



# A Man in Uniform

**Author:** Leah Holt

**Category:** Romance, Adult

**Description:** I fell in love once... We were young, fresh out of high school. But I believed in us, I believed in our love. He left to serve our country. Promising to always stay with me no matter where he was. He broke his promise. He got on that bus and I never heard from him again. So, I did what anyone would, I moved on. I left him in the past, right beside the broken heart gave me. Five years came between us, five years for me to forget all about him. Until the night he swoops in and saves me. The boy I remember has turned into a hard bodied soldier. His muscles are thick, his arms strong, protective, holding me like he never wants to let me go.

And his smile, his smile still makes my heart flutter. I don't know what to do. He hurt me once already. Do I forgive him and give him a second chance? Or do I let go of this man in uniform?

**Total Pages (Source):** 31

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 4:32 pm*

## Prologue

### Lost Love Letters

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“Do you really have to go?” My eyes peer up, tears resting on the thin edge of my lids. But I hold the tears in, refusing to let them out. I told him I wouldn't cry, and I'm trying like hell to stay true to my word.

My lip trembles as he smiles softly, ready to just let go of it all. He nods, running one thumb across my jaw as he holds my face.

I tip my head higher, allowing myself to embrace his touch. To feel his fingers on my face. To let the heat from his fingers burn my skin so I can feel his touch on me forever.

I want to be able to still feel him when he's not here. I want my skin to sizzle when I think about this moment, and the way his hand captures my jaw. He holds me, and for a split second a sense of comfort blankets my body.

His touch is strong, bold, secure. He knows I'm his, and I know he's mine.

But that sensation doesn't last, it swiftly dissipates into dust and blows away. I'm not ready to let him go. I'll never be ready to let go.

He's leaving for so long, and I'm going to miss everything about him. It's going to be

three years with no kisses. Three years without his smile. Three years without smelling his cologne, and feeling the roughness of his cheek as it brushes against mine.

It's an eternity without him. I don't know how I'm going to survive. I can't even bring myself to imagine what it's truly going to be like when he's gone.

“I do, Story, I'm sorry. I wish I didn't have to, but I need to go. I made a promise to my country, and now they need me.”

Twisting my face, I kiss the inside of his palm, letting the weight of my cheek fall deeper into his hand. “I know.” I try to smile, but it's useless. My lips wriggle between a frown and completely breaking down. Tears are clouding up my eyes, making it hard to see.

I can't see his face as clearly as I want to, and that makes me angry, and scared. What if I forget what he looks like? What if I try to imagine him and all I see is this fuzzy, blurry shape?

You'll always remember his face, don't be ridiculous, Story!

“I'll be back before you know it,” he says, digging his fingertips into the base of my skull and massaging my scalp. “I promise.”

“Don't make promises you can't keep, Wyatt.” My lids lower, and I sniffle, doing my best to stiffen my back. “You don't know what's going to happen.”

“Baby, I don't want you to worry, I'm coming home to you. I promise, and I always keep my promises, don't I?” I nod, letting a few tears escape with a single blink. He kisses my forehead, then releases me. “I love you, Story Brooks, never forget that.” Reaching down, he grabs his dark green duffle bag, and throws it over his shoulder.

“I love you too,” I say weakly, unable to hide the sadness consuming me. The tears fall, dripping off my cheeks and hitting the ground. I don't wipe them away, because I can't. My arms dangle lifelessly by my sides. I have nothing left but sadness. “You're going to write me, right?” I call out as he walks towards the bus.

“Every chance I get!” he yells back, giving me a slight wave as he turns, and disappears up the steps, and through the door.

This is the last time I'm going to see him for three years. . .The thought is crippling. My chest hurts, I can't breathe, and it isn't until I feel my father's hands on my shoulders that I finally fully break.

Whipping around, I bury my face in his chest as he holds me, hushing me silent just like he used to do when I was little. “Shh, Story, it's alright. He's doing an incredible thing, he's fighting for our country, for our freedom. We need men like Wyatt, he's going to be a hero.”

I nod, wiping the back of my wrist across my nose. I can't speak, so I stay silent. The only sound coming out of me are the sobs of sadness.

“Come on, lets go home. You'll feel better, just give it some time.” My father guides me by the shoulders out of the bus terminal and to the car.

I want to believe him. I want to believe that my father is wise, and knows what he's talking about.

Time heals all wounds, right? That's what people say isn't it?

I can't hurt forever, can I?

But what does time really do for anyone?

It doesn't do anything except help you forget.

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## Page 2

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Dear Wyatt,

I hope you made it safely. I saw on the news that things were getting more dangerous. I tried to call you a few times, but you didn't answer. I know we said we'd write, because we want a love story to tell our children one day. But I'm afraid for you, I just need to hear your voice. Even if it's just once.

My father called you a hero. A hero, can you believe that? The same man who once told me you were a no good bad boy. And yes, he actually used the word hero. My mother sends her love, and she promises to make you her famous apple pie when you get home.

I can't believe we need to do this for three years. It's insane, it hasn't even been a week yet and I already miss you like crazy. I should hear something soon about my application to RISD, fingers crossed they accept me. Like you said, if it's meant to happen, it will.

Stay safe, I love you.

—Story

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Dear Wyatt,

I got good news! I got accepted to RISD! You were right, you were totally right. They loved my painting of the water fires. I start in September, and I'm so excited.

Thank you for encouraging me to go for it. I couldn't have done it without you. You're the one who pushed me to keep trying, even when I thought it would never happen. Thank you for that.

Do you realize it's been two months since you left now. A full sixty days, that's crazy!

I hope you're getting my letters. I thought I'd hear something from you by now, but my dad says sometimes it takes weeks for you guys to get mail.

I can't watch the news anymore. Every time I see something about the war, I have to turn it off. I can't stand to watch it, all I think about is you, and wondering if you're okay. These awful thoughts run through my head and it makes me want to cry.

I don't know what I'd do if I lost you forever. I need you. We promised each other forever. Come home to me, Wyatt Saint. You're strong, and I'm trying my best to be strong for you.

I love you and I miss you, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Stay safe, I love you.

—Story

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Dear Wyatt,

We're four months in. Four months in, and still you haven't written to me. Are you okay? Are you getting my letters? I tried to call you again, I even sent you some texts, but you still haven't answered me.

Did they take your phone? Can you use one of theirs? I know families can communicate by video and the internet. So please, please Wyatt, let me know you're alright. I don't care how you do it. Just let me know. This is killing me inside.

I thought about all the things I wanted to say to you, I even thought about how I would yell and scream so you knew how upset I really am. But I can't. I miss you too damn much.

School starts in a week. Between that and you being out there, my nerves are shot. I'm trying though, I really am. We made a promise to each other, and I'm not going anywhere.

I won't abandon you like this. I love you, and I love that you want to serve our country. My father says it takes a real man to put on that uniform and stand up for what's right.

I've never seen him so proud of you before. He talks about you like you're one of his own. It's nice. It's like you found a place in his world. For the first time ever, you're right for his daughter.

I never thought I'd say that. I never thought I'd see the day my father fully accepted you with open arms. But he does. And it's because you're doing something so selfless.

You really are a hero Wyatt, to more people than just me.

Stay safe, I love you.

—Story

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## Page 3

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Dear Wyatt,

Why haven't you written me yet!? I'm sure you've gotten my letters, at least one of them by now. I've written you twice a month now for a year. And you haven't written me once.

Where the hell are you Wyatt Saint!?

I told you about my father getting sick, and heard nothing.

I told you I needed to hear from you. I told you I just needed you, and still I got nothing.

I can't do this anymore. I can't continue to give myself to you, and get nothing in return. It's not fair. I deserve to be seen Wyatt Saint. And if you can't even see me from a distance, how are you ever going to see me when I'm standing right in front of you?

Twelve months of emptiness. Twelve months of silence. Twelve months of regret.

Do you even see me at all Wyatt?

I know you're not on some vacation. I understand that where you are is dangerous.

But I still need you too. All I've ever asked for is a handful of words on paper. I don't think that's too much. Let the ink speak for you. Let the ink show me you're still here.

I can't keep doing this.

I won't keep doing this.

I'm done.

—Story

## Page 4

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### Chapter One

#### Story

#### Five years later

“One for you, one for you, and two for me.” Jenny tips back one shot instantly, and then Claire and myself follow suit with ours. “Wooo!” she calls out loudly, slamming the glass on the bar. “Girls, tonight's the night. I can feel it.”

“The night for what?” I ask, hissing through my teeth as I swallow the shot. The liquor burns the back of my throat, warming my belly the second it hits it.

“The night I'm finally going to end my sexless streak.”

Coughing as I laugh, I wipe my lips with the small cocktail napkin. “Wow, what the hell was that you gave me?” I ask, my eyes crinkling as the sensation still sits on the back of my tongue. It tingles, the burn still very very real. “Jesus, Jenn, how fucked up do you want to get?”

She laughs, lazily waving her hand in the air. “That my dear, is One-Fifty-One. Good shit, huh?” Jenny smirks as she pushes the cluster of glasses in front of her further onto the bar, and leans back against it to look out into the crowd.

“That was like drinking fucking gasoline,” Claire says as she shakes her head. She runs a finger under her eye, wiping away a single tear from the sting. “I'm not a wild teen anymore, Jenn, do you want to give me an ulcer?”

Jenny laughs as she watches the people around us dancing. “Light weights,” she says jokingly. “You're twenty-three, not eighty. And even then, my grandmother could still probably drink her way around you both.”

“Excuse me!” the bartender cuts in loudly, getting our attention. The music is so loud, I'm surprised we can hear him at all.

Claire turns first, leaning in so she can hear him better. “Yeah?” she asks, her brows arching high.

“The gentleman at the end of the bar would like to buy you a drink.”

He starts to slide a glass across the smooth bar top, and Jenny perks up excitedly.

“See? I told you. Didn't I tell you? My luck is changing.” Jenny smiles as if she's just won the lottery, reaching out to grab it. “You can tell him I said thank you.”

“Oh, I'm sorry, this isn't for you. It's for her.” He slips it past her hand, and pushes it in front of me. “Red shirt, gray hat. He hopes you enjoy it.”

“Me?” I flick my eyes around the bar, searching for the mystery man. “You made this right? He didn't touch it did he?”

“No, I made it, it's good. Don't worry, he didn't slip anything inside if that's what you're asking.”

I nod, happy to know that the bartender is the only person to touch this drink. You can never be too careful, there are plenty of men out there who will take advantage of a woman if given the chance.

“Screw it if he did,” Jenny says with a smile. “So long as he's hot, he can slip me a

little something anytime he wants.”

“Jenny, come on, you don't mean that.” Claire veers her stare and furrows her brows.

“What? You're going to tell me a little cock from a hot guy is a bad thing?”

“Claire is right, Jenny, even a hot guy slipping you some drug to take advantage of you is a bad thing.” I nod, taking a small sip of the new drink in my hand.

Jenn dances her fingers through the air, and grips the straw of her drink with her teeth as she grins. “Don't judge me, I haven't had any good dick in ages. I'll fuck almost anything at this point.”

“Oh my God, Jenn. You know there are some things you really should just keep to yourself.” Claire starts laughing as Jenn shrugs a shoulder, not denying her comment.

The bartender laughs, wiping the top of the bar down before moving on to another customer.

I can't find the man who bought me the drink. I don't see a guy in a red shirt and a gray hat. I don't see anyone who's wearing that at all. My eyes finally land on a man in a blue button-up, his gaze set on me, his mouth folding into a weird smile.

He gives me the creeps instantly.

Leaning over, I ask in Claire's ear, “You think that's him?”

“Maybe. The shirt isn't red, but the bartender could be color blind or something. And maybe he took his hat off so you can see him better. . .” She pauses, squinting to get a better look.

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“I guess.” I smile softly at him, giving the man a nod. I want to be nice, letting him know I appreciate the drink.

He quirks a brow awkwardly, but doesn't smile back. His eyes never move, they're just there, staring.

“He's giving me the creeps.”

Jenn looks down the bar and rolls her eyes. “Seriously, Story? You think everyone is creepy. But that guy. . .” She pauses, letting her eyes troll him, not even afraid for him to notice. “Yeah, you're right, he's fucking creepy.” She giggles, and snatches my hand. “Come on, forget that guy, let's go dance.”

As she starts to move, I reach back, grabbing Claire by the wrist. We push through the crowd, moving to the center of the dance floor. The music is loud, heavy, and shaking my ribs. I can feel the bass as the techno beats thump and pound around us.

Jenny takes my hands, lifting them over my head as she smiles and jumps in place. I stop thinking about the creepy guy at the bar, and just let loose. I let the music in, giving it full permission to take over.

My hips roll, my hands slide and move around my body. Keeping my eyes closed, I forget everything and just enjoy myself.

I've been so tense lately, that I really did need a night to just break away. The air is hot as my body is bounced between Jenn's and Claire's. We're laughing, and I can't remember the last time I really felt this free.

It's incredible. Right now, there's no weight on my shoulders, no responsibilities hanging over my head. Tomorrow can wait.

The music beats in the background, there are people all around us. But everything around me starts to become a blur, a mesh of faces mixed with flashing lights.

Rolling to the tones floating out of the speakers, my body's a wave. I'm grinding up and down my friends, we're all twisting and rocking together causing sweat to trickle down my spine.

Suddenly, I feel strong hands dig into my hips, and I stop moving. I'm stunned for a moment, but I feel good. I have a small buzz, the alcohol is kicking in, the music is feeding my muscles, and I just want to ride this high.

The man behind me wraps an arm around my stomach, and grinds his hips against my ass. Leaning forward, I rub my ass up and down, knowing exactly what I'm doing.

I can't see his face, and I don't even try. I'm here to let loose, to just enjoy myself. I deserve it for once. Tonight is for me. I'm letting go, giving in to the mood of the club, allowing myself to be free of everything.

His hand holds my lower belly as he dips his head into the crook of my neck, and nuzzles his face against mine. And I let him.

We're both hot, our skin is warm to the touch, and there's a slick layer of sweat beading up across my forehead.

The guy starts to roll his body against mine in ways I've never felt a guy move before. His hips gyrate, his hands paint their way up and down my ribs, taking small bits, and leaving me exposed.

I wrap my arm around his neck, grinding my ass into his cock. This man is making me go crazy, creating a spark that ignites fireworks across my brain.

His hands slip down my sides, just barely tracing the edges of my breasts. So light, so delicate, yet so very very sensual.

Every piece of me is screaming for him to touch me harder. To give me more. To help me forget the world I can't escape.

The man rubs his hard cock against me, pressing it to my ass, and I'm getting wet, grinding back against him. My nipples are hard, pebbling as they graze my shirt when I roll my body, pressing back into his chest.

Gliding my arm up, I wrap his neck, and lay my head back. My fingers slip into his hair, and I grasp around his roots softly.

I feel his lips as they slide over the shell of my ear. Slow. Subtle. Tickling lightly as he lets out a breath of air.

Closing my eyes, his hand moves up my stomach, and he sets an open palm in the center of my chest. Flashes spark behind my eyes, and I freeze.

Those eyes. . . Those lips. . .A face explodes in my mind, sending a sharp pain through my chest. It's the only face that's ever made me melt, that's made me truly feel. And now he's in my fucking head.

His face. His eyes. His hands. I see it all.

And I feel it all.

The fingers on my skin, the way they grip me firmly, the way the tips of his fingers

softly caress my flesh. It's sensual, it's erotic, it joggles up memories I've spent years trying to forget.

I can't do this! I'm not ready!

I stop moving as my heart races inside my chest and my lungs ache.

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I can't. I can't be here like this.

Turning around quickly, I snarl, "Get off me!" Taking a long step backwards, I pull myself away from his grasp.

I don't see his face, it's like a giant black blur. No eyes, no nose or mouth or any distinguishing features. He's just a smear of skin.

"What's wrong?" Jenn asks, her eyes darting between me and the guy. She turns her attention to him, because the look on my face is probably telling her he tried something he shouldn't have. "Go! Get the hell out of here!" She flails her arms in his direction, shooing him away like a stray dog.

Keeping my head down, I rub my forehead, trying to get a grip on my fucking mind.

This has to stop, I can't keep doing this to myself!

"Are you okay? Did he try to hurt you?" Her eyes scan my body, checking for any visible injuries.

"No, no, nothing like that. I just, I got a little freaked out is all." Running my hand through my hair, I try to laugh it off. "Sorry, guys, I think I'm just going to go. That shot isn't sitting right." I point over my shoulder at the exit with my thumb, and start to back away as I rub my belly.

"What? But the night hasn't even started yet. Don't go yet, stay a little longer." Jenn pouts her lips, and gives me puppy dog eyes.

“Yeah, Story,” Claire chimes in. “Don't go home just yet.”

“I'm sorry, I really am, I'm just not feeling good right now.”

My friends look at each other, then back at me. “Is this about him?” Claire asks.

“About who? That guy?” Shaking my head, I say, “No, it's fine. He didn't do anything, I just—”

“No, not that guy, you know who she's talking about.” Jenny tips her head, and folds her arms across her chest.

The look she's giving me, I hate it. I can't lie to her about anything. We've know each other for a few years, and she's been able to see through every lie I've ever given her. But I still try to any way. Because I'm stubborn as fuck, who am I kidding.

“There is no guy, I don't know wha—”

“Don't play stupid, you know who I'm referring to. It's been years, Story—years. You've gone out on what—five dates since that boy?” She looks between Claire and myself, her brows furrowing. “Is that right, Claire? Five?” she asks, scrunching her face like she's counting in her head.

She's right, one a year. And all of them tanked.

But I don't let her know she's right. It doesn't matter how many dates I've gone on, or who they were with. None of them felt—right.

She doesn't understand. She has no idea what it's like to lose the person you love and not know why.

“I know, I know, to you it looks like I'm not putting myself out there, but—”

“But,” she says, cutting me off. “That's exactly what you're doing. You're not putting yourself out there.” Jenny takes a step forward, grabbing both my hands and pulling me closer. She softens her expression, tilting her head into her shoulder as she lets out a heavy breath. “He isn't coming back. I know it, Claire knows it, and even you know it. It's time to move on, Story. Every time you look like you're finally starting to enjoy yourself, or you feel even a sliver of butterflies for someone else, you find some reason to end it. You're waiting for a ghost, Story, a ghost who's never coming.”

“I'm not waiting for anyone.” Pulling my hands free, I can't stop the defensive tone in my voice. “Look, the guys I went on dates with weren't even guys, they were boys. I just haven't met the right person yet, that's all. And I will one day, but it's not going to happen in some dirty nightclub. I'm not going to meet the man of my dreams in a place like this.”

“I'm not trying to pressure you, Story, I'm really not. But you find fault in every guy you date. You have to realize that Mr. Perfect—your version of Mr. Perfect, doesn't exist. This man you've put your life on hold for isn't coming to sweep you off your feet. The sooner you let his image go, the sooner you can open your heart to someone else.”

Fuck, she's right again. How does she do that?

The thought hurts. It's something I've never really wanted to address. I know he's not my Prince Charming anymore. I know the day he left, he also made a choice to leave me too. I just wished he had the balls to tell me.

“Look, I appreciate the advice, I do, but let me do this on my own time, and on my own terms. It'll happen, when it's supposed to happen.”

From the corner of my eye, a figure catches my attention. Whipping my head over my shoulder, I spot a shape in the shadows of the back. It's tall, thick, and familiar.

Could it. . . Blinking, I try to focus in the darkness of the club, finding stable light between the bursts of the strobe light above the dance floor. But when I blink again and open my eyes, he's gone.

Squinting, I stand on my toes, dipping and moving, trying to see through the crowd of dancers. He's definitely gone, disappearing as quickly as he manifested. The weight of that shadow sits on my chest. It settles there, painful and uncomfortable, yet wildly familiar.

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“Story? Story? Are you still with me? Hello?” Jenny snaps her fingers in front of my face. “Over here, eyes on me.”

“What?” I ask.

“Forget it, I'm not going to say it all again. But I will say this, it's time for you to really move on, because if don't, you're going to end up just like my mother; a miserable, lonely woman, who prefers the company of her cats over the company of anyone else. Do you want to be that person, Story? Do you want to be the cranky cat lady?”

Shaking my head, I roll my eyes as I smirk. “Alright, I get it.” Reaching my arms out, I give her a hug. “On that note, I'm heading home. I'll give you ladies a text tomorrow. Sound good?”

“You alright to drive?” Claire asks.

“Yeah, I'm good, you two be careful.” I smile and push my way through the crowd and out the exit.

The fresh air feels good on my face, causing me to inhale a deep breath. Pulling my keys out, I put my head down and head for my car. It's bright on the sidewalk, but turns dark as I round the corner to where my car is parked.

I can see my crappy two door sedan from across the lot. The rust covered fenders stick out like a sore thumb against the bright green paint. The music dulls the deeper into the parking lot I get, and an eerie silence wraps my shoulders like a prickly

blanket.

My ears perk, my skin bristles, and I can hear the wind whistle as it blows between the cars. Looking back over my shoulder, I get the feeling like I'm being watched, so I walk faster.

My car is right there, it's so close. I keep my gaze fixed on the car, while I fumble with my keys in my hand, trying to make sure I have the car key ready.

Stopping at the driver's side door, I struggle to find the key on the ring. A tingling sensation starts to work through my body, and I'm suddenly seeing doubles.

Rubbing my eyes, I blink a few times, hoping it will fix itself. I feel weird. It's hard to explain what it is exactly, but my entire body just feels different. I'm getting really tired, and it's getting harder and harder to keep my eyes completely open.

I'm not drunk, at least I shouldn't be drunk. I only had two drinks the entire night, and that God awful shot Jenny gave me.

My fingers work through each key, playing an endless game of not the right one.

Come on, where the fuck is it? I know it's here.

A noise crackles behind me, causing my fingers to stop moving and my ears to perk. I listen. What was that? It sounds like rocks being kicked across pavement.

I attempt to twist my head and look around when I'm suddenly struck from behind like a surfer by a shark in the ocean. A heavy hand sweeps across my mouth, stealing my scream. I try so hard to push my voice past his fingers, but it's useless.

Muffled noises are all that come out. I can taste his skin in my mouth, it's salty with a

hint of dish soap. Lifting my fingers to the hand, I try to peel it off my face, but all that does is make him press harder.

The edge of his finger is getting extremely close to my nostrils, and I'm afraid if I move in the wrong direction, he'll block my nose and I won't be able to breathe. Freezing, I try to keep my head still.

“Hello again. How are we feeling? You look like you're having a good time,” he says, his tone mockingly sweet. His fingertips dig into the flesh of my cheeks as he grabs me by the hips and spins me around.

The bartender. . .

The man behind the bar who made me the drink is smiling at me, but that smile isn't kind at all. The look in his eyes sends terror through my body. My heart races, my stomach is in knots, and I can taste the bile as it rises to the back of my throat.

There was no man buying me a drink. . . It was him.

“Figuring it out now, aren't you?” His lips curl up, brows dropping hard. “The real rule is to never take a drink from anyone you didn't see make it.” He chuckles at his own words, but I'm not laughing at all.

“I knew the second you walked in tonight that I was going to take you home with me. But I don't take rejection well, so I like to make things easier on myself. It should be kicking in soon, do you feel it yet?”

My eyes expand wide as I shake my head. No! Don't do this! You don't want to do this!

“No? Why would you say no? Because that body of yours. . .” He pauses, leaning

back to look me up and down. “That body is saying you want this more than I do.”

Every inch of my body starts to shake, my muscles trembling so violently I can feel my bones vibrate.

The man presses his heavy frame against mine, pinning me against the side of my car. His hand is still covering my mouth, and he starts to run his free hand up my thigh.

He's getting closer, almost touching my panties. My instincts kick in, and I react. I'm not out of it yet, I'm still alert enough to try and do something.

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With one quick jab, I knee him in the dick, causing him to grunt in pain. But he doesn't let go. He doesn't even seem that fazed, instead his hand digs into my face harder. He's blocking my mouth so I can't utter a fucking word, and pins me tighter against my car.

Lifting his gaze to mine, his pupils expand, filling his entire eyes. I'm staring into the eyes of the devil. This isn't a man in front of me, it's a fucking monster.

Folding his lips down, he growls as he slips his hand easily from my mouth to my throat, cutting off my air supply.

I'm trying to breathe, and I'm getting nothing. I can't focus on anything else but the oxygen around me I desperately need.

My eyes start to swell, and everything around me is getting fuzzy. When movement behind him catches my attention. The man holding me follows my eyes, twisting to look back over his shoulder.

“Get your fucking hands off her, Asshole.” A fist flies out from the darkness, cracking against the man's jaw. Hands grip the bartender's shoulders, tearing him off of me.

Leaning over, I rub my neck as I inhale giant gulps of air. Gasping, I lift my eyes, and see the man who was about to hurt me out cold on the pavement. The figure in the dark steps into the light, reaching for me gently, and gripping my elbow.

“Are you alright?” he asks, his eyes feverishly checking me over.

Squinting, I stare at his face as he comes into view under the light of the lamp in the parking lot. I know him. His eyes are familiar, his voice is soothing, and his hands instantly make calm me.

Holy shit it's him. No, it can't be. . . Can it?

I'm not even sure if what I'm seeing is real, or if it's just my mind playing tricks on me.

“Wyatt?” I ask, angling my head to get a better look at his face as I inhale deep breaths.

His head is shaved, and he has a thick goatee on his chin. Hard arms bulge and roll as he moves, helping me to stand up straight. He's bigger than I remember, with muscles he didn't have when I saw him last.

But it's him, it's definitely him. The boy I remember is now a man.

“Did he hurt you?” he asks as if he either didn't hear me, or just doesn't want to answer. His hands slip up my arms, then down again, taking both my wrists, and lifting up my arms.

“Is that you, Wyatt?”

He stops, letting his eyes connect with mine. And that's when I'm one hundred percent sure it's him.

I could never forget the color of his eyes. They're not quite blue, but they're not quite gray. Gunmetal, that's the best color to describe his eyes.

They sparkle with silver, they shine with cobalt, and they penetrate my soul the same

as daggers in my lungs. I can feel him, he's looking through me, diving deep into my chest to see if my heart's still beating.

“It is you,” I say before he answers. I'm not sure if he even has the words to answer. He looks shocked, like he didn't think I would recognize him. But I do. I don't think it would matter how much time has past, I'd never forget him.

You can't forget your first love. . . Your only love.

I want to take a step back, but I'm still trapped against my car. I'm flustered. Between the guy who just tried to assault me, and the ghost in front of me, I don't know what to think.

Wyatt doesn't confirm or deny anything for me, there's no nod or subtle shake of his head to tell me I'm right. He stares at me for a long moment then goes back to making sure I don't have any visible injuries. “Who is this guy?” he asks.

“I don't know, I think he's the bartender here, but that's all I know, I don't even know his name.” Folding my arms over my chest, I look at the guy on the ground. He's knocked out, his eye already beginning to swell, and his lip is trickling blood down his chin and over his cheek.

I attempt to take a step, but I stumble, losing my balance and falling back against the car. He quickly throws his arms out, capturing me and holding me up. I feel dizzy all of sudden, and the double vision is back.

What the hell did that guy put in my drink?

Wyatt looks down at the guy as he talks. “Let me drive you home.” Holding out his hand, he wriggles his fingers for me to give him the keys.

I hesitate, clutching my keys tighter. He senses my reluctance, lifting his eyes to mine. “I just want to make sure you get home safely, Story, alright?”

There's a million different emotions flowing through me. My adrenaline is pumping, filling my body with fear and anger, sadness and surprise. I want to cry. I want to smile. I want to scream and shout, and I want to punch Wyatt in the face.

Wyatt drops his hand, resting a hand on the roof of my car and still holding me with the other. Shrugging a shoulder, he looks around us. “Or we can just stand here until asshole there wakes up, and tries to fight me.” He gives me a fake smile, but I don't smile back. “We can call the cops too, I'll give a statement.”

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“What the hell are you doing here, Wyatt?” My stomach starts to bubble, and the world beneath my feet begins to spin. Leaning, I let myself rest against his side.

“Well, it looks to me like I'm keeping you safe.”

“Fuck you,” I snap.

“What? I am.”

“That's not what I mean, and you know it. What the hell are you doing here?” holding out open palms, I try to stand up and turn to face him. My legs are jello, and my knees buckle with no support.

Wyatt swoops down, scooping me into his arms. “Alright, we're not doing this right now. I'm taking you to the hospital.”

“No!” I yell, pushing him away.

“Story, please, let's get you checked. Who knows what he gave you.”

“No, Wyatt! No hospital. I can get myself home.” Slicing the air, I fall backwards and he grabs me.

“Then I'm driving you home, you can't drive like this. Give me your keys.”

Thinning my lips, I nod. He's right. I can't drive like this.

“Fine,” I say, holding out my keys. “You can take me home.”

Wyatt helps me into the car and buckles me up. I can barely keep my eyes open as I half watch him circle the car to the driver's side and climb in.

My lids are heavy, so fucking heavy. I blink and my eyes stay closed for a long second, only to reopen them and see we're moving. Flickers of the streetlights flash as I lay my head against the cold window.

Another blink and I'm in his arms, being carried up a flight of stairs.

There are blips of moments. They're quick, only a single second or two before everything goes black again.

Wyatt wiping my forehead. His fingers moving hair out of my face. A blanket being lifted to my chin. My shoulders being held up, and a cool glass of water against my lips.

I'm in complete darkness. It's a darkness that's palpable, flavored, and I can feel it in my soul. It's like I'm awake with my eyes closed. I can sense things around me. The weight of the blanket, the scent of mint, the sound of my heart beating in my chest.

Then there's nothing.

### Chapter Two

#### Story

---

My eyes are closed, but I'm awake, and my head is pounding like I've been hit by a fucking freight train. It's a headache like I've never had before.

Clutching my skull, I rub my temples for a second and try to open my eyes, until the sun creeping through my blinds turns my headache into a devastating earthquake. The thin streams of sun pierce my pupils like serrated blades, and twist their way into my brain.

Pulling the blanket up over my head, I tuck myself back into darkness as I groan.

What the fuck happened last night?

My mind is blank, I don't even know how the hell I got home. Think, Story, think. There's flashes of dancing with my friends, laughing, drinking, and then it all goes silent.

Suddenly, a rustling noise comes from the kitchen, causing my eyes to jump open, but I stay hidden under my blanket. A scent starts to work its way under the blanket, it's bold and aromatic.

Coffee? Who's making coffee?

Gently, and quietly, I slip the blanket down my face to my nose, and peer out. My bedroom door is open, but I can't see anyone. There's more clanking and rustling, footsteps and the sound of the faucet.

Who the hell is that? Jenny? Claire?

It's got to be one of them, that's the only thing that makes sense. I was with them at the club last night, and that's the last memory I have. Who else could it be?

Wait, there was dancing, but not with them. There was dancing with. . .

Mystery guy. Fuck, that's right, mystery guy had his hands all over me.

Oh, God, what if?

A rancid thought twists my stomach. Did I bring home some random dude last night?

The sizzle of butter on a pan cuts through the air, and I'm left with a curiosity that I'm afraid of. I'm afraid to see some guy in my kitchen that I don't know. A stranger whose name isn't on the tip of my tongue, and I can't even remember his face.

No, don't be ridiculous, Story. You wouldn't do that. It's got to be one of the girls.

Calming my nerves, I sit up in bed. I don't know why I'm freaking myself out. I've never gone home with, or brought home, any random guy. I've dated, I've danced, I've even kissed, but not once have I just tossed caution to the wind and brought someone home.

So why would I start now?

Twisting my legs over the side of my bed, I let my feet dangle above the floor. I can't

stand up yet, I'm not ready. The pounding in my skull is growing, so I take my time, and my entire body is tingling with a weakness I've never felt before.

Pressing my toes into the floor, I move my feet back and forth over the plush carpet. Looking down, I'm in a t-shirt and shorts.

When did I change?

Raking my fingers through my hair, I finally get the strength to stand and slowly make my way to the door. Yawning wide, my eyes are on the floor as I step out of my room and into the open living space of my apartment.

A one bedroom on the east side of Providence, it's small, it's quaint, and it's all I can afford. The kitchen and living room are one space, the only separation is the rug turning to linoleum tile for the small kitchenette. The ceiling is spotted with orange water spots, and the walls are cut right out of the eighties with wood paneling.

“Wow, what the hell happened last night? I can't remember a—” My voice cuts out instantly as my eyes lift to the figure standing against the stove.

Clear as a day, like a mirage when you're dehydrated and have been walking in the desert for days, Wyatt Saint is standing in my kitchen.

No. This can't be right. I'm dreaming, I have to be dreaming.

Rubbing my eyes, I blink over and over, unable to grasp what I'm looking at. He's standing shirtless, the hard muscles of his biceps draw my gaze across his broad shoulders and down to the V shaped muscles of his back as they disappear into his jeans.

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Long, sweeping lines of ink follow his shoulder blades, swirling across the back of his neck and down the back side of his ribs. There are pictures built into the design. Crosses, an American flag, letters and dates.

It's beautiful.

He twists to look at me over his shoulder, and gives me a smile. “Morning, I didn't think you'd be up this early. I'm making eggs, and the coffee is ready if you want a cup. How's your head?”

My jaw is on the floor. I'm still dreaming, I have to be. There's no way Wyatt is in my kitchen right now. Pinching myself, I cringe.

He smirks, pointing at me with the spatula. “Did you just pinch yourself?”

Pursing my lips, my heart is in my throat as I take a small step forward. “What are you doing here?” I ask, rubbing the red skin where I dug my nails in.

“Wow, did we just reverse time?” he laughs, and that laugh. . . It does things to me it shouldn't. My heart races wildly, my muscles begin to tremble, and my pussy grows hot. His eyes meet mine as he keeps talking. “Because you asked me the same thing last night a few times before finally passing out.”

Holding up a hand, I warily step towards the kitchen. “Whoa whoa whoa, what do you mean last night? I don't remember you from last night at all.”

“I'm not surprised. I don't know what that guy gave you, but you had me nervous for

awhile.” He flicks his eyes at me briefly, then turns them back to the stove. “You're really lucky I was there, you know that? That guy looked like he wanted to hurt you.”

Holding up my hand, I veer my stare. “I'm sorry, I'm confused. Drugged? Other guy? What the hell is going on? What the fuck are you talking about? I was with my friends, I was having fun, I . . .” My voice fades I try like hell to remember more.

I really can't remember.

He spins away from the stove, holding a pan full of scrambled eggs. Scooping some onto two plates, he sets the pan back on the burner, and pulls out a chair.

“Here, sit, you could probably use some food right now.” He fans an arm from me to the chair. “It'll help get rid of the shakes. Come on, come sit before you fall down again.”

“Again?”

He nods, ticking his head in my direction. “Check the left side of your head.” Feeling my scalp, there's a big egg. My eyes lift to his, unsure how to process this. “You insisted on walking up the steps on your own,” he goes on to say, “but you ended up falling over, and hitting your head on the banister. So, I carried you the rest of the way.”

What the hell is going on right now?

I'm so confused. The last thing I can vividly remember is dancing at the club. Now, I'm face to face with a ghost from my past. I never thought I'd see him again, no matter how many times I wished for this, no matter how many shooting stars I watched cross the sky, and said his name as they disappeared, I never thought I'd wake up and he'd just be here.

Slowly, I walk to the table and take a seat. Wyatt helps to push me in, handing me a fork, and going back to the counter.

“You still like extra cream and sugar?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I say, my stomach tumbling softly. “I can't believe you remember that.”

“Of course I remember. I remember a lot more than just what you like in your coffee.” He winks, giving me a sexy little smirk. “I remember how you used to giggle when I gripped the area around your knee. And I remember the way you used to open your sodas with your teeth instead of your fingers.” Smiling, he looks off in thought.

My heart lurches in my chest with that smile. I'm brought back to when we were first started dating when I was sixteen. It's that smirk right there that drew me in in the first place, that same smirk that made butterflies flutter in my stomach, and my skin flush, and my heart race in my chest.

It's the same smirk he would use after we had. . .Oh, oh no. No. No. No.

My eyes jump to his, wide and on the verge of panic. “Wyatt, did we. . .” I pause, unable to even finish my sentence.

He chuckles, and gives me a genuine smile. “No, we didn't have sex if that's what you're asking.” Leaning into the fridge, he takes out the cream, and pours it into both mugs. Stirring them, he carries them to the table and passes me one. “Here, this will get rid of the headache you have, plus a couple of these.” He hands me a few aspirins, and takes the seat across from me.

“Drugged? How do you know I was drugged?”

“Trust me, Story, you were slipped something. And you refused to go to the hospital,

you wouldn't even hear it.”

“Wow,” I say in shock, “I can't believe I was drugged.” Lifting the mug to my lips, I blow cool air across the top and take a sip.

Wyatt nods, inhaling a fork full of eggs into his mouth. “I'm just glad I was there and nothing happened to you.” He lifts his eyes to mine, and points his fork in my direction. “You really don't remember anything at all?”

“No, I don't remember anything after dancing with my friends.”

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“That's probably a good thing, you're better off not remembering what happened. And that asshole better hope I don't run into him someplace else, because I'm going to fucking kill him.” He sounds serious, and I don't doubt he means it.

Wyatt Saint might look almost the same as I remember, but his eyes are different. They're dull, empty, distant. I don't like it. He's changed.

I'm not sure what that means. The change I see, the difference; his eyes are telling a story, but I can't hear what it is.

Resting back, I grip the cup with both hands and stare at Wyatt. I have so many questions for him, and I'm trying to decide which one makes more sense right now.

It's been five years. He left right out of high school, and I haven't seen him since. Until right now, until he made the choice to come back. I'm just not in the right state of mind to think this hard. My brain is mush, it isn't functioning the way it should.

But how do you know you'll get another chance?

How do I know he won't disappear again for another five years? I don't.

Don't waste this!

Sucking in a big breath of air, I tilt my head. “Where have you been Wyatt?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean, don't pretend like you don't.” Leaning forward, I grip my mug. “So. . .” Pausing, I give him a second to get his thoughts together. “Tell me, where the hell have you been?”

He sets his fork down, wiping his mouth with a napkin. “You should eat, you'll feel better.”

“I feel just fine, don't change the subject, Wyatt. Tell me, tell me where the hell you've been?”

He drops his eyes to the table, and lets out a heavy breath. “You know where I've been, Story, you don't need me tell you. And now I'm here, having breakfast with you.” His tone is low, almost annoyed I'm even asking him.

Rage floods my body, turning my blood hot and percolating under the skin. This goes deeper than just a fact check. This is about us. This is about how he left me, and never looked back.

And if he isn't willing to man up and answer me, he can just leave.

“Get out.” He flicks his eyes up to mine, and leans back in his chair. “Go, get out,” I say again sternly, jerking my head towards the door. Standing up stiffly from my seat, I shove the plate away, and point at the door. “Out. Now.”

I don't say anything else and I don't want to. I deserve to know where he went when he left. I know he went to war, I know he was stationed some place in Iraq, but that's not what I want to hear him say.

I want to know where he went, where did my boyfriend go once that bus pulled away. Because I never heard a fucking thing after that moment, and I at least deserve an honest answer.

I deserve to know why he left me. I deserve to know why he let me keep writing if he never intended to talk to me again.

“Get the fuck out, Wyatt, I don't want you here!” Storming away, I go into the bathroom and slam the door. I don't want to see his face anymore. Locking the door behind me, I slide down the wood, and wrap my arms around my knees.

It's like everything hits me all at once. All the time I waited for him. All the love I lost. All the moments I gave him that he never returned. All the years I let myself still love someone who didn't love me back.

Tears sweep in, consuming me like a tsunami. And I let them. I let the tears take me because right now, they own me. I'm sobbing to the point I can't even take a full breath.

I hear the front door shut, but I stay where I am. I can't look, I'm not ready.

This man had been my everything. I gave him every piece of my heart and soul and he destroyed me. But, even through the fury, through the need for answers, through the hate that's sending my brain spinning; just seeing him breathes life back into my soul.

It's bittersweet.

To love someone so much it hurts. To love someone so much that even amid the hate, my heart still beats for him. And because of that, I hate him even more. He has too much power over me, I can't stand it.

What the hell is happening to me?

Poking my head out of the bathroom, Wyatt's gone, and I'm glad to be alone. My

head is spiraling out of control, and I'm not sure how to process everything I'm feeling.

The least he could have done was answer me. Don't I deserve that?

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Don't I deserve to be seen? To be heard? To be acknowledged?

Don't my feelings count at all?

If he isn't going to be honest with me, and answer my question, if he can't even give me the courtesy of that, I want nothing to do with him.

Liar.

I'm lying to myself if I think I can just erase this man from my head now. I haven't been able to get him out of my mind since the day he left, this is no different.

Scratching my scalp, the curls in my hair crunch from the gel I put in last night.

I need a shower.

Turning on the water, I let it run over my wrist until the temperature feels right. Steam billows out the top of the shower, and starts to fog up the mirror. I strip my clothes off, and climb inside.

The water is hot, spilling down my head and over my shoulders. I close my eyes and put my face directly in the water.

Wyatt's face shows up behind my lids. His smile, the double dimples he gets when he grins big, the way his eyes sparkle like the ocean if the sun hits them just right. His firm chest, with stepping stone abs and solid arms.

Damn, he looks so good.

My body aches to feel him around me. I remember the way his lips would feather kisses across my neck, and his tongue would circle my nipples one at a time, until finally sucking my tit into his mouth.

We were young back then. Young and in love. Wyatt's my first everything. My first boyfriend. The first person I had sex with. The first and only person I ever loved.

And he's still the only one I ever think about. He's pleased me throughout the years without even knowing it. Lonely nights turned into dirty thoughts of Wyatt and a vibrator.

He's still so fucking sexy, and his voice, fuck that voice is deeper, more powerful, and it stirs something deep inside my belly.

The water slips over my pussy, and I follow it with my finger. My clit is tender, and the second I touch it with the pad of my finger my legs clench around my hand.

My memories are old, the ones I've been using to get off don't compare to the man I saw in my kitchen. I want this man to take me now, to overpower me, to have me anyway he wants.

Flicking my clit, I rub my pussy in firm circles, massaging with precision. I slip a finger in my entrance as I picture Wyatt tearing his cock out, and bending me over my kitchen counter.

Sinking my finger up to the knuckle, I use my palm, and press it against my swelling nub. One finger quickly turns into two as my mind runs wild. His hands on my tits, pinching my nipples, his tongue running down my stomach until he finds my hot pussy, and devours it like it's a fucking meal.

My pussy bears down around my fingers, the walls tighten, milking my hand like it's his cock. I don't want to have this much desire for the man I hate, but I can't control it.

When I think about him my body lights up. My belly gets warm, and that feeling radiates through my skin, making me hot all over.

The movie in my head keeps playing, and Wyatt tangles his hand in my hair, tearing my head back as he slams his cock inside me. I can feel the orgasm as it swells in my lower belly, and my clit pulses hard.

My fingers move at the same pace as his cock in my head. Faster and faster, I work my body until I finally break. My knees buckle slightly as I throw my hand against the wall and electric sparks hit my veins.

Pulling my fingers free, I stay still, just letting the water wash everything away. My mind goes blank, and I give myself permission to just enjoy this feeling coursing through my body.

I'll figure out the rest later.

Today I'm just going to pretend like everything is normal.

I can't handle much more than that.

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### Chapter Three

Wyatt

---

She's still just as gorgeous. As pretty as I remember.

And I fucked up.

I know what she wants from me, but it's something I'm not willing to give.

Story deserves a lot from me, and I can apologize for so much of what she might be feeling, but I can't give her all the answers she wants.

She'll never understand.

I watch her from a distance as she leaves her apartment and walks up the street. She turns, and the long arms from the sun slip between the buildings, they catch her skin perfectly, making her glow.

Fuck, this girl makes my cock hard, and my heart hammer inside my chest. She always has. Even when I was overseas, all I had to do was think about her, and I could get myself off in minutes.

She heads up Union Ave, and is greeted at a small coffee shop by a tall blonde girl with heavy eye makeup. The woman makes an excited squeal, embracing Story in a

hug. They take a seat at a table outside, and her friend starts talking.

I can see her lips moving and her hands dancing in the air. She lifts the tea bag in her cup, steeping it a few times before taking a sip. Story sits quietly, nodding and smiling, but not really talking at all.

This is the first time I've seen Story out since that night. It's been almost a week. I've given her space, just waiting for her to feel more normal. This is it.

Starting my motorcycle, I pull up to the curb and slow to a stop. Pulling off my helmet, I smile. "Excuse me ladies, I'm lost, and need directions."

Story's friend's eyes light up as she leans over the table and smiles back. It's definitely flirty and I see a flare of jealousy in Story's stare.

She doesn't hate me completely.

"Where you going?" the blond asks, resting her chin in her hand.

"He's lying, Jenny, he isn't lost."

"Now, Story, don't be rude. Not every guy is a pig looking to get laid, or a dirty creep. Right?" she asks, turning her attention to me. "You're not a dirty creep are you?"

"Me. . ." I say, pausing and pouting my bottom lip. "Nah, not me."

"See," Jenny says, looking back at Story. "He's just a hot guy on a motorcycle."

"Your friend is right, I'm just a hot guy on a motorcycle," I say teasingly with a soft smirk.

Story's brows furrow as her lip curls into a snarl. "No, you're an asshole on a motorcycle, big difference."

"Story!" Jenny yells, her eyes growing wide. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Story stands up from her chair, folds her arms across her chest, and tips her head. "What the hell are you doing, Wyatt?"

"Wyatt?" Jenny's mouth falls open as she glances between us. "This is the guy I've heard about all these years?"

"Yeah, this is him," she says. "Jenny, Wyatt. Wyatt, Jenny." Story draws a hand between us, but she's not happy about this introduction. I smile and wave, tucking my helmet under my arm. "Now that the introductions are out of the way, maybe you can tell me what you're doing? Better yet, you can just drive off and never come back."

Jenny sits back in her chair, picking up her tea and holding it close. She looks down into the cup and says, "Staying out of this one."

"Story—"

"No, Wyatt, I'm not doing this. I'm not playing whatever game this is." Her finger jabs back and forth between us. "I don't know what you're up to, but I'm not having it."

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“I want to show you something.”

“What?” Crossing her arms, she kicks her hip out.

“You'll have to get on to find out.”

Jenny bounces her eyebrows and grunts noises that aren't really words. She's nudging her head towards my motorcycle, and basically telling Story to go.

“I don't—”

“She's coming,” Jenny says, answering for her. Story gives her a look and I can see both girls have a voiceless conversation.

Story rolls her eyes, letting them fall back on me. “You got another helmet?”

I reach into my saddlebag, and pull out a helmet. “Here, climb on.”

“Just don't think this means I'm not still mad at you.” Her eyes zero in on mine, and I know I owe her more than what I've given her.

But apologies mean nothing if you don't believe it. I won't apologize for anything, because I'm not sorry. I just hope she can eventually understand me. I did it to save her from a world she could never handle.

Story is too innocent, too pure, the truth of what I saw and what I lived through will destroy her.

“I wouldn't expect anything less,” I say with a grin.

She pulls the helmet on her head and straps it tight. Throwing her leg over the seat, she wraps her arms tightly around my waist and snuggles up against my back.

Turning the throttle, we're gone. I feel her body jerk back, causing her fingers to tighten around my chest. I love that feeling, I've missed that feeling, no matter how much I try to pretend it doesn't exist.

The wind slaps against my face, and a rush fills my body, a feeling I don't recognize.

Adrenaline.

But not the adrenaline I spent years living with, this is different. It courses through my veins, making my heart pump like a drummer playing double bass in a heavy metal band.

I smile to myself, gleaming from ear to ear. Freedom in the form of pleasure.

Rolling to a red light, I look back at her over my shoulder. “You have anywhere to be today?”

“Is that any of your business?” I can hear the annoyance in her voice.

I'm going to change her mind about me. I'm going to make her see the man I am now. Not the boy that broke her heart. We all make choices, and I had to chose between giving her what she wanted, or letting her go; if only for a little while.

I'm here now. Ready to give her everything she ever wanted. I just need her to take my hand.

A twinge of jealousy hits my stomach, as my head rolls with thoughts. How many boyfriends has she had over the years? And how many has she loved?

The thought of her with someone else makes me feel sick. But she isn't my girlfriend, I burnt that bridge the second I got on that bus, and it took me only one day to realize it.

Story doesn't owe me any act of celibacy. We aren't a couple, so why am I getting so heated with the idea of her being with someone else?

Because she's always been mine. Even when she thought she wasn't.

The light turns green, so I twist back to the road. As we take a right turn, she leans into my ear. "Where are we going anyway? You haven't told me anything."

"A little place I know." Hitting the throttle harder, the motorcycle jerks forward. Story digs her hands into my chest, gripping tighter to stay in place.

I enjoy having her on the back of my bike. It's been too long since I've had her around me, her tits rubbing against my back, her thighs hugging my hips. My cock thickens as her nipples bead, scraping against my back.

God damn, I've missed this. . .

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She snuggles herself closer, erasing any space between us. Her hands slip down, securing around my stomach.

And fuck have I missed her.

Pulling down a long, partially paved road, the tires jump around over the uneven dirt. Slowing to a stop, I kick out the stand, and shut off the engine.

“Where are we?” she asks.

I climb off the bike, and Story climbs off with me. Opening the saddlebag, I pull out a small blanket. “Follow me and you’ll see.” Turning away from her, I start walking up the dirt road.

Story scurries to my side, and stays close. She’s right there, her elbow grazes mine as she wraps her arms around herself, and I chuckle.

“What?” she asks.

“Still afraid of the dark I see.”

“I might not be a child anymore, but the monsters in the dark never change.” She angles her head and peers up at me under hooded lids.

We’re in the middle of the woods, the only sounds around us are the treetops blowing, and the leaves dancing in the wind. The ground is full of pits and loose rocks, pitching up. Stumbling over the dirt, Story almost falls, latching onto my arm tightly

to keep her balance.

My eyes flick down, lip peeling back. Bringing a hand to her wrist, I caress her skin gently.

She's so soft, her skin's like silk.

Story peers up at me as I take the opportunity to take her hand and braid our fingers together. She doesn't fight me. She doesn't protest my hand around hers. She holds mine back, curling her fingers up, and squeezing.

I smile at her, she smiles at me, but neither of us say a word. We just keep walking. There's an unspoken moment between us. One that says this is alright for now, because the dark is scary, but don't push me.

And I'm alright with that. I came back because I'm ready to live again, and I'm here to claim the only person who ever showed me what it means to be alive.

I need the girl who makes life worth living to see me again. I want her to look at me with the same eyes she used; full of love.

The treeline opens around us, and I watch as her eyes grow to the size of the moon. We're on the top of a cliff, and the city below is doused in lights. Everything is glowing, brightly on display and shimmering. It's beautiful, and I knew the second I found it that she'd love it.

“What do you think?” I ask, tossing the blanket out, and spreading it across the ground.

“Wow, it's so pretty. I've never seen the city like this before, it looks incredible.” Her jaw hangs open in awe, eyes scanning back and forth.

“I wasn't sure if I ever took you here before or not.” Bending down to sit, I pat the blanket with my hand. “Sit.”

“How did you find this place? It's beautiful.” Lowering beside me, Story is still looking out at the city, but I can't take my eyes off of her.

“I was just cruising around one day, and stumbled on it.”

She flicks her eyes to mine briefly, and smirks. “You got lost, huh?” Giggling, she leans into my shoulder and gives me a nudge.

“Okay, so, maybe I did.” Smiling, I let my eyes connect with hers.

Her face glistens under the night sky with the moon brightly lit above us. She looks so fucking beautiful, all I can think about is kissing her.

As if she can read my mind, Story licks her lips, making them dewy and wet. She nibbles softly on her bottom lip, moving her eyes around my face.

I lean a little closer towards her, so fucking ready to taste her. But her eyes cut away, and she leans back on her palms, crossing her legs over each other. I'm left in mid air, my lips cold, and my body aching.

“I knew it, “ she says playfully. “No one just finds a place like this without getting lost first.”

“Go ahead, twist the knife a little more.” I make the motion of being stabbed in the gut, keeling over onto my side.

Laughing, she says, “Hey, the truth hurts sometimes. That's why they created GPS.”

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Lifting a finger to her cheek, I run it over her flush skin. “You really are so damn beautiful, Story, even your laugh is sexy as hell.”

Her cheeks turn redder, and goosebumps break over her skin. But a piece of me still feels a level of reserve.

What is she feeling? Is there anything left for me at all?

She made it easy when we were together before, everything about her always exploded with confidence. But I can see the change in her eyes, in the way she looks at me. The darkness looms with sadness.

I never expected her to wait for me, no matter how much I secretly wished she would. Exhaling a deep breath, I pinch her chin and lift her face so I can look her directly in the eyes.

“What? What is it?” she asks.

“Look, I just need to know one thing. How many guys have you. . .” Pausing, I bite my tongue and choose different words. “You know, were there a lot?” My brows lift, hopeful she won't hit me.

She sits in silence for a moment, lips pulling back tight. “I'm not fucking anyone else if that's what you're asking, Wyatt.”

“Why do I find that hard to believe?”

“You don't have any right to even ask me that question to begin with. You're lucky I gave you an answer at all.” Her words trail off, jaw crooking to the side.

She's right, but I don't care.

Gliding my hand down between her shoulder blades, I can't stop the grin from spreading across my face. “You're right, Story, it's none of my business. The problem I have is I still see you as mine.”

I watch her stop breathing as she sucks in a quick gulp of air and holds it in. I can see her thinking, unsure of what to say.

A cool sweat breaks across my skin, the small droplets surrendering to gravity, tracing the dips of my spine. I'm waiting, I won't break the silence. This is her platform to tell me what she wants.

Forcing out an exhale, she shakes her head side to side. “You left me, you left me and I haven't heard from you for years.” Tilting on her hip, she adjusts her body, and glares at me through slit lids. “How can you sit here and try to claim me as yours?” she asks, her voice trying to maintain some composure.

But I hear it. I hear the slight hiccup. I hear the dip in her tone as her voice cracks and spits. “I'm not your property, Wyatt, I never was.”

“You think I'm joking, don't you?” I ask, shoulders snapping square.

She purses her lips and looks forward. “I don't know what you want me to say.”

“Well, I know what I'm feeling, and I know what I want.” My brows arch high, mouth drawing taut. “And my gut's always right. We both know that.”

She can't see it, she's refusing to. Story isn't letting herself open up to what I know she wants to feel. I can still read her body, same as before. Her muscles tremble, her eyes hooded as she nervously nibbles on the inside of her cheek.

She's afraid, I know she's afraid. But this isn't fear of the dark, this fear of me and opening herself up to me.

Story is a girl whose emotions and thoughts are painted on her face. The way her slender fingers curl around the ridge on her jeans, the quick flutter of her lashes against her eyes, it tells me she wants to be mine; but fear has spun a web around her spine.

She hasn't realized how intricately I'm studying her. She sees me, watches me even; but she's avoiding my eyes at all costs.

Leaning back on one hand, my head tilts up at the sky. "You see that star right there?" I ask, pointing up.

"Which one? There's a whole sky full." Story leans in, trying to follow the line of my finger.

"That one, right at the tip of my finger." Shaking her head yes, I say, "Just watch it."

Her lips seal tight, tugging down against her chin. "Alright." Squinting her gaze, I watch as her eyes spread wide. "It's moving, why is it moving like that? Stars don't move like that." Her neck twists, looking at me, then back at the bright moving speck.

"Because it's not a star, it's a satellite." Shifting onto my elbow, I set my head in my hand and hold it up.

"How do you know that?"

“Because I know things, just like we both know you're mine, You've always been mine. That's something you can't change, Story, no matter how much you try.”

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Her head jerks in my direction, hair following, draping over her chest. The tight sweater begins to rise rapidly, breasts peeking slightly with each inhale. The sound of air whistles into her throat as she breathes, turning my cock hard.

Even in the darkness I can see her soft, milky skin deepen to a raspberry shade. The prettiest, most fuckable shade of red there is.

“I'm not the same girl anymore, just like you're not the same guy I remember. What happened to you, Wyatt? Why didn't you write me?”

My heart hurts suddenly, full of regret and sadness for leaving the way I did. I want to tell her the truth, to give her all the answers she's looking for, but I don't want her to look at me differently.

I already see the hurt in her eyes, I couldn't stand to see real, true hate.

You had no choice, Wyatt. It's not your fault.

I know my silence is a sharp thorn in her chest. And I'm planning on taking that thorn out, kissing the wound, and making both our lives a hell of a lot better; when the time is right.

But, tonight is not the night. Tonight is for her to see the man I've become, to see me as new, better, and here.

“I can't give you the answers you want, Story, I'm sorry.”

Her back stiffens, ribs stacking up like a tall ladder. “Then we're done here. Take me home.”

Reaching my hand out, I caress her thigh. “Well, I'm not done, and I don't think you are either.” My head tips into my shoulder as I say, “Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me you feel nothing for me and I'll take you home.”

Story doesn't speak, her lips form a soft circle, eyes shifting between mine. She's trying to find the words, but even she can't bring the lies to the tip of her tongue.

Bringing her fingertips to my forehead, she pushes them through my hair. I can feel her heart beating against her chest from where I'm sitting, pounding with need into mine.

She's mute. Letting the whispering breeze be her voice. She can't lie to me and she knows it.

“I didn't think so,” I say, whispering the words across her chin as I lean in closer. Cupping her jaw, I pull her onto my lips, and I kiss her.

I kiss her because I might not have another chance. I kiss her because the look in her eyes is begging me to. But mostly, I kiss her because I've needed to feel her lips again.

Sliding my tongue into her mouth, the taste of her honeyed kiss teases my cock, turning it rigid. Story doesn't shove me off, she relaxes her jaw, kissing me back. And that feeling, the sensation of her kissing me is enough to turn me wicked.

Her fingers walk down my torso, playfully running across the edge of my pants. “I bet you want me to keep going, don't you?” she asks, speaking into my mouth.

Pretending like I had to think about it, my lids hover half open, head tilting to my shoulder. “Hm...” Thumbing my chin, I say, “Nah, you're right, I should probably get you home.” Laughing, I grip her hand, guiding it to the hard-on forming below. “But he has other ideas.”

I feel her shudder, the rhythmic vibration filling her belly, and rolling out over her body.

Quickly, I throw my arms around her, yanking her into my chest. “See, I was right, we're definitely not done here.”

Her hair spreads into a wave behind her head as I lay her down, spilling over the blanket. And right then, I'm hit hard, struck by a beauty I had refused to remember.

The feelings surge through my body, carving into the bone. I had spent so much time pushing this down, pretending that I'm alone, and have no one waiting at home, that seeing her like this makes it all come rushing back.

I have to remind myself to breathe, consciously making my lungs fill with the oxygen surrounding me. She literally takes my breath away. Swallowing a thick gulp of air, I run my knuckles down her cheek. “You really are so fucking beautiful.”

“You are going to fuck me now, right?” Biting her lip, Story's thighs close, and her knees rub together.

A slow smile pulls up on my cheek, tongue running across my teeth. “Is that a question, or a demand?” Palming the erection in my jeans, my cock aches to feel her warmth again.

Of course I plan on fucking her. All I've wanted to do since finding her again is make her mine. But when the reluctance takes hold, it reminds me of how damaged I am.

Of how the scars sit at the surface and hold me hostage. What if she doesn't like the man I've become? What if I'm a disappointment to her?

But those questions only set a fire in my gut. A raw desire to make her completely mine, every inch of her.

“It's a request. I want your cock inside me.” Her hand slips over her center, cupping her mound, ass swaying erotically against the firm ground.

My eyes are drawn to her lips, her plump, wet lips as she licks them softly. They pucker gently, her gloss lighting under the sky. A delicate sheen is spread across each one, glistening as her head rolls to look up me.

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Her eyes are just as magnificent as the rest of her. A hard green, sparkling like a shaded pool under an oak tree in the summer. Pops of gold specks flicker like the stars in the sky.

“You have no idea how badly I've wanted you. Your pussy's made for me, Story.” Walking my finger to the button on her pants, I pop her jeans open.

An air filled coo escapes the back of her throat as she groans, “Fuck me Wyatt, just fuck me.” Visible heat radiates off her, seeping from every pore.

The night is getting cooler, a chill setting in around us. And even with this gentle breeze, sweat begins to emerge across my shoulders. This fucking girl drives me wild, making every piece of my body painfully hard.

Her hand makes its way over to my cock, teasing the muscle. My cock's throbbing, pulsing to feel flesh on flesh, to experience her heat, to feel her bear down around me, and beg me for more.

I can hear the sultry whimper of her voice as she tugs on my zipper. The sound of metal breaks the air in loud clicks as she slides the zipper open.

My chest begins to pound as her hand claws to free my dick. Pulling it through the opening, she squeezes it hard, stroking the thick shaft.

“You want that? You want to feel my cock deep inside you?”

Weakly, she shakes her head yes, fingers curling over my balls. I'm not sure how this

woman has such power over me, making my entire body shiver with her touch.

But in that moment, as my body trembles from the delicate weight of her fingers around my shaft, I know.

She's the one. She's always been the one.

I didn't have a family waiting for me, there's never been anyone who's really give a rats ass about me, but Story has. She's always been by my side, even when the world was against me.

The past few year have been rough, my time with the Army is anything but peaceful. And when I walked off that plane, no one was there to greet me. I was met with an empty terminal, as lone soldier, and not one person to welcome me home.

Story is my life outside the walls of the military, one worth fighting for, worth making it back to. And she doesn't even know it.

Coiling my fingers over the trim of her pants, I yank them down her hips. She's ready, arching her back and lifting her ass. Wiggling her waist, she kicks the jeans off, boots following at the same time.

Running my hand under her shirt, I grip her tit, teasing the nipple. Perking up, it's hard and inviting. Rolling the beaded skin between my thumb and forefinger, Story moans loudly, legs falling open wide.

“You're so hard,” she says, grinding her palm against my length.

Rocking my hips, I inch towards her pussy. “That's all yours.” Tugging my pants down to my knees, I push my dick into her hand. I can smell the scent of her arousal, the sugar musk fills my senses and coats my brain. “I'm all yours. I've always been

yours.”

Damn, she still smells as sweet as ever.

Flicking her panties to the side, I slide a finger up her wet pussy. The slick juice covers my finger, soaking it instantly.

Story's neck bends up, head pressing into the blanket. Bringing my fingertip up to my nose, I hold it there. Inhaling a deep breath, her body's perfume fills my head. “God you smell sweet,” I say, licking the cream off my skin. “I could eat you all damn day, and still never have enough.”

Dipping my waist in, the tip of my cock brushes her entrance. “Wait—” Her legs begin to close, pushing up on her elbows, she asks, “Do you have a condom?”

Laughing, my head falls back. “A condom? For what?”

“You're joking right?” she asks, a thin brow shooting up, face crinkling in disbelief.

“No, what do we need one for?”

“Because I don't know who you've been with.” Veering her stare, she pushes herself up on the blanket. “And it's the right thing to do. Why wouldn't we?”

“I thought we went through this. You're mine, Story, plain and simple.”

“No, no fucking way. Are you crazy?” Reaching for her pants, she frantically tries to pull the legs straight. “That's fucking nuts, Wyatt! Do you think I'm so gullible that I'll just listen to you and believe you?”

“I know you think I'm crazy, but I'm not. I need you, Story, all of you.” Tracing her

knee up her thigh, I softly rub the delicate skin.

Shoving my hand away, she yanks her pants up. “Take me home, Wyatt.” Standing quickly, she digs her hands into her hips and glares at me from above.

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“Story, just listen to me,” I say, holding out my palms to calm her down. “In my line of work, I never know if I'm going to make it home standing or if I'll show up in a wooden box—”

Cutting me off, she hisses. “What's that supposed to mean? That I'm just supposed to throw caution to the wind? You chose to go into the army, no one made you, Wyatt.”

“No, that's not what I mean.” Laughing nervously, I rub my jaw. “Caution is good, I'm not saying to be reckless.”

“I'm glad you think this is funny.” Huffing under her breath, she folds her arms tight across her chest.

“Story, I'm a soldier.” Cracking a smile, I reach up and grab her hand. “I'm not crazy either, what I feel for you has never changed. And you feel too, I can see it.”

Story eyes me, lids static. “Even if that's true, it doesn't mean that I'm just going to fuck you. You hurt me, can't you see that?” I watch the tension in her body ease, muscles loosening.

“I've been gone for far too long, and I'm sorry if that hurt you, but I can't change the past, Story.” Twining my fingers into hers, I tug her back down onto her knees. “It's not easy for me either, I've spent a lot of time keeping myself away because it's easier than actually dealing with the issue.”

Her face softens, eyes flicking rapidly. She's thinking, I can see it. Her mind's wrapping around what she should do. “So why now? Why come back at all?” she

asks.

“Because you stayed with me. You made me smile when you weren't there, you made me laugh when I thought I was alone. You did that, and you don't even know it. You made me realize that family is more than just something you can lose, it's something that can help you live.”

“Then why not write me? Why let my heart break into pieces? Why not just give me one thing to hold? Why were your feelings so much more important than mine?”

She isn't going to understand. She'll never understand.

Dragging my fingers through my hair, I want to answer her. I want to tell her about where I've been, what I've seen—and what I lost along the way. But that's the piece that kept us apart. It kept me from being able to love her back.

Sucking in a large breath of air, I say, “Story, I spent my entire childhood wanting more, needing to become more. I never knew my mother, and you know that. My father's a piece of shit, you know that too. Fuck, I could have gone down the wrong path at any point in my life, but you kept me grounded, and I can't thank you enough for that. I'm not saying your feelings don't matter, because they do. I just need you to realize this is me helping to keep you whole.”

Dipping her head, she looks at the blanket. “Wyatt, I don't think I can do this. I think you should just take me home.”

“Story, you make me feel things I can't explain. If you want to go home, I'll take you. But I need you to understand I can't give you what I don't fully control.” Lifting her chin, I force her to look at me.

It wasn't easy being a kid, feeling like you're not worthy to have a family, to have

people who love you. And then I met Story, she brought me happiness, she gave me the strength to become someone else.

I became a soldier. Someone worth remembering.

But without someone to love me on the other side, I'll just end up being another name on a headstone.

I'm just a man in uniform.

### Chapter Four

#### Story

Waking up in bed, my phone vibrates on the nightstand. Reaching over half awake, I answer, “Hello?” My voice is scratchy and dry.

“Hey, good morning, did I wake you?” My mother's on the other end, her voice bursting in my ear.

“No, no, I was just getting up. Why? What's going on?”

“Nothing, nothing,” she says, and I can actually hear her flap her hand in the air on the other end. “I was just wondering what time you were coming today to the summer house?”

Shit, that's right.

It's the Fourth of July, and my family always has a big cookout at the lake, and watches the fireworks. It's something that my mother has pushed herself to still do, even after my father passed away.

“Oh, yeah, I'll be there about five, is that alright?” She's quiet for a moment, so I keep talking. “Or I can come earlier if you need me to. I just thought Ben had offered this year.”

“He did, and no, five is fine. Sorry, I was just thinking about your father and the time

he forgot to buy meat for burgers.” She chuckles, but it's not a happy laugh, it's sad and full of loss.

“I remember that. We ended up having just hot dogs, and he made grilled cheeses too.” Giggling, I feel my heart tighten with pain. It's been almost four years, but it still feels like yesterday.

“God, I miss him.” She lets out an audible breath into the receiver as she says, “Alright, alright, enough sob stories, today is for smiles and fire works. Bring a friend if you want too, Uncle Greg and Aunt June are bringing ribs and homemade beans, so we'll have plenty of extra food.”

Hanging up with my mom, I sit in bed for a bit. Scratching my nails through my hair, I stretch my arms up and pull myself out of bed.

I've been trying like hell to forget Wyatt. He pissed me off. He can't claim me as his. He has no rights me, not now, not ever. He lost any privilege to call me anything the second he decided to let me go and not tell me.

Leaning against my sink, I drink a cup of water, and tap my finger against the glass. No matter how much I want to pretend like this man hasn't infiltrated my brain, I can't deny he's there.

I close my eyes and he's there. I dream and he's there. I can't do anything without him there in some way. A memory, a thought, a feeling, he's a part of me, he's always been a part of me.

Checking the clock, it's already four. Pursing my lips, I grab my phone and send him a text. 'You busy?'

'Never too busy for you.' His text comes through instantly.

'Meet me outside my apartment in twenty minutes.'

'Okay.'

His message comes through, and I question my choice for a second. Bringing him to our family cookout could be disastrous. Wyatt brought me so many tears, so many sleepless nights, too many to count.

My family watched me spiral. They hugged me, they held my hand, they gave me a shoulder to cry on. And they told me I'd move on, I'd get over him, that your first love is the hardest to lose, but you'll meet someone else.

I never met anyone that makes me feel the way Wyatt does.

Since the day he left, I feel like I've been half living. I need answers to be whole. I need closure to this chapter in my life so I can finally move forward.

Maybe that's why all these years I've pushed men away, kept them at arms length. Refused to let anyone in, because this chapter isn't closed. There is no end to our story because it's never been typed.

It's time for him to man up and just tell me. I don't care how hurt I might feel after, or how sad. I can't move on if I don't know the truth.

Coming down the stairs, I see Wyatt standing at the bottom, leaning against his motorcycle.

He smiles up at me and bites his bottom lip. "Wow, you look amazing. What's the occasion?"

He brazenly looks me up and down, his eyes undressing me as I stand on the

sidewalk. In a pair of jean shorts and a flowy tank-top with a diamond cut out in the back. My lids are splashed with pink eye shadow, and my cheeks are dusted in light pink blush.

The way he's looking at me makes my flesh hot and my shoulders snap square. “We have plans,” I say, amused that this time I'm the one in charge. This is my choice, my family, my invitation to him.

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“Plans?” he asks, his smile growing slightly. “Is this payback for the other day? Am I walking into a trap?”

“No, not unless you think my family is a trap.”

“Your family?” he asks.

“Do you know what today is?” He frowns, brows arching high with curiosity. “It's the Fourth of July weekend. What does my family do every year?”

“Still? They still have a big party at the lake?”

“Yup, and you're coming with me.”

Wyatt strokes his jaw, his expression somber and serious. “You know I never got to tell you I'm sorry about your dad. I am sorry, Story, really sorry to hear he passed.”

“Yeah, well, thanks, I guess.” Shrugging my shoulder, I try to act unaffected.

I don't want him to apologize for something he had no control over. Yes, it bothers me he wasn't here for that. But it also bothers me my letters went unanswered, and I was left in the dark when I needed him the most.

That's what he should be apologizing for, he should apologize for leaving me with no explanation, for abandoning me without cause, not for my father dying.

Climbing on the back of his bike, I slip the helmet on. “You remember where it is?”

“I do actually. How could I forget? That's where I popped your cherry.” He chuckles and bites the tip of his tongue.

My cheeks heat, and I feel the redness as it moves down my face and over my neck. And in the same special memory, I feel my heart as it twinges with pain.

You can never truly forget your first time. But you can numb the memory, you can turn down the volume and let it sit silently inside. But Wyatt opened the vault.

More and more memories flood my brain, and I'm hit with an overwhelming sensation. My pussy gets wet, my heart beats faster, and in the same breath it cracks in two.

My muscles tingle with love and all the firsts we shared together. And then it feels like glass is slicing my body apart. The pain he left me with, the hurt he caused, it's unbearable.

You never forget your first love, just like you never forget your first heart break.

And this man is the reason for both of mine.

He is my first everything. He took my virginity. He took my heart. And he broke my heart into a million unmendable pieces. Pieces that have sat on my chest and made life almost unlivable.

That's why I found a friend in the numbness. It felt good to pretend this stuff wasn't here.

Now I can't get it out of my face.

He pulls down the dirt road, and the tires on the motorcycle bounce and jump over

the uneven gravel. I wrap my arms tightly around his waist, and feel him tighten his abs. I'm not sure if it's to show off how hard they are, or if it's because I took him by surprise.

It doesn't matter. I love being right here, my arms wrapped around his waist, and a smile on my face.

I can see the small summer cottage, and the cars parked all around it. They're in the driveway, on the grass, across the small road and on the grass hill.

He parks the bike, and pulls his helmet off. Looking back at me over his shoulder, he asks, "So you think you're mom will be happy to see me?"

"If anyone is happy, it'll be her. I can't guarantee my brothers will feel the same."

He laughs, throwing his leg over the side and climbing off the bike. He holds out his hand, and helps me down. "I can't blame them, you're their little sister, nothing I could ever do will be right in their eyes."

"You'd be surprised, Wyatt. I think there was a time they felt differently."

I start to walk around to the front of the cabin, and Wyatt is at my side. I can tell he's nervous, and that little glimpse of vulnerability makes my heart flutter. He's still in there, the man that stole my heart all those years ago.

"Hey, Mom," I say, sneaking up behind her, and grabbing her shoulders.

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She yelps, throwing a hand to her chest as she whips around. “Story, you know I hate when you do that.” She's breathing heavy as her eyes move from me to Wyatt, and she does a double take. “Wyatt? Is that you?”

He holds his arms out and grins. “Mrs. Brooks, look at you. You haven't aged a day since the last time I saw you.”

She bashfully smiles, brushing his compliment away with a single hand. “Wyatt Saint you might be good with the ladies, but a real woman can smell bullshit.” They both start to laugh as she waves him in for a hug. “It's good to see you,” my mother says as she pats his back.

“What the hell is he doing here?” Ben comes around the corner, the question quick and snappy before he asks Wyatt directly. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Ben, come on,” I say, stepping in between them. “I invited him.”

“Benjamin Brooks, not here, not now, and not today,” my mother sternly cuts him down with a harsh tone and serious look.

He grunts, not even looking at me, but keeping his eyes on Wyatt. Flaring his nostrils, he jerks his shoulders and walks away.

“At least he doesn't hate me,” Wyatt says, whispering it into my ear.

Giggling, I smack his chest and nod my head. “Come on, let's go grab a drink.”

The cookout is actually fun. Wyatt is smiling, laughing, and messing with a few of my cousins. And for a moment I almost forget that there's five years of missing time between us.

I'm sitting on the tree swing, rocking back and forth. I'm in a daze, thinking about how much I loved him when I was a kid, and how that feeling is still there, like a faint flicker of light.

It's like a smoldering fire. Fire burns hot, and it can burn for awhile, and as long as it has plenty of oxygen, it can keep living. But, remove the oxygen and it dies. Under all the ashes, deep in the belly of those flames, the sparks are hot, waiting for more fuel to ignite.

Wyatt is my oxygen, and that fire is coming back to life. I can feel him everywhere. In my chest, in my lungs, in every muscle, right down to the bone. He's always been there, that's why no one else has ever gotten in.

“Hey,” he says softly in my ear, sneaking up from behind me. “What are you doing all the way over here alone?” Wyatt pulls back on the rope, and starts to push my easily.

“Nothing, just watching.”

“Watching what? Me?”

I nod, and look back over my shoulder. “It's nice to have you here, I missed this, Wyatt.”

He smiles, grabbing both ropes to stop me from moving. “I missed this too,” he says. Walking to stand in front of me, he holds out his hand. “Come on, lets go for a walk.”

I take his hand, and we head down to the beach front at the lake. We follow the sand, until we reach a little broken dock that's tucked in some thick brush.

“You remember this place,” I ask with a smirk.

“Of course I do, how could I forget.”

Wyatt helps me up onto the dock, and we sit on the edge, letting our feet dangle off. This is our dock, the one Wyatt and I had our first kiss on when we first started dating.

“It's been seven years since that kiss, Wyatt.” Leaning into his shoulder, I bump him softly.

“That long already, that's crazy.”

“Right,” I say, my voice suddenly crackly and dry. It makes me sad. That kiss, that kiss has been the kiss I've compared all other kisses to. “Wyatt,” I say, lifting my face to his. “I—”

I'm cut off, my voice forced back into my throat as Wyatt kisses me out of nowhere, fast and hard. His lips lock on mine, and his hand sweeps up across my face, digging into the base of my neck.

My mind goes blank, my body suddenly numb as my lips part naturally and make room for his tongue. His tongue thrusts into my mouth, licking and tasting as it swirls around my mouth.

Moaning, his hand clutches the back of my head holding me in place. With strong fingers, he maneuvers my head, pulling it in, and deepening our kiss.

My heart thuds in my chest, and I kiss him back. I kiss him like I've wanted to kiss him every day since he left. I kiss him because he's the only man I've ever wanted to kiss.

Wyatt grabs me around the waist and he holds me against his side. Our breathing is heavy, labored, full of wanton need. My hands move up his arms, wrapping around his neck. I feel feverish as desire pool between my legs.

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We shift deeper onto the dock, and Wyatt lays me back, our lips never breaking. Climbing between my legs, his fingers move down my ribs, and back up to my face. He touches me with such tenderness, I shiver inside.

“I've missed you so much, Story,” he says as he kisses me.

Arching my back, his hand slides up my shirt and finds my nipple. He pinches it gently, coaxing a moan from me. I kiss him back harder, fiercer, unhinged like a caged bird. I'm ready to spread my wings, I'm ready to fly.

Wyatt reads my cues, his hands finding the button on my shorts and tearing it open. Stuffing his hand in my shorts and down my panties, he cups my mound. Smiling into our kiss, he says, “You're fucking soaked.”

“You make me wet, Wyatt, you've always made me wet.”

He slides a finger between my pussy lips and he dips it in my entrance. “I've been thinking about your pussy.” Wyatt runs his finger around my clit as he says, “I can't get you out of my mind.”

“You never left mine.” My eyes meet his, full of need. I'm ready to end this ache between my legs, eager to satiate the throb.

I hear the sound of metal teeth, and Wyatt shifts on his knees. Gripping my shorts, he starts to pull them down my thighs, so I lift my ass to help.

Spreading my pussy with his engorged head, he presses himself against my entrance.

I know I should think about protection, and it's there, a fleeting thought before he thrust his hips and his cock stretches my walls as he buries himself deep.

Goosebumps shoot down my skin, and I dig my nails into his back. "Fuck, Wyatt," I say, my voice almost nothing but air as he stills above me.

Brushing loose strands of hair away from my face, he looks down at me and I see something in his eyes. It's alive, breathing, filling him with a look I thought I'd never see again.

Love.

It's love. I know that look, I could never forget it.

My fingers slip under his shirt. I trace the pads of my fingers up his back, and then run them back down. His muscles are hard as marble, like he was cut from stone.

He pulls back, and drives in with purpose. Pistoning his hips, Wyatt fucks me like the man he is and not like the boy he left behind. In my mind I've always remembered the boy who took my virginity. But this man, this man is far more wicked than I expected.

Grunting, Wyatt drives his cock faster, deeper, and I feel his balls slap against my pussy, hitting my swollen clit. A light sweat breaks across his forehead, and small beads of sweat trickle down his temples.

Picking up the pace, my pussy squeezes around his cock, milking him with each pulse. My pussy holds him tightly, I'm hungry, unwilling to let him go.

I'm aching for him, my body pushing back against his as he throws himself in deeper. Every moan makes his dick twitch, and my body quivers for more.

My head dips back, eyes closing tight as my lower belly begins to tremble. Colors shoot across my brain, electrifying my nerves. The impulses create a heat in my gut, and send lighting to my core.

Arching my back, I press my lower back into the wood of the dock, and wrap my legs around his hips.

“Fuck, Wyatt. Fuck me harder, fuck me and don't stop.” The airless words float over his shoulder, and get lost in an explosion in the sky.

The sky starts to light up with colorful blasts, and the noise drowns out my moans. Thrust after thrust, I rock my hips up, meeting his cock with a thrust of my own. My spine rolls up, nails clawing down his back as I cum.

Wyatt grunts loud in my ear as he gives one last pump. Warm come fills my pussy, and a sense of calm fills me on the inside.

He's the only man I could ever picture myself with.

The only man to ever make my heart skip a beat.

Wyatt is my future. He's always been my future.

### Chapter Five

#### Story

Wyatt pulls himself free, and falls to his side. He sits up, shoulders rolling forward as he stares up at the sky.

I'm waiting for him say something, but he sits silently, his eyes fixed on the fireworks. His body lurches softly as the explosions get louder and they come more frequently. He's twitching, muscles tensing as he stares off.

He's not here with me, I can tell. He's somewhere else in his mind, and I want to know where he is.

“Hey,” I say, gently reaching out to touch his shoulder.

Wyatt jerks away, spooked by my hand. He looks at me over his shoulder and gives me a faint smile. “You know when I was over seas, the sounds like these fireworks didn't come from something so beautiful.”

My fingers dance across the top of his back, and I stay quiet and just listen. This is what I've been waiting for, for him to open up, to let me in, to give me something to understand.

He laughs to himself, and I see his eyes glaze over. “Sounds like these over there made me think the world was ending. The first six months I didn't sleep through the night, not once. Then I got used to it, the sounds become something that soothed me

to sleep instead of keeping me up at night. That's fucked up, huh? Craving the noise instead of silence?"

"I don't think that's fucked up, I think you did what you had to do."

He smiles at me, and looks back up at the sky. "What I had to do, that's what they all say. What I had to do." His voice trails off, and I let him have this silence. He needs it for himself, it's not for me. "I got all your letters, every single one. I know you didn't know that, you said it in a few of them, questioning if they were even coming to me. But they did."

"I didn't know for sure. I never got anything back."

"Well I did."

Resting my cheek on his shoulder, I let out a soft breath. "Then why didn't you write me, Wyatt?"

I feel Wyatt's body slump forward. He runs a hand through his hair, and he sighs. "I couldn't."

"Why not?"

Jerking his shoulders as another firework goes off, his back stiffens and he stands up quickly. Wyatt starts to storm off into the darkness, but I'm not letting him go. Not this time.

He did this once already. He left and I let him go without any resistance. I won't do it again.

"Wyatt, wait!" I call out, running to his side. Grabbing his arm, I force him to turn

and look at me. “I deserve an answer. You tell me you got my letters, you tell me you kept every one. So, tell me why you never wrote. Tell me!” I yell, demanding to know.

Hanging his head, he shakes it. “Story, I can't. Don't you get it, don't you understand that I can't tell you because you would never understand the answer?”

“Try me,” I snap, folding my arms across my chest.

Grunting, he rakes both his hands through his hair and pulls it tight to his scalp. “I'm broken, Story! I'm scarred!” Lifting his shirt, I can see a long, thick scar across his side. “I couldn't write you because there was nothing for me to write! Is this what you wanted to hear about? About how I got sliced up from an IED?”

His brows arch high as he lets his shirt drop down. “I've done things I'm not proud of. I've killed people, I've watched my brothers die, and I sat by, unable to do a fucking thing. These hands,” he says sharply, holding up open hands in front of my face. “these hands are tainted, they're covered in blood that's not mine. I'm not the person I was before, I'm different. Why would I ever want to let you see me this way?”

“We're all scarred, Wyatt. Just because I don't wear my scar on the outside, doesn't mean I don't hurt. That,” I say, pointing at his stomach, “that scar you bear should be worn with pride. What you did was incredible, you have to know that. But, you hurt me. . .” My eyes fill with water, making it hard for me to see his face. “You broke me, you tore my heart into pieces.”

“I saved you, Story.”

“Saved me?!” I yell, my eyes popping open wide. “You left me, you broke your promise.”

“I kept you whole.”

“Wow.” Flicking my eyes to the sky, I hold out open hands. “How can you say that?”

Wyatt takes a step forward and grabs my wrists. “Story, you were my everything. You made me who I am; you and your family. But what I lived through, what I saw, what I've done. . .” Sucking his bottom lip into his mouth, he shakes his head. “What the hell did you want me to write? That I was living in hell. That I watched a man get shot in the face, that I pulled the trigger over dozen times and didn't think twice about it? I couldn't write you that. All I saw was carnage, death, destruction. You were too innocent for that kind of truth. I couldn't destroy your world.”

“And yet, that's what happened anyway.”

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“I thought I was keeping you safe, I thought I was protecting you from the darkness of war. What you don't know is your letters helped me. I could read them, and they would take me home, they brought me back to you. You were the only light I had, Story.”

“One letter, that was all I needed, just one.” I blink, freeing the tears. Water rushes down my cheeks, and my body begins to tremble with tears I've held in for years.

“I'm sorry, Story, I never meant to hurt you.” Wyatt wraps me in his arms, and holds me against his chest. “But I didn't have the words to give you, I didn't have the strength to let you go.”

He tips my head up, and cups my cheek. His eyes dart between mine, and he licks his lips.

Swallowing hard, I sniffle as I say, “I never let you go, no matter how much I tried. You were always there.”

He smiles, a real, full, heartfelt smile that makes my chest tighten. “I love you, Story, I never stopped loving you. That's why I'm here, that's why I came back. I came back for you.”

Pressing up on the tips of my toes, I kiss him. I kiss him like I've dreamt about kissing him for years. I kiss him with every ounce of my soul.

Wyatt has always owned my heart. And he always will.

Real love doesn't just go away. It can be dulled, numbed, the volume turned down, but it's always there. It sits in your heart, in an unreachable place. It's a knot in your stomach and a heat in your veins.

Love is what makes us human.

And without it, we'd never know what it means to be alive.

I'm alive with Wyatt. He's my air, my food, my everything.

### Chapter Six

Wyatt

Three months. We've been back together for a full three months and it feels like we've never been apart at all. I can't get enough of her. In my mind it feels like I never left, but my body is trying to make up for all those missed moments.

Brushing the hair over her shoulder, I twine it around my hand, and pull. Her head snaps back, the sound floating off her tongue as she coos, hits my ears, and goes straight to my cock. "I'm going to fuck the shit out of you, your pussy's going to hurt for days."

Biting her lower lip, a devious grin spreads across her face. "You're threatening me with something I'll enjoy."

A deep grunt hits my throat, and my hand climbs over her stomach, reaching for her breast. Squeezing, I thumb her hard nipple, pinching and rolling it between my fingers.

There are no more words between us, only sounds. A heavy breath escapes her lips, back arching in an artful dip. Winding her hair tighter, I tug again, her throat curving up, exposing delicate skin.

Straightening my back, I nibble the exposed flesh. Small beads of sweat layer her skin, their salty taste coating my tongue, forcing my cock against the seam of my jeans.

Story glides her pussy against the engorged length, rubbing it with need. In one swoop, I rip her shirt over her head. The red lace hits my eyes, her pink nipples hard against the sheer fabric. She slips her hands up her ribs, reaching in and popping the clasp.

I watch her in awe, as her fingers gently riding over the dips of her sides, so sensual as she touches herself. Each individual rib, up to the crease of her tits and her chest, it all drives me wild.

The heat in my gut begins to surge, hitting my veins, each one exploding against the skin. I don't have to see myself to know my face is flushed. The fire of my insides breaks free, sending a roaring inferno through my body.

Story leans in, resting her breasts against my chin. Letting her hair fall, I grip both tits, and drag my tongue over her nipples.

Her entire body trembles in my hand. I feel the shiver as it passes through my fingers, and curls into my chest.

She smiles, her eyes lighting up as if she knows what I just felt. Her lips softly trace my ear, and whisper. "Do you want to feel me, Wyatt?"

"Fuck, babe, I don't think I can take much more of this. I need you." Gripping her nipple in my mouth, I roll it between my teeth, and bite down.

Story's shoulders roll forward, and she nuzzles her face into the crook of my neck. Lifting on her knees, she slips her shorts down her legs and lets them fall into a crumpled ball on the floor. A sexy pair of lace panties covers her pussy, her lips outlined behind the tight material.

Popping my button free, I slide the zipper down. "Let me get that," she says, reaching

her hand in, and grabbing my thick shaft.

My head falls back as her hand wraps firmly around my length. She starts to stroke up and down, each stroke causes a rush of tingles across my thighs.

Fuck me, I'm going to blow my load so far inside her.

A surge of adrenaline pulses through my muscles, squeezing life into them. Curling my fingers into her panties, I split the seam, ripping the thin fabric in two. Her dripping wetness is exposed as small bursts of light sparkle when she rocks her hips forward.

Story gasps, the stream of air explodes out over her tongue. Her hips keep swaying, her pussy liquifying in my lap. Thrusting my hips up, my cock slides easily between her lips, and the tip of my dick hits her lower belly. "You need me, don't you?"

She nods eagerly, her pussy attempting to force me inside. "I need you more than you can know." Running a single finger over the head of my cock, she twirls the pearly pre-cum resting on the surface. "Now shut up and fuck me."

Pressing up, Story pinches my cock and circles my dick around her entrance. I could feel her heat, the warmth of her pussy spread down over my shaft.

Slowly she lowers her hips, and my cock disappears inside her.

A buzzing sensation crawls up my chest, coalescing with the muscle pounding to keep blood flowing through my body. I can't think, my brain has shut down completely.

This moment, this single second in time where I know I have her in every way. . .

Story is mine, and I've needed her more than I ever thought I could.

Thrusting myself deeper, I grip her ass. Digging my fingers into her skin, I help her ride my length. We have the perfect rhythm, our bodies moving as one. Up and down, she gyrates her hips, saturating my furry base with her juice.

“Mm, Wyatt,” she moans, throwing her hands behind my neck. Pressing her forehead against mine, she stares into my eyes. The blue color of her eyes explodes, lashes fanning her wide gaze.

Another tremble breaks over her skin, forcing the beaded sweat to slip free, and follow her curves. Story's pussy tightens, thighs shaking around my waist. I know she's getting close, on the brink of climax.

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This is my favorite part, feeling her come on my dick. It always drives me over the edge, the velvety feel of her body as it pulses and clenches my cock.

I can't hold back anymore, my stomach clenches and the sensation hits balls, drawing them up. Closing my eyes, colors fire off behind my lids. Fireworks of pleasure as I blow my load deep into her heat. Wave after wave of cum fills her pussy, and my cock throbs so intensely it almost hurts.

Falling to my chest, I feel her body go limp. Breathing heavy, she lays voiceless, tracing her fingers over my chest. We sit like this for what seems like hours, skin to skin, just the two of us.

Looking at the time, I push her off my chest and say, "Come on, I've got something to show you."

"What? What do you mean?"

"Get dressed, come on." Moving her off my lap, I pick up her close and pass them to her.

"Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise."

She quickly pulls on her clothes, and runs her hands through her hair to fix it. We leave her apartment and I hand her a helmet.

“You and your surprises, I swear you like driving me crazy.”

I laugh, and start my motorcycle. “You look so cute when you're going crazy. Can you blame me?”

Story wraps her arms around my waist and lays her head against my back. “You're lucky I love you.”

“I know, I've always been lucky.”

Pulling away from her apartment, I drive us to a small restaurant in the city. Parking the bike, I help her off.

“I haven't been here yet,” she says, taking off her helmet and fixing her hair.

“Well, I hope you like it.”

Walking inside, the hostess smiles and greets us at the door. Giving her my name, she leads to a small private room in the back.

Story is preoccupied with all the paintings and the decorations. She keeps stopping and admiring the art work. “This is so pretty, Wyatt. Did you see it?”

“I did,” I say, wrapping my arms and leading her into the room.

As she turns to step inside, the entire room erupts.

“Surprise!” Everyone jumps up from their seats and yells.

Story throws her hands to her face and flicks her head between me and the guests.

“Wyatt, what the hell is this? I thought I told you I didn't want a big birthday party?”

“You did, and I chose not to listen.” Kissing her cheek, I see her eyes fill up with water as she starts to cry. Moving her deeper into the room, she starts to cry harder as her mother and brothers come up to greet her.

Shaking her head, she looks over at me. “I can't believe you did this.”

“I'm not done yet,” I say with a grin.

Her eyes widen as she tilts her head.

Dropping to one knee, I pull small black box from my pocket. Story takes a short step back as she starts to cry harder.

“Story Brooks, you're my everything, you've always been my everything. I tried to live without you, but it didn't work. I need you in my life, and I can't go another day without you being my wife. Will you marry me?”

Tears fall effortlessly down her cheeks as she nods her head. Slipping the ring on her finger, I stand up and hug her.

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“Wow, it's beautiful,” she says, holding out her hand to dazzle at the ring. “You know I have a surprise for you too.”

“For me?” I ask, confused.

She nods and reaches back into her pocket. Pulling out a small white plastic strip, she hands it to me with a big grin on her face.

“What's this?” I ask, looking down.

“I'm pregnant,” she says, her smile broadening as more tears stream down her face. Lifting her hands to cover her mouth, she looks up at me.

“Seriously?” I ask.

Story nods, crying harder as her mother begins to cry with her.

Wrapping my arms around her waist, I lift her off the ground and spin her. Kissing her hard and fast, I hold her tight.

Story is my family, she's always been the woman for me.

And now we're having a little one of our own. A baby.

I'm so happy and excited I could explode.

Life is finally what it should be.

I have everything I could ever want. I wouldn't change a thing.

### Epilogue

### Story

“I feel like a cow.” Holding out my arms, I look down at the area where I once had feet. “Look at me, I’m huge.”

“Story, you don’t look like a cow.” My brother Ben rests his hands on my shoulders. “You look beautiful, plus you’re pregnant. So. . .”

My doctor told me the same thing, I’m pregnant. Not fat, pregnant.

But when I look in the mirror and see the giant balloon that was once my stomach, and the fact that I no longer have ankles, it’s a little hard to believe. Pregnancy has not been easy on me so far.

I’m seven months along, but feel like I could pop any day. It doesn’t help either that I had morning sickness the first five months, and heartburn that made me think the baby’s using a furnace to keep warm in there.

Pinning the flower in my hair, my brother steps back. Folding his arms over his chest, he holds a smug smile.

“What?” I ask, hand falling to my hip. I’m being dramatic, I know. Another side effect of all the weight hanging off my front and the fact my hormones are in control.

He doesn’t speak, he just shakes his head. Leaning against the mantle over the

fireplace, he wipes a tear from his eye.

“What is it?” Waddling over to him, I'm still barefoot, because I'm waiting as long as I can before putting my shoes on. The swelling of my ankles has started to migrate to my feet, and shoes are becoming more of a struggle.

“You just look so beautiful, dad would be so happy and proud to see you like this. You're glowing, Story.”

Stepping to him, I straighten his tie. All day I've been holding back the tears, and I can't stop them, not anymore. “Yeah, you think so?”

Wrapping his arms around my shoulders, he pulls me into his chest. “There's not a doubt in my mind. And I'm proud of you too.” Kissing my forehead, he holds my face up. “I might be the big brother, but I'm really proud of you.”

The tears slowly flow over my face as I nod my head. I don't know what to say.

My brother embraces me, and hugs me like our father used to.

“Are you ready for this?” Ben asks, scooping up my bouquet and placing it in my hand.

“Yes, definitely.” Holding the flowers up, he helps me slip my feet into the flats by the door.

The back door opens and my mother pokes her head in. “Hey, they're ready for you.” Smiling brightly, she says, “Story, you look beautiful. You were right, that is definitely the dress.”

Finding a dress for our wedding, one that could be altered easily with my growing

tummy, had been tough. But this one is perfect. It's a gorgeous white lace, and the top has halter style straps. Perfect to make me feel well supported with my bigger chest.

There's a sparkling, silver sequin belt that rests just above my belly, and the bottom flows out with a loose shear and a lace overlay.

The second I put it on, I knew it was the one. I feel beautiful in it, and the way the bottom has so much movement, I knew there was room if I needed it.

My mother walks up and helps fix the purple orchid pin in my hair. "Thanks," I say.

"I tried, Mom," my brother says, holding his arms out, and shrugging his shoulders. "But I'm sure you remember how bad I am with hair."

Laughing, my mother lowers her head. "I sure do. I remember it taking me an hour to brush that knot out of Story's hair when you tried to braid it for her when you guys were younger."

Rolling my eyes, I jokingly spat, "God, that was horrible." Elbowing him in the ribs, I laugh.

The soft sound of a violin starts to fill the room, seeping in from outside. Whipping her head in my direction, my mother says, "That's our cue." Holding a small cluster of daisies, she heads for the door. "Let's get you married!" She yells, kicking one leg out to the side.

My lips form a soft circle, pushing out a smooth breath of air.

Here we go, I'm about to be married. I'll be Mrs. Story Saint in a few minutes. Closing my eyes, I try to cool my nerves.

It's hard to tell if the fluttering in my stomach is just butterflies, or if the baby's toes are tickling against the wall. Placing a palm against my belly, I look up to the ceiling.

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“I miss you Dad, but I know you're here with me. I can always feel you.” The delicate whisper presses off my lips, words only audible to my own ears.

And in my heart, to his ears too.

Wyatt and I are having a small wedding, set on the lake of our family summer house. A handful of people are sitting outside, eager eyes waiting to watch me walk out that door.

As the violin slows, a different song begins to strum across the strings. It's the most amazing music I've ever heard. The solo notes bring tears to my eyes.

This is the day—our day.

Stepping to my side, my brother bends his arm at the elbow. “Time to let you go, Lil Sis.” Smiling, his eyes well up, and gloss over.

Scooping my arm in his, I squeeze my fingers tightly. As much as I'm excited to be standing here, a piece of me is sad. I'm still mourning my father, and wishing he was here. But he's watching me from above, and I know he's happy with the man I'm spending my life with.

Brushing a tear from my face, I take a deep breath. “Let's do this.”

The door slowly opens, and a cool breeze rushes over us. Looking towards the water, all I see is Wyatt. His striking form takes over all my senses. It's as if a tunnel opens between us, and everyone else dissolves into blackness.

Lengthening my legs, I walk down the grassy path, keeping pace with the music. The ground is coated in bright purple roses petals, white ribbons float between the chairs, and there, at the end, is the love of my life.

His fitted uniform is snug against his body, perfectly contouring his muscles. He's the most handsome man I've ever seen, and he's mine. Wyatt's hair blows gently in the wind, brushing loose strands across his forehead. His eyes focus on mine, and I can see he's trying not to cry.

A huge smile fills my face instantly, as his eyes engorge themselves on me as I make my way to him; to my future, with our unborn child snugly tucked inside me. All of us are here, our small family, here to share our special moment, here to share our love.

Dipping my head, I look up under hooded lids. Wyatt was shining, a glow of pure happiness highlights his skin. Holding his hand out to my brother, they embrace.

Ben leans in and whispers. "Wyatt, I am happy my sister found you. Thank you for making her happy, and for everything you've done for our country." Patting his shoulder, my brother guides my hand into Wyatt's. "Our dad was right, you are a hero."

Wyatt nods, his thankfulness to my brother more than visible in his eyes. Wyatt's hand wraps mine tightly and my heart flutters in my chest. His touch sends tingles cascading down my body, and I know instantly everything we've been through was meant to lead us here.

I'm right where I belong. Wyatt is my angel without wings.

And no matter where we end up, I'll always be home.

The End