will still watch it with you after I'm done," Jared assures her, as he sits on the coffee table in front of her. "I don't plan on going anywhere, until you kick me out."

"I could never do that to you, Jared."

"Good," remarks Jared, smiling. "Now what kind of cereal do you want?"

"All of them," replies Rebekah, making Jared laugh.

"Alright. I'll go get you a mixture of all the cereal in your cupboard. Be right back." With that, Jared kisses her forehead, then walks into the kitchen and prepares her a bowl of cereal, while Rebekah watches him, intently.

"Why are you so good to me, Jared?" Rebekah asks, as he pours the milk on the cereal.

"What do you mean, Bekka?" inquires Jared, grabbing a spoon and walking over to her with the cereal.

"This," Rebekah replies, taking the bowl and spoon. "You came over on your day off to take care of me and build a crib. You could have relaxed, but instead you chose to work for me." As Jared sits on the coffee table in front of her, Rebekah stops for a moment. After taking a bite, she adds, still chewing on her food, "Plus, you came over every day when Dr. Carter said I needed to take it easy. You came over on your days off, and you even would show up the moment you got off of work to help. Many nights you slept on my couch, when I'm sure your bed is much more comfortable. I've seen you more than anyone, Jared, even more than Madds. I'm not complaining. I enjoy seeing you. I just feel bad that I keep you so busy."

Gazing happily at her, Jared declares, "Don't feel bad for me, Bekka. I like keeping busy, and being busy for you is just an added bonus." Hearing this, Rebekah smiles at Jared and kisses his cheek. "Now that makes it all worth it, Rebekah." Instantly, Rebekah's grin turns into a giggle after Jared says this, which

makes her forget her cereal and stare at him, until Jared breaks the silence. “Your cereal is getting soggy, and I need to get that crib done.” After he stands up, he grabs the remote and hands it to Rebekah, while commanding, compassionately, “Now, you just enjoy your cereal, and watch whatever you want. And if you need anything, just yell, okay?”

“Thanks, Jared,” states Rebekah, before taking another bite of cereal and turning on the television.

“No problem,” he states, smiling, then walks back into Rebekah’s room.



A while later, Jared walks into the living room at the end of an episode of *Firefly* and watches it, without Rebekah realizing. At the end of the episode, Jared announces, “Great episode.” Hearing his voice, Rebekah jumps, causing Jared to express, “Sorry, Bekka. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“You’re fine,” she assures him. “I was just daydreaming.”

“About what?”

“Nothing,” Rebekah quickly answers, causing Jared’s eyebrow to furrow, while she feels embarrassed that she was daydreaming about being married to Jared. “I was just thinking about being a mom and wishing I had someone.”

“You do,” Jared declares, as he walks around the couch and sits next to her. “You have a lot of people. You have Madds, Garrett, Cherise, your dad, and me. You know I’ll do anything for you, Bekka. Just say the word.”

“Thank you, Jared,” Rebekah says, smiling. “But I mean, I wish I had a partner, you know.”

“Well, Bekka,” he utters, nervously, “Well, I’ll do whatever I can to make you feel like you’re never alone.” Immediately, Jared notices a sparkle in her green eyes, as she smiles at him in a way she never has before. “Speaking of which, come with me.” Gently, Jared helps her stand up, then requests, “Close your eyes.” Curiously, Rebekah looks at him, then closes her eyes, before Jared giddily guides Rebekah back into her room and stops right in front of the finished crib.

“What’s going on, Jared?” beseeches Rebekah. “Is everything okay? Is it the crib? Will it not work?”

Smiling, Jared tells her, “You can open your eyes.” Slowly, Rebekah opens her eyes to see the crib and begins tearing up. “Are you okay, Bekka?”

“Yeah,” she responds, tearing up. “It’s just so beautiful, Jared. Thank you so much.”

“It’s no problem,” Jared assures her, while smiling, then wipes a tear from her face.

With a giant grin on her face, Rebekah exclaims, “You know, Jared, this deserves payment.”

“You don’t need to pay me, Bekka.”

“I wasn’t meaning with money,” Rebekah clarifies with a coy smile, moving closer to Jared.

“Oh, what did you have in mind?” inquires Jared, revealing a flirtatious grin, leaning closer to her.

For a moment, they get stuck staring at each other, until Rebekah leans close and kisses his cheek, then asks, “How’s that?”

Smiling Jared answers, “It’s perfect. Although, I think the other side wouldn’t mind some of that kind of payment.”

With a gleeful grin, Rebekah kisses his other cheek, then queries, “That better?”

“Yeah,” Jared replies, playfully.

“Is there anywhere else you’d like some payment?” Rebekah inquires, alluringly, causing Jared to swallow hard and clear his throat, which makes Rebekah feel nervous and embarrassed.

Noticing her red cheeks, Jared suggests, “Actually, I had a different idea in mind for how you could pay me.”

“Oh?”

“But it can wait until after you have the baby,” he explains, “Unless you feel up to it now.”

“That depends on what you want,” Rebekah states, anxiously. “What is it that you want?”

“To dance with you,” he answers, coyly, rubbing her arm.

Smiling, Rebekah declares, “I think I could do that now. But it might be a little awkward, since my stomach sticks out so far now.”

“I’m sure we can make it work,” he announces, as he takes her hand and escorts her out of her room to the table, then moves it and the chairs. “There. Now we just need music.”

“I can do that,” Rebekah announces, as she walks over, picks up her phone, and starts streaming music. The first song to play is “Perfect Duet,” by Ed Sheeran and Beyoncé. Nervously, Rebekah vocalizes, “Maybe this isn’t a good song for this.”

“It’s perfect,” Jared tells her, as he takes the phone from her and puts it on the table, then takes her hand and pulls her in close to dance. “It has a good beat, not too fast and not too slow.”

“Okay,” accepts Rebekah. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to do all the moves you taught me with this giant boulder.”

"It's fine," he assures her. "There doesn't need to be any special moves. Dancing like this is good enough for me."

After a while, Rebekah rests her head on his shoulder and confesses, "I love this song." Happily, she starts singing Beyoncé's part, as Jared kisses her forehead and continues to dance slowly with her. As the end of the song approaches, Jared joins her singing. Hearing him, Rebekah moves her head up to look at him, then finishes singing the song with him, while gazing into his eyes. When the song ends, Jared announces, "Rebekah, there's something I want to tell you."

"What, Jared?" she implores.

"You are the most amazing woman I have ever met," he declares, making her tear up. "And I was wondering-"

"Yes?" she pleads.

Nervously, he stammers, "Would you-" Suddenly, Rebekah grabs her stomach, causing Jared to stop and inquire, "Are you okay? Is it a contraction?"

"No," Rebekah replies, smiling. "It's the baby. He's super active for some reason. He hasn't been this active in a long time. Feel." Enthusiastically, Rebekah grabs Jared's hand and places it on her stomach.

When Jared feels the baby, he declares, "Wow! Someone's excited!"

For a while, they gaze at each other, before Rebekah tells him, "Thank you, Jared."

"For what?"

"You said you'd do whatever you could to make me not feel alone, and that's exactly what you're doing now and what you've done all this time. If it's like this after the baby's born, I'll have my wish."

“What wish is that?”

“To have someone by my side.”

“Bekka, that’s where I belong,” he assures her, still gazing at her.

“Jared, I have a confession to make,” Rebekah announces.

“What?” he beseeches.

“These past few months have been so difficult,” Rebekah expounds, “And also terrifying, between becoming a new mom and the baby wanting to come early, not to mention the life-threatening moments. But as long as I have you near me, I’m not afraid. These past few months have made me realize one thing.”

“What’s that?” he queries, smiling.

“That there’s no one I’d rather have by my side than you,” Rebekah confesses, causing both of them to breathe heavily.

“Me neither,” Jared admits. “You always question why I do what I do for you. Yeah, I do it to make sure you’re taken care of. But I also do it for selfish reasons. I do it so I can see you smile every day, Bekka. I do it so I can hear your voice, and so I can see you get excited before you kiss my cheek, and also so I can hold you in my arms. Every moment with you is just incredible.”

“I feel the same, Jared.”

“And I was thinking that maybe-”

“Yes, Jared?” she implores.

“Could we-” he stammers. Unsure of what to say and unable to hold back anymore, Jared stops talking and begins leaning closer to her, as does she toward him, until Rebekah cringes and looks down. “Is everything okay, Bekka?”

“I’m pretty sure that was a contraction this time,” she announces.

"You should probably sit down," Jared suggests, taking her hands and leading her to the couch to sit down. "Let me get you some water. Is there anything else you need? It's around lunchtime. Are you hungry?"

"Actually, yes," Rebekah replies, as she watches him walk into the kitchen.

"What would you like?" he asks, after he brings her a cup of water.

"Hmmm... Fettuccine Alfredo!"

"Fettuccine Alfredo coming up!" he exclaims, enthusiastically.

"You don't need to go through all that. I was kidding."

"Does it really sound good?"

"Well, yeah, but--"

"Then I will make you some," Jared interrupts, pushing some hair out of her face and tucking it behind her ear. "I know you love my Alfredo."

"I really do," she declares, giddily, then stares at him, smiling.

For a while, they stare at each other, until Jared breaks free of the gaze, rather awkwardly and says, "You need food." Feeling somewhat disappointed, Rebekah watches Jared walk back into the kitchen, then smiles lightly, wondering how she got so lucky to have Jared in her life.

"I think I need to go to the bathroom," Rebekah announces.

"Let me help you up," Jared tells her, as he sets down a pot of water on the stove, then walks over to her and helps her stand up.

"Thank you, Jared."

“No problem,” Jared says, then walks back into the kitchen, while Rebekah walks to the bathroom.

Just as she reaches the doorway of the bathroom, Rebekah looks down and says, “Jared.”

“More kicking or another contraction?”

“Neither,” she responds, as she turns around to face him.

“What is it, Bekka?” he asks, feeling a little nervous when he sees her very worried face.

“I think my water just broke,” she announces, causing Jared to drop a bag of noodles, which breaks open on the floor and spills everywhere.

Quickly, he turns the stove off and walks around the counter to see a puddle on the floor, then queries, “Isn't it still too early?”

“A little, yeah,” she responds. “But Dr. Carter did say she'd feel better once I was 36 weeks.”

Noticing she's starting to breathe heavily, he rushes over to her, rubs her back and reminds her how to do her breathing exercises, while doing them with her. Once she breathes better, he declares, “We better get you to hospital.”

“My bags and the car seat,” she announces. Remembering seeing them in the room, Jared rushes back into her bedroom, grabs her hospital bag, diaper bag, and car seat, then rushes back to Rebekah. As they walk out, Jared continues to help her breathe, while being nervous himself.



On the way to the hospital, they get stuck in traffic, while Rebekah is in the back seat, groaning because of the

contractions. With frustration, Jared throws his Bluetooth on the seat and declares, "I still can't get a hold of anyone."

"Are we almost there, Jared?" Rebekah asks, wincing.

Fretting, realizing how close the contractions are becoming, Jared points out, "I can't get around, Bekka. I'm sorry."

"I don't think we're going to make it!" announces Rebekah, making Jared stop and flip his head around. "The baby's coming now!" Feeling terrified for Rebekah and the baby, Jared contemplates what to do, while his mind races. Finally, he makes a decision and pulls over. "What are you doing?"

"Delivering your baby!" he announces, before getting out of the car.

"What?"

"I don't know what else to do Rebekah," Jared explains, after getting in the back seat, "But we are stuck. Your baby is coming, and there is no stopping it! Besides, this ain't my first rodeo, Bekka. I've done this before."

After considering her lack of options, she states, "Do it!"

"Okay," Jared says, then grabs his Bluetooth and puts it back on. "Just hang on, Bekka. I need to call 911 and try to get an ambulance here, just in case." While he does that, he gets some supplies from his first aid and her diaper bag.

When Jared finishes explaining the situation to the dispatcher and puts some gloves on, Rebekah panics again and blurts, "I can't do this, Jared! I'm too scared!"

Leaning forward, Jared pulls her face up by her chin, looks her in the eyes and assures her, "Bekka, look at me. You can do this. I know you can do this. I believe in you."

“But what if you delivering my baby changes everything between us?”

“Bekka, I’m not going anywhere,” he vows. “If delivering your baby changes our relationship, I can only believe that it will be for the better.”

After some silence, she finally accepts, “Okay.”

“Okay. Ready to push?” he beseeches, as he takes a deep breath and prepares to help her give birth. After she nods, he tells her, “Okay, Bekka. Push. You can do this!” Bracing onto the front seat’s headrest, she begins pushing, releasing a scream from the pain. “Keep going, Rebekah. You’ve got this!” With all her strength, Rebekah continues to push, until she can’t anymore. “Good job, Bekka. One more push, and the head should be through.” After taking a moment to rest until the next contraction begins, she pushes again and then lays her head back. “Okay, Bekka, the head is out. You’re doing great. Just keep it up.” Waiting for Rebekah to catch her breath and prepare for the next contraction, he pauses and prays silently for her and the baby. When he sees her exhausted face, he begins to worry, but pushes back his fears and commits to helping her, by telling her, “Okay, Rebekah. This should be it. Just one more big push, and I think the baby will be out.”

“Are you sure?” she asks Jared through her labored breathing.

“I’m pretty sure, Bekka,” he states. “I do know though your baby is almost out. It shouldn’t be too much longer.”

“I can’t, Jared,” she cries.

“Bekka, look at me,” Jared implores, staring her straight in the eye. “You can do this. You are the strongest person I know, and you’re not alone. I’m right here.”

“You won’t leave me?” she pleads, not breaking eye contact, while cringing from pain.

“I told you I’m not going anywhere,” he promises her, still gazing into her eyes, until Rebekah screams and starts pushing again. “That’s it, Rebekah! Almost there!” Full of the strength Jared gives her, she keeps pushing, laying her head down again and back up, pushing with all her might, until she can’t push anymore, then lays her head down and weeps. After taking a moment to catch her breath, she hears the baby crying and looks up to see Jared holding the baby in a blanket. “It’s a boy, Bekka!” Jared announces, causing Rebekah to cry and laugh at the same time, looking at her baby boy.

“Can I hold him?” she asks with happy tears pouring down her face.

“Of course,” he replies, while he wraps the baby, then moves closer to Rebekah’s head and hands the baby to her after she sits up more. As he gently passes the baby into her arms, her eyes light up. Watching her enthusiasm causes him to become elated. Once she is holding the baby, they both look down at him, and he declares, “You did it, Bekka!”

“We did it!” she tells him, then, without thinking, kisses his lips, taking him by surprise and making him smile. “Thank you, Jared!”

When she looks back at the baby, he kisses her forehead and says, “Anything for you, Bekka!” Watching her beam with joy, looking down at the baby, he realizes he is happier than he ever has been in his life, confounding him. After they look at him for a little while, he asks, “Did you ever decide on a name?”

“No,” she states. “I have been trying to find a name that has part of both Maggs’ and Rion’s name, but I can’t think of any.”

After thinking for a while, Jared suggests, “What about Mario?”

Surprised, Rebekah looks at him and exclaims, “It’s perfect! It fits them and him. Thank you, Jared.” Nodding, Jared smiles at her, and then they both smile at Mario, grateful for this perfect moment.





Chapter 15

Later at the hospital, Rebekah is resting with Mario, who is perfectly healthy, despite having been born a little early. In awe of how much she loves him, she just keeps staring at him and doesn't even notice Jared peeking in to her see her happily staring. Now wanting to disturb her, he remains silent, until she looks up and smiles at him, causing him to ask, "How are you feeling, Bekka?"

"Jared!" she says, beaming, "Come in. I am feeling a lot better."

"Where's Madeline?" Jared inquires, walking in. "Has anyone else been by?"

"You just missed Cherise, Garrett, and my dad," Rebekah tells him. "They wanted me to thank you for what you did."

"It was nothing."

"Madds is still around here," Rebekah adds, "Trying to find single doctors to flirt with." This causes both of them to laugh, until Rebekah asks, "You wanna hold him?"

"Sure," he replies. Gently, she hands Mario to Jared, who smiles when he looks at him. "I had already forgotten how tiny he is."

"Yeah," she agrees. "It's crazy how tiny newborns are and how easily it is to love them."

"Yeah," agrees Jared. Thinking about everything that led them to this moment, they both smile at Mario, then at each other.

Just then, a nurse walks in and says, "It's time for some tests."

“Is everything okay?” Rebekah asks, worrying. “Is Mario okay?”

“Just the usual tests,” the nurse explains. “We just want to make absolutely sure that he’s healthy.”

“Okay,” accepts Rebekah, still worrying, as Jared hands the baby to the nurse, who leaves with him.

When Jared turns around, Rebekah is wiping a tear, so he sits down on the chair next to the bed to calm her, rubbing her shoulder, while assuring her, “Hey, Bekka, I’m sure everything is fine. It’s good they do these tests so they can keep him safe.” Grateful for his words, she smiles, but another tear falls, which Jared wipes away, while smiling at her.

Suddenly, Madeline walks in and inquires, “Am I interrupting?”

“No!” Jared contends, quickly standing up.

“No, of course not. Come in. How’d your doctor hunt go?”

“And that’s my cue to leave,” announces Jared, as he walks out, making Rebekah and Madeline laugh.



Out in the hallway, Jared watches Mario get laid down in the nursery, while they continue their tests. Adoringly, Jared waves at Mario and smiles. Moments later, Madeline walks up to him and asks, “So, you were the one to help Rebekah deliver? How was that?”

“I don’t really want to talk about it,” Jared responds sharply.

“Calm down, Jared,” Madeline says, laughing. “I’m just giving you a hard time. Actually, I wanted to thank you for being there for her. In fact, you’re always there for her.”

“She’s my friend.”

"It's more than that, and you know it!" she states, but Jared doesn't respond. "Good name, by the way. Maggs would have loved it. And Siakisoni as his middle name after my dad. You should have heard him when I told him. He was so touched. He can't wait to meet his grandson."

"That was Bekka's idea."

After some silence, Madeline implores, "Jared, when are you going to tell her already?"

"Madeline, we've been through this," he protests, with frustration building.

"Come on, Jared," she petitions, rolling her eyes. "She and Darrick aren't together anymore, so you can't use that as an excuse."

"But they just broke up a month ago," counters Jared. "I would just be a rebound."

"No, you wouldn't, Jared," she corrects him. "They haven't been together for months. You know that. In the meantime, you have been the one who's always there, and she has noticed, trust me. She tells me all the time how you're always there for her. Plus, I've seen the way she's been looking at you lately, Jared. Since she and Darrick have been drifting apart and you haven't left her side, she has seen you in a whole new light. Also, she told me this in confidence, but-

"Why are you telling me then?" he interjects.

"Because I really think you should know," she answers. "She said she was only able to break up with Darrick because of you."

"What?" Jared asks, his eyes widening.

"She said you give her confidence she's never had before," Madeline explains, making Jared smile. "You also give her hope that she'll never be alone, and the way you treat her at the doctor,

when you're 'pretending to be her boyfriend' she just loves. You're exactly the kind of man she's looking for, and she's finally realizing it."

Processing everything Madeline is saying, Jared looks at her, then back at Mario, before he reminds her, "Madeline, I can't. With my past-

"Everybody has a past!" Madeline points out. "And she may not know all about your past, but she accepts you just the way you are. The point is, Jared, you two could make each other happy. You just need to take a chance."

Rapidly, Jared moves his eyes back and forth, then, after a long pause, he declares confidently, "I'm gonna do it!" After a short time, he repeats, "Yeah, I'm gonna do it!"

Not sure if she is imagining this moment, Madeline beseeches, "Really? Did I just hear you correctly? You're going to tell Bekks how you feel?" Enthusiastically, he nods and walks past her towards Rebekah's room. After he's out of sight, Madeline jumps a little and exclaims, quietly, "Yes!"

Joyously, Jared walks straight to Rebekah's room and feels as if time is going too slow and too fast altogether. He can't believe he's finally going to tell her how he feels and wonders what he's going to say. Many times he thought about what to say, but never found the right words. Excitement and nervousness builds the closer he gets to her door. Just before he reaches the door, he stops, takes a deep breath, and smiles. Despite all of his fears of telling her how he feels, he remains committed to following through. Finally, he moves again to the door opening to find Darrick down on one knee, holding a ring box. Realizing they haven't noticed him yet, he hides beside the door and listens in. Soon his excitement and nervousness turn to anger and regret, as he overhears Darrick talking.

"Bekka, I know I've been distant lately," confesses Darrick. "I have been trying to figure things out since you know-" After he clears his throat, he reveals, "But after I heard about Mario, I

finally knew what I was supposed to do. I had to take action right then. I want you to know you're never going to have to do this alone, and I am kneeling before you, willing to offer you a life with me. So, Bekka, marry me." Speechless, Rebekah just stands there, as she looks down at Darrick, who queries, "Bekka, are you okay?"

Hearing this, Jared listens more intently, as Rebekah replies, "I think so. I'm just not sure what to say, Darrick." Without saying a word, Darrick stands up and kisses her.

"Does that help?" Darrick asks Rebekah.

"Wha... what?" Rebekah stammers, furrowing her brow.

"What's the matter, Bekka?" petitions Darrick.

"Honestly, Darrick, I'm a little surprised," confesses Rebekah. "Actually, I'm very surprised. I broke up with you, because I haven't seen you in months. You don't text. You don't call, and that's the first time you've kissed me since before Maggs and Ri-" Suddenly, Rebekah stops and clears her throat, trying to stop herself from crying in front of Darrick, while Jared wants to comfort her, but doesn't want to interrupt, so he remains hidden. "Plus, you never even returned my phone message when I broke up with you."

"I already told you!" Darrick retorts, angrily. "I've been trying to figure things out, and now I have."

"You've been trying to figure things out?" Rebekah cries. "You know, Darrick, I've been hurting too, but you've been too busy 'trying to figure things out,' you never even noticed. You didn't try to comfort me. Jared did. You haven't gone to a single doctor's appointment or birthing class. Jared did. You weren't here for the birth. Jared was." Hearing this, Jared smiles slightly, as his heart beats even faster. Meanwhile, Rebekah adds, "Then, you just show up and act like nothing happened and ask me to marry you? Forgive me if I'm a little out of sorts."

“Bekka?” Darrick pleads.

“No, Darrick,” Rebekah snaps. “I think you need to leave.”

“Bekka, no!” Darrick contends. “Let’s talk about th-”

Before Darrick can finish, Jared rushes in and barks, “You heard her! Get out!”

“Jared?” Rebekah utters in shock.

“Get out, Darrick,” Jared commands, “Now, before I have the nurses call security.”

“Fine!” Darrick submits, aggressively pulling his jacket down, then storms out.

Once he’s gone, Jared and Rebekah look at each other awkwardly, before Jared expresses, “So?”

“How much did you hear?”

“I may have heard his proposal,” Jared confesses, “And everything after that. I’m sorry for eavesdropping. I just... I wanted to make sure you’re okay and that you know that I care about you very much.”

“I care about you too, Jared,” Rebekah admits. “Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?”

“Some other time,” Jared replies. “However, you’re going through some things right now, between having a baby and your ex proposing after ignoring you for months. I don’t want to add to that. So, we’ll revisit that when you’re ready. In the meantime, I’m here for you. As I said before, I’m not going anywhere. So, if you need to talk or cry or scream, just remember I’ll always be your shoulder to cry on. You can even punch it if you want to.”

“Jared, I could never do that to you,” Rebekah declares, releasing a small chuckle.

"I know," Jared proclaims, smiling. "I just want you to know I'm willing to do whatever you need. Now what do you need, Bekka?"

Tearing up slightly, Rebekah requests, "Could you just hold me?"

"Of course," Jared tells her, holding his arms open for her. "Come here."

Giving into her sobs, Rebekah slides into his arms, before crying, "I don't understand why I'm crying. I should be happy, because I just had a baby, who I love so much already. But what if something... happens to him? They're still running tests."

"I'm sure he's fine," Jared assures her, keeping his arms around her. "He'll be in here before you know it."

"You're probably right," Rebekah concurs, looking up at him and sniffing. "Cherise said the same thing when I texted her how worried I was. She also said I should try to rest, but it's just so difficult to rest."

Just then, they hear a knock and look over to see Madeline, who questions, "Am I interrupting?"

"No," Rebekah answers, pulling out of Jared's arms, sighing.

"Is there anything you guys want to tell me?" beseeches Madeline. Quickly, Jared shakes his head at Madeline, who queries, "Jared, did you not tell her?"

Sighing, Jared turns and looks at the opposite wall, rolling his eyes, as Rebekah asks, "Tell me what?"

"Sorry," Madeline utters. "I just thought with how Darrick stormed out of here that he... You know what? Never mind."

"Darrick is just upset," Rebekah announces, irritably, "Because I told him to leave after he proposed to me."

“He proposed to you?” petitions Madeline, reeling.

“Yes!” Rebekah snaps with a growl. “Can you believe him? I broke up with him over a month ago, which he never even said a word about. Then, he just randomly shows up and proposes, just expecting me to say, ‘yes.’ Why would I say, ‘yes?’ I wasn’t in love with him before he started ignoring me. I’m most definitely not in love with him now. Why would I marry him? Why would he even ask?” Overwhelmed with all her emotions, Rebekah starts weeping again, so Jared pulls her into his arms, while Madeline looks at her with concern, just before they hear another knock. When they look over, they see Mario being carried in by the nurse from earlier, causing Rebekah to smile and rush to him, taking him from the nurse, tearfully, while pleading, “Is he okay?”

“He is perfectly fine,” the nurse says with a smile. “He passed every test with flying colors. You have a very healthy boy.”

“See, Bekka,” Jared remarks, grinning. “I told you he would be fine.”

Still sobbing, Rebekah exhorts, “Why am I still crying?”

“Bekks, you just went through an ordeal,” Madeline points out, compassionately. “Your body is just adjusting.”

“She’s right,” the nurse concurs, kindly. “If you’d like, we can have our psychiatrist come talk to you.”

“Alright,” Rebekah accepts, nodding.

“Jared, can I talk to you for a second?” Madeline interjects.

“Sure,” Jared replies, then follows her out into the hallway.

Once they are down the hallway a little, Madeline beseeches, “Why didn’t you tell her?”

“I showed up when Darrick was proposing,” Jared explains. “I just didn’t think it was the best time to bring it up. I don’t want to put any more pressure on her than what she’s already dealing with.”

“I guess that makes sense.”

Meanwhile, Rebekah sits down on her bed, holding Mario and cries, “I’m sorry, Mario. You deserve better than this. Look at me. I’m just a mess. You would have been a whole lot better off if you had Rion and Maggs as your parents than just me. Maybe I should have accepted Darrick’s proposal. He would at least be able to help financially. I don’t even have a job right now. How am I going to take care of you? At least I have Jared to help, but I can’t ask him to help me with money. He’s not the father, and I don’t want to take advantage of him or anyone else. I already have so much help from Cherise and Garrett, and Madds is paying all of our rent right now with some help from her parents. This isn’t fair to you, Mario.”

Just then, there is a knock at the door, followed by a woman announcing herself, “Hello, I am Dr. Serenity Banks. I am a psychiatrist with the hospital. Are you Ms. Redd?”

“Yes, I am,” answers Rebekah, drying her tears.

“Is it alright if I come in?”

“Of course,” Rebekah replies. “You look a little familiar. Do we know each other?”

Before Serenity answers, her phone rings, and she states, “Hang on one second. I need to take this.” Just before she leaves the room, she says, “Hi Josh.” “No, it’s fine.” Meanwhile, Rebekah waits, trying to control her emotions. When Serenity walks back in, she knocks, then expresses, “I apologize. Normally, I don’t take personal calls, while I’m at work. However, my boyfriend is deployed overseas right now, and he only has certain times he can call.”

“That’s how I know you,” declares Rebekah. “Your Josh’s girlfriend. I met you about at Ben’s birthday party.”

“That’s right,” concurs Serenity. “How have you been? I mean, you just had a baby, so I’m sure that’s causing a lot of emotions for you.”

“You could say that,” Rebekah confesses.

“Would you like to talk about them?” inquires Serenity, sympathetically.

“I don’t know,” answers Rebekah.

“And no one is going to force you too,” Serenity assures her. “Just understand that the feelings you’re having are normal after pregnancy, and there is nothing wrong with you. Having a baby takes a toll on your body, both physically and emotionally. Imagine, if you will, if you lost an arm or a leg. That would be pretty devastating to your body, wouldn’t you say?”

“I suppose.”

“Well, it’s very similar when you have a baby,” Serenity explains. “This little boy you have was part of your body, and suddenly he wasn’t.”

“That’s not what’s bothering me,” Rebekah states, remorsefully. “At least I don’t think it is.”

“Alright. What is bothering you?”

“I’m a single mom,” declares Rebekah. “How am I going to do this? I don’t have a job or any other income coming in. Plus, my ex-boyfriend just proposed, but he hasn’t been there for me during the entire pregnancy, so why should I marry him? Although, he could help financially. I just don’t love him, and I always hoped to love the man I marry. This would be so much easier if his real parents were here.”

“You were a surrogate?”

“Yeah, but they passed away after I got pregnant.”

“I am so sorry,” Serenity states with compassion.

“I miss them so much, especially now. I don't know what to do without them. What if I screw up? What if I can't take care of him? What if I make a mistake? What if I already did by not wanting to marry my ex? Like I said, he could provide financial support. He is extremely wealthy, and he said he feels obligated to help with him now. Although, I'm not sure what made the difference. Then, there's my best friend, who I wish was more than a friend, but he can't be in a relationship. I just wish I knew what the right thing to do was.”

“You do have other family, correct?”

“Yes,” Rebekah replies. “I have my dad and my brother and his wife. I also have my best friend, like I said, who has been so supportive throughout this whole thing. And I have my other best friend, Madds, who's like a sister to me and was a twin sister to Mario's real mother. Plus, her parents have offered to help.”

“Well, it seems like you have a good support structure,” Serenity declares. “I would say rely on them.”

“It's just, from everything I've heard and watching my brother and his wife, who just had a baby a few months ago,” explains Rebekah, “Parenting is hard enough with two parents, and Mario only has me as a parent.”

“There are plenty of single parents out there,” Serenity assures her, “With kids who turn out just fine. You said you have a dad? What about your mom?”

“She died when I was 11.”

“Has your dad been single since then?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah responds. “But he had my brother’s help. He moved back home to help him with me.”

“Well, I believe you’ll be a fine mother to your little boy,” Serenity exclaims, “As long as you accept help from those who have offered. In the meantime, I think it might be a good idea to give you a prescription for an antidepressant. Would that be alright?”

“I guess.”

“Alright. In that case, are you planning on nursing?”

“Yes,” Rebekah answers.

“Okay, then I will prescribe a mild antidepressant that will be safe for your baby,” Serenity declares. “And if you need to talk again before you leave the hospital, don’t hesitate to ask. I also think it would be a good idea to see a therapist once you are home. I have several I would recommend, if you’d like.”

“Sure.”

“Alright,” Serenity says, as she stands up. “I will get that list to you, as well as your prescription. Is there anything else you need right now since I’m here?”

“No, thank you,” Rebekah replies.

“In that case, congratulations, and I hope you have a wonderful day, bonding with you baby boy,” Serenity states, then leaves the room, before Rebekah begins sobbing.

Once she leaves, Rebekah hears another knock and looks up to see Jared, who implores, “How are you doing, Bekka?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you need anything?” beseeches Jared.

“Another hug?”

“Of course,” Jared replies, then walks over and sits on the bed next to her, before hugging her and adding, “Bekka, I promise you won’t have to go through this alone, because you’ll always have me, your fake boyfriend.” Hearing this, Rebekah lets out a very tiny laugh, then sighs, causing Jared to feel concern.



“Thank you,” Rebekah tells Jared after walking inside her apartment with him following her, carrying Mario in his car seat. “And thank you for the ride home.”

“No problem,” he states, as he shuts and locks the door, before placing Mario’s car seat on the floor by the couch. “What kind of fake boyfriend would I be if I didn’t give you a ride home?”

Forcing a smile, Rebekah utters, “Yeah.”

“Hey, you okay?” implores Jared.

“Just more postpartum emotions,” Rebekah responds, causing him to hug her, until Mario wakes up and starts crying, causing them to sigh.

“I’ll take care of him,” Jared declares.

“You don’t need to do that,” she urges, while he begins unbuckling Mario.

“You have been taking care of him practically by yourself,” Jared points out, standing up with Mario in his arms, “Since I’ve had to work the past couple of days.”

“But you do so much for me,” Rebekah rebuttals.

“Which I happily do.”



“Hey, Bekks,” Madeline states, walking out of her room. “How you feeling?”

“Tired,” Rebekah says, sleepily.

“What you thinking about?”

“Jared,” Rebekah replies, making Madeline smile. “He had to go back to work today, and you have to work, so I guess I’m on my own. I’m so scared about Mario. I know I’m going to have to get a job soon, so I can take care of him, but then what am I going to do about him while I’m at work? Do you remember what happened at the daycare I worked at? It was hit by the freakin’ Raiders. I can’t send him into that kind of situation.”

“Bekks, that is not typical,” Madeline contends. “Most daycares are safe and don’t have things like that happen.”

“Of course,” Rebekah states, hastily, then wipes a tear. “You probably need to get going, don’t you?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Madeline says, sighing. “I wish I could stay, but I have a meeting at work I can’t get out of, and then I have the night shift tonight. I could see if someone could take it for me.”

“You’re fine,” Rebekah assures her. “I’m alright. I think I’m just going to lay down, since Mario’s asleep.”

“Is there anything I can get you before I head out?”

“No.”

“Okay,” accepts Madeline, before she hugs Rebekah, feeling concerned about her. “I’ll see you later.” With that, Madeline leaves, so Rebekah walks into her room and sets Mario’s car seat on the ground. Feeling exhausted from not getting any sleep in the hospital, Rebekah lays down on her bed, only to hear Mario start crying. Sighing, Rebekah gets back up and takes Mario out of his car seat, then tries to nurse him, but struggles, causing her

and Mario to stress more. Feeling frustrated and depressed, she calls Cherise. "Hey, Cherise," utters Rebekah when Cherise answers. "Are you busy?"

"Not too busy," Cherise tries to convince her, while Rebekah hears crying in the background. "What do you need, sweetie?"

"Nothing," answers Rebekah. "You're busy. I'll try my dad. Good luck with M.E."

"I'm sorry, Bekka," Cherise tells her.

"It's okay," Rebekah expresses. "Bye."

After she hangs up, she calls Arthur, who coughs heavily the moment he answers, "Hey, little Rose. How are you and Mario doing?"

"Are you sick, Dad?" queries Rebekah.

"It's just a cold," replies Arthur. "How are you and Mario?"

"We're fine," Rebekah declares, while trying to calm Mario's crying. "Just trying to get him used to home. I just called to say, 'Hi.'"

After Arthur coughs again, he states, "Well, it's good to hear from you. Love you, little Rose. Give little Mario a hug from Grandpa."

"Will do, Dad," Rebekah responds, sadly. "Love you, too. Feel better. See you later."

As she hangs up, Rebekah sighs and tries to figure out what to do. Even though she knows he's at work, she tries to call Jared, who doesn't answer. Feeling overwhelmed, she calls him again. Now exasperated, she tries Darrick, who surprisingly answers with, "Hey, Bekka. What do you want?"

"I'm sorry, Darrick," Rebekah cries, her voice cracking. "I need help with Mario. Will you please help me?"

“Of course, Bekka,” Darrick declares, sighing. “I’ll be right there.”

After they hang up, Rebekah tries to nurse Mario again and succeeds. Just as she finishes up, there is a knock at the door, so she covers up and takes Mario out to the front to open the door. “Hey,” Rebekah says to Darrick when she sees him standing there.

“Hey, Bekka,” utters Darrick. “What can I do?”

“Just be here with me,” she replies.

“Okay,” Darrick accepts, then walks in.

After she shuts the door, Rebekah asks, “Would you mind holding him for a while?”

“Sure.”

“Thank you,” states Rebekah, as she hands Mario to Darrick, who trembles a little when he takes him. “Just support his head.” After holding Mario for a minute, Darrick sits down to hold him, but keeps him about an inch from his body. “You’re not going to break him, Darrick,” she assures him, while Mario continues to cry.

“Are you sure?” Darrick queries, anxiously.

“Of course, I’m sure. Just relax. Hold him closer, Darrick. He won’t bite.”

Hesitantly, Darrick pulls him close to his chest, then declares, “He is just so little. Are you absolutely positive I won’t break him?”

“Yes.”



A little while later, once Mario settles down, Rebekah lays Mario in his crib, then announces, “Darrick, I’ve been thinking about what you asked me at the hospital. Why did you propose to me? Madds told me you don’t even believe in marriage.”

Taking a deep breath, Darrick stammers, “Bekka, I... I don’t know what to say. Madeline’s right. I don’t believe it, but before you, I didn’t believe a woman would stick around, but you did, until I took off, because I couldn’t handle Rion’s death. Rion was like a brother to me, and when he died, I didn’t know how to cope, so I turned to the bottle, which I know you don’t like. I knew I couldn’t be around you like that, especially with what happened when you first were pregnant... when I was drunk. When I got your break-up call, I knew I had screwed up. The only thing was I didn’t know how to fix it, so I decided to let you go. When Jared left a message, saying you gave birth, I felt that not only did I betray you by not being there for you, I betrayed Rion, my best friend... my brother, so I went to visit him. On his gravestone, it said, ‘Loving Husband.’ On Maggie’s, it said, ‘Loving wife.’ That’s when I figured that the only way I could make it up to you and them was by helping you raise Mario. The only thing is you don’t accept handouts, so I decided to offer you marriage, Bekka. Plus, I don’t think I’ll ever find another woman like you, who will stand by me, like you have.”

“Are you saying you’re willing to give up your life as a bachelor to help me raise Mario?”

“Yes.”

For a moment, Rebekah loses herself in her brain, thinking to herself, “He’s willing to marry me and take care of Mario, whereas Jared won’t commit. I can’t spend my entire life waiting for Jared when he has made it perfectly clear he won’t ever be with someone... or be with me.”

After some silence, Darrick queries, “Bekka, is everything alright?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure,” Rebekah confesses, “But I promised you I wouldn’t abandon you, so if it’s not too late-”

“Are you saying you’ve reconsidered my proposal?”

“Yes.”

While reaching into his inside pocket, he declares, “In that case, I never took the ring out of my jacket pocket.”

“So? Do you want to ask me again?” Rebekah inquires, nervously.

“Sure,” he exclaims, anxiously, then kneels down, pushing back his distress. “Bekka, will you marry me?”

Pushing back all her anxiety and fears, Rebekah firmly answers, “Yes, Darrick.” Lightly smiling, Darrick puts the ring on her finger and kisses her.



After Darrick leaves that night, Rebekah’s phone rings. Looking down at her phone, she sees Jared calling. Sighing, she answers, “Hey, Jared.”

“Hey, Bekka,” he states, sorrowfully. “I’m so sorry I missed your calls. I’ve been so busy I couldn’t answer. I wanted to, but I’m headed your way right now. I’ll be there as soon as I can. Is everything alright?”

“Yeah,” Rebekah replies. “Everything’s fine, and you don’t need to come over. I’m just going to go to bed.”

“I can help,” Jared insists.

“You need your rest,” Rebekah points out. “Maybe tomorrow you can come over after you get off work. I need to talk to you anyway.”

“Okay,” mutters Jared. “Good night, then, I guess.”

“Good night,” Rebekah says, sighing, then hangs up the phone, leaving Jared bewildered and concerned.



“You have a visitor, Bekks,” Madeline announces the next morning.

“Really?” Rebekah inquires. “Who?”

“Just come out here and see, Bekks,” pleads Madeline.

“Okay,” Rebekah submits, while bouncing Mario, then walks out of her room and sees Jared sitting on the couch.

“Hey, Bekka,” he says, hesitantly.

“Jared, what are you doing here?” Rebekah queries. “I thought you had to work.”

“I do,” Jared declares, “But Madeline is worried about you. She said I should come see you before I go in. Are you al-?”

Seeing Madeline trying to sneak to her room, Rebekah interrupts Jared to ask her, “Where are you going, Madds?”

“I was just going to leave you two alone,” Madeline states, softly. “He came to see you, not me.”

“What’s going on, Rebekah?” inquires Jared, as Madeline walks into her room. “Madeline said you had something to tell me.”

“Oh, um... Darrick and I are getting married,” Rebekah announces, unenthusiastically.

Taken back and heartbroken, Jared stammers, “Wha... I thought... When did this happen?”

“Last night,” Rebekah replies, tearing up.

“I thought you didn't want to marry him.”

“I didn't,” Rebekah admits. “I just... I need help. I can't raise Mario on my own.”

“I told you, Bekka,” Jared states, pushing back heartbreak and anger, “I would help you. You don't have to do any of this alone.”

“But Jared, I don't have a job,” Rebekah snaps, surprising Jared. “And I'm scared to get a job. I don't want to send him to daycare, not with those freaking Raiders around.”

“Bekka, Mario is going to be fine,” he tries to assure her.

“You don't know that!” Rebekah cries, fretfully. “If I marry Darrick, then I don't have to worry about that.”

“I'll help you.”

“Like you did last night?” Rebekah snaps, causing Jared to look down, shamefully, and Rebekah to immediately feel regret. “I'm sorry, Jared. That was uncalled for. The point is you don't live here. How are you going to help at night with the nightly feedings? I know you've spent some nights here on the couch, but you should be able to sleep in your own bed. Besides, you and I aren't a couple. You said so yourself that you couldn't care for a woman like that. You can only pretend.”

“Bekka, I-”

Just then, Mario starts crying again. Immediately, Rebekah becomes stressed, causing Jared to feel compassion for her. “Hang on, Jared,” Rebekah requests. “I need to grab a diaper and some wipes and heat some breast milk.”

"I can hold him," Jared tells her, "If you'd like." At first, Rebekah hesitates, but succumbs and hands Mario to Jared, who starts swaying with him, immediately calming him down.

"I guess I better get his bottle and diaper," Rebekah tells him, then goes into her room and grabs a diaper and some wipes.

When she returns, Jared inquires, "Would you like me to change him while you get the bottle?"

"Okay," she utters, as she hands him the diaper and wipes, then walks into the kitchen, as Jared walks into her room to use the changing table in there. Once she's in the kitchen, she grabs a bottle of breast milk from the fridge and places it in a pot she fills with water, then places it on the stove.

"All clean," Jared announces, walking back in with Mario.

"I can hold him, while you take care of the diaper," Rebekah states.

"Okay," Jared says, as he hands Mario to Rebekah, then heads into the bathroom to throw away the diaper and wash his hands. When he returns, he takes Mario and begins bouncing him to keep him calm.

Again, there is silence, until Rebekah declares, "Bottle's ready. I can take him, Jared."

"I could feed him," Jared tells her, "If you'd like to rest or eat or--"

"Really?"

"Of course," he assures her, kindly. "I can just let my boss know something urgent came up."

After contemplating for a while, she remarks, "Thank you, but you have to work. Besides, Mads and I will be talking some

boring wedding stuff with the wedding planner when she gets here, which actually should be any minute.”

“Oh, okay,” Jared states, sadly, as he hands Mario back to her. “I guess I’ll get going then. Congratulations.”

“Thanks,” Rebekah says, as she begins feeding Mario.

“I guess I’ll see you at the wedding.”

“So, you’ll come?”

“Sure,” Jared answers, clearing his throat. “I better get going. See you, Rebekah.”

“See you, Jared,” Rebekah says, as she watches Jared open the door, then lock the handle. Just before he walks out, Rebekah requests, “Jared, wait.”

Eagerly, he turns back to her and asks, “What is it?”

As she walks up to him, she tells him, “I didn’t properly thank you.” Hearing this makes him smile, until she says, “Goodbye, Jared.” Sadly, she kisses his cheek and lingers there for a while.

Pushing back tears, Jared tells her, “Goodbye, Bekka.” Pushing back her tears, Rebekah watches him walk out into the hallway before shutting the door. Once the door is shut, tears start streaming down her face, while he is on the other side of the door, leaning his head against the door, releasing a stray tear.





Chapter 16

At the beginning of October, Rebekah is getting ready at her soon to be father-in-law's house, sitting upstairs in a guest room, while Madeline does her hair, trying to get excited. In the room with them is Arthur, who is holding a sleeping Mario. Silence fills the room, until Madeline says, "I'll be right back. I just need to use the restroom, Bekks." Once she walks into the bathroom attached to the bedroom, there is a knock on the door.

When Arthur starts to get up, Rebekah stops him and tells him, "No, Dad. I'll get it. Mario just fell asleep. If you move, it'll be another hour before he falls asleep. I'm hoping the ceremony is over by then." When Rebekah opens the door, she sees Cherise and Garrett, gets excited and hugs Garrett, exclaiming, "You came!"

"I made him!" Cherise announces.

"She did not!" argues Garrett. "Come on Bekk. You know I wouldn't miss my baby sister's wedding." After looking to the side, he mumbles under his breath, "Even if I don't like the groom." Annoyed, Cherise smacks his arm. "What? It's not a secret! Everyone knows I don't like him! Dad doesn't like him either. He didn't even ask my dad for permission to marry her."

"He's right!" exclaims Arthur.

"It must have just slipped his mind," Rebekah tells them. "At least, you don't have to pay for any of it. Mac paid for everything."

"Including the wedding planner," Madeline adds, as she walks back in. "She didn't even get to plan her own wedding. All the meetings with the wedding planner was her telling Bekks how the wedding was going to be. Eventually, she just tuned her out,

so half of what going on today Bekks doesn't even knows about, including all the music."

"Doesn't that bother you?" argues Garrett.

"I've been busy being a new mom," Rebekah confesses. "I haven't had time to plan a wedding."

"So, stop this," Garrett pleads, causing Rebekah to tear up and look away.

"Did you just come to try to talk her out of it?" exhorts Cherise.

"No," replies Garrett, "Not completely. I just thought I'd try one more time."

"I don't care," Rebekah confesses, drying her tears and looking back at them. "I'm just grateful you all are here."

"Well, we're happy for you all the same," Cherise remarks, pulling her and Garrett in for a group hug. "We'll see you downstairs."

"Dad, can I talk to you for a second?" Garrett asks Arthur, as Cherise takes Mario from him.

"Sure," responds Arthur, standing up, as Garrett picks up Mario's diaper bag. "I'll be right back, little Rose." With that, he kisses Rebekah's forehead, then walks out with Cherise and Garrett into the hallway, where he inquires, "What is it, son?"

"We need to stop this, Dad," Garrett persists.

"Garrett!" Cherise snaps.

"Cherise, I'm serious," Garrett proclaims. "This is going to end really badly. I need to protect her."

"Son, I don't like this anymore than you do," Arthur admits, "But this is her choice."

“Well, I don’t think she really wants this,” counters Garrett.

“What do you think she wants?” asks Arthur, just as Jared walks up the stairs. “If you know what she really wants, then I will try my best to help her see that.”

“You guys ready?” questions Jared, as he walks up to all of them. “It’s time to start. I was just on my way to tell Bekka and Madeline.”

“Actually, I think this little guy needs a change,” Cherise announces, while Mario fusses. “Jared, could you hold him for a second while I get the stuff out of the diaper bag? Bekka said you have a magical way of calming him.”

“Sure,” Jared says, as Cherise hands Mario to him. Soon after, Mario calms down, as Jared slowly bounces him.

In awe, Cherise points out, “Bekka was right. You really do have a way with him.”

“I guess so,” Jared utters, sighing, causing Cherise to sigh as well, before she quickly grabs wipes and a diaper.

“Could you help me, Jared?” requests Cherise.

“I can do that,” Jared states.

“There’s a bathroom just down the hall,” explains Garrett. As Cherise and Jared walk away, Garrett points at Jared and tells Arthur, “That’s what she wants.”

“I was wondering if that were the case,” Arthur confesses, sighing. “I’ll think of what I can say to Bekka.”



Meanwhile, in the bathroom, while Cherise and Jared are changing Mario, Cherise queries, “Jared, can we talk?”

“About what?”

“I told myself I wasn't going to get involved,” Cherise discloses, “But then I saw your face. Jared, this is killing you, isn't it? Watching Bekka marry Darrick is breaking your head—”

“Cherise, please,” Jared interrupts.

“Why?” snaps Cherise, handing the diaper to Jared, who throws it away. “You're my cousin, and I know you feel like you don't deserve happiness, but you do.”

“So does she!”

“Then, give her happiness!” Cherise commands. “Jared, I saw her face, and it's as tormented as yours.”

“It doesn't matter,” Jared contends, frustrating Cherise.

“Oh, really?” yaps Cherise. “It doesn't matter that you're breaking her heart because she broke yours?”

“That's not what I meant!” Jared rebuttals. “It doesn't matter, because she already made her choice, and it wasn't me.”

“Did you give her a reason to choose you?” petitions Cherise, as Jared picks up Mario and Cherise washes her hands. “Did you tell her that you love her?”

“It doesn't matter.”

“Why not?” pleads Cherise.

“You know why, Cherise,” Jared points out, while keeping Mario calm. “Because of Dagon.”

“Jared, that's not fair,” Cherise remarks. “You deserve happiness. Don't let him stop you from having it.”

“Like he hasn't already?” exhorts Jared, causing Cherise to tear up. “He took my mother, probably my father, and because Julia

has to stay safe but wants me to be happy, I had to lose her too. I couldn't bear it if I lost Rebekah to Dagon as well, Cherise. And what if he hurt Mario? That would kill me, but more importantly, it would hurt her. I can't bring her that kind of pain."

"Then, why do you stay in her life?"

"Because I can't live without her," Jared confesses. "I've never needed someone like I need her, but how I wish I didn't." After some silence, Jared hands Mario to her and adds, "I really need to go tell them that it's time to start, Cherise."

"Alright. I'm sorry, Jared. Just know that you don't have to say the words for others to figure out you've fallen in love."

Concerned she's right, Jared sighs and closes eyes, then walks out of the bathroom, nodding at Garrett on the way out, and contemplates the conversation in the hallway, out of sight from everyone, thinking to himself, "How could I have been so stupid? Cherise is right. If Dagon finds out that I can't live without her, he will kill her. The best thing to do is leave. I don't want to hurt her, but she has Darrick." Letting out a regretful sigh, Jared sits on the floor and rests his head against the wall in defeat, trying to decide if and when he should leave. "I should at least wait until after the wedding. I have made a commitment to be here."



Inside the room with Rebekah, who is silent, Madeline inquires, "Are you alright, Bekks?"

"With Garrett?" Rebekah asks, sighing. "It's true. I am grateful he's here, that they're all here. It's just... I miss Jared. Things haven't been the same since I told him that I decided to marry Darrick. Do you... do you think Jared could have feelings for me?"

"Duh!" Madeline enthuses.

“Really?” petitions Rebekah, her heart racing. “You really think he does? Did he tell you that he does?”

“Look, Bekks. It is obvious that Jared really cares about you, and he has always been willing to wait for you... to figure things out or whatever you need to do. Only the best guys do that.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“So, does this mean you’ve figured things out?”

“I don’t know.”

“You have got to be kidding me!” Madeline snaps, rolling her eyes. “You know he has feelings for you, yet you are choosing to stab him in the heart and marry Darrick, who doesn’t love you, just because you have postpartum depression.”

“That’s not why I’m-”

“Yes, it is,” Madeline interrupts Rebekah, “And you know it.”

“Fine, Madds,” Rebekah submits. “You’re right, but the fact is I already made a commitment to Darrick. I can’t let my fear get in the way of that.”

“So, you’d rather break Jared’s heart?”

“No,” Rebekah responds, remorsefully. “It’s just... he said himself, he can’t care for a woman like that.”

“Don’t you see?” implores Madeline. “He already does.”

“I... I don’t know. I feel so lost.”

“Because you shut Jared out of your life, Bekks,” Madeline points out. “He’s the one who always helps you find your way, and because you got scared, you pushed him away. You didn’t give him a chance. You chose not to tell him you wanted something more. Instead, you chose to marry the one guy, who has hurt you over and over.”

“But what if you’re wrong, Madds? What if he doesn’t have feelings for me and I ruin this all for nothing?”

“Are you serious right now, Bekks?” barks Madeline, making Rebekah tear up. “What exactly are you ruining? A future with Darrick? There is no future with Darrick. I still haven’t figured out why he’s doing this. He’s not interested in marriage or love. On the other hand, you have Jared, who ever since you two met has doted on you, flirted with you, most of the time unintentionally, and did everything he can to show you his feelings, even when he tried not to when we were together.”

“Is that why you two didn’t work out?”

“Are you kidding me, Bekks?” exclaims Madeline. “Jared and I never had anything, no spark, nothing. He didn’t even want to date me, but I pushed for him to.”

“Why?”

“Because he needed a distraction,” discloses Madeline, “Long enough for you to realize Darrick wasn’t the one for you. But it didn’t work, and the entire time we were together, he wished I was you.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because he told me,” Madeline announces, causing Rebekah to tear up more. “But he didn’t need to, because I knew. Everyone knew, Bekks, except you, apparently.”

“Are you saying Darrick knows?”

“Pretty sure he does, Bekks.”

“Then why would he ask Jared to be his best man?”

“Probably to torture him. I mean, yeah, they’re friends, but you know how Darrick can be. He begged Jared, who was going to turn him down, but Darrick told him it would make you happy,

so Jared decided to take the torture for you, just to make you happy. Plus, I think part of him is hoping Jared will stop the wedding, because Darrick, deep down, doesn't want to do this. You can see it on his face.”

“And why would Jared do that?”

“Because he's so completely in love with you.”

“He's in love with me?” beseeches Rebekah, as her mind races.
“Are you sure?”

“Without a doubt,” Madeline states, adamantly. “I see it every time Jared looks at you, and honestly, I see it when you look at him. Bekks, I think you're in love with him too. You're just afraid to admit it.”

“I wish I would have known he was in love with me.”

“You do now,” Madeline tells her. “So, what are you going to do about it?”

Contemplating how to respond, Rebekah sits there in silence and doesn't even realize there is a knock at the door, so Madeline gets up and answers the door to see Jared. “It's time,” he announces, as Madeline moves out of the way to reveal Rebekah. Seeing Rebekah in her wedding dress, Jared is taken back by her beauty and just stands there with his jaw wide open, before he finally utters, “Bekka?” Hearing Jared's soothing voice, Rebekah looks up, just as Madeline pushes Jared's chin up. “Bekka... you look... you look beautiful,” Jared stammers, making Rebekah smile and look at Madeline, who is smiling as well.

“Thank you, Jared,” Rebekah says quietly, looking down and losing her smile, causing Jared to rush to her.

“Bekka, what's wrong?” Jared asks, kneeling in front of her.

“I'll leave you two alone,” Madeline says, shutting the door.

"Bekka, what is it?" Jared queries, concern in his voice.

For a while, Rebekah just stares at him, her mind racing, and finally says, "I don't know. Cold feet or something. I just want to get this over with. Could you send my dad up please?" Sighing, Jared walks out past Madeline, who shakes her head, then follows him down the stairs to proceed with the wedding.

When Arthur walks in the room, he notices Rebekah is crying, walks up to her and asks, "What's wrong, little Rose?"

"Nothing, Dad," she replies, standing up and heading to the door. "Let's just get this over with, please."

"Rebekah Rose Redd!" Hearing Arthur say her full name, she stops and shuts the door, as she feels more tears building up. "Listen. I know I'm not as good at this as your mom, but I can't walk you down that aisle with you crying like this. So, talk to me. Tell me what's wrong. Do you want to marry this guy, Rebekah?"

"No, Daddy," she admits, trying to push her tears back.

"Then why are you marrying him?"

"Because Mario needs a dad," Rebekah explains, struggling not to cry. "And I made a commitment to Darrick. I can't let my fears get in the way of that. Jared... Jared taught me that."

"Jared?" petitions Arthur. "Bekka, do you love Jared?"

"Of course, I do, Dad," Rebekah declares, releasing a stray tear. "He's my best friend."

"That's not what I meant," Arthur points out with compassion. "Do you love him as more than a friend?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Little Rose, it is so obvious," Arthur divulges. "You two act like a couple, so much so that everyone talks about you and him and

asks if you two are together. Plus, you brought him up. Why is that? Is it because you love him?"

"Dad, I can't talk about my feelings for another man when I have made a commitment to marry someone else."

"If your mother were here, she'd tell you that neither can you ignore what your heart is trying to tell you, little Rose," Arthur expounds. "So, tell me. Do you wish Jared was the one downstairs waiting to marry you?" Tearing up, Rebekah nods, so Arthur adds, "Then, what's stopping you from stopping this wedding?"

"Dad, Jared has made it perfectly clear he can't be in a relationship," Rebekah declares, tearfully. "And even if he could, I hurt him by choosing not to trust him. He told me time and time again to trust him and that he would always be there for me, but because of this stupid depression I got scared."

"And you think marrying Darrick will fix all that?"

"No. I just don't feel like I deserve someone as wonderful as Jared after what I did to him."

"Little Rose," says Arthur, compassionately, "If Jared loves you, which I'm pretty sure he does, he will forgive you, if he hasn't already."

"I don't deserve his forgiveness."

Pulling her in for a hug, Arthur attends, "We usually don't deserve forgiveness, but it's not up to us. It's up to the person we wronged. Have you apologized to him or asked him for his forgiveness?"

"No," Rebekah responds, pulling away from the hug. "I'm too ashamed and afraid of the answer."

"Instead of being afraid, do what Jared taught you, and don't let fear get in the way of your commitment."

“I have a commitment to Darrick.”

“You have one to Jared as well,” Arthur points out, kindly, “As your best friend and the man you love to tell him the truth. Plus, you have a commitment to your heart. Don't let down your heart, because you're too afraid of the other person breaking it. Otherwise, you're still breaking your heart by not allowing it to grow and love that which it wants to love.”

After a long pause, she begs, “Come on, Dad! Please, let's just go!”

Not sure what else to do, Arthur just gives in and follows Rebekah out to the stairs and interlocks arms with her to prepare to go down the stairs, while a small orchestra plays an instrumental version of “Perfect Duet,” by Ed Sheeran and Beyoncé.

The moment Rebekah hears the music, she stops, causing Arthur to implore, “What is it, little Rose?”

“No... nothing,” Rebekah stammers, tearing up again. “It's just... the last time I listened to this song... I was dancing with Jared.”

“Rebekah, don't you think God's trying to tell you something?” beseeches Arthur.

“I don't... I don't know,” she mumbles. “Let's just... let's just go.” Sighing and shaking his head, Arthur begins escorting her down the stairs. As they descend the stairs, Rebekah looks down, trying to force a smile. When she looks up, she sees Darrick and Jared, who both have different expressions on their faces. Looking at them, she can tell Darrick looks more apprehensive than she has ever seen him, while Jared looks the way Rebekah feels. Without ever smiling, she makes it to the altar, where the music stops playing, but continues to play, along with the lyrics, in both Rebekah's and Jared's minds.

When the officiant starts, his voice sounds muffled to Rebekah and Jared, as they think of everything that they have been through together. As the ceremony continues, Jared and Rebekah look at each other, longingly, and Darrick looks around anxiously, constantly looking at the clock. Finally, Madeline taps Rebekah on the shoulder and whispers, “Bekks?” When Rebekah doesn’t even budge, Madeline repeats a little louder, “Bekks?”

Noticing this, Darrick exhorts, “Is everything alright, Bekka?”

After Rebekah doesn’t respond to Darrick, Jared implores, “Bekka?”

When she hears Jared’s voice, Rebekah finally breaks free of her trance and stammers, “I... I...” Looking past Darrick at Jared, who seems to be breathing heavily, Rebekah feels her chest clench, then looks at both of them and tries to decide whether to listen to her brain that’s telling her to marry Darrick for safety or to her heart that wants more than anything to be with Jared.

“Bekks?” Madeline beseeches from behind her.

“I can’t do this!” Rebekah declares, then runs away and back up the stairs. Instinctively, Jared runs after her, while Darrick stays back and lets out a sigh of relief.

When Rebekah gets back to the guest room, she shuts the door and sits down on the bench in front of the bed, while tears start streaming down her face. Suddenly, she hears a knock at the door, wipes her tears, then looks up to see Jared open the door, causing Rebekah to sigh in relief, while he walks in and shuts the door. “I knew it was going to be you,” exclaims Rebekah, smiling. “If it was going to be anybody, it was going to be you.” With the song and lyrics still ringing in both of their ears and love in their eyes, Rebekah petitions, “Why are you always running after me, Jared?”

"I have to make sure you're okay, Bekka," Jared says, earnestly, kneeling down in front of her. "You're my best friend. I'd do anything for you."

"Then, will you answer a question for me?"

"Of course."

"Do you think I should marry Darrick?"

Sighing, he looks down and confesses, "I want you to be happy, Bekka."

"That's not what I asked," Rebekah rebuttals, frustration building slightly. "When I told you that I was going to marry him, you clearly didn't want me to marry him then. Has that changed?"

"Bekka, I don't think now is the time," Jared argues, standing up and turning away from her. "You're getting married."

"But I don't have to," Rebekah states, causing him to look back at her. "I don't even want to marry him. I never did. I only chose to marry him, because my emotions were so difficult to manage, and I was so terrified. But that fear is nothing compared to the fear of not having you in my life, Jared." Hearing this, Jared's eyes moisten, as Rebekah adds, "Look, I know I hurt you when I didn't trust you to help me, which I am really sorry about. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Of course, Bekka," Jared states, compassionately, causing her to let out a sigh of relief. "I know that your postpartum made it difficult for you to act like yourself. I've seen it before, so I get it. I just don't want to hurt you."

"Then, don't," Rebekah pleads, tearfully, her mascara smearing on her cheeks. "Tell me how you're feeling."

"It's not that easy, Bekka."

“Seriously?” Rebekah snaps, sharply, feeling some rising anger. “It’s used to be easy for you to talk to me.”

“I’m sorry, Bekka. I-”

“No, I’m sorry,” she imparts, before taking a deep breath. “I’m still trying to get a better handle on my emotions. I shouldn’t have lost it on you. I just... I need to know, Jared, because not knowing is eating me up inside. I need to know how you feel. I need to know why you didn’t want me to marry Darrick. Is it just because he’s hurt me? Or is it because you have considered having a more serious relationship with someone? With me perhaps? I mean I saw how you were with me when we were pretending to be together, and you just, you seemed to want that. Do you? Do you think you could allow yourself to fall in love with someone?” At first, Jared just gazes at her with glossy eyes, so Rebekah cries, “Please, Jared. Please tell me.”

“Alright,” Jared accepts, then takes a deep breath and tells her, “The truth is I don’t want to be friends anymore, Bekka.”

“You don’t want to be friends anymore?” beseeches Rebekah, tearing up more, before looking away.

“What I mean is I don’t want to be just friends anymore,” Jared expounds, reaching out and holding her hand, causing her to look back at him, “Because I... I am already in love with you, Rebekah. I have been in love with you for a long time. The truth is I started falling in love with you the moment we met. I tried not to, but I couldn’t stop myself, and after we started spending so much time together and acted like a couple, I’ve fallen in love with you even more. I realized just how much I wanted to be with you for real, and not just as a friend.”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

“Because you were right, Bekka,” Jared expounds, looking down at the ring on her finger, while he touches it. “When you basically said that Darrick had more to offer you than me, it reminded me why I always talked myself out of telling you,

Bekka. I didn't tell you, because I have nothing to offer you, whereas Darrick does."

"You don't think you have anything to offer me?" Rebekah exhorts, pulling her hand away and fiddling with the ring on her finger. "You just said you love me. You know as well as I do that Darrick doesn't, and I know I said that I needed Darrick's money, but that isn't what I want. I want a man who loves me and who would do anything for me. If you think I'd reject you because you can't give me a mansion and a ring with I don't even know how many carats, you're wrong."

Ignoring her ring waving in front of her on her hand, he pushes her hand down and contends, "That's not what I mean. What I mean is I can't offer you anything, but the chance of my stepfather finding out about you and hurting you."

"You thought I'd reject you because of your stepfather?" Rebekah questions, more tears forming. "I know you would do anything to protect me. How many times have you risked your life to save mine? You make me feel safer than anyone I know."

"But--"

"No buts," she interrupts, moving closer to him. "Jared, listen to me. I know you said you can't have happiness, but you, more than anyone I know, deserve it. You are the most incredible man I've ever met. Any woman would be lucky to have you. I know I am lucky just to have you in my life. You have brought me more joy than anyone I know."

"You've brought me joy as well, something I never thought I'd find."

Smiling and tearing up, Rebekah takes his hands in hers and adds, "Jared, you deserve love and someone who is loyal, despite your dark past. I am truly sorry that I got scared and for choosing not to trust you when I was terrified. I should have done what you taught me to do and turned my fears into a commitment to do the right thing, which is to trust you."

Seeing tears streaming down her face, he pulls his hands from her and places them on her cheeks to wipe her tears away, while looking directly in her eyes and exclaiming, "I should have too, Bekka. I should have turned my fears into a commitment to you, because you're worth it."

Hearing this, Rebekah's tears turn to joyous ones, as she smiles at him, benevolently. Gazing at her with love, Jared leans closer, keeping his hands on her cheeks, then finally touches her lips with his and gives her the most heartfelt kiss she's ever had, while wrapping his arms around her. Overcome with love, Rebekah clings to his arms and kisses him back, not wanting him to stop kissing her.

After realizing that they've lost track of time kissing, Rebekah pulls away from Jared, causing him to immediately say, "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Rebekah urges with a small smile. "People are just waiting downstairs, and I have to deal with this mess I've made. I just need a moment to figure out how to clean it up. Also, I shouldn't talk about my feelings for another man, when I have a man waiting downstairs to marry me. But I promise, as soon as I fix this, you're the first person I plan on talking to."

Taking a deep breath in, she walks past him to the other side of the room, trying to muster the courage to call off the wedding, before Jared turns around towards her and states, "Rebekah, I understand, and I want you to know that I love you, no matter what, and I will never stop loving you. I am willing to wait my whole life for you. I hope one day you can forgive me for not telling you, even if you never love me how I love you." With that, Jared walks out of the room, leaving Rebekah speechless, touching her lips and smiling lightly, thinking about their kiss.



Meanwhile, everyone is murmuring amongst themselves downstairs, until Rebekah finally descends the stairs and walks

back to the altar, then turns around to face the audience. "Everyone, thank you for coming, but there isn't going to be a wedding today," she announces, causing everyone to let out sighs of relief, especially Jared and Darrick. "Please feel free to stay for refreshments," Rebekah adds, then takes a deep breath, before she turns around to face Darrick, handing him his ring and telling him, "Darrick, I'm sorry. I just don't think we're ready for this. I hope one day you can forgive--"

Before she finishes, Jared sees a laser moving around that seems to be pointed toward Darrick. Without hesitation, Jared pushes Darrick and Rebekah out of the way, getting shot and falling to the ground. Immediately, the guests start screaming, and Rebekah sits up to see Jared lying on the ground.

"No, Jared!" Rebekah shrieks, rushing over to him, while Madeline and Darrick look at him with widened eyes.

"This isn't how this was supposed to happen," Darrick announces, pulling his phone out, trying to make a phone call.

When Rebekah gets to Jared's side, she grabs his hand and pleads, "Jared, stay with me."

"Bekka," Jared utters, struggling.

"Shh," she pleads, tears swelling in her eyes. "You need to save your strength. Just give me one second." Turning away from Jared, she looks toward Mario, who is crying and being shielded by Cherise, Garrett, and Arthur. "Get Mario out of here!"

"What about you, Bekka?" yells Arthur, apprehensively.

"I can't leave him, Dad! Please, just get Mario out of here, all of you!"

Reluctant to leave Rebekah, they submit, and Cherise shields Mario, as Garrett shields her and pulls Arthur to leave. When they're gone, Rebekah turns her attention back to Jared, whose

blood is covering her dress. "Okay, Jared. I'm here. Just hang on."

"I'm sorry, Bekka," Jared states, struggling. "I should have—"

"Jared, not now. Please just save your strength." Still crying, Rebekah begins praying in her heart, begging God to save him, then looks around, trying to think of how to help him and sees Madeline, who is frozen in fear. "Madeline, he needs you!" she shouts. Finally, Madeline thaws from her petrifying terror and runs to Rebekah and Jared, then looks at Jared's gunshot wound and freezes again. "Madds!"

"Sorry, Bekks," Madeline tells her.

As Madeline examines the wound, Darrick hangs up his phone in defeat, then rushes over as well and asks, "What can I do, Madeline?"

"Give me your jacket," Madeline requests, still looking at Jared's wound.

"What?" questions Darrick, furrowing his brow.

"Give me your jacket!" she repeats, this time more adamantly, while looking at him. "I need it to try and slow down the bleeding." Without hesitation, Darrick removes his tux jacket and hands it to Madeline, who takes it and states, "This is going to hurt, Jared. Just try to breathe through the pain." Apprehensively, Jared nods, while Rebekah holds Jared's hand and Madeline uses the jacket to press deeply on his wound, causing Jared to scream in agony, making Darrick and Rebekah fret more.

"It's okay, Jared," Rebekah assures him, holding his hand tighter, releasing some tears onto him. "I'm here. You're going to be alright."

“We’re all here for you, buddy,” adds Darrick, then paces a little and takes out his phone, before announcing, “I better call for an ambulance. Do you need anything else, Madeline?”

“Just that ambulance,” Madeline requests. Anxiously, Darrick lifts up his phone, then notices a message that stops him in his tracks, causing him to look around, frantically. “Now, Darrick!”

“I got it,” announces Darron, as he puts his gun away and pulls out his phone, then dials 911 and tells dispatch, “This is Special Agent MacDonald, FBI...”

Meanwhile, Darrick types on his phone, desperately, when suddenly a group of masked men come in and grab him, while he repeatedly yells, “Not now!”

Flipping her head around, Madeline sees Darron trying to save Darrick, who is fighting with all his might to get free. Turning back to Rebekah, Madeline tells her, “Keep the pressure right here, Bekks.” When Rebekah takes over, she doesn’t push as hard, so Madeline says, “Bekks, I know you feel like you’re hurting him, but you have to push harder, or he will bleed out.” Pushing back the fear of hurting Jared, Rebekah puts more pressure on the wound, causing Jared to groan deeply.

“Jared, I am so sorry,” Rebekah cries, as Madeline pulls her hand away and rushes to help Darron stop the men trying to take Darrick. In the struggle, Madeline gets pushed down onto the floor.

“Madeline!” Darrick desperately cries out. “Darron, help her!” Quickly, Darron rushes to Madeline and crouches down to help her. Full of fear for the lives of everyone there, Darrick quits struggling and watches Darron and his friends. “Why did it happen this way? I’m so sorry.”

“I’m fine,” Madeline declares, out of breath, while Darron helps her sit up. “Just give me a minute.”

“Don’t leave her, Darron!” Darrick pleads, desperately.

Just before Darrick is pulled out of sight, Darron nods, while kneeling next to Madeline and supporting her back, then pulls his phone back up to his ear. "Hello?"

Over the phone, Darron hears, "Emergency services are on the way, sir. Can you tell me more about what is going on, please?"

While Darron is explaining the situation, Rebekah continues to put pressure on Jared's wound and begs, "Jared, please hang on. Help should be here soon."

"Bekka," Jared says, while cringing in pain, "I... am... so sorry."

"Jared, no," Rebekah cries. "Please don't. You need to save your-"

"I need... to say this," Jared interrupts her, while battling his severe pain. "I'm sorry... I nev... never told you how I... feel about you."

"Jared, it's okay," Rebekah assures him, while forcing a smile. "I forgive you."

"There's more," he tells her, causing Rebekah more concern. "Bekka, I want you... to know... my life began... the moment... I met you. I knew... even then... you were the girl... of my dreams." Hearing Jared's confession, Rebekah smiles lightly, but then sobs more, while he reaches up to dry her tears. "I wish I... could go back... and tell you... that I wanted... to be with you... and how much... I love you, Re... bekah."

While he wipes another tear, she says, "Jared, I should have told you before that I lo-" Before she can finish, Jared's arm falls, and he loses consciousness, causing Rebekah to wail, "Jared? Jared? No, no! Please don't leave me! You can't die, Jared." Hearing Rebekah panic, Madeline rushes over to check for Jared's pulse, letting out a sigh of relief when she feels it, then hears sirens and sighs again.

"Madeline?" Darron calls.

After getting up, Madeline walks over to Darron and asks, "What is it?"

"You should get checked out by the paramedics," requests Darron.

"Jared needs help first," Madeline demands.

"Yes," he agrees. "But we should probably move out of the way for them. They should be walking in any second."

"That's fine," she concedes, pushing back her anxious tears. "Bekks still has pressure on the wound."

As Darron and Madeline walk away, Rebekah continues to weep over Jared, while still holding the pressure on his wound. "Please, God, please let him live. I can't live without him." After saying this, she looks directly at Jared's face and utters, "Jared, please don't leave me. I need you in my life. I can't live without you." Delicately, she leans down and kisses his lips, then gazes upon his face, before finally declaring, "I love you, Jared." Time seems to freeze, while she ponders what she just confessed, realizing just how true it is, and also fretting about her life without him. In her heart, she continues to pray that it's not too late, that she won't lose her best friend and the man she loves with all her heart.



Moments later, a soft, muffled voice sounds behind her. "Rebekah... Rebekah." Eventually, the voice is now down at her level beside her face. "Rebekah." Finally, she recognizes the voice and can see Kevin in her peripheral view. "Rebekah," Kevin repeats once more.

Just then, Rebekah hears another voice, one she doesn't recognize, utter, "She needs to get out of the way, Kevin, so we can get him on the stretcher."

“I got this,” Kevin assures the paramedic. “Rebekah, listen to me. I know Jared means a lot to you, but I need you to move, so we can help him, okay?” Taking a deep breath, Rebekah nods, as the paramedic puts pressure on the wound before Rebekah stands up, while Kevin helps her, then asks her, “Do you have some other clothes you can wear?” Once again, she silently nods. “Okay, how about you quickly get changed and wash up while we take care of things here and then you can ride with us to the hospital, alright? That sound good?” Still unable to say anything, Rebekah just nods again.

“I’ll help you, honey,” states Cherise, as she hands Mario to Garrett, then puts her hands on Rebekah’s shoulders and leads her upstairs. When they arrive in the room upstairs, they are both silent, and Rebekah walks into the bathroom to scrub the blood off her hands, while Cherise unzips her wedding dress. “Where are your clothes, sweetie?” Cherise queries. While pulling her arms out of the sleeves of the wedding dress and tucking them under her arms, Rebekah points at a duffle bag, which Cherise then opens, grabs some jeans and a shirt and asks Rebekah, “Is this alright?” Again, Rebekah nods and takes the clothes, then puts the shirt on over the wedding dress and the jeans underneath. When she’s done, Cherise helps her take the wedding dress completely off and puts it in a garment bag, while Rebekah sits down and switches her high heels with slip-on sandals. Without saying a word, she heads toward the door, while Cherise grabs her purse for her and follows her downstairs.

“You ready to go, Rebekah?” asks Kevin.

As Rebekah nods, Cherise hugs and tells her, “Don’t worry about Mario. We’ll take care of him. You just take care of yourself and be there for Jared.”

Before Rebekah walks away, Garrett and Arthur both grace her shoulder, and Arthur says, “Love you, little Rose.”

“We all love you, and we’ll be praying for you both!” Garrett declares, as Kevin helps Rebekah get in the passenger seat of the ambulance.



On the drive there, Rebekah continues to remain silent, occasionally wiping a tear away that escapes from her eyes. “Jared’s strong, Rebekah,” states Kevin. “He’ll pull through.” Feeling another tear coming, Rebekah looks away and wipes the tear away briskly. After this, Kevin chooses to remain silent for Rebekah for the remainder of the drive, while she continues to plead in her heart to God that Jared will be alright. When they arrive at the hospital, Rebekah quickly gets out of the ambulance, without waiting for Kevin to help her and rushes in with the paramedics.

“We need you to stay out of the way, ma’am,” barks one of the paramedics.

“Rebekah,” Kevin says softly, “Walk with me. They got this, okay? They’ll take good care of him, alright?” Sadly, Rebekah watches Jared get pulled away on the stretcher. After he is out of sight, Kevin walks Rebekah into the waiting room and offers her some water, but she shakes her head without looking at him. “Alright, I have to get back to work,” he tells her, putting his hand on her shoulder. “But I’ll be praying for you and Jared, and I’ll ask Chandra to pray as well. Just hang in there, okay?” Silently, she nods, and he walks away from her, sighing.

Just then, Rebekah hears Madeline crying, “Oh, Bekks! Are you alright?” Turning around, Rebekah sees Madeline run up to her and ask, “How’s Jared?”

“I don’t know,” Rebekah answers, her voice quivering. “They just took... they just took him back for surgery.” Suddenly, Rebekah starts sobbing heavily. “What if he doesn’t make it, Mads? What if he-?”

“He’ll be fine, Bekks,” Madeline interrupts, while hugging her. “He’s strong, and there’s no way he’d ever leave you.”

“He told me, Madds,” Rebekah declares, pulling away from Madeline to look at her, while continuing to cry. “He told me he loves me. He even gave me the most amazing kiss I have ever had, and what did I do? I told him to give me a moment, instead of telling him how I feel. How could I have been so stupid? He is the most incredible and devoted man I have ever met.”

“You were planning on getting married, Bekks,” Madeline consoles her, “To someone else. You weren’t thinking about having a relationship with him.”

“Yes, I was, Madds,” Rebekah rebuttals. “For a while now, I’ve been developing feelings for Jared, and I’ve wanted to be with him for real. I mean, he has always been there for me, and he brought out parts of me I always wanted to show but was too afraid to. He helped me find confidence in myself, and he helped me realize what love truly is. But because I was too afraid of ruining what Jared and I had and because I thought he could never feel that way about me, I pushed all those feelings aside and never told him. After he told me, I felt so guilty about having feelings for him when Darrick was waiting for me. So, I chose to wait, and now, I may never have the chance to tell him how I feel.”

“Bekks, that’s incredible!”

“No, Madds! It’s not. He could die not knowing that the woman he loves also loves him back. I wish I had told him how I feel before I agreed to marry Darrick, and I really wish I never would have told him I would marry him, which I feel horrible about. But maybe none of this would have ever happened. Jared wouldn’t be fighting for his life right now, which is all I can think about. I try to worry about Darrick, but I am so worried about Jared; it’s like I can’t even breathe.”

“Don’t worry about Darrick,” Madeline requests. “Let the police and Darron worry about him. You just worry about Jared. You don’t need more than that right now, and as far as you not being able to breathe because you’re so scared, Bekks, you have more

faith in God than anyone I know. So, you pray, and you pray harder than you ever have in your life.”

“I have been praying.”

“Then you keep praying, Bekks, and don’t give up hope. Jared needs your hope and your faith and your love right now.” Once again, Madeline hugs her and tries to reassure her that everything will be alright. For hours, Rebekah and Madeline wait to hear about Jared, with no news. Desperately, Rebekah continues to pray, and whenever Madeline thinks she needs encouragement, she gives her a hug and prays with her.

Finally, after what feels like forever, Dr. Martin Paris walks toward them and asks, “Are you Rebekah Redd, here for Mr. Bentley?”

“Yes,” Rebekah answers, as she and Madeline bolt up out of their seats.

“I am Dr. Paris. I just wanted to let you know we were able to remove the bullet successfully and stabilize Mr. Bentley.” Hearing this, Rebekah and Madeline sigh, happily, and hug, then listen to Martin, as he adds, “However, we weren’t able to repair all of the damage. We will need to keep him here for observation for several days, and he will need multiple surgeries to repair the rest of the damage. Plus, there is a chance, because of where the bullet was, he may never walk again.” This causes Rebekah and Madeline to have looks of dread appear on their faces, while Martin adds, “However, I know an excellent orthopedist, who has been very successful treating these kinds of cases. Now, do you know if Mr. Bentley has any family?”

“We are his family!” Madeline blurts, angrily. “Especially her!”

“Madds!”

“Does he have any biological family?” asks Martin.

“He has a couple of cousins,” explains Rebekah. “But both his parents have passed away.”

“Okay,” utters Martin. “I’d like to talk to one of them before moving forward, at least until he wakes-”

“They’re in love!” Madeline interrupts. “He would trust her judgem-”

“Madds!” Rebekah interjects, sharply. “It’s okay.”

“Dr. Paris,” a nurse calls, “The gunshot patient is awake.”

“Thank you, nurse Kaylee,” states Martin.

“Can I see him?” Rebekah asks, pleading in her voice.

“As soon as he’s ready to move from recovery,” Martin answers. “In the meantime, I will have a nurse come show you to his room.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” Rebekah says, then hugs Madeline again, as Martin walks away.

“He really is a good doctor,” Madeline assures Rebekah, sighing. “His attitude just bothers me sometimes.”

“I’m just glad he’s alive.”

“Now, you can tell him how you feel, Bekks.”

“Are you sure he could handle that, Madds?” implores Rebekah, nervously. “You’re a nurse. He just got shot, almost lost his life, and he’s about to find out he may never walk again. Adding more stress to that, even if it’s good, could really hurt him.”

“You’re just like Jared,” Madeline points out, shaking her head and looking away, briefly. “He waited and look what happened, but I suppose you’re right. You probably shouldn’t tell him the moment he wakes up, but honestly, he needs your love right now. Even if you don’t tell him today, he needs to know. Don’t wait,

because you will regret it even more.” Feeling her phone buzz, Madeline looks at it and announces, “I actually have to go get ready for work so I can get back here in time. I have the graveyard shift tonight, so I could be at the wedding today. Hopefully, I can find Darron, since he was my ride here. Are you going to be okay, Bekks?” After Rebekah nods, Madeline gives her another hug, saying, “I love you, Bekks. Call or text me if you need anything, okay?”

As soon as Madeline leaves, Rebekah sits down, just before a nurse walks up to her, making her jump up again, and asks, “Are you Mrs. Bentley?”

“Jared and I aren't married,” Rebekah states, heartbroken.

“I am so sorry,” the nurse says, looking down at her tablet. “Yes. Then you must be Rebekah Redd. Dr. Paris said that the patient was asking for you. If you'd like to follow me, I'll take you to Mr. Bentley's room.” Eagerly, Rebekah rushes behind the nurse and follows her to Jared's room. Upon arriving, the nurse asks, “Can I get you some water, ma'am?”

“Sure.”

“Okay. I'll be right back, and Mr. Bentley should be in soon.”

“Thank you,” Rebekah expresses, as the nurse leaves, then returns with the water and hands it to Rebekah, who thanks her again, before the nurse leaves Rebekah alone. While waiting for Jared, Rebekah begins pacing the floor, occasionally taking a sip of water every few minutes, then prays, “Dear God, please help Jared be okay. Please help him heal and to know how much I care about him and that he won't be alone during this time.” Finally, some nurses wheel Jared in on a hospital bed, causing Rebekah to light up when she sees him, but his eyes are closed and doesn't see her. After the nurses get him situated, they leave, and Rebekah moves a chair closer to his bed to sit on.

Immediately after sitting, Rebekah gently grabs his hand and speaks to him. “Jared? Jared?” After not getting a response, she

simply states, "I'm here, Jared." Taking a deep breath and holding his hand up to touch her face, she adds, "And I'm not going anywhere. And I know you probably can't hear me, but I want you to know that I love you, Jared." After several minutes of holding his hand, exhaustion takes over, and she falls asleep, resting her head on the side of the hospital bed.

A while later, Jared starts to move a little, waking Rebekah. "Jared?"

"Bekka?"

"Jared!" she cries happily, then, without thinking, kisses his cheek multiple times, energetically, each kiss getting closer to his lips. Just before she reaches his lips, she stops and notices he is wincing. Feeling remorseful, she tells him, "I am so sorry."

"It's okay," he assures her, smiling a little. "I'm happy to see you too!" Looking down at his face, she is overcome with love and kisses him on the edge of lips, gently, then gazes at him and wants more than anything to tell him she loves him, but decides to wait, just as he did. "What happened?"

"You were shot by a sniper. You pushed Darrick and me out of the way and ended up getting shot."

"Are you alright?" he implores, anxiously.

"I'm fine," Rebekah tells him, fighting her tears, "As long as you are."

Letting out a sigh of relief, he queries, "What about Darrick?"

"Actually-"

"What, Bekka?" he presses, wincing. "Tell me."

"He was taken," Rebekah reveals, nervously. "We don't know where he is."

“What?” Jared yaps, trying to sit up, but cringes from intense pain, making Rebekah cry a little.

“You need to rest.”

“Did you see who?”

“I was preoccupied,” she confesses, tearing up, recalling the moments after he was shot.

“With what?” he beseeches, coughing.

“You,” she answers, softly. “You were shot. I was so focused on that. I was so afraid I was going to lose you. I-”

Suddenly, Rebekah stops talking and begins sobbing again, causing Jared to reach his hand out to her and request, “Hey, come here.” When she moves closer, he struggles to put his arm around her, because of all the hospital cords attached to him. Realizing his frustration, she untangles them, then squeezes next to him on the bed and rests on his chest.

“Are you okay? I’m not hurting you, am I?”

“No, Bekka.” Once he has his arms wrapped around her, he kisses the top of her head and declares, “And I’m not going anywhere, okay? I promise you.” Hearing this and being embraced by him calms her fears and makes her realize that nothing feels more like home than his loving embrace.

To be continued...!





About the Author

Sherice Drake was born and raised in different parts of Central to Southern Utah and is the youngest of 7 children. In 2010, she completed her bachelor's degree in human communication from Dixie State College in St. George, Utah. Later that year, she married her husband. They have three daughters together. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends and writing her stories. Her passion for writing began while she was in college and is excited to finally share her stories with others.

