



Rival Hearts

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: Can she let down her guard and risk it all for love?

This is an Opposites Attract, Enemies to lovers, Lesbian/Sapphic Romance. It's packed with tension, heat, and the promise of a Happy Ever After.

Dr. Riley Parker is a trauma surgeon known for her bold, unconventional methods and a past that taught her to trust no one but herself. When Jett Thompson, a disciplined firefighter paramedic with a legacy to uphold, storms into her ER with a critical patient, their first clash is explosive.

Jett is structured and methodical, everything Riley isn't. Riley makes decisions on the fly, guided by instinct rather than rules. It's not long before their professional tensions turn personal, igniting a firestorm of emotions neither expected.

The chemistry between them is undeniable.

Riley knows she shouldn't feel this way about someone who challenges her at every turn.

Jett knows she shouldn't let her guard down, especially not with someone as unpredictable as Riley.

Will Riley and Jett risk their hearts and break their own rules to explore the burning connection between them?

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RILEY

Dr. Riley Parker rushed over. “What the hell happened?”

“I—I don’t know,” said Leah. “I left for a few seconds and when I came back, blood was gushing out of his arms.”

Leah was young and had only been at Phoenix Ridge Hospital for a few months. Riley knew the newcomer wasn’t used to how bold she was, but Riley wasn’t going to dial it down when a patient was on the line.

Riley pursed her lips and grabbed the patient’s chart from next to his bed. “You seriously left a patient on suicide watch alone?”

Leah trembled. “He was asleep. I didn’t think?—”

“You’re damn right you didn’t think. But it’s a good thing you paged me,” Riley said, looking at the chart again. “Call Hudson and tell her that this psych patient just became a trauma patient.”

“Yes, doctor.” Leah scurried out of Riley’s way to do as she said.

Riley lifted the rails on the hospital bed, her muscular and tattooed arms rippling as she prepared to move her new patient. She wheeled him to the elevators to take him to the Emergency Room on the first floor.

When she got to the Emergency Room, she took the patient to one of the trauma bays and was preparing to inspect the injury when all of a sudden, there was shouting and the sound of multiple boots hitting the floor.

Riley could hear the distant wail of an ambulance. As soon as she opened the curtain of the trauma bay, she witnessed pure and unadulterated chaos.

A small group of police officers and firefighters were rushing through the Emergency Room, holding a gurney while nurses trailed beside them. Dr. Carroll, one of the Emergency doctors, caught Riley's eye.

"Doctor Parker!" Dr. Carroll shouted. "We need you out here. It's a bad case."

"I'm with a patient," Riley shouted back; she couldn't ethically leave her current patient even if another one needed her just as badly.

"Trade me." Dr. Carroll hurried over. "What's the case?"

"Psych patient attempted suicide," Riley said, and Dr. Carroll looked into the bay, at the man with his arms covered in gauze.

"I got it," Dr. Carroll said. "This is a waste of your talents, and as much as I want to help out there, I don't think the patient will live if you're not there."

"Okay." Riley flashed Dr. Carroll a small smile before she rushed past the curtains to join the commotion. She followed the gurney to the trauma bay and met them behind the curtains.

"What's going on?" Riley asked as soon as she entered.

She hadn't been able to get a good look at the patient while nurses were wheeling her

the gurney in—the patient had been surrounded by too many people and moving too fast. However, once Riley entered the patient’s room, she found herself at the foot of the gurney, completely able to see what was wrong. And what she saw horrified her.

The patient was young, likely between ten and twelve years old, and she had something sharp and metal lodged into her chest. Riley noticed that she was conscious. She appeared alert and in pain. Tears streaked down her face.

“What is that?” Riley pointed at the pink metal bar protruding from the girl’s chest.

One of the firefighter paramedics in uniform stepped forward, a tall woman with short dark hair. Riley couldn’t miss the effortless elegance in the way she moved, her body lithe in her navy blue jumpsuit. Her dark brown eyes were fierce as they met Riley’s gaze. “She was in a bike accident. The handlebar was missing the protective rubber and somehow managed to impale her. We cut off the rest of the bike and rushed here. She has a few other injuries, but that is the most prevalent.”

Riley nodded. “Where are her parents?”

“Her foster parents had to stay behind to watch their other kids, but her foster dad said he’d be here soon,” the paramedic said.

Riley’s face hardened in determination as she looked at the girl. A foster kid, huh? Riley knew what that was like. And as much as it sucked to hear that neither of the girl’s foster parents was there to support her, Riley would make sure to support her and get her out of this life-threatening injury thriving.

Riley looked at one of the ER nurses. “Prep an OR,” she said, “and get ready for surgery.”

“Surgery?” the paramedic asked “Don’t we need to stabilize her first?”

“Not with that injury,” Riley said. “The longer we wait, the worse her chances get.”

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“But—”

“But what?” Riley was used to being questioned, but who did this paramedic think she was, challenging her? The woman’s dark brown eyes flashed dangerously at Riley and Riley didn’t back down.

“Are you suggesting we pull the handlebar out of her right here?”

“Of course not,” the paramedic said, her voice getting slightly louder and Riley could see the patient flinch slightly as she watched their interaction. “But going straight into an operating room is risky. You should stabilize her and then see what you’re working with before you jump to surgery.”

Riley rolled her eyes and scoffed, “And who the hell are you to tell me what to do? I didn’t know you were a surgeon?”

Riley couldn’t take her eyes off the angry curve of the paramedic’s top lip.

She knew it was a low blow, and she’d always hated people pulling rank against her when she was younger, but she also knew that she was right, and the paramedic was just going to prevent the girl from getting the help that she needed. She needed that woman out of her way so that she could do her job.

Riley watched as the paramedic pursed her lips, and her dark eyes burned with annoyance and hatred—something not unfamiliar to Riley and something that had ceased to bother her over the years.

“Fine,” the paramedic snapped, and walked away.

Riley’s eyes followed the beautiful curve of her ass in her navy blue paramedic jumpsuit. Something about this woman had gotten right under Riley’s skin.

Many of the others who had come to escort the little girl left as well, in order to give Riley the space that she needed to treat the girl and prep her for surgery.

“Have you ever had surgery before?” Riley asked, noticing her looking at her.

The girl shook her head but didn’t say anything.

“Are you scared?” Riley asked even though she knew the logical answer. Anyone would be scared for their first surgery. The girl was stable and conscious with the metal in her chest, but as soon as they moved the metal, anything could happen. Time would tell how much damage had been done. Riley hoped they might be lucky. It was positive the girl’s vitals seemed to be doing well.

The girl nodded and again, didn’t say anything.

Riley wanted to build rapport, to get to know her at least a little bit before she had to operate, and since they were waiting on an operating room, now was the perfect time.

“What’s your name?” Riley asked.

“Amanda,” the girl said.

“Well, Amanda,” Riley started, “I can promise that I am going to do my absolute best to make sure that everything goes well, and you’ll be able to get back on another bike soon.”

Amanda shook her head. "I think I'm done with riding bikes for the rest of my whole entire life," she said.

Riley laughed. "That is absolutely fair. I can't blame you. Maybe you can stick to roller skating."

"Maybe," Amanda said, "but I don't know how."

"You can learn," Riley said. "You seem like a smart kid."

Amanda frowned and shook her head, looking dejected. Riley knew that look. It was the look of someone who'd been told so many negative things about herself that she started to believe them. It broke Riley's heart, but she knew Amanda still had a chance. After all, Riley had made one for herself.

"How long have you been in the foster system?" Riley asked.

"I don't know," Amanda said.

"That long?" Riley asked.

"I guess so," Amanda said. "My birth mom stopped asking for visitation last year."

Riley frowned. She never knew her parents, but she could empathize with being abandoned by them. Riley knew a lot of abandonment growing up.

"You know, sometimes I think it's a good thing that I never knew my parents," Riley said. "I never had to have that happen."

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“You didn’t know your parents?” Amanda asked.

“Nope,” Riley said. “I was a foster kid, too.”

“Really?” Amanda looked at Riley in awe. Riley smiled. If she’d had a doctor as a kid who knew what she had been through, she would have been amazed, too.

“Yeah,” Riley said, “and personally, no matter what other people say, I think foster kids are like superheroes.”

“What do you mean?” Amanda asked.

Riley struggled with what to say. She wanted to encourage this kid even though she’d probably never see her again, and she wanted her to feel hopeful before she went into surgery. Maybe was nonsense, but Riley truly believed that how a patient felt before undergoing an operation affected their outcome.

“Most people never have to go through what we go through. We put up with a lot and survive it. Most people never have to do that,” Riley said. “Being able to survive it gives us a lot of skills and strength that most people don’t have.” Riley thought back to her tumultuous past and knew that she definitely wouldn’t have been able to do what she did without it.

Amanda looked at Riley with a smile. “I like that.”

Riley smiled back, tempted to ruffle her hair or pat her head, but she didn’t want to cause Amanda any pain. “I hope you’ll remember that you’re a superhero, and like a

superhero you're going to make it through this."

Amanda nodded and looked up at the ceiling with a new look of determination. Riley smiled to herself, feeling more confident about this surgery than ever. She didn't know who that paramedic was, but she was used to people questioning her even when she turned out to be right.

Soon after, the nurse that Riley sent to prep the OR came back. A couple of other nurses entered behind her.

"The OR is ready," the nurse said.

"Good," Riley said. "Is Doctor Everett available right now?"

"I'm over here," Dr. Lucinda Everett said with her British accent, walking into the trauma bay. Lucinda was a very talented trauma surgeon and Riley was happy to have her skills on hand.

"You want me to scrub in?"

"Yes please," Riley said, "and if someone could page cardio, that would be great. I want to get this surgery done as quickly as possible, but we need a decent number of hands."

"You got it," one of the nurses said before she walked off.

"Great," Riley said. "I'm going to wheel her out of here."

* * *

When the surgery was over, Riley breathed a sigh of relief. Despite a few

complications, the surgery was a success and Amanda was wheeled away to a hospital room to recover. Riley had gotten worried when they had to remove the handlebar from Amanda's chest and she started to crash on the table, but everyone in the room was able to come together and piece the girl back together. Riley couldn't be prouder of her team.

After she cleaned up, Riley walked into the waiting room, where she saw some police and firefighters, as well as the angry, fiercely attractive paramedic from earlier. Riley felt her gaze drift over the paramedic. She noticed the way her hair was now slicked back more than it had been earlier. She noticed the way her face was strikingly beautiful and the way her big dark almond shaped eyes were full of rage still. She looked like some kind of athletic model.

A very angry athletic model.

Talking to one of the firefighters was a middle-aged man in plain clothes.

"Amanda," Riley called, and almost immediately, the middle-aged man turned.

Riley walked toward him and held out a hand for him to shake.

"You must be Amanda's foster father," Riley said.

"I am," the man said. "The name's James."

"Well, James," Riley said, "you'll be happy to know that Amanda is expected to make a full recovery. I can have a nurse take you to her room right now."

"Yes please," James said.

Riley gestured to one of the nurses who'd accompanied her, and the two left to find

Amanda.

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“Thank you, doctor,” one of the police officers said. “We just wanted to make sure that little girl made it through, but now we’ll be leaving.” The other firefighter also left, giving Riley an appreciative nod before walking out.

Then, all that was left in the room was Riley and the angry athletic beautiful paramedic. Riley knew that she should have kept her mouth shut, but she couldn’t help herself. She was tired of being questioned and treated like she wasn’t good enough.

“I told you she would make it,” Riley said.

The paramedic looked at her with a sharp expression on her face, almost as if to say, Are you serious right now?

“It’s a good thing, or you’d be looking like an idiot and a murderer with your negligence,” the paramedic fired back.

Riley looked at her in shock. What on Earth was her problem? she thought. She succeeded in the surgery—surely that was all that mattered. But when she looked into the paramedic’s dark eyes, they were burning with anger.

Riley had had enough. Not only was she being accused of being negligent, but she had also just gotten out of a long surgery. “What the hell is your problem?” Riley asked.

“I don’t like someone skipping steps and putting a little girl’s life at risk just for some glory,” the paramedic said.

Ouch. That one actually hurt. She had been accused of being a fame-chaser when it came to her successes in the medical field, but she hated when people accused her of not caring about her patients.

“Glory?” Riley said with a scoff. “I wanted to save her life, not put her at risk of shock or sepsis. You need to stop acting like you can do my job better than me when I’m the reason that girl is alive and going to make a full recovery.”

The paramedic dropped her jaw before closing it again. “You’re the reason?” the paramedic asked in shock. “You surgeons always think you are such a big deal. Do you seriously think that what my team did to save that girl’s life and bring her to you means nothing?”

Riley furrowed her eyebrows. “What the hell?” she asked. “I never said that.”

The paramedic just shook her head, frustrating Riley even further. Strands of her slicked back hair fell across her lovely face.

“You know what?” the paramedic said. “You can go to hell.” She walked away and Riley couldn’t stop her eyes once again following the beautiful curve of her ass and long lines of her legs in that navy blue jumpsuit.

2

JETT

It had been a few days since an eleven-year-old girl was rushed to the Emergency Room after getting the bike handlebar stuck into her chest, and Jett Thompson couldn’t stop thinking about that day. It was one of the most stressful and frustrating days in recent memory.

Jett was off today, like she was every Sunday. It could be hard to get a weekend day off, especially in a career such as hers, but it was fairly easy for her given her experience in the field—and her legacy. Jett's father had had Sundays off as well, and Jett had fond memories of him spending time with her, Brody, and their mother. Now, even though her father was no longer around, Jett continued the tradition.

When Jett was a little girl, her parents would have her go to church with them. Jett never really hated it, and their church was rather progressive compared to others, but as she got older, she stopped going, much preferring to sleep in instead of praying.

However, Jett's mother still went to church and required her children to come to her house every Sunday at one o'clock for a family dinner. While Jett did have one sibling, Brody, their family dinners were never just the three of them. Jett had always known a close, tight-knit family, and her home growing up had an open-door policy. Aunts, uncles, and cousins often Josephineined for food on Sunday.

Jett lived close to her mom, just a few blocks away in the same suburb, so today she decided to take her homemade sweet tea and walk with the pitcher to her mom's house.

When she got there, a few cars were parked in the driveway and Jett smiled when she saw Brody's among them. Last week, he'd been too sick to make it, but he must have been feeling better and Jett was happy about that. Even though Brody was her older brother, she worried about him a lot.

When Jett got to the door, she walked inside without knocking. Her mom never minded. Again, she had always had an open-door policy.

Jett set the pitcher of sweet tea on the kitchen island before she looked around to see what all was for lunch today. Jett's mom was the best cook on the planet, and Jett always looked forward to Sunday lunches for that exact reason. Jett wasn't a half-bad

cook, but no one could compete with her mom.

While looking at the food, Jett saw broccoli casserole, baked macaroni and cheese, cajun chicken, and many other dishes that made her belly grumble. But her mom was nowhere in sight. Jett looked around before she finally found her and Brody on the back porch, talking.

“Hey Momma,” Jett said, giving her mom a big hug.

“Hey bro,” Brody said, and Jett laughed. She always found it funny that Brody called her bro even though she was a girl. When Jett was studying to be a paramedic, she went to the same college as Brody, and he would introduce her to his friends as his little bro, confusing all of them, but Brody had always maintained that bro is a gender-neutral term.

“Hey,” Jett said, “is Hannah here?”

“Yeah,” Brody said. “She went to the bathroom. She’s been there a while actually.”

“Do you want me to go check on her?” Jett asked.

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Brody shook his head and then paused. “Yeah, actually. It’s probably nothing. The closer she gets to her due date, the longer she takes in the bathroom. But just in case...”

“Of course,” Jett said. “I’ll be right back.”

Jett walked back inside and to the ground floor bathroom where she knocked on the door.

“Give me a minute,” Hannah called behind the closed door.

“No, you’re fine,” Jett said. “Brody just wanted me to check on you and make sure you’re all good.”

“Thanks,” Hannah said, “but I’m okay, besides this pipsqueak laying directly on my bladder and making me need to pee constantly.”

Jett laughed. “Okay, well I’ll leave you to it,” she said and walked away. She was heading toward the back porch again when someone put their arms around her from behind.

Jett turned around and smiled once she saw who it was.

“Aunt Becky!” she said. Even though she saw her aunt regularly at work- Becky Thompson was the legendary Fire Chief of Phoenix Ridge, it was always nice to see her on her off times.

“Hey, peanut,” Becky said, using Jett’s dad’s nickname for her. Apparently when Jett was born, the nurse told her dad that she looked like a peanut and Jett’s dad called her that until he died. Jett used to hate when people called her peanut because it reminded her of her dad, but now she loved it for the same reason.

“Where is everyone?” Becky asked.

“Momma and Brody are outside, and Hannah is in the bathroom,” Jett said. “Where’s Ember? I’m guessing she couldn’t make it.”

Ember was Becky’s daughter and Jett’s cousin.

Becky shook her head. “She’s working on a project right now, but she said she might come over later.”

“I’ll be crossing my fingers then,” Jett said.

Becky laughed. “If she does come, I’m sure she’ll be bringing Natalie. I know how much you love that little girl.”

“Yes,” Jett said, “I’m extra excited now. You know I can’t wait until Brody and Hannah have their baby so I can spoil that little one as well.” Jett adored Ember’s daughter, Natalie.

Becky laughed. “You definitely fit the stereotype of the fun lesbian aunt.”

“Good,” Jett said, “because that’s all I want in life.”

Becky gave Jett another hug. “Let’s go find the rest of the family.”

Becky and Jett walked outside and found Brody with a cigarette in his hand. Both

Becky and Jett frowned.

Brody raised his hand. “Before you say anything, I only smoke outside and away from Hannah. Plus I’m working on quitting.”

“I hate those things,” Jett said.

“And I’ve experienced too many fires because of them,” Becky added.

“I know,” Brody said, “which is why I’m down to about one cigarette a day and I’m going to try to quit completely by the time the baby’s born.”

Jett nodded. She still hated that her brother smoked, but she knew that he was trying and it meant a lot to her. “I’m proud of you,” she said, deciding to focus on the positive instead of the negative.

Brody smiled. “So how have you all been?”

“Good,” Becky said.

“Josephine couldn’t make it?” Jett’s mom asked.

“No,” Becky said. “Apparently yesterday was a full moon and she has a lot of paperwork to catch up on.”

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“Is that really a thing? The full moon thing, I mean,” Brody asked.

“Yes,” Becky said.

“No,” Jett said at the same time, and Becky gave her a playful glare.

“Look here, you,” Becky said.

“Hey,” Jett said, “I’m just saying. There have been studies that show there is no correlation between a full moon and births or deaths.”

“You sound like a textbook,” Becky said.

“And you sound like a superstitious witch,” Jett countered.

Becky laughed. “Well when you have been in the emergency services as long as me, you’ll start to twitch when the full moon comes! Anyway, regardless, the hospital was especially busy yesterday, so Josephine has a lot to catch up on.”

Dr. Josephine Mars was Ember’s wife, Becky’s best friend and the Head of Phoenix Ridge Hospital. Their family was big and complicated and full of strong women and Jett loved that about it.

“You know, as cool as it would be to be the head of something, I’m kind of glad I’m not,” Jett said. “It seems like too much work.”

“It’s definitely not for everyone,” Becky said, “and as long as you’re happy where

you are, it doesn't really matter what you do."

"Tell that to my boss," Brody said. "He's trying to get me to take a promotion I don't want."

"You don't want the promotion?" their mom asked.

Brody shook his head. "It means more money, sure, but it also means more hours and travel, and I'm about to be a dad."

Jett nodded. That made sense. Even though she didn't have children—she didn't even know if she wanted any—but if she did, she'd want to be around them and their mother.

Some of the best memories she had were when her dad was still alive, and even though her mom was still amazing, she was never the same after he passed.

Brody finished his cigarette and soon after, everyone else decided to go back inside. When they got there, Hannah was sitting at the kitchen table with a glass of sweet tea in front of her.

"I know I just used the bathroom, but I am so thirsty," Hannah said.

Jett and Brody's mom laughed. "I remember that feeling," she said. "Drink as much as you want and take good care of my grandbaby."

Hannah smiled and took a large gulp of the tea. "I'm also starving," she said. "Is it alright if we get food now?"

"Oh, absolutely," Jett's mom said. "You just sit there, and I'll grab a plate for you."

After everyone grabbed their food and sat around the table, the conversation started. Food in the Thompson household had always been a social event, with conversation and jokes. Jett always tried to keep her mouth closed when she was eating, but sometimes it was hard and no one really cared. Everything was all laughs, smiles, and love.

After a while, the conversation turned to work. Since Becky was the fire chief of Phoenix Ridge's fire department, she started with giving a lecture on fire safety.

"And you," Becky said, turning to Hannah, "when it comes to winter, don't put a space heater in that baby's nursery. If you're worried about them getting cold, get a bassinet and put them in your room or something."

"I know," Hannah said. "Brody is anal when it comes to fire safety."

Becky turned to Brody. "And you've checked all the fire alarms?"

"Regularly," Brody promised. "I might not be a firefighter like you, or dad, or even Jett, but I'm very safe, I promise."

"Except when it comes to smoking," Becky teased.

"I'm quitting," Brody said.

"I know, and we're all proud of you," Becky said.

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“Technically though, I’m not just a firefighter,” Jett said. “I’m a firefighter paramedic.”

Brody groaned and laughed. “We get it,” he said. “You’re cool and definitely better than me.”

“I’m just saying, it’s better than being a financial advisor,” Jett teased.

“Tell me that when you’re saving for retirement.” Brody stuck his tongue out at his little sister and everyone laughed.

“So.” Becky broke up the conversation and turned to Jett. “How are things with you? I haven’t been able to talk to you much at work lately. Been so busy with other things, but I heard you helped save an eleven-year-old girl from an unusual bike accident?”

Jett smiled—but a picture of that abrasive new trauma surgeon- Dr. Riley Parker- flashed into her mind. The surgeon was slightly shorter than her with piercing green eyes and a messy ponytail, lots of masculine energy, and well, undeniably hot, but also an arrogant pain in the ass. She frowned slightly at the memory, but then went back to smiling.

“Yeah,” she said. “She left the hospital the other day, but she’s expected to make a full recovery.”

“What happened?” Jett’s mom asked.

“She fell while riding her bike down a hill and somehow, the bike twisted and the handlebar managed to pierce through her chest,” Jett said.

Her mom covered her mouth in shock. “Oh my God,” she said. “That’s horrible.”

“Yeah,” Jett said, knowing that her mom gets upset about things like that. “But don’t worry. She’s good, and I have her foster family’s number so that I can check up on her often.”

“That’s good,” her mom said.

“Yeah,” Jett agreed, but she couldn’t get the image of Dr. Riley Parker and those fierce green eyes out of her head. She was so aggravating and had she been wrong, Jett would be telling her mom a different story.

Jett tried to push it out of her head, but occasionally, throughout the lunch, Dr. Parker’s face would pop right back up in her mind as if to taunt her. She was so aggravating, not listening to anything Jett had to say, and putting a small child through a risky operation.

But a small part of Jett also felt bad. The surgeon had been right. And Jett did tell her to go to hell.

After lunch, Jett and Becky volunteered to do the dishes, and Jett couldn’t help but think Aunt Becky wanted to talk to her, especially considering as soon as Jett offered to do the dishes, Becky said that she would help her.

When they got into the kitchen, Becky put the plates she was carrying into the sink and turned the water on before she turned to Jett.

“So,” Becky said, squinting at Jett, “what’s going on?”

“What do you mean?” Jett asked, playing dumb.

Becky gave Jett her infamous look, tilting her head and narrowing her eyes so that it looked like she was staring into her soul.

“You kept zoning off during lunch,” Becky said, “and it all started when we were talking about that girl who wrecked her bike, so what the hell is going on? Is there something I need to know about?”

“No, it’s nothing like that,” Jett said, and she sighed. “It’s just that one of the doctors that day kind of pissed me off.”

“What do you mean?” Becky asked.

“A surgeon named Dr. Parker just really pissed me off,” Jett said. “She didn’t even stabilize the patient or get a good look at her before she was wheeling the little girl to an operating room. And when I tried to talk sense into her, she just completely blew me off.”

Becky nodded and gave Jett a little hum, allowing her to continue.

“And she’s lucky that the girl survived, but she could have died,” Jett said. “And she was just rude to me the entire time, pulling rank and all of that nonsense.”

“But the girl did live,” Becky said.

“Yeah,” Jett said, “but if the doctor was wrong about what she needed in her three-second glance, she wouldn’t have. She was too reckless. I’ve met surgeons like her before, all she wants to do is to cut into people and receive recognition, and if a patient dies, it’s no big deal.”

“I think you’re being too harsh.” Becky frowned. “And you’re letting other experiences cloud your judgement when you don’t know that doctor. I don’t know her very well, but I can say that Phoenix Ridge Hospital has one of the best trauma departments around, and Dr. Parker has been responsible for saving many lives that people didn’t think would live.”

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RILEY

Dr. Riley Parker was once again in surgery, working on a patient who had suffered multiple injuries during a car crash. When she finished, she walked out of the operating room and took a deep breath before she had to notify the patient's family that the surgery was a success.

There were some complications and the patient was going to have some notable scarring, but they would live—and considering how bad of a state they were in, that's all that mattered.

Riley finished notifying the family, receiving an awkward hug from the patient's wife, and walked back into the Emergency Room to see what else she could do. She was barely there for long when suddenly, the sound of multiple pagers going on attracted the entire department's attention.

Before Riley even had the chance to look at her pager, the head of the hospital, Dr. Josephine Mars, came rushing into the Emergency Room in her heels and smart skirt and white doctor's coat. She looked disheveled, which was rare for her.

"Everyone!" Dr. Mars called out. "A building under construction has collapsed a few miles away. We're the closest hospital, and paramedics and firefighters are bringing all survivors here."

Everyone had their attention on Dr. Mars, and Riley felt her stomach drop. Building collapse could mean mass casualties and lots of unsurvivable injuries. She took a deep breath and steadied herself; she was going to do whatever it took to have as

many survivors as possible. She looked at Dr. Mars and resolved to be the best doctor she could be.

* * *

The next few minutes were chaos. While they waited for the first ambulance to arrive, everyone prepared the Emergency Room. Nurses moved patients to allow for the flood of people that would arrive. Doctors and everyone laid out gauze and emergency supplies they thought they might need.

Everyone worked like a storm of elephants, seemingly without order, but still managing not to trample anyone else. When the first ambulance arrived without its lights on, Riley knew something was wrong. One of the nurses came back into the Emergency Room looking shaken and informed everyone that the patients in the first two ambulances died before they made it to the hospital.

Riley felt that pit in her stomach and knew that today would be difficult, both in keeping patients alive and keeping one another's spirits up.

When the next ambulances arrived, the patients were fortunately alive, but they also brought someone who caused Riley to scowl to herself before she schooled her face into a neutral expression.

A certain tall athletic very attractive angry paramedic. Now was not the time for dislike or rivalries. But Riley couldn't deny how she both wanted to and didn't want to see her at all.

Riley took a stretcher and loaded it into the ER getting briefed by another member of the ambulance staff, hoping to avoid the angry paramedic, but she knew that the other woman noticed her when she saw the obvious frown on her face as she looked in Riley's direction and their eyes met for just a second.

Just as Riley expected her to leave with the ambulance, Dr. Mars raised her voice.

“Jett,” she called out and the paramedic turned around to face the head of the hospital.

“Josephine?” the paramedic replied and Riley tried to tune out their conversation as she focused on her patients, but it was hard. Nobody called Dr. Mars Josephine. Apparently this Jett the paramedic knew her boss on a personal level, which slightly annoyed her.

“Can you stay here and help in the ER?” Dr. Mars asked, and Riley inwardly groaned as she noted the awkward angle of her patient’s arm. They would need an X-ray to be sure what they were looking at, but Riley could already tell that her patient likely needed surgery.

“Absolutely,” Jett said. There isn’t too much left to do on scene. I’m sure they will cope without me.

Jett spoke into her radio most likely ascertaining permission with her commander.

Riley couldn’t stop her gaze from being drawn to the curve of Jett’s lips as she spoke.

“Awesome,” Dr. Mars said. “Thank you so much.”

Jett got to work. She focused mainly on stabilizing patients and helping the nurses hook them to monitors and IV lines. At one point a patient needed to be intubated and Riley couldn’t help but notice in admiration how efficiently Jett performed the procedure. She had a look of determination on her face that Riley couldn’t get out of her head.

When Jett accidentally walked into Riley, Riley couldn’t help but snap at her,

memories of Jett calling her a glory chaser surfacing to her mind.

“Hey, watch it,” Riley said as their bodies clashed and they both pulled sharply back. Jett looked back at her, dark eyes hard to read suddenly, and Riley definitely noticed when she started to roll her eyes but stopped.

“Sorry,” Jett said, a little reluctantly.

Riley wanted to say more, but the situation definitely didn’t allow it, so she got back to work.

“My arm! My arm!” Riley heard someone screeching, causing many nurses and doctors to fumble in their work before they refocused. Riley finished with her current patient and headed to where the commotion was to see what was happening. When she got there, she saw a man with what was obviously a compound fracture to his arm.

When the man saw Riley, he started sobbing.

“Please,” he said. “Can you fix my arm? I need it.”

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Riley inspected it, noticing that the arm needed immediate surgery to avoid further damage or potentially him losing the arm. Riley wasn't an ortho specialist, but she had done a surgery like this before and she was confident that she could do it again.

"Please," the man said again. "I don't care about anything else, but I won't be able to work without my arm."

"Okay," Riley said, and then, because she was curious and also liked to get to know her patients: "What do you do for work?"

"I'm a construction worker," the man said. "My name is Dennis."

"Okay, Dennis," Riley said. "I'll see what I can do."

At that time, a nurse and Jett came walking toward her, and Riley zeroed in on the nurse. "Hadley," Riley said, pointing at her, "are you doing anything right now?"

"No, I was just showing Jett where we keep the gauze."

"When you're done with that, get an OR ready. We need to get this man to X Ray and then get this compound fracture sorted quickly. Get him started on pain meds."

Jett stopped what she was doing and raised a very elegant eyebrow. "You're seriously doing this again?" she asked. "He just got in here. He needs to be checked out thoroughly before he can be operated on."

Riley was feeling riled again straight away. Something about this paramedic just got

right under her skin. “I can see just from looking at the color his fingers are beginning to turn that if we don’t get on with this, he may very well end up losing his arm.”

Jett frowned. “So much could go wrong if you just rush into this,” she said, “and it’s not like you can have a large team with you. Everyone else is focused on other patients.”

“I will most certainly be paging Ortho, but if you’re so worried about my decisions, scrub in then,” Riley said, impulsively.

“What?” Jett asked, shocked.

“I’m serious,” Riley said. “I don’t have time to argue with you, and if you think you can help then by all means, do.”

Riley wasn’t against other people helping her, although she’d known some surgeons to be. And, unlike what Jett had insinuated the last time, she wasn’t a glory chaser. Her life’s goal was to be able to save lives and make lives livable. She cared about her patients, even if she barely knew them, and that’s what frustrated her about Jett. The paramedic didn’t seem to see that.

“Okay,” Jett said, her face suddenly flushed.

“Great.” Riley started to wheel the patient away. Jett joined her, making it a million times easier, and Riley couldn’t help but notice the lovely elegance of Jett’s finely muscled forearms as she bent to push the stretcher.

“Have you ever had surgery before?” Riley asked the patient.

“A couple of times,” Dennis said.

“Great,” Riley said. “Is there anything I should know? Are you allergic to anything?”

Riley continued to ask Dennis important questions before they left him with the OR staff and went to the scrub room to scrub in.

She guided Jett through the procedure, watching her long graceful fingers as she scrubbed.

Riley looked up and found Jett’s eyes above her mask. “You ever been in an operating room before?” Riley asked.

“Only as a patient,” Jett said.

Riley nodded. “You’ll do fine,” she said. “If you have any problems or any questions, ask me or one of the nurses.”

Jett’s eyes showed shock at Riley’s words. “Thank you,” Jett said.

Riley might have had personal issues with Jett, but she wasn’t about to have a nervous or unsure paramedic in her operating room.

* * *

Throughout the surgery, Riley maintained her razor focus, but she did notice Jett’s behavior throughout the operation. It might have been Jett’s first time in surgery, but Riley couldn’t tell. She assisted quickly with anything she was asked and her focus was intense and methodical.

She asked questions that were relevant and showed she wanted to learn as she went.

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Riley could definitely see where and why they clashed. Riley was good at her job, but she was a risk-taker. She didn't always like to do things the proper way, and she hated jumping through hoops to do what she knew needed to be done.

Jett was definitely the opposite. Riley could tell that she didn't like risk, but to Riley, surgery was all risk. She enjoyed the risk, and sometimes she did struggle knowing where to pull back and where to push ahead, but she did care about her patients. More than anything, Riley cared about her patients. But she also knew that sometimes a risky surgery gave them their best shot.

Jett could complain about Riley's methods all she liked, but Riley listened to her patients and her own observations before she would listen to someone else. But Riley couldn't deny that Jett's own methods were admirable. She was definitely passionate about her job and Riley could respect that.

She found herself glancing at Jett's focussed dark eyes above her mask at breaks in the surgery. Jett's concentration was intense. It might not have been usual procedure to take a paramedic into the OR, but Jett didn't care so much as that. She knew she worked in a teaching hospital and Dr. Mars would always support learning opportunities for staff.

When the surgery was done, Riley breathed a sigh of relief. It looked like Dennis would have a full recovery.

Dennis' wife and kids were in the surgery waiting room, along with a group of other people. Riley knew that some of those people were going to be receiving bad news, but she tried not to focus on that. She decided to focus on the good news that she was

going to give.

As expected, Dennis' family was very grateful, but Riley was ready to get back out of that room. She needed to get back to the Emergency Room to help with more patients, to get more people back to surgery.

However, when Riley walked out of the room and into the hallway, Jett was standing next to the door, staring into space. As Riley walked into the hallway, Jett's eyes found hers and Jett raised her hand as if to stop her.

"Yes?" Riley asked, noticing how Jett's short dark hair framed her face and exposed her intense brown eyes, which almost stared into Riley's soul. Riley felt uncomfortable yet intrigued.

"I think I was wrong about you," Jett said.

"You think?" Riley asked, crossing her arms and taking a step closer to Jett.

"You did a good job in there," Jett said, "and I know how much that man needed his arm."

"Dennis," Riley said.

"What?" Jett asked.

"His name was Dennis," Riley said. "Not 'that man.' And the thing is, I know that because I care about my patients, and I want what's best for them. I learn all of their names, and I do my damndest to make sure they make it out of that operating room alive."

"I care about my patients, too," Jett said.

“I was never the one who said you didn’t,” Riley said, unable to get Jett’s criticisms out of her head.

“I’m sorry,” Jett said. “I was wrong.”

Riley frowned. She definitely wasn’t expecting the other woman to apologize. Riley expected Jett to be as hard-headed as she was, and hearing that apology shocked her. “Oh,” Riley said, uncrossing her arms.

She felt slightly exposed, but after the apology, she didn’t feel as much of a need to be guarded around Jett.

“You’re a good doctor,” Jett said, staring directly into Riley’s eyes with a heated gaze. “Forgive me?”

“Okay,” Riley said, something that was hard for her. She held grudges like nobody’s business, but there was something about the other woman that made her want to move on. Besides, she was tired of being angry, and there was something about Jett that intrigued her. She was unable to put her finger on what exactly it was, but she didn’t want to move away from Jett.

But she couldn’t let go of what had upset her the most. “I’m not a fame chaser,” Riley said.

Jett looked at her in shock, like she didn’t remember what she said the last time they met.

“You said that I was more concerned with getting fame than caring for my patients,” Riley said, “and I know I have a reputation, but it comes from caring about my patients, not dismissing them or using them as tools to propel my career. I’ve met people like that, and I’m not one of them. I have my reputation because I’m a good

surgeon, and doctors who don't care about their patients aren't good surgeons.”

Jett nodded and frowned. Riley's voice showed pain and raw emotion. She didn't like being vulnerable, but Jett's accusations struck her right in the heart and she couldn't shake them.

“Like I said,” Jett said, “I was wrong about you. I couldn't see past the risk you were taking to see the people you wanted to help. I'm sorry.”

Riley felt immense relief to hear that. She wasn't sure why Jett's opinion mattered so much to her, but it did. Usually, Riley was a fuck-it-all kind of woman. She didn't care what other people thought as long as she knew that she was doing the right thing. But with Jett it was different—and that both thrilled and terrified her.

The two of them stood there for a moment, looking into one another's eyes. Until Riley's pager went off.

“Shit,” Riley said, checking her pager, “I have to get going.”

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“I should probably get out there and help, too,” Jett said.

“Good idea.” Riley rushed away towards the Emergency Room.

And maybe it was her imagination, but Riley thought she saw Jett smile at her. The action caused shivers to run up her spine and she hurried away even more quickly, not wanting to dwell on what that could mean.

4

JETT

Jett ran home to quickly get changed after a long and exhausting shift at the fire station. It seemed like she didn't even get a moment to breathe the entire day, so when she got home she decided to take a quick, scalding shower before getting dressed into a nice blouse and pair of black slacks. A quick slick of mascara and some lip gloss and Jett was good to go.

Jett wished that she could just crawl into bed and watch TV, but she had somewhere to be.

* * *

When Jett arrived at the hospital for their annual fundraising gala, she quickly found her Aunt Becky. Becky was standing next to her wife, Dr. Lucinda Everett, and laughing at something Lucinda had said.

Jett always admired her aunt's relationship. And especially the strength and dedication that it took for two people to have high-stress jobs and still come together and be full of love. Becky was working on more of a consultancy basis now for the fire department, but she was still widely famous as Fire Chief Becky Thompson.

Jett felt the same admiration for her cousin, Ember, and her marriage to Dr. Josephine Mars, and Ember and Josephine managed to somehow raise a child amidst Josephine being the head of the hospital.

Speaking of their child, beautiful little Natalie came running toward Jett while calling her name, her curly red hair pulled back into a scrunchie with at least ten bows placed randomly in it.

"Hey, baby girl," Jett said when Natalie reached her, and she picked the girl up and placed her on her hip. Natalie had been getting a lot bigger lately, but as long as Jett could reasonably pick her up, she would. "How is my favorite Natalie?"

Natalie giggled. "Good," she said, "I got a hundred on my spelling test today."

"Wow," Jett said, "that's awesome. I'm so proud of you."

"Momma said she doesn't know where I get it from since she's a terrible speller," Natalie said.

"Well obviously, you get it from me," Jett said. "I won the spelling bee every year when I was in elementary school."

"Wow," Natalie said and Jett noticed her moms walking over.

Josephine immaculate as ever in a classy royal blue evening dress and Ember, tall and muscular in a smart navy blue pant suit with her red hair slicked back. They looked

like every inch the power couple they were.

“Hey Jett,” Josephine said at the same time Ember walked over to Jett and ruffled her hair.

“Hey, peanut,” she said, using her family’s nickname. Ember was a few years older than Jett and she always felt more like an older sister than a cousin. She was always there for Jett when she was going through a tough time, especially when they were younger and Jett needed sisterly advice.

Ember was there for Jett a lot through college and training, helping her with both her professional and personal life. She actually used to work as a firefighter until she retired a few years ago because she wanted to be there for her family more. Now she ran a small shop for muscle cars out of her garage.

Jett was happy for her. She always thought that Ember was just a firefighter because of her family and because of what was expected of her, but she’d always been obsessed with cars, and her ability to work on her passion full-time definitely suited her.

“Hey,” Jett said with a smile. She couldn’t ask for a better family, and she was happy to see Ember again. Seeing her older cousin always brought a smile to her face.

“I see you’ve stolen our kiddo,” Ember said.

“Actually, I’m Jett’s now,” Natalie said and the three adults laughed.

“I’m okay with that,” Jett said. “I’ll take you home and feed you insane amounts of sugar and Redbull.”

“Nope,” Josephine said, taking Natalie from Jett’s hip. “I think that’s enough Jett for

today.”

“Hey,” Jett complained, “I was joking.”

Josephine started to walk away, but she turned around and flashed Jett a smile. “Let’s go see Gran Becky and Grandma Lucinda,” she said to Natalie, and Natalie squealed in excitement.

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Ember gave Jett a hug. "I'm going to go to the bathroom," Ember said. "You should get a drink. I know how much you love champagne."

"Oh, yes," Jett said, "especially when I don't have to pay for it."

Ember laughed and left. Jett headed straight for the bar. However, before she even got there, someone took a step backwards and lightly bumped into Jett's chest.

"Oh shit." The person turned around and Jett saw that it was Dr. Riley Parker. Riley was immaculate in a button down open neck dress shirt that covered her tattoos. Her usual messy ponytail was a sleek low bun tonight.

She looked up at Jett and smiled. Jett was still somewhat sceptical of her, but the smile looked genuine. Maybe she was more chill away from work.

"Sorry about that," Riley said. She looked down at her shirt and frowned when she noticed the slight spill of champagne on her light blue shirt.

Jett couldn't help noticing the sparkling green of her eyes.

"I can look for some napkins," Jett offered.

Riley shook her head and waved her hand in the air dismissively. "Don't worry about it," she said. "It'll dry. Are you going to get a drink?"

"Yeah," Jett said.

“Perfect,” Riley said before she emptied her champagne glass in one gulp and raised the glass. “I need a new drink anyway. I’ll go with you.”

Jett’s opinion of Riley Parker had definitely improved from their last meeting, but she hadn’t expected Dr. Parker to be so friendly. Maybe she’d had too much alcohol. Jett didn’t know.

“You look really nice tonight,” Riley said, eyeing Jett with her intense green eyes as she stood at the bar, waiting for the bartender to pour more glasses of champagne.

“Thanks,” Jett said, and figured she should return the compliment. “Uh, you do too.”

Riley flashed her a smile, and Jett stood there for a moment questioning her life. Jett supposed it made sense. She had only seen Riley when she was working, and Jett knew that she was different inside of work and outside of it. That must have been it. This might be a hospital fundraiser, but Jett must be getting a glimpse into Riley’s outside of work demeanor, and she couldn’t deny that as strange as it felt, she was enjoying the other woman’s company. She decided to just accept it and go with the flow.

“You know,” Riley said once the two women finally got their drinks, “I don’t think we’ve properly introduced ourselves. I know that your name’s Jett. I’m Riley. Technically, Dr. Riley Parker if you want to be fancy.” Riley said with a slight laugh.

“Well I’m Jett Thompson, Firefighter Paramedic Jett Thompson,” Jett said, “and it’s nice to properly meet you, even though we seem to only see one another in this hospital.”

Riley laughed. “Yeah,” she said, “but at least this time there’s no compound fractures to worry about.”

Jett sure nodded at that one. “Oh yeah,” she said, “I definitely prefer this setting.” Jett took a sip of her champagne and sighed.

“That good?” Riley asked.

Jett nodded. “I love champagne,” she said, “but it’s kind of expensive so I rarely drink it.”

Riley looked Jett up and down with her intense gaze, causing Jett to fight a blush as she felt Riley’s eyes on her body.

Is she checking me out?

“You know,” Riley said, swirling her glass, “I have a nice bottle of champagne at home. Maybe you could come over sometime and share it with me.”

She is hitting on me. For sure!

Jett blanked at that. Did Dr. Riley Parker really just ask Jett to come home with her one day? What on Earth was happening? Jett couldn’t deny that Riley was super hot, especially tonight, all masculine charm, but it had been so long since someone was so forward with her. Honestly, it was usually Jett who flirted with other women in the hopes of taking them home.

It was unusual and a little uncomfortable for her, but Jett couldn’t deny the heat that she felt at the thought. She also wondered what Riley’s home was like. A person’s home told a lot about them, and Jett wondered what Riley’s space said about her.

Jett didn’t get the chance to stutter through a response before Ember found the two.

“There you are, peanut,” Ember said, “I see you’ve found the champagne.”

Jett saw Riley snicker off at the side about her nickname and so Jett turned to Riley and pointed to her. “Don’t say anything,” she said, but Riley just laughed.

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“Peanut?” Riley asked, not even attempting to conceal her laughter.

“Shut up,” Jett complained, but she couldn’t deny it was a strange nickname. “My dad used to call me that.”

“Aw,” Riley said, “that’s so cute.”

“Yeah,” Ember said, and Jett knew that she was going to tell Riley the story of how she got her nickname, “apparently right when Jett was born, the nurse told her dad that she looked like a peanut.”

“That’s cute,” Riley said. “I wish I had a nickname like that.”

“Your parents never gave you a nickname?” Ember asked.

“I never knew them,” Riley said with a shake of her head. Jett saw a moment of sadness in her green eyes.

“Oh,” Ember said, and Jett frowned. She couldn’t imagine not knowing her parents or growing up without them. She looked at Riley, who looked as if she was daring one of them to say something sad or negative about that situation, so Jett said the first positive thing she could think of.

“Well that’s their loss then,” Jett said. “It sucks that you don’t have an embarrassing nickname I can tease you for, though.”

Riley laughed and Ember looked relieved that the awkwardness no longer remained.

“I’ll be sure to hold it over your head as long as we know each other,” Riley promised.

Jett rolled her eyes, but she didn’t think she would actually mind that much.

“So, how do you two know each other?” Riley asked with a question in her eyes, and a slight tint of jealousy as she eyed up Ember’s impressive stature.

“Peanut is my cousin,” Ember said.

“Though, growing up, we’ve practically been sisters,” Jett said and she noticed a look of relief on Riley’s face. Had Riley been jealous of her easy relationship with Ember?

“Oh yeah,” Ember said, “the only difference between us and sisters is that we didn’t share a house. But we used to drive our moms crazy with the amount of sleepovers and phone calls we would have.”

Riley laughed, but her laugh was cut short when Josephine walked their way and stood beside Ember.

“Well hello everyone,” she said, looking at the group. Jett noticed that Natalie was no longer with her, and when she looked around, she saw the little rascal talking animatedly to Becky and Lucinda. Jett smiled to herself.

“Hi, Dr. Mars,” Riley said, her air of professionalism returning.

“Hi, Josephine,” Jett said with no pretense of professionalism, hoping that she could remain casual enough for Riley to remain the same way. She did notice that Riley looked at her strangely when she called her Josephine.

“What is going on over here?” Josephine asked.

“Oh, just talking and embarrassing Jett,” Ember said.

Josephine laughed and shook her head. “Well I’m about to give Jett a reprieve,” Josephine said, “because I would like my lovely wife to come with me. Music is about to play and I want a dance.” Josephine gave Ember a quick peck on the lips.

“Of course,” Ember said, wrapping her arms around Josephine. “Lead the way,” she said, and the two left.

Jett saw Riley looking after Josephine and Ember in awe and with a slight sweet look in her eyes. Jett understood. It was hard to look at their relationship and not be overtaken by sentiment.

“Your cousin is married to the head of the hospital?” Riley asked.

“Yeah,” Jett said. “There are a lot of impressive women in my family. My aunt, Ember’s mom, is actually the infamous Fire Chief Becky Thompson.”

“Wow,” Riley said, “that is impressive. Honestly the only impressive family member I’ve ever come close to having was a foster mom who was a marine biologist.”

Jett raised her eyebrows. “That’s pretty cool,” she said, “did you ever get to see the animals?”

“A few times,” Riley said, “but I didn’t stay in that home for long.”

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Jett nodded, but she didn't pry. There was a large part of her that wanted to, that wanted to ask a million questions and learn everything that there was to learn about Riley, but she got the sense that the other woman was guarded and that asking direct questions would immediately rebuild any walls she was taking down to talk to Jett.

"I don't suppose you're interested in dancing?" Riley asked, looking at the people and couples getting ready to dance, and Jett shook her head.

"Not really," Jett said, "but if you want to dance, I will for one song, but that's it."

Riley laughed and shook her head. "Oh lord, no," she said, "I hate dancing. I was just wondering, because if you weren't interested, we could go somewhere else."

"Like where?" Jett asked.

"Well," Riley said, "I know how to get to the roof."

"Okay," Jett agreed.

"Great," Riley said. The two decided to go back to the bar to get more drinks, and somehow, Riley managed to talk the bartender into giving the two of them an entire bottle of champagne.

After that, Jett followed Riley to the roof. She didn't know if they were allowed to be up there, but she also didn't care. She was enjoying the other woman's company and the thrill that she got being around her.

When Riley opened the door to the roof, she held it open for Jett.

“Thank you,” Jett said.

“Of course, princess,” Riley said and Jett’s heart beat slightly faster at the nickname. She didn’t know why it made her heart flutter, but she smiled.

There wasn’t any furniture or anything like that around the rooftop, and Jett shouldn’t have been surprised. It was a rooftop, after all. So the two of them sat on a low wall, looking out over the city lights, the bottle of champagne in between them.

“So, I’ll be honest,” Riley said. “One of the reasons I own a bottle of champagne is because I have no clue how to open the damn things.”

Jett laughed and reached into her pocket for her keys. “Well, you’re in luck because I happen to keep a tool for everything on me, including a swiss army knife with a corkscrew.”

“Fancy,” Riley said, before handing the bottle to Jett. She watched her open the bottle and noticed something else on her keychain that was a little unusual.

“Are those nail clippers on your keychain?” Riley asked.

“Yeah,” Jett said with a laugh. “Ember calls it my lesbian badge of honor. She keeps one on her keychain too. Got to be prepared.” Jett smirked at the joke she had always enjoyed with Ember.

Riley laughed. “Man, I wish I would have thought about something like that, especially when I was younger,” she said. “There were definitely a couple of times that a girl turned me down in college because my nails were too long.”

Jett looked at Riley's nails. "I'm guessing by the state of your nails now that you don't have a girlfriend," Jett said.

"No." Riley laughed. "It's been a while since I've had any kind of relationship, but I've never really had a long-term one."

"Damn," Jett said.

"Have you ever been in a long-term relationship?" Riley asked.

"A couple of times," Jett said, "but not recently, and work always seems to get in the way."

"Felt that," Riley said.

Jett took a long drink from the champagne bottle before she handed it to Riley, who did the same. The two sat there drinking for a while, and Jett felt a nice buzz. She couldn't tell if she was properly drunk or just tipsy, but it felt nice, and she was enjoying herself while she talked to Riley.

Riley was a lot less guarded like this, and so was Jett. The two were seemingly making connections together while giggling like little girls over their bottle of champagne.

"Here," Jett said. "Give me your hands."

When Riley did, Jett couldn't help but notice how strong her hands were. Surgeons hands, strong fingers, hands that saved lives. Her nails were only a little long, but Jett had enjoyed ribbing her.

"What are you doing?" Riley asked when Jett rummaged through her keychain.

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“Clipping your nails,” Jett said, taking the clippers and methodically going through Riley’s nails, making them short.

The air between them sparked with chemistry and Jett felt a rush of desire through her as her hands touched Riley’s.

The act was intimate and they both knew it. Jett looked up as she finished one hand and smiled as she met Riley’s intense green eyes.

“Is this your special way of asking me to fuck you?” Riley asked and Jett snorted in embarrassment, almost snagging a nail, but she caught herself.

Well, the thought of those strong hands taking me to ecstasy has certainly crossed my mind, Jett thought to herself.

“Oh my God,” Jett said, laughing while she continued. “I don’t even know how to respond to that.”

Riley laughed. “Well if that’s what you wanted, all you had to do was ask,” she said as calm as ever and her gaze was so intense, Jett had to look away.

Jett had no idea how to ask directly for what she wanted.

Jett finished clipping Riley’s nails and put her keychain away. “And if we were to do something like that,” Jett said, “what makes you think I’d let you top? What makes you think you would be the one doing the fucking?”

Jett felt a warm boldness in her from the champagne, but it was true. She usually chased women. She usually was the top sexually. She usually started the fucking.

But here was this gorgeous masculine woman with a ton of dominant energy suggesting otherwise. Riley was more masculine than Jett's usual type, but she felt strangely undone by her.

What if a butch top was what she had needed all along?

Riley giggled and took another drink, and Jett was mesmerized by her piercing green eyes that seemed to sparkle as she looked at Jett. "I think I could persuade you," she said, but Jett immediately wanted to challenge her.

"Oh yeah?" Jett questioned, feeling slightly drunk now and emboldened by the feeling of the alcohol buzzing in her system, "and how exactly would you do that? Because, sweetheart, I think I could have you screaming my name before you got the chance to try." Jett was usually never this bold, but the alcohol had definitely gotten to her.

The alcohol had obviously gotten to Riley, too, because the next thing Jett knew, Riley's lips were on hers, opening up her mouth with her probing tongue and pushing Jett backwards and onto the ground. Riley quickly climbed on top of Jett and put her knee in between Jett's legs pressing tightly on her pussy through her pants.

Oh, fuck. Yes, please.

Jett felt a rush of desire and felt more turned on than she could remember feeling in ages.

Riley bit Jett's lip and Jett moaned, but Jett was determined to not let Riley get ahead of her, and so she reached towards Riley's waistband and untucked her shirt, running

her hands under and up to where she felt her sporty crop top bra. Her nipples felt hard through the fabric.

Jett pushed her thumbs up against them roughly. Riley's lips departed from Jett's and she raised her head up to let out a large moan, turning Jett on even further. There was something about getting a reaction out of Riley that satisfied her no end.

Jett took advantage of Riley being distracted to remove her hands from her nipples, gently cradle her head, and roll her sideways so that she was now on top. Now that their positions were reversed, Jett felt sexually powerful in the way that was so familiar to her.

Jett smiled and immediately latched her lips onto Riley's neck while her hands reached for the zipper on her black slacks. Jett wanted to go for Riley's lips, but she also wanted to give the other woman the chance to moan for her, so she decided to place gentle and sensual kisses around her neck and ear.

Riley whimpered when Jett finished her task with the zipper and pulled Riley's slacks down to her knees, exposing a pair of black Calvin Kleins. Hearing a whimper from the big tough surgeon was a particular win for Jett. She smiled to herself and smiled at Riley's muscular thighs as she exposed them.

Jett left Riley's neck to lean up and look her directly in the eyes with her fingers hovering over the waistband of her briefs.

"Is this okay?" Jett asked.

"Yes," Riley said while violently nodding her head. "Oh God, yes please."

Jett smirked. She couldn't help herself. "You sound so pretty when you beg."

Riley scowled and Jett laughed before she pulled down Riley's briefs and exposed her to the cool air outside. Jett ran her eyes over Riley's dark pubic hair, smiling to herself in satisfaction. Riley hissed and Jett laughed again.

"Okay, sweetheart," Jett said. "I'll give you a choice if you like to be in charge. Mouth or fingers?"

It seemed like Riley didn't comprehend what Jett was saying at first, but when she did, her eyes widened and she looked at Jett in awe. "Mouth," Riley said, "definitely mouth."

Jett didn't waste any time in moving down. She pressed a sweet kiss right below her belly button and then moved lower, causing Riley to moan and groan. Jett searched for Riley's clit with her tongue, tasting her in the process, and when she found her clitoris, she wrapped her lips around it and lightly sucked.

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She kept doing that, listening as Riley moaned and whimpered, and Jett couldn't deny that she felt proud of herself. Part of the enjoyment of sex was watching another woman unravel underneath her, and Riley sure did unravel.

After a few moments, Riley's hands found their way to Jett's hair, and she tugged on the strands, adding to Jett's enjoyment.

Riley gasped and gripped Jett's hair harder. "Don't stop," Riley said, and all Jett could think was that she wasn't planning on it. "But please," Riley continued, "your fingers, too. I need to feel you inside of me."

Jett obeyed, pushing two fingers inside of Riley, delighted with how wet she was, how wet Jett had made her, and it didn't take long of Jett curling her fingers inside of Riley as she began to fuck her with them while she sucked lightly on Riley's clitoris.

It didn't take long before Riley's legs were shaking and Jett knew she was close.

Winning the first orgasm between them was a battle Jett would certainly enjoy having under her belt. She increased the pace of her fingers, feeling Riley's body tighten around them and tense.

Riley gasped and moaned. Then she let out a loud shout as her orgasm tore through her. Jett could practically feel her vibrating in her mouth and around her fingers. Jett released her mouth from her clitoris and removed her fingers slowly as Riley went quiet, gasping and heaving beneath her.

Jett raised her head to look at the beautiful woman who had just come undone from

her mouth and fingers. It felt like the greatest privilege in the world to be able to bring a woman to climax like this. Bringing pleasure to beautiful women never tired for Jett. “Do you want me to stop or keep going?” Jett asked, looking into Riley’s wide green eyes.

“Stop,” Riley said with a gasp, “I don’t think I can keep going.”

Jett rocked back onto her knees with a smirk.

Round One to meshe thought to herself.

5

RILEY

Riley couldn’t shake the feeling of Jett’s touch on her as she took an Uber home. She didn’t know what she had been thinking, but she couldn’t regret it.

It had been a while since she had done anything sexual with someone and that thing with Jett was just amazing. Her mouth was amazing, and Riley couldn’t deny the large amount of attraction that she felt toward the other woman. But she couldn’t get involved. She didn’t even know how Jett felt, and Riley felt that Jett was probably just taking advantage of a situation; it wasn’t because she cared specifically about Riley or anything.

Besides, it didn’t matter. Riley didn’t do relationships. Her few attempts in the past had always been pathetic, short-term affairs that always ended before things got too intense. Riley knew that she was the problem. She struggled to open up to others, and emotional intimacy scared the hell out of her. She didn’t know how to be vulnerable and she didn’t want to be either. She was content to be by herself, or so she thought.

* * *

But, God, Jett was attractive. Both physically and spiritually. She was the kind of strong and powerful woman that Riley typically found herself attracted to. Her independence and ability to speak her mind, while annoying to Riley at first, did draw Riley to her. She couldn't deny that those were traits that she looked for in the relationships that she had had in the past.

But at the same time, Jett felt different. Riley wasn't used to people apologizing when they were wrong or had hurt her feelings. She also wasn't used to exposing her feelings in front of other women. She didn't know why she felt safe around Jett, but she did and it terrified her.

She didn't know what she wanted from Jett, but her heart hurt at the idea of her just being a fling or casual sex partner. Her heart wanted something more and Riley crushed that idea down the moment it surfaced. Absolutely not, she thought. Whatever had just happened with Jett was never going to happen again. It would just be some one-off thing, and Riley told herself that she was okay with that.

It didn't matter that Jett was attractive and that something about her drew Riley to her: Riley didn't do relationships. She didn't do broken hearts and vulnerability. It was going to be okay. Whatever weird feelings Riley had for Jett would fade, she was sure of it.

And so, when Riley went inside her apartment and prepared for bed, she pushed down any thoughts of Jett, no matter how persistent they were.

* * *

Riley went back to work as usual. She felt immense pride in what she did, and it brought her joy, so she put all of her time and energy into being the best trauma

surgeon she could be. Part of her hated the fact that her job often required people to be injured in order for her to be there to help them. But she tried to focus on the positive. She was saving their lives and often helping them regain their life as it was before. It wasn't perfect, but nothing was.

Riley was naturally a pessimist. She often saw the negatives to a situation, especially growing up in the foster care system where she was often shoved around like a toy. But throughout her career, she had trained herself to look at things in a way that didn't come natural to her. She was a pessimist, but as she went into surgery to perform something that many surgeons would dare not try, she forced herself to be an optimist.

Just like the construction guy with the compound fracture, if she had listened to the standard advice and waited, he likely would have lost his arm. Instead, Riley was able to walk by the physical therapy office on her way to the Emergency Room and see Dennis waiting there.

She smiled and when Dennis waved at her through the glass window, Riley waved back. She hummed to herself with a little extra pep in her step. This was what she was here for. She didn't have time for a relationship, not with lives on the line, and besides, all of her past attempts at a relationship had proved that she just wasn't good at them.

There was no shame in that, Riley told herself. She was an accomplished trauma surgeon. She couldn't expect herself to be good at every little thing. Besides, her job benefited her—a relationship wouldn't.

* * *

Riley walked into the Emergency Room and saw Dr. Josephine Mars walking out. Riley held open the door for Dr. Mars, and let her out.

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“Thanks, Parker,” Dr. Mars said with a smile before she walked away, and as Riley watched her leave, she couldn’t help but think of Jett and Ember calling her Josephine.

Riley walked into the Emergency Room and saw Dr. Lucinda Everett standing by the nurse’s station, fixing her dark hair into her usual butterfly clip.

Riley walked over. “So, I’m guessing there’s not much to do,” Riley said.

Dr. Everett groaned. “Not a thing,” she said, “which I suppose is good, but I’m bored. I’ve resorted to scheduling myself to help with an appendectomy in a few minutes.”

Riley laughed, and when Dr. Everett almost dropped her butterfly clip, Riley caught it before it could touch the floor.

Dr. Everett stared at Riley in shock and awe. “Damn,” she said, “do you ever fail to impress?”

“I try not to,” Riley said and Dr. Everett shook her head with a small smile.

“Oh, I was meaning to talk to you about something,” Dr. Everett said.

“Yeah,” Riley answered, assuming that Dr. Everett wanted to talk to her about something medical-related, which was a reasonable assumption considering they rarely talked about their personal lives. But, Riley was wrong.

“What was up with you at the hospital fundraiser?” Dr. Everett asked, and Riley’s

eyes widened. She took slow breaths in order to keep herself from blushing. She wasn't sure how well it worked, however, especially when Dr. Everett gave her a knowing look and a smirk.

"What do you mean?" Riley asked, playing dumb. She didn't want to give anything away on the off-chance that Dr. Everett was talking about something other than a tall, graceful dark-haired woman.

"I mean, I saw you talking with Jett Thompson," Dr. Everett said, "and then I looked away for a second and the two of you were gone for over an hour, and when you came back, you were completely disheveled." Lucinda raised an elegant eyebrow.

OhGod, Riley thought. This could not be happening. This was way too embarrassing. She'd thought that maybe Dr. Everett would ask what she was doing taking to Jett, but Riley didn't expect her to be so observant.

But then, Riley caught onto something that she hoped would distract Dr. Everett from her question. "How do you know Jett's name?" Riley asked. The firefighter paramedic wasn't in the hospital enough to have given introductions to everyone who worked there.

Dr. Everett gave Riley a look, like she knew Riley was trying to distract her, but she did answer. "Jett is my wife's niece."

That threw Riley for a loop and she couldn't help but exclaim, "Is everyone in this town related to that girl?"

Dr. Everett laughed, and it took her a while before she stopped. It was obvious that she wasn't expecting that kind of reaction from Riley, but she understood what she meant.

“It sure feels that way sometimes,” Dr. Everett said. “I married the most wonderful woman in the world and it’s like I know half of the town now.”

Riley smiled. She didn’t do relationships, but it was sweet to hear the way other people referred to their partners.

“Dr. Everett.” A nurse arrived. “Are you ready for the appendectomy?”

“Shit,” Dr. Everett said. “Yes, I’m on my way.” She started to leave, but before she turned the corner and left Riley’s line of sight, she turned back around and pointed directly at Riley. “Don’t think I forgot about you. I’ll get an answer from you later.” Then she disappeared.

* * *

Great, Riley groaned, and looked at the nurse who had been sitting there for the conversation. Of course it was Leah. Riley regretted being so short with her the other day, and sighed. Sometimes her temper got the best of her, especially in high-stress situations.

“Don’t say anything,” Riley said to Leah. “Please. I don’t want all the nurses gossiping about something they don’t know anything about.”

Leah nodded. “Okay,” she said, not sounding too convincing, and Riley knew that she was going to have to do damage control.

“How was your psych patient?” Riley asked.

“Good,” Leah said, “he made a full recovery and is now in inpatient. I don’t know how he’s doing now, but hopefully he’s doing well.”

Riley nodded. “Good,” she said, “and look, I know I was harsh on you for leaving him alone.”

Leah raised her hand. “Don’t bother,” she said. “When Dr. Hudson found out, she made what you said seem like pillow talk.”

Riley pursed her lips and nodded.

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“Besides,” Leah said, “I know I messed up. That patient could have died because of me. I just feel horrible.”

Riley nodded again. “You know, it’s a good thing you feel horrible,” Riley said and Leah looked at her in confusion before Riley continued, “It means you’re not a psychopath.”

Leah laughed a little at that. “Yeah,” she said, “but it’s making it hard to focus and do my job.”

“That’s not good,” Riley said, “Look. You messed up. You know you messed up, everyone knows you messed up, but also everyone messes up. And you were lucky; you messed up and no one died. I haven’t always been that lucky. But the thing is, no matter how badly you mess up, you have to be able to forgive yourself and learn from it, because if you don’t learn from your mistakes, you won’t know how to do better, and if you don’t forgive yourself, you won’t be able to act of what you now know and actually do better.”

Leah frowned and nodded and Riley looked at her. “Did that make sense, or did I just sound like some sort of hippie?” Riley asked.

Leah laughed a little at that. “It did make sense,” she said, “but you’re also sounding kind of like a hippie right now.”

“Damn it,” Riley said with a shake of her head. “I’m not good at the whole pep talk thing.”

“I can tell,” Leah said, “but thanks for trying anyway. And you really don’t have to try to make me feel better. I’m not going to gossip about what you and Everett were talking about.”

“Yeah,” Riley said, “but I don’t like leaving people in bad places, even if I’m the reason they’re there.”

“It’s okay,” Leah said, “I forgive you. Plus if you were super nice about it, I probably wouldn’t have taken it so seriously anyway.”

Riley didn’t know what else to say, so she just changed the subject. “Is there really not much to do?”

Leah shook her head. “It’s been incredibly busy all day,” she said in the most sarcastic voice she could muster, letting Riley know that it had been dead today. Every doctor and nurse knew to avoid saying, “It’s not busy,” or it would become the busiest day in memory.

* * *

Riley worked for hours, trying to keep herself busy, and even when the sky turned dark outside, nothing changed. This wasn’t the first time she had had an easy shift, but it was fairly out of the ordinary for the surgeon.

Then, an ambulance came in. Dr. Everett came running through the hallway, passing Riley.

“I call dibs,” Dr. Everett said, making her way toward the ambulance dock. Riley just shook her head and let her. When times were uneventful in the hospital, it was often that the two trauma surgeons would compete and call dibs for patients. Normally, Riley was more competitive, but she just didn’t seem to care today.

That didn't change, either, when Riley saw who was helping wheel the stretcher in. Riley's breath stopped for a moment as she stared at the woman she was trying to forget. Riley didn't know what she had been thinking. It was obvious the two would see each other again. After all, they had worked together twice before. Riley really should have prepared for this possibility. Instead, she walked into the closest room, which just so happened to be the trauma bay that the paramedics were taking their patient to.

Riley looked up like a deer in headlights when she saw Jett helping the other paramedic carry in the patient while Dr. Everett followed.

"Hey," Dr. Everett said, "I called dibs."

"Right," Riley said, "sorry." Riley went to leave the room and as she was leaving, she felt Jett's eyes on her and she couldn't help but hear Jett speaking to Dr. Everett.

"Lucinda," Jett said, "do you need me here? Or am I good to go?"

"You may leave," Dr. Everett said, and Riley walked as quickly as she could, trying to lose Jett, before she walked into one of the on-call rooms.

However, it didn't take much for Jett to find her, and when she did, Riley looked up at the other woman and tried to keep her calm, even though her heart was racing and she felt anything but calm.

Jett closed the door to the on-call room and walked toward Riley. Her hips swayed and every curve of her body and her lips was deliciously tempting. Her brown eyes were pools of melted chocolate. "Running away from me, sweetheart?"

"No," Riley lied, not wanting Jett to know how much she affected her. "I just needed a moment to rest."

Jett gave a short laugh; clearly she didn't believe Riley, but Riley tried not to let that affect her either.

"Poor thing," Jett said. "Would you like some help? I can tire you out."

"I—no," Riley said, crossing her arms. "And what makes you think that I would let you top for the second time in a row?"

"Are you saying that it's your turn?" Jett asked. "Okay."

Riley's brain buffered. All of her attempts to forget Jett and convince herself that what they had was a one-time thing were being thrown out of a window.

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She couldn't deny the attraction that she felt toward the other woman, and how badly she wanted to feel their lips pressed together. Jett took another step toward Riley, and Riley couldn't help herself. She took a step toward Jett and within an instant, the two were kissing passionately.

Riley pushed herself forward and put her hands on Jett's waist, forcing Jett backwards until Jett hit the wall of the on-call room and gasped.

Riley took this opportunity to bite Jett's lip and reach her hands toward Jett's waistband. She was going to be the one getting a taste of Jett tonight.

She unceremoniously pushed Jett's pants and underwear to the ground and felt Jett's hands reach under her shirt and toward her bra, reaching for the clasp.

Riley bit Jett's lip harder, and yanked her hands off of her. This time it was going to be Jett who would be naked. Riley wanted to see her, to feel her, to hear her.

"What was that about, sweetheart?" Jett asked, pulling away from the kiss for just a second before she put her lips back on Riley's.

"I want your shirt off," Riley said, doing the same thing, except instead of putting her mouth back on Jett's, she put her mouth on Jett's collarbone, leaving gentle kisses. She wanted to leave hickeys, but she would have to wait until Jett's top was off. She didn't want to leave proof of what they were doing where other people could see and question it.

Jett hummed and then laughed. "If you want my shirt off, then I want you to beg,

sweetheart.” Jett’s brown eyes offered a challenge.

Absolutely not, Riley thought, and she pushed Jett against the wall as hard as she could, using her torso to pin her to the wall as her hands reached for the buttons of Jett’s shirt. However, before she could even undo the first button, Jett reached toward Riley’s hands and held them in her own.

Riley struggled to get out of Jett’s grip, but she was too strong, and Riley was not weak. She couldn’t help herself from thinking about how hot this was, distracting herself from her mission of undressing Jett.

“What did I say?” Jett asked. “You want my shirt off, you’re going to have to beg.”

Riley couldn’t believe that she was even considering it. She never begged, but she couldn’t deny how hot this entire situation was, and she felt the heat from their interactions through her entire body.

Riley opened her mouth and watched as Jett smirked at her, but before Riley could even say anything, her pager went off.

For fuck’s sake! Of all the times to ruin a quiet day in the ER.

Both of them knew exactly what Riley’s pager meant for their on call room time.

Jett let go of Riley’s hands and went for her pants and underwear. And even though Riley couldn’t help but spare a glance at Jett’s long legs as she reclothed herself, she did almost instantly look for her pager.

“Shit,” Riley said. Apparently calling dibs didn’t mean much. Dr. Everett ended up needing Riley’s help with her patient. “I’ve got to go.”

“Yeah,” Jett said with a nod, “but I’ll see you sometime later, right?”

Riley blanked, remembering the promise to herself that what happened on the roof was just a one-off thing, and how she almost just broke that promise. She didn’t even answer Jett. She just walked out of the on-call room and went to the trauma bay.

6

JETT

Jett was left in the on-call room, breathless, before she decided to leave and go back to the fire station. There wasn’t a reason for her to stay at the hospital anymore, not with Riley gone.

After Jett’s shift, while she was taking a long shower in her house, she couldn’t help but think about Riley and what the other woman was making her feel. Jett was always in control, but it was clear to her that Riley was used to having the control in her relations with women.

Jett didn’t know how to feel about that. She didn’t know if she was ready to give up any control to Riley, or how she felt about the other woman taking it, like she had seemed so adamant on doing, even though she hadn’t succeeded. Jett smiled to herself. There was something beautiful about bringing a powerful woman to her knees, making her beg and lose the control she was used to having.

But the kind of control that Jett would have to give up if she was to continue this thing with Riley was more than just sex. It was emotional, and that was something that Jett was unfamiliar with. Sure, Jett had had a few relationships, her longest lasting four years until the two broke up two years ago, but she always struggled with emotional vulnerability.

Her ex, Sky, had wanted more than Jett was wanting to give. She wanted Jett to be more open with her emotions, something that she always struggled to communicate. In fact, it seemed like all of Jett's relationships ended the same way, with issues caused by her inability to communicate her emotions. She knew she was guarded and that it led to issues, but she wasn't really sure what to do about it.

She wanted a proper, long relationship, maybe with marriage, like her aunt and cousin, but she didn't know how to actually make that work.

Jett thought back to Riley and her lovely muscled tattooed body and sharp green eyes and couldn't deny the attraction that she felt toward her, but she thought that it might be for the best if the two left one another alone. However, at the same time, Jett couldn't imagine doing that. She felt so much toward Riley that she felt out of control of herself.

While in the shower, Jett decided that the next time she saw Riley, she would talk to her, to figure out what was going on between the two of them. That was probably the best. Jett hated being uncertain and not knowing what was going on, and her situation with Riley definitely left her feeling uncertain.

* * *

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It was a few days before Jett found herself in the Emergency Room of the Phoenix Ridge Hospital. When she did find herself there, she was wheeling in a patient with the help of another paramedic, Sarah, and walking into the hospital, where they were directed by a nurse to trauma bay two.

When they put the patient in the bay, Riley was already waiting for them in green scrubs and a white doctor's coat, a stoic expression on her face as Jett looked at her. Jett couldn't tell if the look was directed at her, or the situation, but it unnerved her nonetheless.

"Thank you," Riley said to Jett and Sarah, "we got it from here." A nurse came in, carrying some pain medication, and Jett left while Riley started speaking to the patient.

"You ready to go?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah, I guess so," Jett said, thinking about Riley in the trauma bay. She didn't even smile at Jett. Jett didn't know what was going on, but she did know that she was definitely going to get to the bottom of it.

Jett wished that she could talk to Riley right then, but she decided that probably wasn't the best time. She was with a patient and Jett had a job to do. However, right when Jett was about to leave the Emergency Room, she saw Lucinda Everett walking to the nurses' station.

"Actually," Jett said to Sarah, "give me just one minute." And Jett rushed to Lucinda.

“Lucinda,” Jett called, and Dr. Everett looked up with a confused expression on her face before she saw who it was, and then she smiled.

“Hello, love, is everything alright?” Lucinda asked.

“I was actually wondering if you could do me a favor,” Jett said. “Do you know when Dr. Parker gets off work?”

Lucinda smiled, a smirk almost, but Jett was so focused on Riley that she missed it.

“Of course,” Lucinda said. “She gets off at eight tonight.”

Perfect; Jett was getting off at six. That gave her plenty of time to go home, get ready, and come back to the hospital before Riley left.

“Perfect, Lucinda, thank you,” Jett said.

“Of course,” Lucinda said.

* * *

When Jett got back to the hospital after her shift, she felt a little awkward. Many of the doctors and nurses knew her face, but she was a little unrecognizable when she wasn't in her usual uniform.

She managed to make it back to the Emergency Room without incident, however. When she got there, she looked around until she saw Riley. It was a few minutes past seven thirty, and when Jett saw Riley walking toward the nurses station, Jett marched toward her until she faced directly in front of her.

Riley stopped and looked at Jett in shock, looking her up and down and noticing her

casual clothes, ripped jeans and a t-shirt.

“Is something wrong?” Riley asked.

“We need to talk,” Jett said.

Jett heard a snicker, and the two turned to see Lucinda at the nurse's station.

“Follow me,” Riley said, and she led Jett to the on-call room that they had gone to the other day. “What’s up?”

“What’s going on between us?” Jett asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, that night on the roof, and the other day in this room?” Jett asked. “What are we doing?”

“I don’t know,” Riley said. “I thought the night on the roof was just a one-time thing?” But Riley sounded uncertain. She had a questioning lilt to her voice; she sounded slightly like she was rehearsing a speech that had become off-topic.

“And the other night in this room?” Jett asked. “Having two encounters doesn’t really scream ‘one-time thing,’ does it?”

Riley looked at Jett in complete uncertainty, and Jett realized that she had never seen Riley this vulnerable before. She was looking at Jett as if she expected her to have the answers, and she didn’t, but she wanted to.

Jett leaned closer to Riley, so close that she could feel her breath, and Jett whispered to her, lips an inch apart. “Tell me, Riley, do you want this to be a one-time thing?”

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“I don’t know,” Riley said, but something told Jett that she did know, she was just scared of admitting it.

“Are you sure?” Jett asked, “because I don’t. Are you okay with that?”

Riley looked at Jett hesitantly and nodded. Jett smiled and kissed Riley.

The kiss soon turned passionate, with the two of them grabbing onto one another’s waists for dear life as each of them battled for control. Jett smiled into the kiss. Maybe one day she would let Riley have control, but not now.

Jett pulled away and grabbed Riley’s hands, restraining her, and smiled at her. “You still have a shift to finish,” Jett said, taking pleasure in Riley’s pout and gasps for breath.

“Oh, come on,” Riley said. “That’s not fair.”

Jett laughed. “I know,” she said, “but after your shift, we should meet up at the bar a couple of blocks away, okay?”

Riley pouted again, but nodded. “Okay.”

“Good girl,” Jett said with a smirk and laughed when Riley shot her a glare. “I’ll see you there.”

The two left the on-call room and Jett left the hospital. She decided to go to the bar and save a seat for Riley before the end of her shift, since the bar was sure to be busy.

Jett was right and the bar was busy, which was perfect for her. The two could talk and not easily be overheard. Though it did suck, because Jett had to wait by the entrance of the bar until a table finally opened up. As soon as Jett saw the couple stand up to leave, she rushed to take her seat.

It didn't take long before Jett saw Riley enter, looking around confused. She was wearing black jeans and a black T shirt that deliciously revealed her tattooed forearms. Her usually messy hair was brushed and neatly tied up. She looked fresh from the shower. Jett waved to make it easier for Riley to spot her, and she couldn't miss the look of relief in Riley's face the moment she saw Jett. It made Jett smile.

Riley walked over to the table and stood beside the chair across from Jett. "Excuse me, miss," Riley said, "is this seat taken?"

Jett decided to play along. "It's actually reserved. For the sexiest woman in the bar," she said and relished in Riley's blush as she sat down.

"Thanks," Riley muttered.

"Of course," Jett said. "Do you want me to get drinks?"

"Just one," Riley said. "I want to have a little more control than the time on the roof."

Jett shook her head with a smile. "Oh, but where's the fun in that?"

"Hey," Riley said, "I can't have you topping every time."

Jett laughed. "But you looked so hot coming apart under me," she said, and watched as Riley tried to fight another blush.

"Just go to the bar!" Riley shooed Jett.

“Anything in particular that you want?” Jett asked.

Riley shook her head. “Whatever you think sounds good.”

“You got it,” Jett said, and left to go to the bar.

She ended up ordering two vodka cranberries, which was her favorite drink. Since Riley didn’t specify what she wanted, Jett decided to go for the classic.

When she got back to the table, Riley thanked Jett as she set the drink down.

“I did a double,” Jett said with a smile. “Can’t have you keeping too much control.”

Riley rolled her eyes. “I’m getting you back,” Riley said, “just you wait.”

It was Jett’s turn to roll her eyes. “Okay, sweetheart,” she said and took a sip of her drink while Riley did the same.

“So,” Jett said, deciding to change the subject. Besides, what they were doing felt like a date, so she might as well treat it like one. “Tell me more about yourself.”

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Riley looked at her with an expression of shock and, really? “Well,” Riley said, “what do you want to know?”

“Everything,” Jett said. “I know you grew up in foster care and that you didn’t know your parents. That your coolest foster mom was a marine biologist, that you’re an incredible surgeon, sexy as hell, and I think really sweet and caring under a tough exterior. But I want to know more about you, Riley. Starting with whether or not you have any pets, any hobbies, unrealized dreams, just whatever.”

Riley paused for a moment, a little stunned, and nodded. “I don’t have any pets,” she said, “but when I was a kid, I was convinced that I was going to be a lonely old cat lady with twenty cats. But I work too much to really even have one. I don’t really have time for hobbies anymore, but to relax I’ll watch TV and crochet socks.”

That last bit was definitely not what Jett was expecting. “Really?” she asked. “Do you have any pictures of your socks?”

“No,” Riley said, “but I’m wearing a pair.” She pulled up her pant leg and sure enough, she revealed a baby pink and blue striped sock that was very obviously handmade.

“Wow,” Jett said, “that’s kind of impressive. Are they comfortable?”

“Yeah,” Riley said, “that’s actually why I make my own socks. The store-bought ones are too thin and uncomfortable.”

“That’s cool as hell,” Jett said.

“Thanks,” Riley said, “but what about you? I want to learn about you, too.”

“Okay,” Jett said with a smile, “I don’t have any pets, but I did have a dog from the time I was a kid until a couple of years ago. His name was James and he was the best boy on the planet. I also can’t really think of hobbies unless you count cooking and baking, but those are basic survival skills.”

Riley smiled. “You like to cook?”

“I love it,” Jett said, “and I also love baking. I have a major sweet tooth, so it works out well.”

“I actually hate cooking,” Riley said, “and I’m pretty bad at it, too.”

“Really?” Jett asked. “How come?”

“I was never really taught how. When I aged out of foster care, there were a lot of things that I didn’t know how to do, that I had to learn how to do, and am still really bad at,” Riley said. “I’m that way with laundry, too. I did finally figure out how to use a washer and dryer, but not before breaking one when I went off to college.”

Jett winced. “Damn,” she said, “that’s rough. I guess I’ve kind of always taken my upbringing for granted. My mom was really good at teaching me and my brother how to clean, cook, and take care of ourselves.”

“I didn’t know you have a brother,” Riley said.

“Oh, yeah,” Jett said, wondering how she could have forgotten to bring him up. “His name is Brody, and he’s actually going to make me an aunt soon with his wife, Hannah.”

Riley smiled, a sad kind of smile. A smile of longing. “That’s amazing.”

Jett didn’t want to be insensitive, but she wanted to ask. “I don’t suppose you have any siblings?”

“According to what little records I could find, I do, but I’ve never met them,” Riley said.

“I’m sorry,” Jett said.

“It’s okay,” Riley said.

There was an awkward pause, and Jett decided to change the subject again. “So, what made you become a trauma surgeon?”

Riley smiled. “Well, when I was a kid, I was always really good at school, and my third-grade teacher, the best teacher I ever had, once told me I was smart enough to become a doctor. And so little me decided that’s what I wanted to do. And when I was looking into medical school I had no clue what I wanted to do, but I heard someone say that a surgeon is one of the hardest professions, and I always did like a challenge.” Riley laughed.

“But when I was in residency, I really fell in love with it, and one of my mentors was a trauma surgeon, and just generally one of the best doctors on the planet. She was brilliant and kind, and she actually asked me to train to be a trauma surgeon under her, and I said yes,” Riley finished.

“Wow,” Jett said, “so it sounds like you got to where you are due to some really good teachers.”

“Oh, absolutely,” Riley said. “When I retire I was thinking I might want to be a

teacher or something.”

Jett nodded. “That’s really sweet. I think you’d make a good teacher.”

Riley gave a sweet smile and nod and looked at Jett. “So what about you?” she asked.
“What caused you to be a firefighter paramedic?”

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“Well,” Jett said with a smile, “it kind of runs in the family. My aunt is the fire chief, my cousin Ember used to be a firefighter, and my dad was a firefighter, too. He actually died saving a family when I was really little. And when I was a kid, all I had were good memories of him, so as I got older, I guess I decided to follow in his footsteps.”

“Wow,” Riley said, “that’s impressive. Also, your family is incredibly impressive.”

“I know,” Jett said with a laugh. “I come from a family of heroes.”

“And you managed to become one, too,” Riley said.

Jett smiled awkwardly. She didn’t feel like a hero. She felt like she was just doing her job, and helping people because she had to, not because there was anything special about her. “I guess.”

Riley smiled and decided to drop the conversation, taking a long sip from her drink. “So,” Riley said after the two of them had finished their drinks, “what are we doing now?”

Jett smiled. “Well,” she said, “if I didn’t kill the mood talking about all the emotional things, would you like to go to my house?”

“Sure,” Riley said, “but if you try to make me beg again, I’m leaving.”

Jett laughed. “But you almost did it,” she said, standing up.

“Shut up,” Riley said, making her way toward the doors.

Jett wanted to tease Riley more, but thought better of it. Jett was naturally a joker—she got it from her relationship with her brother—but she didn’t want to put Riley off, especially when she didn’t know how she’d take it.

“Fine,” Jett said, following Riley to the parking lot. “We can take my car.”

“I walked from the hospital,” Riley said, “so you’ll have to drop me back off later.”

“Sure thing, sweetheart,” Jett said.

* * *

Jett didn’t even get the chance to take her coat off when she got inside her house. Because the moment she shut the front door, Riley was all over her.

Riley gripped her by her hair and pulled her down slightly so that the two of them could kiss. Jett wasn’t much taller than Riley, just a couple inches, but it was still noticeable.

Jett gasped as Riley pushed her back against the door, and their chests met. The two of them were breathing heavily, and when Riley reached for Jett’s hands to pin her down, Jett raised her hands above Riley’s head.

“Uh-uh,” Jett said. “And besides, I’m stronger than you, sweetheart.”

“This isn’t fair,” Riley pouted. “You have to let me.”

But that was a big ask for Jett and she smiled at Riley. “Maybe next time,” she said.

“Fine,” Riley said, “but I’m holding you to it.”

Jett laughed and surged forward, wrapping her arms around Riley as the two kissed passionately, and Jett walked Riley backwards until they reached the entrance of Jett’s bedroom. Jett didn’t waste any time in pushing Riley backwards and onto the bed.

“Wait,” Riley said, “I can’t pin you down, but I’m assuming you are fine with me fucking you?” Jett contemplated for a moment. She felt so wet. She didn’t always let women fuck her, but tonight might just be an exception. She didn’t like to give up control, but something about Riley made her feel safe.

And very turned on.

“Okay,” Jett said, and she let Riley switch their positions until Jett was lying flat on her back in the middle of her bed. Riley climbed on top of her and smiled.

Jett smiled back. Riley was beautiful, her brown hair escaping its band and her green eyes glittering, and even though Jett was a little nervous, she could definitely get used to this view.

“I’ll take care of you, princess,” Riley promised, and Jett couldn’t help the whimper that escaped her lips. She didn’t know what the hell had gotten into her, but as Riley reached for the hem of her t-shirt, she didn’t care.

She gasped as Riley slowly removed her t-shirt, before moving onto her bra, leaving her exposed. Riley threw the removed clothing to the floor and smiled at Jett before she reached for the button on her jeans.

Riley was absolutely sensual, whereas Jett was normally rushed and frantic. Riley took her time in undressing Jett, teasing her as her fingertips graced Jett’s bare skin,

leaving her wanting more.

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The way Riley touched her was different than what Jett was used to, but God, was it good. Every touch left her wanting more, and she still had her pants on.

Not for long, however. Riley carefully removed Jett's jeans, snapping the waistband of her underwear before she carefully pulled the jeans down Jett's long legs and threw them onto the floor with the rest of Jett's clothes.

Riley looked at Jett in only her underwear and smiled so sweetly that it took Jett's breath away. Riley leaned her head forward and Jett gasped as Riley kissed the top of her belly button and made her way down, until she kissed the waistband of her underwear.

"Do you have any toys?" Riley asked.

"Top drawer of my dresser," came Jett's breathless reply.

Riley left her alone, and Jett watched as she rummaged through the drawer. Riley paused for a moment and looked at Jett with a smirk before pulling out a leather strap on harness.

"Now this... I like," Riley said and Jett's face turned red while she tried to regain composure.

"Only if you let me use it to fuck you, sweetheart," Jett said and it became Riley's turn to blush.

Jett had only ever been the one to wear the strap on. It bothered her that in some

corner of her mind she wanted Riley to fuck her with it.

“Maybe, one day,” Riley said, and pulled out a dildo from the drawer.

Fortunately, it wasn't Jett's biggest dildo, but it was still one that she hadn't used in ages. Usually, when Jett got herself off, she used a small vibrator. She wasn't always the biggest fan of penetration, but she took a big gulp of air and decided that she was going to let Riley do what she wanted.

She suddenly realized she wanted Riley to fuck her. Really wanted Riley to fuck her.

Riley thumbed Jett's clit through her underwear and Jett whined. All of this teasing was killing her. She was normally very controlled, and rarely this impatient, but there was something about Riley that led to her wanting to get fucked right then.

Riley giggled. “Don't worry, princess,” she said. “I'll get to you in a second. Get your underwear off for me,” Riley commanded as she herself stepped into the harness and began to position the dildo.

Jett found herself wriggling out of her underwear. Her body was acting of her own accord. As much as she didn't want to let Riley top her, she really did.

Riley didn't waste any more time once Jett's underwear came off. Riley leaned down and licked long and slow over Jett's clit before she found it with her thumb and began to rub quick and gentle circles. Jett moaned at the feeling.

Fuck, this is good. So good. I'm so wet.

She felt herself opening her legs wider to allow Riley access.

Riley took each of her legs one at a time, hanging them over her shoulders.

Jett felt more exposed than she ever have done before. Her legs over Riley's shoulders, the dildo so close to her soaking wet pussy.

"Is this ok, sweetheart?" Riley growled and as much as part of Jett wanted to resist, she heard herself yelp, "Yes.. please fuck me."

Riley's eyes were hungry above her and Jett watched her as she positioned the dildo in front of Jett slowly coating it in her wetness before taking her time to push it inside. All the time she was watching Jett's face with care and Jett felt safer than ever, as though Riley would only ever go at the pace Jett was comfortable with.

It felt so big as though it was stretching Jett out and she moaned loudly as Riley entered her.

"Oh, god," Jett moaned as she felt her body beginning to relax and adjust to the size of the dildo.

She felt Riley thrust in the rest of the way to the hilt and she felt the clash of Riley's pelvis pressing into her as she was opened right up.

God, it felt so good. Jett had to admit that Riley was definitely good at what she was doing, and she moaned and gasped as she felt pleasure in her lower stomach and clit.

"More," Jett begged. It didn't escape her that usually she was the one making other beg, but she couldn't bring herself to care.

"Faster?" Riley asked.

"Faster," Jett said, and Riley delivered, beginning to thrust in and out of her and the dildo struck places in her that she hadn't felt in years.

Jett gasped and moaned so loudly that if she still lived in an apartment complex, she would have been worried about neighbors.

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“You sound so pretty when you moan for me,” Riley growled.

Since it was only the two of them, Jett moaned louder, unable to control herself and her voice until everything became so much that she couldn’t make a single sound.

“You’re shaking, sweetheart,” Riley said to her, but she didn’t slow down. Instead, she kept the same pace and Jett felt her whole body jolting with the vigor with which Riley was fucking her. Jett closed her eyes as she felt the beautiful pressure of Riley’s thumb on her clitoris.

“Oh... my... god...” Jett called out. “I...uh... I think... I’m going to...” Jett didn’t even get the whole sentence out before her orgasm exploded and tore through every inch of her body.

“Come for me, baby, that’s it. Squirt for me...” Riley growled.

She felt the gush of her own pleasure flooding out of her, once, twice, thrice in time with Riley’s thrusts.

“Good girl.... good girl, baby.”

For one thing, she had never felt so out of control sexually. For another thing, it had never ever felt this good.

It had been over a week since that incredible night at Jett's house, but that was not the last the two saw of one another. It seemed like Jett was constantly at the Emergency Room, giving Riley smiles and knowing looks that Riley couldn't help but return.

Even though they hadn't had a chance to be alone with one another since that night because of the way their shifts had fallen and other commitments, Riley knew that her initial desire to keep what they had a one-time thing was foolish. They seemed drawn to one another. There was something between her and Jett that was more than just sexual chemistry.

Even in the Emergency Room when Riley's often impulsive and unusual approaches to medicine left Jett raising her eyebrows, the two had managed to find a rhythm. Riley knew that sometimes she focused on the big problem first and left smaller issues for later, but in medicine that wasn't always the best practice.

Jett's preference for a methodical approach to medicine balanced Riley's own boldness, and she found herself stepping back a few times to listen to the paramedic, and vice versa. The two realized their own and one another's strengths and weaknesses and it made them into an incredible team.

The other hospital staff had noticed, too, often pushing Riley into the room when Jett brought in a patient. Even Dr. Everett let Riley take on more complex cases when Jett was delivering them.

Today, however, was slightly different. Jett was putting pressure on the wounds while Riley came into the trauma bay to be faced with a woman who was unconscious with multiple stab wounds. There was blood everywhere.

"You have to go straight into surgery," Jett said, her voice full of alarm, surprising Riley. "Her odds are practically nonexistent, but if she has a chance, it's with you holding a scalpel."

Riley nodded, feeling the weight of this patient on her soul. The woman was practically dead, but Riley wasn't going to give up.

Riley turned to Leah. "Prep an OR," she said, "and see if Dr. Everett is available. This has to be fast, Leah."

Leah nodded and ran out of the room.

Riley turned to Jett. She wasn't sure why she wanted her there with her, Jett wasn't a surgeon and it wasn't standard practice. But, nevertheless, she did want Jett there. "Come into the OR with me?" she asked.

Jett looked surprised, but she quickly covered it up. "Of course," she said.

* * *

Unfortunately, everyone's instinct was right and the patient didn't make it. Riley left the operating room exhausted only to have to notify the woman's family. She was devastated, and one look at Jett told her that Jett was devastated as well.

This wasn't the first time Riley or Jett had lost a patient, but it was the first time they had lost a patient together, and it felt different, like it shouldn't have been possible. They made such a good team, and should have been able to save a patient that was not savable. But, they were not superhuman, and that was a good reminder of that fact.

Riley watched as Jett walked away, and she followed her. "Jett," Riley called, and Jett turned around to face Riley with a devastated and questioning look on her face.

"Would you like to come to my place?" Riley asked, "I don't think it's a good idea for either of us to be alone right now. I can ask Dr. Mars if I can leave early."

“Yeah,” Jett said, “that sounds good.” Riley could see the concern and pain etched in her beautiful face.

“You did everything right for her, you know? You did everything you could to save her.”

Riley smiled weakly and gave Jett a semi-awkward hug before she left toward the office of the head of the hospital. Feeling Jett close to her made her just want to hold Jett in her arms and comfort her properly. But, now wasn’t the time.

* * *

Riley took pride in her car. It was incredibly clean, save for an old coffee cup from that morning. She had just taken it to the car wash yesterday and vacuumed it, too. It was an old habit from a former foster home.

When Riley was sixteen and got her driver's license, her foster mom at the time was nice enough to buy her a used car for her to drive around. The only catch was that her foster mom would inspect the car every Sunday night and if it wasn't spotless, Riley wouldn't be allowed to drive it for the next week.

She got used to keeping her car spotless and she felt incredibly grateful for that foster mom. She was one of the few that taught her how to do basic things, like drive and do dishes. She wasn't able to teach Riley how to cook anything fancy, but she did show her how to make plenty of easy meals, which had definitely kept Riley from starving over the years.

Riley led Jett into her apartment and the two of them sat on the couch. Riley had to clear the couch of various bits of yarn and unfinished socks from where she had been working previously.

Jett laughed slightly when she saw the basket of yarn that Riley moved her projects to. "You're like a grandma, with the yarn basket," Jett said.

Riley realised how much she liked Jett's laugh.

"I know," Riley said with a sigh. "It's kind of embarrassing."

Jett smiled at Riley and leaned toward her to rest her head on Riley's shoulder. "I actually think it's cute."

Riley smiled. Her past relationships had always thought it was a little embarrassing. Riley put a hand on Jett's thigh and rubbed gentle circles in the fabric of her pants.

Jett tilted her head upwards and kissed Riley on the mouth. Riley let her, and then deepened the kiss. She found herself leaning unconsciously towards Jett. Jett was like a magnet to her, she seemed to keep on finding her way back to her.

The two came together like a moth to flame. Riley moved closer to Jett, and Jett helped her find her way into her lap, with Jett's hands on the soft skin of Riley's waist as she rubbed her hands up and down underneath Riley's shirt.

That night everything was more gentle. When Jett stripped them both and then got on top of Riley, Riley didn't stop her. When Jett looked deep into her eyes and kissed her pressing her tongue into Riley's mouth, as the beautiful weight of her body on top of Riley made Riley feel safe, Riley didn't question it.

Jett reached down between their bodies with her right hand.

"Open your legs," she whispered, and Riley parted her legs with no argument. She needed this. So very much today.

"Please... I need you..." Riley gasped.

Jett pushed her fingers inside of Riley, she didn't do so with any sense of urgency, and Riley let her have control. To Riley, she didn't mind others having control sometimes, but she had a complex about things having to be equal. She didn't like it when only one person topped and the other bottomed.

Maybe it came from a place of growing up where nothing was fair, she wasn't sure. But she could tell that when Jett gave control to her, it was a bigger deal than it was for Riley, so she let Jett take it this time.

Riley felt Jett's fingers pushing into her and opening her up and it felt more incredible than anything else Riley could imagine in that moment.

Jett kissed her again, penetrating her mouth with her tongue in the same way she was penetrating Riley's pussy with her fingers.

Riley felt her fingers begin to thrust in and out of her, slow at first and then as Riley's breathing and moans began to build, so did the pace at which Jett's fingers moved.

"Fuck me... harder...please.." Riley gasped, desperate for more suddenly. She felt tears beading in her eyes.

"I've got you, baby," Jett's voice was kind, yet possessive as it whispered in her ear and Riley had no problem with that.

Jett added what felt like another finger and picked up her pace. Riley could feel Jett's fingers fucking her harder and faster than ever before and right now it was exactly what she needed.

Riley felt everything building inside of her. Her orgasm, her emotion, her feelings for Jett.

"Come for me, baby," Jett growled deeply into her ear and as though in direct response, Riley's orgasm exploded through her whole body pulsing and running through her in waves. Jett's fingers inside her stilled for a minute as Riley rode her orgasm and then she felt them begin to move again inside her, slowly thrusting in and out, deep and slow.

Riley felt herself enjoying it once again, she felt herself building once again alongside the thrusts from Jett's fingers.

I'm going to come again...

Jett must have known exactly what Riley was thinking as her fingers began to pick up pace. Riley heard her own moans begin to pick up pace in response. Jett was working magic with her fingers and Riley wanted nothing more than to lose herself in it.

"Oh my god..." Riley cried out and her body let loose once again, another mind-blowing orgasm running through every single part of her. She saw a kaleidoscope of stars as she felt Jett's fingers still deep inside of her.

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“I don’t think I can take any more,” Riley said, gasping, her eyes closed.

“Let me try one more thing, sweetheart,” Jett said, and Riley tried to ignore the pounding in her heart that occurred every time Jett called her sweetheart. “And you just say stop at any time if you want me to stop.”

Riley felt herself nodding in response.

“Just relax, baby.” Jett’s voice was like silk in her ear and Riley felt her fingers moving and adjusting inside of her. She felt an intense pressure at her entrance.

“I’m going to slide my whole hand inside of you,” Jett whispered. “Trust me, I’ve got you.”

Riley felt panicked for just a second before forcing herself to relax. She had been fisted before, but not for a long time. But never before had she felt this open for someone. If there was anyone whose whole hand Riley wanted to take inside of her, it was Jett.

“Is this ok?” Jett asked as she increased the pressure pushing into Riley.

“Yes,” Riley breathed in response. “I want it. I want to take you. All of you. So much.”

Riley suddenly felt herself open up and she felt Jett’s hand as it slid inside her. She was so wet and open, no wonder it had been easy. With the relief from the pressure came an incredible feeling of fullness that sent Riley’s mind spinning.

“Oh, god... oh... you feel so good,” Riley felt Jett’s hand moving deep inside of her body. Slow and deep and full.

Every tiny movement felt incredible and Riley felt like she never wanted to lose Jett’s hand from her. She never wanted this moment to end. She rocked her hips on Jett’s hand as Jett kissed her again. The kiss was deep and slow and Jett took Riley’s tongue in her mouth and began to suck slowly on it.

Riley felt another orgasm build deep and slow within her and like a slow motion tsunami, it flooded through her with big slow pulses right through every fibre of her being.

She felt lost in a world of pleasure, floating in a dream, her orgasms were on a different planet to anything she had ever experienced.

Eventually, when Jett slid out of her finally and completely, she gradually came back down to earth, feeling the loss of Jett’s hand acutely, as though it should have stayed inside of her forever.

* * *

Later, they lay together on the sofa, naked and entwined in each other. Riley was still coming down from the intensity of everything she had felt.

“I feel like I have so many expectations to live up to,” Jett said, looking at Riley, “with everyone in my family being a firefighter, with my dad dying in the line of duty. I feel like I should be doing more, saving more people.”

Riley stared at Jett for a few moments, unsure of how to respond, until she started to speak, scaring herself. “I have a hard time following rules,” Riley said, “or listening to any kind of authority. When I was a kid, a therapist I had diagnosed me with

O.D.D., which basically means I struggle when people tell me what to do.” Riley had never told anyone that before. She didn’t even know where the words came from, but they were true.

“I’m scared that I’m going to have to die in order to be good enough,” Jett said, “like my dad.”

“I feel like I have to be different than everyone else in the medical field in order to be good enough,” Riley said. “Like I can’t follow how things are traditionally done.”

Riley and Jett stared at each other again, saying nothing for a few minutes. Jett’s brown eyes were full of emotions and intensity that Riley wanted to spend forever picking apart. Riley couldn’t help but notice that she was still naked and snuggled into Jett’s strong arms.

It felt like the best place in the world to be as words tumbled out of her mouth the she had never shared with anyone before.

When Jett finally did say something, it wasn’t what Riley was expecting, and Riley knew that something big had just happened inside of Jett’s mind. She was giving up a little bit of control again.

“Will you fuck me?” Jett asked, her brown eyes pooling with lust.

Riley nodded, slightly in shock and awe, but she wasn’t going to deny the other woman. This time, however, she didn’t want to make her wait. As fun as it was last time, watching Jett squirm, Riley felt that Jett deserved some kind of reward for asking Riley to fuck her without being asked.

Riley quickly slid down from Jett’s lap and onto the floor on her knees where she parted Jett’s legs.

Jett's pussy looked so very wet and ready, Riley felt her mouth watering at the sight of it.

Riley smiled up at Jett and went directly for the meat of Jett's thigh, taking a chunk of flesh into her mouth and biting down on it.

Riley tried not to go too hard, but Jett hissed and whimpered.

"Jesus Christ," Jett said, tilting her head and neck back onto the top of the couch.

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Riley giggled and traced two of her fingers across Jett's slick pussy, over her clitoris and then over her entrance. She didn't feel like making Jett beg this time, she just wanted to give her everything she wanted.

Riley pushed her two fingers inside of Jett and began to curl them, gently fucking Jett before she took her mouth to Jett's clit, licking and sucking as Jett began to moan her appreciation.

Jett moaned louder, spurring Riley on further and she couldn't help but suck harder, causing Jett to yelp and let Riley know that was too much.

Riley laughed a little to herself. She usually was too much, and when it came to sex, that was something she enjoyed being.

Riley took her free hand and ran it across Jett's thighs. She had learned from the last time the two had fucked that Jett was incredibly sensitive there, and so Riley took advantage of that information, feeling Jett grow wetter around her fingers. She watched as gooseflesh appeared across Jett's thighs and stomach. Jett was so beautiful like this, it made Riley's stomach twist watching her.

Riley moved her mouth back to Jett's clitoris, giving slow licks with the flat of her tongue as her fingers increased the pace with which they thrust in and out.

"Oh, fuck..." Jett's breath started coming in short pants and Riley felt her body beginning to tense.

"This feels so.... good.." Jett was losing it and it felt so good to be able to take her

there.

“You look so beautiful like this. Letting go for me,” Riley murmured between licks.

It was seconds later when Jett’s orgasm exploded through her and she cried out loudly, gripping the back of Riley’s head and pulling her in tight as she rode out her climax.

Riley eventually felt Jett’s grip release and she removed her mouth from Jett’s clit to look up at her, and repeat her old question back to her. “Do you want me to stop or keep going?” Riley asked.

“Stop,” Jett said with a gasp of air as she leaned against the back of the couch completely spent and out of energy. “That was... perfect...”

“And just for the record,” Riley said, taking her fingers out of Jett, “you better not die in the line of duty. I don’t care how if you think that’s the only way for you to be good enough, you don’t get to do it.”

“I think we both need to change how we think,” Jett said, “and become comfortable with the fact that neither of us are going to be our ideas of good enough. Not without causing pain to ourselves.”

Riley looked up at Jett as Jett spoke, so beautiful and so earnest. She didn’t know what else to say to her, so she just nodded. What Jett said was definitely food for thought.

Riley got back on the sofa with her and they instinctively burrowed into each other’s arms, the smell of their sex still heavy in the air.

JETT

Riley and Jett spending a couple of hours together in the evening before going to bed had become a new normal for the two of them. They would have many late night conversations and sex before one of them drove the other home.

Jett was becoming comfortable with that arrangement, and part of it absolutely terrified her. She was being more open with Riley than she had been with anyone before her. Jett hadn't even experienced this type of openness with her other relationships, not even Sky. And she had known Riley for a fraction of the time that she had been with her ex-girlfriend.

Jett also felt herself growing closer to Riley. She tried to maintain a semblance of a professional relationship with the other woman when the two of them worked in the Emergency Room together, but it rarely worked. They would often exchange looks and smiles, sometimes even ending up in an on-call room together.

Jett didn't know what to do about that. She couldn't lie: She did desire a relationship, like the other women who had amazing relationships in her life. She envied her aunt and cousin, who practically worshiped the ground their wives walked on and vice versa.

Even her brother managed to find happiness in another person, and Jett could tell that he deeply loved Hannah. It was clear every Sunday lunch that she saw them. The look of love in her brother's eyes as he looked at his wife was something that Jett envied.

But something was keeping Jett and Riley from fully having that kind of relationship. Maybe it was just time. Then again, they had been spending lots of time together and had yet to put a label on what the two of them shared.

Jett definitely wanted something more, but at the same time she didn't. Her past relationships had led to disaster, and she knew it was her fault. Her girlfriends would always want more emotional vulnerability than she was willing to give.

What she had with Riley was new territory. She had started to share things with Riley that she had never shared with anyone else, like the pressure she felt to be a hero. But she still struggled with other aspects. She couldn't even tell Riley how she felt about her. Hell, Jett didn't really know how she felt about Riley. She couldn't deny the attraction between them and the joy that she found in their late night conversations, but she didn't know how that translated into a relationship.

Jett was currently in Riley's apartment. The two of them were watching some medical drama on TV and pointing out the inaccuracies.

"Oh boo," Riley said, throwing a gummy worm at the TV. "Everyone knows that you don't use a defibrillator if the patient is that far gone. Those things don't bring people back from the dead. What the fuck?"

Jett laughed and stole a gummy worm from the bowl in front of Riley. The two continued to eat junk and talk.

"So," Jett said, "what's your worst patient story?"

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“Oh gosh,” Riley said. “There was this one dementia patient when I was in residency. And like I kind of felt bad for her cause she didn’t really understand what was going on, but she was just so rude most of the time. Called me every name in the book.”

“Oh,” Jett said. “Dementia patients are the worst. Even if it isn’t their fault, still can be so hard to manage.”

“That woman made me cry so many times, and then on her good days she was the sweetest grandma on the planet, which made me cry more,” Riley said.

Jett nodded. “Unfortunately that’s usually how it goes.”

“Yeah, well it sucks, it scares me that I might end up like that one day,” Riley said.

“Agreed,” Jett said, but suddenly her phone rang.

Mom flashed up on the screen.

Jett immediately answered. Her mom called sometimes, sure, but never at this time of night unless something was wrong.

“Hello?” Jett asked, urgency in her voice. “What’s wrong?”

“Hannah is having her baby,” Jett’s mom said.

“Really?” Jett asked, trying not to curse in front of her mom, but she was definitely thinking, oh shit! “At Phoenix Ridge Hospital?”

“Yeah,” her mom said. “Brody just called me. I’m on my way over, but I thought you might want to know, too.”

“Absolutely, thank you,” Jett said. “I’ll be there in a few.”

The two said their goodbyes and Jett ended the call. She looked at Riley. Jett’s car was still parked at the fire station.

“My brother’s wife is having their baby,” Jett told Riley.

Riley immediately stood up in shock, dumping the bowl of gummy worms to the floor, but neither of them cared. “Oh shit,” Riley said.

“Yeah,” Jett said, and then the situation hit her. “Oh shit,” she repeated, “I’m going to be an aunt. Oh my God. I have to get to the hospital.”

“I got you,” Riley said. “Get in my car, let’s go.”

Jett gave her a grateful smile, and the two of them rushed to Riley’s car.

* * *

When they got to the hospital, both of them rushed to the labor and delivery section. Jett didn’t even question Riley coming with her to the hospital. It just felt natural for the two of them to be together.

When they got to the waiting area, Jett saw her mom pacing in front of the chairs.

“Mom!” Jett said, and her mom stopped pacing to look at her in relief.

“Jett, dear.” Jett’s mom rushed to her and gave her a crushing hug. Jett smiled and

hugged her back.

“Is everything okay?” Jett asked.

“As far as I know, everything is going perfectly,” Jett’s mom said. “I’m just a worry wart. This is my first grandbaby after all.”

“I know,” Jett said. “I can’t believe I’m about to be an aunt.”

Jett’s mom laughed. “That’s how your dad felt when Ember was born. He couldn’t stop freaking out.”

“Well, I’m definitely freaking out,” Jett said.

Jett’s mom laughed again, and then her eyes landed on Riley. She looked at Riley in confusion but was still smiling.

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“Hello,” she said. “Who are you, dear?” She kept looking between Jett and Riley, as if expecting either of them to answer.

“Oh,” Jett said. “Mom, this is Riley. Riley is my...” She wasn’t sure how to describe Riley to her mom. They hadn’t labeled anything, and Jett wasn’t about to claim Riley as a fuck buddy in front of her mom.

“I’m Jett’s friend,” Riley said. “We were hanging out at my place when you called her, so I drove her to the hospital.”

“Oh, well isn’t that nice,” Jett’s mom said. “Thank you, Riley, and it’s nice to meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you too, Mrs. Thompson,” Riley said.

Jett’s mom immediately cringed. “Absolutely not,” she said. “You can just call me mom. As long as you’re a close friend of one of my kids, you’re my kid too.”

Riley smiled, and Jett could tell that she was a little uncomfortable, but Jett let it be. She knew that Riley didn’t have much experience being part of a family, and Jett was more than willing to share hers with Riley.

Hell, even if the two weren’t dating and later broke whatever thing they were doing off, Jett couldn’t help but feel care for Riley.

The stories from Riley’s childhood and foster care broke her heart. She couldn’t imagine how tough that would have been for her. All Jett had ever known was a

loving family, even though the loss of her father had cut deeply, and she was so grateful for the love she had always known.

* * *

The three of them waited in the waiting room for a while before Aunt Becky and Ember showed up.

“Hey,” Jett’s mom said when the two arrived, giving each of them a hug.

“Hey,” Ember said. “Josephine said she wished she could come, but we both decided it was best for her to watch Natalie right now.”

“Of course,” Jett’s mom said. “A hospital waiting room is no place for a six-year-old.”

“And I would have brought Lucinda,” Becky said, “but she is actually working in the Emergency Room as the only trauma surgeon on call right now.” Becky looked at Riley when she said that, and Jett couldn’t help but flush.

Aunt Becky was super smart, and if anyone in the family was going to figure out what was going on between Jett and Riley, it would be her.

“But she did say she would come by when she gets the chance,” Becky said. “Check on everyone and all that.”

Jett’s mom smiled, and it looked like she was about to cry. “Thank you all,” she said. “It means a lot that you’re here for us.”

Becky scoffed. “You’re family,” she said as Ember went to hug Jett’s mom. “We’ll always be here for you.”

“Besides,” Ember said, “we’re here for us too. I definitely want to see that baby when she comes out.”

“Not before I do,” Jett said, competing with her cousin.

“Hey,” Ember said, ruffling Jett’s hair, “I’m older.”

“And the baby’s my niece,” Jett said, lightly elbowing Ember, who rolled her eyes with a laugh.

The rest of the family was kind of used to their interactions, and they all laughed. However, Jett noticed that Riley was looking at them a little awkwardly, and she remembered that Riley didn’t even know her own family.

All Riley had ever known was a revolving door of different people throughout her entire life. She never got the chance to make life long connections with other people.

Suddenly, Jett felt incredibly sad. Riley had never known what it was like to tease a family member and still feel loved during. She’d never had siblings or cousins to bicker with and trust. Jett hoped that one day Riley would be able to feel the love of a family. Maybe Jett’s family would be the one?

* * *

The group waited in the waiting room for hours. Eventually, Ember and Becky convinced Jett’s mom to sit down, something that Jett wasn’t able to do. And, after an hour, Hannah’s parents finally arrived. They lived out of town and had to travel a long way to get there.

When a nurse eventually came into the waiting room, it was early in the morning, but still dark outside.

“Hannah Thompson,” the nurse called into the waiting room, and the entire group, including Riley, stood up. “The baby has been born and they are both doing well! Immediate family only please. The rest of you will be able to come back in the morning during regular visiting hours.”

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Ember and Becky groaned, and Jett gave Ember a quick hug and she nodded to Riley, before she followed her mom, Hannah's parents, and the nurse.

The nurse led the five of them to a hospital room, and when she opened the door to reveal Hannah and Brody, Jett couldn't help the gasp that left her lips when she saw the little bundle in Hannah's arms.

Brody looked up and smiled at Jett. "She's beautiful, bro," he said and Jett nodded, walking closer with everyone else.

The five of them took turns holding the baby, which Brody and Hannah decided to name Emma, and stayed for a little bit to chat and look at Emma. However, Hannah was exhausted, and they decided to leave after about an hour with the promise to visit tomorrow.

"Don't come before noon," Brody said. "Hannah needs her beauty rest."

Hannah laughed. "I don't know how much rest I'm going to be able to get," she said.

"Still," Brody said. "Tell everyone after noon."

"Of course," Jett and Brody's mom said before she gave Brody a kiss on the forehead. "I love you."

The five of them left the hospital room and when Jett walked back to the waiting area with her mom, she fully expected for Riley to be gone and for her to have to ask her mom for a ride to her car.

However, when she got to the waiting area, Riley was still there, looking around, and she smiled when her eyes met Jett's.

"How was it?" Riley asked.

"She was beautiful, it is honestly so amazing. That tiny little baby in her first moments of life," Jett said. "They named her Emma."

Riley smiled and then stood up, walking toward Jett. "So, I was wondering, would you want to go back to my place?" she asked. "Or would you rather me drop you off at your car?"

Jett had never stayed the night with Riley before, and if she had been thinking more clearly, she would have talked herself out of it. Staying the night together was something girlfriends did, and the two of them weren't dating. But Jett was tired, and while her brain wanted to keep her distance, her heart really liked Riley and the idea of waking up next to her.

"Your place sounds good," Jett said, and the two walked out together.

When they got to the parking lot, Riley reached for Jett's hand in the dark and Jett let her.

9

RILEY

Riley was at work, wondering why Dr. Everett was being more chatty than normal. She didn't mind it too much; the two had always gotten along well. Dr. Everett had moved from England a couple of years ago and often had bold ideas that matched Riley's own innovations. However, while the two would occasionally chit-chat, most

of their conversations were work-related.

Now, though, Dr. Everett was getting personal. Riley typically tried to keep her work and personal life separate. Which was funny if she thought about it, since lately she had been failing to do that with Jett.

Dr. Everett was talking about Jett's new niece, showing pictures to Riley, and talking about any updates in the little girl's life. Not that there was much since Emma was only a week old.

Riley smiled as Dr. Everett talked to her, but she couldn't help the unnerving feeling that she felt any time Dr. Everett would talk about what was going on in her family. Riley felt like an outsider, and she wondered what she had done to make Dr. Everett no longer feel that way. She supposed it had something to do with a particular tall and dark-haired firefighter paramedic,

"So, anyway, every Sunday we typically meet at Maria, Jett's mom's, house for lunch and hang out the entire day until supper, but she's been too busy being a new grandma and spending time with her son and daughter and law. So Becky and I decided to host it at our house this coming up Sunday instead," Dr. Everett said.

Riley nodded, passively wondering why Dr. Everett was telling her this.

"Anyway, I know that Becky is going to invite Jett," Dr. Everett said, "but we're expecting to see you there, too."

Riley choked on air. Being invited to a family gathering? There was no way that was real.

"What?" Riley said. "I can't—" She was interrupted by Dr. Everett raising her hand in front of Riley's face.

“No,” she said, “now that you and Jett are together, you’re part of the family.”

Jett and Riley together? They had never told anyone that they were together—hell, the two of them had never decided they were together. This had to be some kind of mistake. Dr. Everett must just be assuming things.

“We’re not together,” Riley said.

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Dr. Everett rolled her eyes and shot her a quick glare. “Right,” she said, unconvinced, “you just spend all of your off time together, flirt with each other in public and sleep together. But sure, you’re not together.”

Lucinda Everett wasn’t born yesterday.

Riley’s head was racing. She didn’t flirt with Jett in public, or at least she didn’t think she did. But maybe all of the looks and smiles were more noticeable than she had thought.

“I don’t think people who aren’t together stay for the seven-hour labor of someone’s niece,” Dr. Everett said, “which is exactly what Becky told me happened. She even said you stayed to wait for Jett after everyone else left. But whatever, if you want to say that you’re not together, fine, but you’re still coming to my house Sunday. You can pretend you aren’t together if you like!”

Riley looked at Dr. Everett, wide-eyed. She didn’t know what to do or say. She supposed the only thing really to do was to agree with her in order to avoid further argument, but she didn’t know how Jett felt about all of that.

“Okay,” Riley said, “but I’ll only go if Jett asks me, I don’t want to overstep.” She had no clue if that would or would not happen, but at least she wouldn’t show up at a family gathering where the woman she was most likely falling in love with didn’t want her there.

“Oh, she will,” Dr. Everett said with full confidence, and Riley just nodded, a little stunned at the invitation, before Dr. Everett started talking about her cats and getting

photos up on her phone.

That's lesbians for you, Riley thought to herself.

Riley let her talk about her beloved cats, Mr Sweetie Pants and Mr Toodle Rabbit, giving nods and hums where it was appropriate, but her mind was reeling. She was invited to a family gathering. She hadn't participated in any family events since she was a kid, and even then no matter how much her foster families tried to make her feel welcome, they were always just temporary families, and she always felt out of place.

She didn't know how she felt about going to Dr. Everett and her wife's house, but she decided she would worry about that later. After all, it was only Tuesday, and she had until Sunday before the event, if Jett even invited her.

* * *

Because of their shifts, the next time Riley saw Jett was on Thursday. The two decided to meet at the bar after work for a couple of drinks, and when Jett texted Riley, she also said she had something she wanted to talk about.

Riley was nervous about that. She didn't know what Jett wanted to talk about, but in her previous relationships and flings, wanting to talk usually meant something bad, or a breakup.

When Riley got to the bar, just like last time, Jett was already there, so Riley joined her at her table.

Jett looked beautiful, her short dark hair slicked back, she was wearing tight jeans and a casual shirt in a beautiful shade of blue with buttons undone that revealed a hint of her breasts that Riley couldn't stop her gaze going to.

Jett had on some mascara and it made her eyes even more magnetic.

“Hey,” Riley said, sitting down.

Jett smiled at her; it was a happy smile, not a strained one, which settled Riley’s nerves slightly.

“You look beautiful,” Riley said and she watched as Jett blushed.

“Thanks,” Jett said, pushing over a glass. “I already bought you a drink. It’s a vodka cranberry like last time, but if you don’t like it, or want something else, let me know and I’ll get it for you.”

Riley smiled. Okay, Jett definitely seemed nervous, and Riley really didn’t want to beat around the bush and make either of them wait any longer for whatever was on Jett’s mind.

“So,” Riley started, “what did you want to talk to me about?”

Jett smiled, but this time it was slightly strained, and Riley’s belly fluttered with nerves.

“So, my family has a lunch and supper every Sunday, and my Aunt Becky was wondering if you would like to join us this week,” Jett said.

Oh, it was that. Riley felt silly for being so nervous, but when she thought about Jett’s words, she realized that Jett didn’t say anything about her wanting her there.

“Do you want me to come?” Riley asked. “Or is it just your aunt?”

Jett looked taken aback. “I mean, I would love it if you came,” she said, “but only if

you want to.”

“Well,” Riley said, “Dr. Everett already asked me to come and I said I would if you invited me, so I kind of have to.”

Jett laughed. “Well, as persuasive as Lucinda can be, you really don’t have to if you don’t want.”

“No, it’s fine,” Riley said. “If you’ll have me, I’d love to come.”

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Jett smiled. “Perfect,” she said. “Plus you’ll get to see the baby.”

Riley nodded. “Oh, I’m excited.”

“Perfect,” Jett said again. “I’ll pick you up around noon.”

Riley took a sip of her drink feeling nerves building deep in her belly. “That sounds great.”

* * *

Riley was definitely nervous as she got ready Sunday. She took a shower and started getting dressed over an hour before Jett was supposed to pick her up. When she was done, she sat on her couch and tuned on the TV.

Jett had told her that she didn’t have to worry about bringing any food, which was good because Jett knew that Riley was a terrible cook and Riley had no clue what she would have made anyway.

When Jett finally got to Riley’s apartment, she knocked on the door and Riley immediately answered. Part of her was more than ready to get this over with, but she was also curious and wanted to learn more about Jett and her family. From what little she had already seen, Jett’s family seemed incredibly close. Riley didn’t know how she was going to fit into that kind of gathering, but she liked that there were so many strong women in Jett’s family and she already knew Lucinda Everett well.

“You ready?” Jett asked with a breathtaking smile.

“I think so,” Riley said.

“Nervous?” Jett asked. Of course she would clock that.

“A bit,” Riley said, although she hated to admit it.

“Don’t worry,” Jett said. “You’ll be fine. And fair warning, my family members like to tease each other a lot. I don’t think they’ll do or say anything to you, but if they do and you’re not comfortable, just say something. Though I do hope you’re okay with hugs, because you will probably get hugged around a dozen times.”

Riley gulped. She wasn’t a hugger, or generally a very affectionate person, but she could do this. She helped people survive horrific injuries; she could meet and interact with Jett’s family. After all, she had already met almost everyone who was going to be there at least once and she worked with a third of them. This wouldn’t be too difficult, she told herself, taking deep breaths.

Riley and Jett talked in the car on the way to Becky and Lucinda’s house. It wasn’t about anything important, just whatever each of them could think about, but it helped calm Riley’s nerves. And when Jett pulled into her aunt’s driveway, Riley was laughing at some lame joke Jett told.

Jett smiled at Riley and even got out to open her car door. Riley blushed slightly, but tried to hide it. She definitely wasn’t used to other people doing things for her, but there was something about Jett doing something for her that made her heart flutter.

“I made sweet tea, baked mac and cheese, and blueberry muffins,” Jett said. “They’re in the backseat and if you don’t mind helping me carry them in, I’d appreciate it.”

“Of course,” Riley said, immediately going to help.

It was a juggling act. Riley didn't want to be the one to open the door, so she balanced the muffins on top of the casserole dish holding the macaroni and cheese, and Jett carried the sweet tea so that she could open her Aunt Becky's front door.

Riley followed Jett into the house and saw Becky, Lucinda, Ember, and a little girl who looked exactly like Ember sitting in the living room talking. She looked outside through the sliding patio doors and saw Jett's mom and an unfamiliar man talking in lawn chairs.

Riley set down the food where Jett showed her, and followed Jett as the other woman walked into the living room to face her extended family.

"So," Jett said, "where are Hannah and Josephine?"

"Josephine is coming over later," Ember said. "She just has a little bit of paperwork left, but it shouldn't take her long."

"And Hannah is in the bathroom breastfeeding," Becky said.

Jett looked confused. "Why the bathroom?"

Becky shrugged her shoulders. "Beats me," she said. "I told her she could breastfeed out here. It's nothing any of us haven't seen before."

"And I offered to let her use my old bedroom," Ember said, "but she said no."

"I'm sure she's fine, though," Becky said. "New mothers are still figuring it all out."

Lucinda smiled and laughed a little. "I don't know how you all did it," Lucinda looked to Becky and Ember. "I'm still figuring it all out and I think having a baby would have tipped me over the edge!"

Everyone laughed at that, and Riley found herself smiling.

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As soon as she did, she made eye contact with Lucinda, who immediately stood up and walked toward Riley.

“Riley,” she said, lightly patting her on the shoulder, “it’s good to see you here.”

“Thanks,” Riley said. “It’s good to be here.”

“Who are you?” the little girl with wild red hair who was sitting in Ember’s lap asked.

“I’m Riley,” Riley said. “I work with Dr. Everett over here and I’m friends with Jett.” At the mention of being friends, Riley saw at least two eye rolls.

“You can call me Lucinda,” Lucinda said. “And friends, really?”

Riley was a little frozen and stunned, but she didn’t know how else to respond, so she just nodded, resulting in more eye rolls. But her and Jett had never talked about what to call their relationship. Sure, meeting the family had always been something that Riley had thought of as something you do with your girlfriend, but the two of them still hadn’t labeled their relationship.

Riley looked to Jett to see if she said the right thing, but when she looked at Jett, she had an unreadable expression on her face and then sighed.

“Can you all just leave it?” Jett asked. “Really.”

“Okay,” Jett’s aunt, Becky, said. “I’m sorry if we’ve made you uncomfortable.

Would you two like to sit and talk with us?”

“Actually,” Jett said, “I was thinking about introducing Riley to Brody. And then, hopefully Hannah will be out by the time we’re done.”

“Okay,” Ember said, “but we’ll see you back inside in a little bit.”

Jett nodded and led Riley to the back patio. When they arrived outside, Riley saw Jett’s mom sitting on a patio chair and in the patio chair beside her was a man she didn’t know.

The two of them were looking into the backyard away from the house, having a conversation that Riley couldn’t hear. The only reason she knew they were talking was because Jett’s mom’s mouth was moving and the man was nodding along even though Riley couldn’t see his face very well.

“Hey guys,” Jett said, interrupting the inaudible conversation. The man turned in his chair to look at Jett and Riley, and when Riley saw him, she was shocked with how similar to Jett he looked. He also had sharp, angular features and short dark hair. Though his hair was styled in a more masculine fashion and his jaw was a little more square with a bit of stubble on his cheeks.

Riley knew that this man was Jett’s brother from Jett talking about him, but looking at him she would have been able to tell even if she hadn’t said anything, they looked that similar.

Looking at Jett’s mom, Riley realized that the two Thompson siblings must have taken after their dad. Their mom was a lot softer, less muscular, and her features were not as sharp. Also, she had lighter brown hair that was starting to gray.

Brody looked at Riley and looked at Jett and smiled wide before he stood up.

“Hey bro,” he said, wrapping Jett in a hug and Riley watched Jett hug him back. “Who’s this?” Brody asked, pulling away, and looking at Riley again. Riley felt the intense pressure to make a good impression with Jett’s family, but she wasn’t exactly sure how to do that.

So Riley held out her hand for a shake and smiled, albeit a little awkwardly. “Hi, I’m Riley,” she said, but instead of shaking her hand, Brody looked at Jett with a laughing smile.

“She’s my friend,” Jett said as way of an explanation.

Brody laughed. “Yeah, okay,” he said. “Whatever you say, little bro.” He turned back to Riley and opened his arms.

Riley didn’t even have time to brace for the hug that Brody gave her, but she tried her best to accept it. Riley wasn’t very familiar with affection, but it was clear that the Thompson family had no such issues, so Riley hugged back.

Brody pulled away after a short moment. “Any friend of Jett’s is family,” he said, putting an emphasis on the word friend and Riley blushed a little while Jett smacked her brother’s arm and he laughed.

“What?” Brody asked Jett. “You called her your friend, so that’s what I’m doing.”

“You’re going to make her uncomfortable,” Jett said, looking at Riley.

Riley was honestly a little uncomfortable, but people knowing about their relationship was not why. She felt a little bit like she was invading on Jett’s family and playing girlfriend when she didn’t know if that’s what she was or not.

“It’s okay,” Riley said. “It doesn’t bother me.”

“See,” Brody said, vindicated. “Besides, you’re my bro; I have to tease you.”

Jett laughed, and so did Riley. She didn’t know how siblings were supposed to act, but this was definitely not what she imagined. She liked it, however; it seemed like the two of them really loved each other even as Jett smacked her brother’s arm.

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“Anyway, when you two get married, you do have to let me be the maid of honor,” Brody said.

Jett choked on laughter. “Yeah right.”

“Oh, come on,” Brody said. “We both know that you don’t have actual friends to make into your bridesmaid.”

Jett gasped, mock offended, before she stuck her tongue out at her brother. “Fine,” she said, “but only if you wear a dress.”

“Okay,” Brody said with a completely serious expression on his face, “but you better know I’ll steal the show. I’m gonna rock that dress so hard all the girls will cry.”

Jett laughed and so did Riley. The idea was too funny. But she was also starting to get a little worried. Here Jett and Brody were talking about marriage and Riley didn’t even know where their relationship stood. Was that normal banter between siblings, or did Jett see more of a relationship with Riley than she let on?

Riley looked at Jett’s mom, who was watching her children argue and rolling her eyes. She caught Riley’s eye and smiled. “Just ignore them,” she said. “Those two are rarely ever serious.”

“Oh, I’m serious about this one,” Jett argued. “If I ever get married, I’m making him wear a dress.”

“I am also serious,” Brody said. “I’m going to look hot as fuck in said dress.”

Jett's mom rolled her eyes again and looked back at Riley to smile again. She walked over to Riley, who was able to prepare herself for a hug this time. Jett's mom's hugs were definitely weaker than her brother's, and it was a short hug, to Riley's relief.

"It's good to see you again, sweetheart," Jett's mom and Riley immediately understood where Jett got the calling her sweetheart thing from.

Riley smiled. "It's good to see you again, too," she said, and then looked back to Brody, who was still teasing Jett.

"Oh, and congratulations on the baby," Riley said.

Brody stopped his smacking war with Jett and turned to Riley with a wide, happy, new-father smile. "Thanks," he said. "She's absolutely beautiful. Though it's kind of crazy to realize that I'm now a dad. I had nine months to prepare and it still doesn't feel real."

Riley smiled as Brody reached for his phone and offered to show Riley some pictures of the baby, Emma, and she let him show her every picture he had taken—and there were a lot.

The baby was beautiful and although Riley wasn't sure she was saying the right things, she did her best.

"Speaking of Emma..." Jett's mom said after Brody finished showing Riley the pictures. "Hannah is in the living room right now, so why don't we join them?" she asked and pointed through the glass patio doors to the living room where a young woman with long brown curly hair was holding an infant.

Brody saw his wife and his face lit up. "Good idea," he said.

The four of them walked back inside and Becky looked up at them from the couch as Riley closed the patio doors behind her.

“It’s about time you two came back in,” Becky said. “What on Earth were you all doing?”

“Brody was showing Riley pictures of Emma,” Jett said.

Becky laughed and nodded. “Oh yeah, that’ll keep him going for a while.”

Riley walked over to where Hannah was standing, in order to introduce herself.

“Hi,” Riley said, a little nervous, “I’m Riley.”

“She’s Jett’s friend,” Brody said.

Becky laughed and pointed at Jett. “See, even your brother sees it and you expect us not to?” she asked.

Jett’s face was burning bright red. “Oh, shut up.”

Riley was definitely unfamiliar with this kind of family dynamic—the close proximity, conversations, teasing, and telling one another off. She looked around at everyone else and they all seemed incredibly comfortable.

“It’s nice to meet you, Riley,” Hannah said. “I’m Hannah.”

Riley smiled and looked at the baby in Hannah’s arms. She gave the infant a tiny wave.

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“Your daughter is beautiful,” Riley said, and Hannah smiled.

“Thank you,” Hannah said. “Would you like to hold her?”

Riley was shocked that a practical stranger would entrust her to hold her baby, but she also really wanted to.

“I haven’t held a baby that tiny in so long,” Riley said, “so I should probably sit down if I do.”

“There’s an empty chair right there,” Becky said, pointing out a forest green armchair.

“You can sit right there and I’ll put Emma in your arms,” Hannah said.

“Thank you,” Riley said, her heart warming. She sat in the chair at the same time as Ember’s text tone went off and she went to check her phone.

As Ember was reading her text messages, Hannah put Emma into Riley’s arms, and Riley looked at the tiny baby that she was holding. She looked like she was half between asleep and awake, her eyes fluttering open every so often.

“So Josephine just texted me,” Ember said. “She’s going to be here in about twenty to thirty minutes, but she said it’s okay if we start eating before her.”

Becky scoffed and wrapped her arm around Lucinda’s neck. “I can wait half an hour to eat. I think we all can,” she said and then looked at Hannah, “except you, Momma.

If you're hungry you go eat."

Hannah shook her head. "I'm good right now," she said, pulling away from Riley and sitting at another chair.

Riley looked at Emma and smiled sweetly.

Becky pointed at Riley. "You better be careful holding that one," she said, "or you'll be wanting one."

Riley shook her head and felt herself blushing. "I don't think so," she said, "I don't think I'd make a good enough Mom." And it was true. As perfect and precious as the tiny baby was, Riley would be terrified if she had one herself. She had no Mom to look up to herself as a child, so what would make her think that was something she could be to a tiny baby?

"Oh, you'll change your mind," Becky chuckled, good naturedly.

Sometimes she did wish that she had a sibling in the way that Jett did. Riley would love to be an aunt and a helper sometimes. Though, if she was honest, babies and children did scare her somewhat. She wasn't sure what she was supposed to do, and she was terrified of the idea of being alone and something happening to the kid.

But she was definitely happy to hold Jett's niece.

* * *

While waiting for Josephine to show up, everyone started talking about all kinds of things, and the conversation pulled into about ten directions. Riley couldn't keep up, even though she tried to at first. She didn't want to talk and wake up the baby or have her start crying, so she just tried to listen. But after a while she gave up on that,

opting to get distracted looking at Emma.

When Dr. Josephine Mars finally arrived immaculate in dark pants and a cream colored blouse, she came into a bustling living room smiling but looking exhausted.

“Paperwork get to you?” Ember asked.

“Oh, you have no idea,” Josephine said before she went to sit in her wife’s lap and gave her a quick kiss.

Natalie looked at them like she was used to it, but then scrunched up her face.

“You know you’re going to get cooties like that,” Natalie said.

“Nuh-uh,” Ember said.

“Yuh-huh,” Natalie nodded.

“No,” Ember said, “because only boys can give you cooties.”

“That’s not true,” Natalie said. “My teacher said that anyone can give you cooties.”

Lucinda and Becky were both laughing at this interaction, but stopped when Natalie turned on them and pointed at Becky, who still had her arm around Lucinda.

“You’re going to get cooties too,” she said.

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“Well you see, little girl, we’re married,” Becky said. “And if you’re married, your wife can’t give you cooties.”

“Really?” Natalie asked, but it didn’t sound like she was buying it.

“Yes really,” Becky said. “That’s why you can get cooties, ‘cause you’re too young to get married.”

Natalie frowned. “I guess so,” she said and everyone had a good chuckle, though her moms just rolled their eyes.

Riley found that she really loved watching everyone interact. She never really got this growing up, and even though she was a little uncomfortable and didn’t always know how to react or what she was supposed to do, she felt accepted amongst the Thompson Family. Jett’s family certainly was something else. Riley kind of wished that she had had that kind of upbringing growing up, but she also knew that she was the way she was because of how she grew up, the bad and the good.

“Since Momma’s here, does that mean we can eat now?” Natalie asked.

“Sure thing, little munchkin,” Becky said, moving to stand up.

Hannah walked over to Riley and Emma and looked like she was about to get the infant back, but Riley shook her head.

“If you want, I can hold her while you go eat,” Riley said. “And you can pick her back up when you’re done.”

Hannah looked at Riley and had a relieved expression on her face.

Riley could only imagine how difficult it was to be a new mom, and how difficult it must be to try to balance a baby and a plate of food.

“Thank you so much,” Hannah said. “I’d really appreciate that.”

Riley smiled and everyone left to go to the kitchen to get food. Well, everyone except Riley and Jett and Emma. While everyone else was walking to the kitchen, Jett walked over to Riley and sat on the floor in front of her.

Jett smiled warmly. “You know,” she said, “that was really sweet of you.”

Riley shrugged. “I just wanted to help,” she said, and then whispered, “Plus I think I’m starting to get really attached to Emma.”

Jett laughed and smiled. “As you should,” she said. “I do have the best niece, after all.”

Riley smiled and looked down at Emma’s peaceful sleeping face again. “You sure do,” she said, and after that, the two of them sat in silence, just watching the baby and occasionally glancing at one another with smiles on their faces.

When Hannah came back having eaten, Riley tried not to show how reluctant she was to give her baby back. She waved at the little thing once more and smiled at Hannah.

“Thank you,” Hannah said.

“Oh, I was happy to do it,” Riley said, and then she and Jett walked to the kitchen together, passing the dining room where everyone else was finishing up their food and talking.

Riley wasn't used to eating this well, so she grabbed a little bit of everything, as it all looked and smelled so delicious.

When she and Jett went to the dining room they were welcomed by everyone but Brody, Hannah, and Emma, who were in the living room once again. And, once again, Riley felt a little overwhelmed and out of place.

"That hungry?" Becky asked, pointing at Riley's overflowing plate.

"It all looked so good," Riley said. "I wanted a little bit of everything."

Becky laughed. "Well at least you've got a good appetite, but I'm sure your food is good too."

Riley paled a little. "I, um, I actually can't cook," she said.

Becky looked a little shocked, but not judgmental. "Really?"

"No one ever taught me," Riley explained.

"Well, I'm sure Jett would love to teach you sometime," Becky said. "She's a great cook."

Jett looked surprised, like she was wondering why she hadn't thought of that before. "Oh yeah," she said, looking kindly at Riley, "I would love to teach you sometime."

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“Thank you,” Riley said, smiling back. “I’d like that.”

She was still trying to make a good impression, but she wasn’t prepared for this. She barely knew what the word family meant and she definitely hadn’t expected to be treated like it. Even though everyone dialed back a little bit with Riley, there was still teasing, jokes, and inappropriate questions.

“Do you guys use toys?” Becky looked at Jett and then Riley, deadly serious.

Once Riley realized what kind of toys Becky was meaning, she wanted the ground to open up and swallow her up.

“Oh my God, Aunt Becky,” Jett said, covering her face. “I’m begging you, please shut up.”

“I’m just saying,” Becky said. “Wicked Orchid have just opened a store in Phoenix Ridge and they give discounts for healthcare workers and first responders and they have an amazing range for lesbians, I must say, don’t they, baby. I mean just last week we picked up their new...” she smiled cheekily at Lucinda who laughed back at her.

“Becky!” she admonished. “I don’t think Jett and Riley want to know about which toys we have!”

Riley laughed uncomfortably. She couldn’t believe that they were just talking about this at the dinner table. Even if Jett seemed mortified, the rest of the family didn’t seem to be.

“I definitely don’t want to know about your toys!” Jett exclaimed.

“Normally I wouldn’t want to know either,” Ember said, “but I could definitely deal with a discount right now!”

“Oh my God,” Jett complained once again, “Riley is never going to want to come back here ever again.”

“Ah, nonsense,” Becky said. “The woman has been elbow-deep in blood. I doubt a little sex talk is going to scare her off.”

Becky certainly was a character, and as the day wore on, Riley found herself enjoying the older woman’s company and getting to know her more.

Riley had always liked Lucinda when they worked together. They often both had unusual and innovative ideas, and Lucinda was not afraid to call out nurses or even other doctors when they were being idiots. And while Riley tried to keep her personal life separate from her work life, Lucinda had no problem talking about whatever was on her mind.

Becky seemed to have a similar, nothing-is-off-bounds view of conversation. And as Riley watched her and Lucinda interact it was clear that the two of them loved each other very much. In fact, every relationship in Jett’s family seemed to be working well, and everyone seemed to be deeply in love. It made Riley wonder, why hadn’t Jett asked her to be her girlfriend yet?

Did Jett not want that kind of relationship?

Riley wasn’t sure what she wanted in a relationship, but she found herself falling for Jett the more she learned about her, even though she was scared about making it official. All of her past relationships had ended in disaster and Riley wasn’t sure that

she even knew how to have a healthy relationship.

Was something wrong with her? Did Jett maybe sense it? Or was something else stopping the other woman from furthering their relationship? Riley knew that Jett had had a few long-term relationships, but not too many. And Riley didn't even know if Jett wanted another one, if that was something she was willing to try again.

Riley was tempted to bite the bullet and ask Jett to be her girlfriend, but she was scared. When it came to initiating things like that, Riley was always passive. And besides, Riley told herself that she'd rather keep things as they were than lose Jett, which was something that might happen if she asked to label their relationship.

Riley wished she had some of the confidence she had while working in the ER when it came to relationships, but unfortunately for her, she was in way over her head. She wondered why Jett didn't say anything either. Was Jett also scared and nervous? The idea of the firefighter paramedic being too scared to ask her to be her girlfriend was a funny thought—but so was the idea of an accomplished trauma surgeon being too scared to do the same.

* * *

The rest of the day continued smoothly, and after a while, Riley started to get used to Jett's family, even though they were definitely different than anything she had experienced before. She loved watching the tight knit group even when she wasn't sure how she fit into it.

It did bring some worries to Riley, though. She was beginning to realize that her and Jett's worlds were vastly different. Riley hardly knew what the word family meant, whereas Jett was surrounded by it. She didn't know what that would mean for their relationship.

Riley was sitting at the dining room table with Natalie and the two of them were drawing pictures. Riley was no artist, but the six-year-old girl at the table with her didn't seem to care.

Riley was making colorful hearts all over her paper, and every time she tried to see what Natalie was doing, the little girl would cover up her paper and stick her tongue out at Riley.

"Stop it, it's a secret," she said.

"Okay, okay," Riley said raising her hands in surrender. "I'm sorry." Riley went back to coloring her paper.

After a while, Jett came back into the dining room after talking with her family.

"Hey, sweetheart," Jett said. "Are you ready to go?"

"Sure," Riley said, standing up and pushing her paper of colorful hearts over to Natalie so that the girl could keep it.

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“Wait,” Natalie said with urgency in her voice, “I’m not done yet.”

“Baby, we need to go,” Jett said.

“No!” Natalie demanded. “You have to wait until I’m finished.”

Riley laughed and Jett shook her head and rolled her eyes in a playful manner.

“Okay, fine,” she said.

Natalie started to rush her drawing, so it didn’t take long for her to finish. While she was working on it, Jett and Riley just looked at one another.

“Okay, now I’m done,” Natalie said, standing up from the table and walking with her paper to present it to Riley. “Ta-da!”

Riley looked at the paper with two people standing close to one another with sunshine and a rainbow in the background. One person was taller than the other, and the shorter person had a wide smile on its face.

“It’s you and Auntie Jett,” Natalie said, pointing at the shorter figure first and then the taller one.

Riley smiled. “Oh my goodness, it’s beautiful,” she said, and she laughed a little. Jett wasn’t too much taller than her, but she supposed that in a child’s mind a couple inches was noteworthy.

“You gonna take it home and put it on your fridge?” Natalie asked.

“Of course,” Riley said. “I don’t have any pictures on my fridge, so this is going to have its own special place of honor.”

Natalie smiled and gave Riley a hug. “I like you,” Natalie said and Riley’s heart warmed.

She looked at Jett, who smiled at her and went to ruffle Natalie’s already-wild hair.

“Okay kiddo, we’ve got to get going,” Jett said.

“Okay.” Natalie frowned and wrapped Jett in a hug. “I’ll see you later, right?”

“Of course,” Jett said, “and I love you.”

“I love you too,” Natalie said before turning to Riley, “and you, too.”

Riley smiled, and for the first time in a long time she said words that she never heard growing up. “I love you too.”

The two of them prepared to leave, and Riley followed Jett into the kitchen, confused.

“Aunt Becky was worried about you feeding yourself since you can’t cook and all and told me to grab you leftovers,” Jett said, looking in the cabinets for a large plastic container before she started to fill it up with food.

“Oh, thank you,” Riley said, “but you don’t have to do that. I can take care of myself.”

Jett just gave her a look and kept piling food into the container. “It’s best that you take some anyway. I’m usually left taking home the leftovers and I never know what to do with all of them.”

Riley just nodded.

When they finished and got out to the car after a long goodbye to the rest of the family and well wishes to get home safely, Riley found herself drained. In a way, it was a good drained, but she found herself wondering how Jett seemingly still had energy as she put the leftovers and picture in the backseat and then reminded Riley to buckle up in a chipper voice.

10

JETT

Jett was not having a good week so far. Two days after the Sunday lunch and supper with her family, and she had already responded to two dead on arrivals, multiple car crashes, fires, it all seemed to be happening.

She barely had any time to see Riley, and when she even thought about her a lot, her mind was muddled. Jett didn't know what to think about Riley or how to feel about her.

Things were moving so quickly; on one hand she was okay with that, but on the other hand, it was overwhelming.

Everything was incredible when they were together. There was an ease to every interaction, Jett felt safe with her. And the sex... well the sex was simply mind-blowing in a way that Jett had never experienced before. Jett couldn't stop thinking about Rileys muscular tattooed body, her masculine energy, her piercing green eyes. She was so damn attractive it was impossible not to want her.

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Jett's family seemed to really like Riley, which was incredibly important to Jett, but she wasn't sure how Riley felt about them.

After Jett dropped Riley home Sunday, she asked Riley how things went. Riley said that she had a good time, but that she wasn't used to doing things like that and that she was overwhelmed.

Jett knew about Riley's upbringing and knew that she didn't really have much of a family growing up. Jett wanted to give Riley grace and take her at her word, and just accept that Jett's family was just something Riley would have to get used to, but a nagging feeling kept permeating the back of Jett's mind.

She was filled with doubts and questions about what they were doing, wondering where this relationship was headed. Riley wasn't Jett's girlfriend, but did Jett want her to be? Jett didn't know.

Throughout the days, Jett barely had time to think about Riley, but when she went home at night, that's all she thought about. She wanted Riley to get along well with her family and for their relationship to grow and progress, but that idea also scared her.

Jett knew that if she wanted to be with Riley for a long time that she would have to open up and be vulnerable with her, and that was terrifying. She had already told Riley things that she had never told anyone else, but to be open with Riley about her feelings and wants? That was a whole other beast.

It didn't help that Jett barely saw Riley lately in the hospital. She would occasionally

catch glimpses of her as she rushed away in the opposite direction, but the two hadn't worked together since the week before.

That desire to see Riley at work worried Jett. Was she becoming too dependent on Riley? Jett's career also meant a lot to her, and she didn't want a relationship to compromise that, but she couldn't help but desire Riley whenever another doctor took Jett's patient in the emergency room.

* * *

Riley texted Jett Wednesday night after Jett finally got home from work after another hellish shift.

Riley:Hey

Jett:Hi

Jett was exhausted and ready to hop in the shower.

Riley:I was wondering if you would like to hang out at my place tonight.

Jett:Not tonight, sorry. I'm tired.

Riley:Okay. Good night.

Jett didn't respond. She wasn't sure why, but she knew she was being cold and she felt bad about it, and she just couldn't bring herself to respond. She found herself starting to distance herself from Riley. Just like she had done in her past relationships that eventually ended in disaster.

Jett didn't even know entirely why she was doing that, so she just told herself that she

was tired, that she would hang out with Riley another time.

* * *

Jett was filled with anxiety throughout the week. She wasn't sure why, but she kept feeling like something was wrong. It all came to a head on Thursday when Jett was rushing a patient into the emergency room. The doctor that greeted her was not Riley, and instead, Jett saw Riley and Lucinda rushing off together in the opposite direction.

Jett wondered what on Earth could be so bad that it required two trauma surgeons. Why couldn't one of them be spared to help her? Why couldn't Riley help her?

The doctor that helped Jett, Dr. Carroll, was good at her job and did everything she could to help Jett's patient, but the patient still died and Jett couldn't help but blame Riley. She knew that it wasn't right and that it was unfair, but Jett's feelings were all over the place. They weren't right or fair.

Jett was beginning to wonder if a relationship with Riley was a good idea, if it was sustainable, or if it was just going to crash and burn. She couldn't deny her feelings for Riley, but they were starting to lead her down some dark and uncomfortable places. Jett wondered if a relationship with Riley was even possible, or if she should have ended it before it turned into disaster.

Jett also didn't know how Riley felt. Both women had their moments when it came to sharing and exposing themselves, but they also each struggled to convey their emotions. Jett felt like Riley was holding something back. She felt it before the family lunch and supper Sunday, but it got worse as that day wore on.

Jett wondered if Riley had issues with Jett's family. She had said otherwise, but Jett was worried. Her family was the most important thing to her and she definitely couldn't be with someone who didn't respect that or didn't want that.

Jett didn't know. She just didn't know.

* * *

As Jett walked out of the room with Dr. Carroll, both of their heads looking at the ground and a frown on each of the devastated women's faces, she could hear whispers as she walked.

At first, Jett didn't hear what they were saying, but after a minute she realized that she was hearing her name and Riley's name.

Jett looked up and saw a nurse looking at her before she looked away, giggling, and Jett realized what was happening. Her and Riley were becoming hospital drama. Jett froze.

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Normally, such things didn't bother her. Rumors and gossip never really affected Jett before, but that's because most of the rumors that had affected Jett in her life had been false. Having heard hers and Dr. Parker's names come out of the nurses' mouths, Jett knew that at least some things they were saying were true.

Jett's first thought was Riley. How would she react when she found out that everyone was gossiping about the two of them? Jett didn't want Riley to be upset or embarrassed.

But then Jett remembered where she was and what just happened. She had bigger things to worry about, like the fact that she had just lost a patient. Jett went to one of the chairs in the hallway of the Emergency Room and sat down before she put her head in her hands.

Jett didn't know how long she sat there, but it wasn't very long before she felt a hand rubbing her shoulder. Jett looked up, and it was Riley, looking concerned. Lucinda was next to her, frowning.

"What's wrong?" Riley asked Jett.

Jett opened her mouth to tell her, but found that she couldn't say what she meant to. Jett closed her mouth and opened it once again before answering.

"Nothing, I just need to be alone," Jett said, and then she ran outside of the Emergency Room to the ambulance bay, where she threw up.

* * *

Jett was barely responding to Riley, who had only trying to be kind to her. She still felt the loss of her patient acutely and she still felt nothing but confusion when she thought about Riley and their relationship.

All she was doing was pushing Riley away and she knew that, but at the same time, she just didn't know how to stop it.

It was Saturday morning, and Jett hadn't yet asked Riley back to her family's Sunday gathering, and she wasn't sure that she wanted to. This time the lunch and supper was going to be held at Jett's mom's house, the house that Jett grew up in. Jett was worried that Riley seeing where Jett grew up would be opening up too much.

But, Saturday she got a series of texts from Riley.

Riley:Hey, I'm sorry

Riley:I didn't know if you wanted me to come to your Sunday gathering

Jett was a little worried at that. She knew that Riley was expected to be there after how much her family had liked her the previous week, and Jett didn't want to disappoint her family or Riley, but whatever weird stuff was going on in her head was really affecting her, her relationship with Riley, and her desire to be around Riley, even Riley was all she could think about.

Riley:But I can't make it.

Riley:I'm booked on to run the ER that day.

Riley was giving her a 'get out.' Even now, Riley was being kind to her, clearly knowing that Jett was going through something and not wanting to make it awkward for her.

Jett felt sick at her own behaviour.

Riley: It was either me or Dr. Everett to do it, so I volunteered so she didn't have to.

Jett thought it was cute how Riley always properly addressed everyone, and while at first she was a little relieved that Riley couldn't make it, she immediately felt guilty. Riley wasn't able to make it so that Lucinda could come. Riley truly was kind, even if she was brash and reactive sometimes, but the more Jett had gotten to know her, the more she had mellowed out.

Now, Jett was being the reactive one, worried about things that hadn't even happened yet. The Jett she was in relationships was definitely different sometimes than the Jett she was at work. Jett tried to be level-headed, but Riley made that difficult.

Riley: But maybe we can hang out next week?

Riley: I'm free Tuesday, if you want to?

Jett: Yeah

Is that seriously all you have to say, Jett?

Jett couldn't believe it even as she text it. Her fingers touching the screen on her phone. Her mind making the decisions, even while she hated herself for them.

* * *

On Sunday, Jett wasn't too worried about showing up without Riley; she just told everyone who asked that Riley was at work. They were a family of emergency workers. None knew better than them that emergency work most certainly continues on nights and weekends. Her mother was understandably upset—she was always the

kind to welcome anyone into the family no questions asked—but Jett was kind of surprised when Hannah equally missed Riley.

Jett hadn't quite realized how much of an impression Riley had left on her family. Even Natalie had to ask Jett if Riley had put her picture on the fridge like she promised.

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“Of course, sweetheart,” Jett said. “I watched her put it up, myself.” In fact, Riley had made Jett stop by the store on the way home to pick up a set of magnets because she realized midway on the drive home that she didn’t have any to hang up a picture with.

Jett had smiled as she helped Riley put her leftovers in the fridge, and Riley made Jett help her position the picture in just the right way.

She had constantly been asking if it looked right or if Jett thought Natalie would like it.

Jett had thought it was sweet, but now her heart clenched. How could she have thought that Riley didn’t like her family?

* * *

“Jett, have you got a minute?” Lucinda asked and Jett knew from the look on her face she wanted to talk in private. Everyone else was busy chatting, they wouldn’t be missed.

Jett nodded and lead Lucinda upstairs to her childhood bedroom. She knew something was up as soon as she saw her Aunt Becky follow them up the stairs.

Uh oh...

When Jett got to the bedroom that was currently being renovated and redecorated so that Jett’s mom had a place for Emma when she came over, Jett left the door open so that Lucinda and Aunt Becky could come inside. Becky closed the door and stood in

front of it with her arms crossed.

Jett gulped. She felt like a child being scolded again. She wasn't sure what she had done wrong, but she was sure they would tell her.

Lucinda was the first to speak. "So the other day Riley asked me if anything had happened in the family. Apparently she was worried because you were barely talking to her," Lucinda said.

Jett's heart dropped. They were here to talk about her relationship. And maybe she needed it, but Jett definitely didn't want to be lectured.

"Of course, I told her that nothing had happened," Lucinda continued, "but what on Earth is going on between you two? Has she done anything? Has she hurt you?"

"Uh, nothing," Jett said, but she didn't sound so sure of herself. "I promise. Riley has been nothing but kind to me. Nothing is going on." Becky rolled her eyes quietly and Lucinda scoffed.

"I might not see you very much at work, but Lucinda does," Becky said. "So then, tell me why she's said she's hardly seen you and Riley together since last Sunday?"

Jett didn't have an answer. "I don't know," she said. She did care for Riley, she really did, but she wasn't sure if that was enough.

Becky sighed. "I know you've had a hard week, but you can't neglect people who care about you because of it," she said.

Jett lowered her head. She was genuinely starting to question if her relationship with Riley could work with her career. Jett deeply cared for her job, but now she found herself having negative feelings toward Riley for no reason because of it, and then

there was the hospital gossip.

“Look,” Becky said, “I know how you are. I’ve seen how you handle relationships, and it’s not healthy. You can’t just avoid people when you start to develop too many feelings and you can’t just hide yourself in your career. If Riley has done anything wrong, or you don’t have feelings for her, that is totally fine. But, I see you, Jett. I know when you are running away from something.” Becky’s sharp eyes bored into Jett’s very soul. Nobody knew her, really knew her, like her aunt.

Plenty of people loved her, but it was her ever astute Aunt Becky that truly saw all of her- the good and the bad.

Lucinda nodded. “A career can give you a sense of purpose and it can be something that you love, and that’s okay, but your job will never love you back,” she said. “You need something in your life that you will.”

“Of course, you have us as your family,” Aunt Becky said, “but having a devoted partner can only help you.”

Jett wasn’t sure about that. She knew that opening her heart to new people not only was scary and required vulnerability, but it also required a lot of work. She wasn’t sure that she could do the work, and she was terrified of dedicating that time to someone, just for her to mess it up in the future.

Jett was with Sky for years before they finally called it quits, and she wasn’t sure she could handle that kind of heartbreak again.

“I think your whole life, you are afraid of loving in case you lose them like you lost your father. That kind of trauma never leaves us, Jett.”

Jett nodded slowly looking down at the carpet and picking at the threads on her

sweater sleeve. She did miss her dad. Every day. “I just don’t want to get hurt,” Jett said, tears beginning to form in her eyes.

Becky pursed her lips and frowned. “Are you saying that you’re not already hurting?”

That gave Jett pause, because no, she definitely was, and she had been for a long time.

“Let me ask you a question,” Becky said.

“Okay,” Jett said.

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“When you’re alone in a room with Riley, do you feel happy? Do you feel safe?”

Jett thought about it. When she was alone with Riley, she certainly was happy. And also, when she was with Riley she felt more comfortable, and she felt like someone else understood her, like she wasn’t as alone as she felt all the time. Because while Jett had her family, there were just some things she couldn’t tell them.

“Yeah,” Jett said.

“Then please, give whatever you two have a chance,” Becky said, “and don’t pull away.”

“Okay,” Jett agreed. She supposed she owed it to herself and Riley.

“Good,” Becky said with a smile, “because Riley’s next day off is Tuesday and I’m taking you off the schedule for that day. Spend it with her.”

Jett huffed. “Oh my God,” she said, but she couldn’t help but laugh at her aunt’s meddling. “Okay.”

Becky laughed and patted Jett on the shoulder. “Good,” she said, “now that that’s settled, let’s go back downstairs.”

When Riley got out of surgery late Sunday, she was shocked to see that she had a text message from Jett awaiting her. Riley wasn't sure what was going on between the two of them and her usual confidence had faltered. She had even resorted to talking to Dr. Everett about her personal life and asking the other trauma surgeon about Jett.

She wasn't trying to be nosy, but she did want to know if anything had happened in Jett's life to warrant the distance that Riley had been given. But when Dr. Everett said no and was just as confused as Riley, Riley didn't know what to think.

In a way, Riley wasn't upset to trade her Sunday shift with Lucinda. She'd enjoyed last week with Jett's family, but if something was off between her and Jett, Riley didn't want to make her uncomfortable. Riley just didn't know if she had done something to upset Jett. She thought that everything was going well between the two of them, even moving a little too fast, but for Jett to suddenly pull back, Riley was found questioning herself.

Riley was wondering whether maybe Jett was beginning to regret the growing relationship that the two of them shared. Maybe Riley was unconsciously coming off as too pushy. She wasn't sure.

A large part of her wanted to further their relationship, but she was scared to admit it, and now she really wasn't sure if that was a good idea.

After Riley finished giving her patient's family the good news and checked her phone, she just stared at it for a moment.

Jett: Hey I don't work Tuesday. Can we hang out then?

Jett: We can cook together. I can teach you.

Riley was confused, but she couldn't ignore her excitement about seeing Jett again.

Still, she did try to dial it back a little bit. Riley wasn't the most expressive person in the first place, but she worried that any previous expressiveness had pushed Jett away.

Riley:Of course. What time?

Jett:When is good for you?

Oh gosh, and now Riley had to make a decision. While normally decisive and blunt ,Riley found herself second-guessing everything when it came to relationships, especially Jett. Riley knew, however, that she had to come up with something.

Riley:Anytime after 11

That was good. It was an answer, but it also allowed Jett to have an input. Plus, if Jett was coming over Tuesday, she really needed to clean her apartment and go grocery shopping. Normally, Riley's apartment was spotless, but lately she had been in such a slump that she had fallen behind a little bit. And, of course, she needed groceries before they could make food. Her fridge and cabinets were embarrassingly empty.

Jett:11:30? We can make lunch together.

Riley:That works.

Riley felt like a little schoolgirl—and that embarrassed the hell out of her. She couldn't stop smiling at her phone when Jett texted, but she was a little apprehensive. Jett had been pulling back a little bit, and Riley was sure that she hadn't been imagining that, but maybe it had nothing to do with Riley. Maybe Jett was just having an off week. Riley didn't know, but she wanted things to keep as they were. She didn't like the idea of the woman she was beginning to grow deep feelings for not liking her back.

* * *

Monday was an early day, which benefited Riley, because when she got home earlier in the afternoon than the day before, she was able to focus on cleaning her apartment rather than on sleeping.

She went through her bedroom, bathroom, living room, dining area, and even swept and mopped the hallway. The only area she left uncleaned was the kitchen because when she finished with everything else, she was tired and ready to watch TV and crochet her socks. She figured that she could clean the kitchen tomorrow before Jett got to her place.

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Besides, Riley had to go grocery shopping in the morning, and it made more sense for her to clean the kitchen as she put the groceries away.

When Riley woke up at seven thirty Tuesday morning, she was excited for the day, but also a little apprehensive. What if Jett was still having second thoughts about their relationship? But still, the two of them were meeting and Jett was fulfilling her promise to help Riley learn to cook, and Riley took that as a positive sign.

Riley skipped breakfast, which she knew was a bad thing, but was also a habit of hers. She struggled to eat anything before ten in the morning, and also if she was going to cook with Jett, she wanted to make sure that she had an appetite.

When she went to the grocery store for ingredients, Riley was shocked. She normally bought premade or easy-to-cook box meals that she still somehow managed to butcher, but she didn't know that grocery stores had so many different kinds of food.

Riley knew the basics of what to get—eggs, bread, milk, and cheese—but she didn't know what else she needed, and she was surprised at the variety of foods that there were.

When she was looking at cheese alone, she was shocked to see over a dozen different kinds. Riley didn't know what any of them meant, but she decided to get several, just in case.

She did the same with pastas, sauces, and other types of food. Riley was at least familiar with vegetables and fruit. She wasn't a great cook, which just meant she'd snack on produce when she didn't feel like attempting to make something a little

more filling.

She grabbed her favorite fruits and vegetables, as well as some that typically needed to be cooked, like squash. Riley hadn't thought to ask Jett what she wanted to cook, and now she was regretting that decision, but at least she would have lots of food for the next couple of weeks. And for the most part, anything extremely perishable could be eaten without cooking. Like the vegetables.

When Riley got back home, she didn't have much time to put everything away and clean the kitchen, only about an hour. But she figured that if Jett came to her apartment while she was still cleaning or putting things away, she probably wouldn't mind that much. At least, she hoped not. But now she was second guessing herself on things that she never used to.

Riley did actually manage to get everything put away and cleaned in time, working at super speed. And when Jett knocked on her apartment door, Riley opened it with a smile, her hair a little disheveled.

"Hey," Jett said, standing in Riley's doorway with a backpack on her shoulders.

Jett looked beautiful in denim cut offs and a casual green t shirt. Her skin shone with good health and her eyes were hopeful. Her smile was shy.

Riley smiled at Jett. "Hi," she said. A backpack was a good sign. It meant Jett was planning to stay. There was a small, mostly ignored part in the back of Riley's brain that was worried that Jett was coming to break things off, but seeing the backpack reassured her that wasn't the case.

Jett came inside and put her things away and went straight for the kitchen.

"Let's see what you have to work with," Jett said.

“I just went grocery shopping,” Riley said, “so it’s definitely a lot more than it was yesterday.”

“Perfect,” Jett said and continued to look in the fridge and cabinets. “Oh, great, you have everything for one of my favorite foods. Let’s make lasagna.”

“Okay,” Riley agreed and watched Jett go through and lay things on the counter. Noodles, sauce, different types of cheese, a can of spinach, an assortment of vegetables and a casserole dish.

“So, I don’t usually add meat to my lasagna,” Jett said, “but I do like to add spinach to the sauce. You know, make it a little healthier.”

“Sounds good,” Riley said, and Jett began to show her how to chop veg and they set to work.

Riley was amazed that Jett knew how to do it without any kind of written recipe, only using her memory.

“I do sometimes use recipes when I cook, especially when it’s something complicated or that I don’t cook often,” Jett said. “But lasagna is pretty easy and it’s also one of my favorite foods, so I make it whenever I have all the ingredients, which actually isn’t that often. Most people don’t have what they need just lying around.”

Riley felt proud that she managed to get the ingredients for one of Jett’s favorite foods even while having no clue what she was doing.

Jett started by preheating the oven and showed Riley how to mix the spinach into the sauce and beat an egg into the cheeses.

“Do we have to cook the noodles?” Riley asked.

“Nope,” Jett said. “When we layer the lasagna, the liquid in the sauce and cheese will seep through and cook the noodles as it bakes.”

“How long does it take to cook?”

“About an hour,” Jett said. “Sometimes longer.” Jett frowned. “I probably should have shown you how to make something that doesn’t take as long. You’re probably already starving.”

“It’s okay,” Riley said. “I’m not super hungry yet, so waiting a little bit is good with me.”

Jett smiled at her, but Riley was definitely lying. She was starting to regret not eating breakfast that morning, but it was okay. She was used to going entire shifts while barely eating if she ate at all. She could wait another hour or so.

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They worked together with the same ease that they always had. There still seemed to be a lot unspoken between them, but Riley was sure they would get to that. For now, she was content to just be and enjoy the little moments with Jett.

Watching her skilled fingers prep the food was seduction in itself.

When they finished preparing the lasagna and Jett showed Riley how to layer everything into the casserole dish, the oven had already preheated, so they put the food inside and decided to chill on the couch with some TV while Jett put a timer on her phone.

“I’m going to check in on it at forty-five minutes, and then see how much longer I think it needs after that,” Jett said. “But if you ever make it on your own, I would recommend checking on it after forty minutes and every ten minutes after that until you get the hang of it.”

Riley nodded and turned on the TV. She was happy to have Jett around again, and things didn’t seem as weird as they had been, but Riley did notice that when she put on a movie, Jett didn’t go to cuddle with her the moment the title screen played. That was definitely out of the ordinary, but Riley didn’t know what to do about it.

Maybe putting on a movie was a bad plan, but Riley didn’t know what to say. It seemed easier to avoid the elephant in the room.

She didn’t want to confront Jett in case it pushed her away, but her imagination was running wild with all kinds of negative possibilities. She wanted to know what was going on in Jett’s head. Riley had never wanted to be a mind reader as much as she

did in that moment.

When the lasagna was finally finished, the two of them enjoyed the food in mostly silence. Riley was definitely hungry and managed to devour two large pieces. When the two of them were done eating, there actually wasn't much left in the way of leftovers and Riley laughed as she covered the dish in aluminum foil.

"That was really good," Riley said and Jett nodded while patting her stomach.

"I feel like I could take a nap now, though," Jett said and Riley nodded in agreement while she put the leftovers in the fridge.

"Do you want to go to the bedroom and lay down?" Riley asked.

"Yeah, actually," Jett said. "I didn't sleep too well last night anyway."

"Why not?" Riley asked.

"Thinking too much," Jett said, and her lovely face screwed up slightly.

"Oh," Riley said, but she didn't say anything else.

* * *

The two of them went to Riley's bedroom and laid down on the bed. Riley pulled the comforter over the two of them and scooted closer to Jett so that the two of them could cuddle. And when Jett didn't pull away, Riley sighed quietly and fell asleep with her head on Jett's shoulder.

* * *

Riley was woken up to a light touch across her thigh and she sighed.

The moment the slight sound left her lips, she felt the hand roughly grasp her thigh and she gasped, fully opening her eyes to look down and see Jett with her hands on Riley's lower body.

Jett looked up at Riley, lust flashing in her eyes as she looked up from under the hair that had fallen in her face. Riley's breath faltered.

Jett looked like a fallen angel looking up at Riley like that, and as soon as Jett realized that she had Riley's attention, she moved her touch closer to Riley's inner thigh and pressed a kiss to below Riley's belly button where her shirt must have ridden up in her sleep.

Even wearing pants, Jett's touch on Riley's thighs was sensual, and she whimpered, wanting more.

Jett looked up at Riley again and grinned before she moved her hands to Riley's waistband. This was more like the Jett she had missed. Cheeky grin, assertive nature.

Riley was happy to see her again and as much as Riley didn't think sex would solve all of their problems, she did want to have sex with Jett. She was turned on just thinking about it.

"I want these off," Jett said, gesturing to Riley's pants, and Riley immediately obliged, the two of them working to take Riley's pants, shirt and underwear off of her. When they succeeded, Jett threw the clothes onto the floor and turned her head toward Riley's thighs, biting along them.

Riley felt exposed, and she liked the way it made her feel. Jett was looking at her body with a fierce hunger and Riley was totally happy to let Jett devour her.

Riley gasped and moaned, but it felt too soon to beg, so she kept her words to herself—even though she wanted nothing more than for Jett to touch or taste her.

Jett bit Riley's right thigh and grabbed her left one, spreading her legs further, and Riley took it. She started to shake in pleasure, shocking herself. It wasn't like it had been that long since the two of them had sex, and Jett wasn't even doing that much yet.

Jett then ghosted two fingers across Riley's pussy, but she didn't put them where Riley wanted them the most. Riley whimpered in need, silently begging for Jett to stop her teasing.

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But, of course, Jett had no intention of complying with Riley's desires without a little fun.

Jett laughed and blew on the mark that she had left on Riley's thigh. "Oh, sweetheart," Jett said in a condescending voice, "do you want more?"

Riley groaned and bucked her hips before Jett held them down and bit her again, causing Riley to yelp and glare.

"Fuck you," Riley said, and Jett laughed again.

"Um, not quite," Jett said and Riley rolled her eyes. Jett thought she was so funny.

Before Riley really registered what was happening, Jett leaned toward Riley's pussy and licked a long stripe all the way up to her clit. Riley moaned loud and gasped, but as soon as it started, it was over. Jett moved her head back toward Riley's thighs and was busying herself in placing sweet kisses along them.

Riley whimpered. "Please," she said, not having the patience or willpower to continue through Jett's teasing. "Please fuck me."

Jett smiled at Riley. "Oh sweetheart, you're asking so nicely," she said, and almost immediately, put her face back against Riley, licking her clit before she began to suck on it.

Riley gasped and moaned, but after a few minutes of that, it wasn't enough. Riley wanted more, but she couldn't seem to form the words to ask for it.

Jett seemed to understand, however, and after a moment, she took her right hand and put two fingers inside of Riley, reveling in the relieved and pleased sigh that came from Riley as she did so.

It didn't take much longer after that for Riley to come hard and fast. She gasped heavily, her chest heaving as she orgasmed, and she reached for Jett afterwards.

Jett moved beside Riley and kissed her tenderly on the lips before she took Riley into her arms.

A million questions filled Riley's head. So much she wanted to ask Jett, but still didn't dare.

12

JETT

Jett was still struggling with her emotions toward Riley. She didn't want her feelings to get in the way of their careers, and she didn't know if she trusted herself not to fuck it up, but she also didn't want to let Riley go. Since Tuesday, Jett had been feeling more energized, and she realized how much she thoroughly enjoyed Riley's presence.

She had continued seeing Riley like they used to before the Sunday gathering, and, in fact, Jett had plans to invite Riley to come with her tomorrow, but first she had to get through this Saturday and then she would see Riley tonight after her shift.

She had plans to teach Riley more recipes, and possibly have her help make something to bring tomorrow. Riley expressed an interest in baking, and Jett decided that they should at least be able to bring some brownies.

While Jett was thinking, she was in the fire station, listening to the radio. That day was not particularly busy, so Jett didn't know what to do with her time. She offered to help her Aunt Becky with paperwork while she listened to the radio for any calls.

Aunt Becky was more than happy for the paperwork help. Jett knew that it was partially because Becky had been thinking about retiring lately and wanted someone to train for her position. She thought that Jett was interested in learning the ropes, but that couldn't have been further from the truth.

Jett was definitely not interested in her Aunt's job—and the bigger responsibilities that came along with it—but she did want to be useful on a pretty boring day.

Jett was doing pretty well with everything, until a call came over the radio asking for all units to respond. Jett rushed up from the table she was writing at and rushed with her fellow firefighters to the first available truck.

She didn't know what was going on at first, but they soon got news on the radio as they headed to the location that the fire was bad. From a long way off, Jett could see and smell the smoke and soon she saw a large, multistory warehouse engulfed in flames, she knew that this was likely to be one of the most dangerous calls of her career.

"Thompson! You are on evacuation with Silva! First floor!" Captain Hallie Hunter gave the orders.

She put on her gear and prepared to go inside the building. Already, people were running out of the building, through the smoke, and Jett could see people on the upper floors looking out of the windows. She only hoped they would let the firefighters get the life net set up before they decided to start jumping.

Jett ran out of the truck and toward the building as her colleagues began to set up

hoses for the water.

She activated her breathing apparatus as she went and put her mask and helmet on. Her heart was racing and adrenaline was flooding through her veins. This was what she trained for, but it was still scary as hell.

“You with me, Thompson?!” her teammate Leilani Silva called out to her.

“Absolutely,” Jett called back, her voice muffled by her breathing apparatus.

“Right, let’s get up these stairs and get those people out!”

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Fortunately for them, the stairs were metal and the fire hadn't penetrated the stairwell, so they made quick progress to the first floor.

She could hear her breath coming quicker as she worked and she felt like she could also hear her heart beating out of her chest.

Jett knew what she had to do. This was her legacy. She had been prepared her entire life for a situation like this, and she was going to make sure that she saved as many lives as she could.

As they made it to the first floor and opened the doors to the warehouse floor, Jett's vision was totally obscured by smoke.

"Help!" Jett heard a call and tapped Leilani on the shoulder.

Jett turned towards the call with Leilani following her. They moved carefully, checking the floor for stability as they went.

They quickly found two women huddled together under a metal table coughing. A piece of the ceiling fell away and landed on the table with a bang.

Jett and Leilani were quick to act. Jett knew they had to get them out of there as soon as possible.

"Come here," Jett offered her hand. "Hold my shoulder, don't let go, let's get out of here."

Jett moved quickly, knowing that the longer they stayed in there, the more damage the smoke would do to their lungs. Between herself and Leilani they soon had the two women back through the warehouse doors to the stairwell where they had come in.

As they bust through the doors into the stairwell, they heard an almighty crash. The building was being compromised. Their stairwell was still fine- they had to get out of there. Leilani pushed ahead at the front helping one of the women as the second of the women started coughing heavily, to the point where she was struggling to walk.

Jett knew that the smoke was already doing its damage to her lungs. She made a decision—not the smartest decision for herself, but a decision to help these two women at any cost.

Jett handed the coughing woman her breathing apparatus, helping her on with the mask and hoisting the cylinder of compressed air onto her back like a backpack. As soon as she removed her mask, she could taste the heavy smoke in the air. Jett knew as she did it she was going against protocol, but she felt like it was her best chance of helping this woman.

The woman took a deep breath of clean air and seemed immediately to be improving.

“You need to get down these stairs and out of here as quickly as possible,” Jett said. “Run and I’ll be right behind you.”

Pieces of the walls and ceiling were already starting to crumble around them, and Jett knew that they really had to hurry.

Jett’s face was exposed, and she also needed to hurry out of the building for her own sake.

The woman nodded and turned away from Jett, focusing on getting down the stairs

and out. Jett followed behind her with her fire hood pulled over her mouth and nose for some protection. She still held her helmet in her hand from where she had removed it to take off her face mask.

However, while Jett was focused on the woman in front of her, she wasn't paying a lot of attention to her own surroundings, and as she neared the last step of the stairs and the woman rushed out of the exit, Jett felt a sudden dull and hot pain on the back of her head.

It was debilitating and she couldn't focus on anything else as she stumbled forward and fell collapsing onto the floor of the warehouse.

Jett's last thought was that this was the end as she lost consciousness.

13

RILEY

Riley was in the Emergency Room once again. She was excited for tonight when Jett was scheduled to come over and cook with her again.

Suddenly Dr. Mars burst through the doors to the ER with that look on her face that Riley knew well. That look on her face that meant that something big was going down.

"Everyone, listen up!" she called. "There is a big warehouse fire on the east of town. We need to be prepared for an influx of casualties! Expect trauma, expect smoke inhalation, expect burns, expect the unexpected!"

Riley felt her heart beating quicker. As a trauma surgeon, this was the kind of incident she lived for.

The staff began to make preparations and Riley knew that Dr. Mars was right. The one thing they could expect was to expect the unexpected.

Patients started coming in quickly, nothing life threatening so far, so Dr. Mars was quick to delegate them to lesser doctors than Riley. Riley assisted where she could, but was careful not to take over.

“Right, get this one to the OR and page Dr. Anderson for the surgery.” Riley felt in control of what she was doing, before suddenly, Riley heard a loud shout coming from the ambulance bay.

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“Oh my God!” she heard being screamed. It sounded like Dr. Everett’s voice.

Riley didn’t know what was going on, but happy that she had sorted the patients she was overseeing, she headed to the ambulance bay.

She bumped into Lucinda on the way, her face screwed up, and a phone to her ear, but when she saw Riley coming toward her, her face dropped.

“What’s going on?” Riley asked. Lucinda looked at her with a calculated expression. She put the phone down and put an arm around Riley, trying to walk away with her.

“You need to be away from there,” Lucinda said.

“What do you mean?” Riley asked, resisting as Dr. Everett tried to lead her away from the ambulance bay. “Why?”

Riley looked toward the entrance of the Emergency Room.

Her world stopped as she saw who was being carried inside.

She went slack and the last thing she heard was Lucinda saying, “Damn it,” before her ears started ringing and all of the noise of the hospital faded into the background as she saw Jett being wheeled in on a trolley.

* * *

Riley’s hands were shaking as she sat on the floor of the ER. She didn’t know how

long she was there, but she was suddenly reminded of the patients. No matter what was going on, she was a surgeon and she had a job to do.

Riley stood up, but almost as soon as she started walking toward the room of the patient that she left with Dr. Carroll, she saw Dr. Mars coming toward her with Dr. Everett beside her.

Riley felt that they were coming for her, so she let them, and when Dr. Mars stood in front of her, she crossed her arms, and Dr. Everett looked at Riley with a concerned expression on her face.

Lucinda started off, “Jett has a head injury and smoke inhalation. She isn’t conscious. Dr. Sullivan from Neuro is with her now, and we will update you as soon as we know more.”

Riley nodded. She felt like she wasn’t really there, that this couldn’t really be happening, that surely it couldn’t be Jett on that trolley unconscious and her fire gear covered in filth and debris.

“Okay,” Dr. Mars said. “This is absolutely not an ideal situation, but I can’t lose both trauma surgeons right now. Lucinda, will you be okay to stay on the floor?”

“Yeah,” Dr. Everett said.

“I can still work,” Riley protested and Dr. Mars and Lucinda both looked at her in disbelief.

“Love,” Dr. Everett said, “I don’t mean to offend you, but your hands are shaking so badly there’s no way in hell I’m letting you into an OR.”

Riley looked down at her hands and sure enough, they were shaking. She raised a fist

to her face and wiped a couple of tears that had fallen down her cheeks.

Dr. Mars looked at her with a pitying expression. “Go,” she said. “Either go home or go to the waiting room and I’ll get you when Jett is stable.”

Riley nodded and walked to the waiting room. She didn’t know how long she sat there, but as she did so, she could barely think or focus on anything, and just spent the time staring at a piece of thread on the tiled floor.

As Riley waited, she knew that it was wrong, but she couldn’t help but feel guilty about Jett’s state. She knew that Jett felt a drive to be the hero, even when it was dangerous and would put her life in danger, and now here Jett was, fighting for her life in the hospital.

Riley wished she could have done more to reassure Jett that she didn’t need to risk her life to be worth something, but she also supposed that was part of who Jett was, why Riley fell so hard for her. She cared so much for others, even random strangers. Jett was a hero in every sense of the word.

Riley didn’t know how long it was until Jett’s mom and brother joined her in the waiting room, along with Jett’s Aunt Becky and cousin Ember. There were a few greetings, and Brody explained that Hannah had stayed home with the baby, but for the most part, their group sat in silence.

Dr Everett rounded the corner, “Just a quick update, Jett has a bleed on the brain. She is going into surgery now. Dr. Sullivan will do her very best for her, but she won’t know how bad it is until she gets in there.”

Riley was starting to lose hope the longer it went on. She didn’t know what she would do if Jett died. She didn’t want to think about it, but it was starting to become a real possibility, and she was terrified.

Riley wasn't like Jett's family. She hadn't know Jett for years, but she had grown to care about her, and she didn't want to lose her before they even had a chance to really connect fully. They were still telling everyone that they were just friends, for crying out loud! It wasn't fair.

Riley wiped another tear from her face as she tried to remain stoic in the waiting room, but it was hard. Everyone around her was crying and filled with nervous energy, and Riley couldn't help but be affected.

After a while longer, Riley eventually saw Dr. Mars making her way to the waiting room. Riley sat up straighter in her chair, giving Dr. Mars her undivided attention as the head of the hospital stood in front of the group.

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“She’s out of surgery. She’s in a critical condition,” Dr. Mars said and Riley held her breath, “but we think she’s going to make it if nothing else goes wrong.”

Everyone else was relieved, and Jett’s mom hugged her brother, but Riley couldn’t find happiness within her. She was a doctor, after all. She knew how fragile these things could be and she knew that things could change in an instant.

But still, Riley allowed herself to have a little bit of hope as she was led to Jett’s hospital room with the rest of Jett’s family.

Jett looked so fragile laying in that hospital bed. Riley stood against the wall, allowing others to have the few chairs that were in the room. She looked at Jett with all the tubes in her arms and the oxygen in her nose, and she took a deep breath.

* * *

As the night wore on, a doctor came in and told them that they didn’t expect Jett to wake up tonight, and that they couldn’t allow all five of them to stay in the room overnight.

“I’ll go home,” Becky said.

“I’ll be back in the morning,” Ember said.

Jett’s mom didn’t say anything. It was clear that she didn’t want to leave the room. She stared at Jett with tears in her eyes and a lifeless expression on her face.

Brody reached forward and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Mom,” he said, “we should get home. You’re not going to be able to get any sleep here and we need you to be well rested when Jett wakes up.”

Jett’s mom shook her head and Brody sighed. “Please, Mom.”

Jett’s mom sobbed and wrapped her arms around herself. “That’s my baby,” she said. “It’s just like your father all over again.”

“No, Momma,” Brody said. “Jett is going to make it. She’s going to be okay. I just don’t want you to be here with no way to leave since we took my car here.”

Brody looked at Riley. “Are you planning to stay the night?”

Riley hadn’t thought about it, but now that Brody asked, there was no way that she was going to be able to go home and she nodded.

“Mom, how about you give Riley your phone number and she’ll text you if there are any updates?” Brody suggested.

Jett’s mom looked at Riley and Riley attempted and failed a smile at her.

“You take care of her, okay?” Jett’s mom said, squeezing Riley’s hand.

“Of course,” Riley said.

Jett’s mom nodded, and the two women exchanged phone numbers.

“Why don’t we all give you our numbers and you can put us into a group chat?” Ember suggested.

“That’s a good idea,” Becky said and Riley agreed, so before everyone left, she had four new numbers in her phone and had created a group chat for updates on Jett’s health.

Riley sat down in one of the now-empty chairs and sighed as she looked at Jett. She was definitely not going to be able to get any sleep tonight, or probably at all until after Jett woke up.

Riley just sat there and stared at Jett’s vital signs. She couldn’t stop crying. The chair was incredibly uncomfortable, but Riley refused to move. She was fine, after all. Jett was the one who wasn’t okay.

Riley continued to think and she felt terrible. Jett could have lost her life in that fire, and Riley didn’t even have the courage to admit her true feelings for her. Life really was too short to not tell Jett how she felt. It was messed up how one of them could be so courageous and the other not.

She made a silent vow to herself that she would tell Jett the truth if she woke up.

I’m in love with you.

Riley reached toward Jett’s hospital bed and took her hand in a gentle grasp. If things had gone worse, Riley wouldn’t have been able to hold Jett’s hand ever again. Riley couldn’t imagine it. She wanted to be with Jett for a long time, and she couldn’t believe that she had been letting her anxieties get in the way of her potential happiness.

A little later, a nurse came in to check on Jett as Jett just lay there motionless and Riley watched. If Riley had been in a better mood, she would have smiled when she noticed it was Leah, but instead she stared stone-faced at Jett, willing her to wake up.

When Leah left the room, Riley heard a groaning sound. At first she thought that it might have been from someone in another room or the hallway, as it was so faint. But as the sound, a low moan, continued, Riley felt Jett's fingers twitch against hers.

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Riley jumped and gently squeezed Jett's fingers.

"Jett?" she said. "Jett, are you awake?"

Riley saw Jett's eyelids flutter before Jett let out a low groan. It sounded pained, and Riley pressed the red nurse button on the bedside remote.

"Hello?" an unfamiliar voice answered. "How may I help you?"

"Hey," Riley said. "Jett is waking up and I think she's in pain. Is there any way you can give her pain meds?"

"I'll tell the nurse," the voice said.

"Thank you," Riley said before she heard the call cut.

Riley looked at Jett and smiled, the first real smile since Jett was brought into the emergency room. "Hey," she said in a soft voice, "the nurse will be here with some pain meds soon."

"Where am I? Jett croaked, looking around the hospital room. "What happened?"

"You're at the hospital," Riley said, "and I don't know exactly what happened, just that you sustained a head injury and smoke inhalation in a fire. You've been in surgery, but they fixed you up."

Jett nodded, clearly disoriented, but then her eyes went alert and she immediately

jolted up in the bed. “The woman,” she said, “that I gave my breathing apparatus to. Where are she? Is she okay?”

Riley had no clue what Jett was talking about, but she knew that she needed to calm her down quickly. The readings on her heart monitor had begun to spike and Jett was clearly distressed.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Riley said, taking Jett’s hand. “I’m sure she’s okay, and you can talk to your Aunt Becky about it tomorrow when your family comes. You know Becky knows everything!”

“Aunt Becky,” Jett repeated with a nod of her head. “Okay.”

Leah came back and put some pain meds into Jett’s IV, instructing Jett and Riley to call if they needed anything else.

Jett nodded her head. “Thank you,” she said.

“You’re welcome,” Leah said before leaving.

Riley waited for the pain meds to kick in, expecting Jett to fall back asleep as soon as they did, but she didn’t. By the time Riley had managed to text Jett’s family with the update, Jett was already forming more coherent sentences and beginning to ask questions, like how long she had been out, how many casualties there had been, and if they knew what caused the fire.

Riley could only answer Jett’s first question, fires certainly weren’t her speciality, but she tried her best to reassure her that she could get all the answers she wanted in the morning. It was hard, though. Jett was persistent and really wanted to know what had happened.

After a moment, however, the fire-related questions died down and Jett looked at Riley while holding her hand.

“Have you been in here the entire time I’ve been here?” Jett asked.

“Yeah,” Riley said. “Your mom wanted to stay, too, but Brody convinced her to go home for some sleep as long as I gave updates.”

Jett nodded. “Good,” she said. “I wouldn’t want my mom to stay the night in the hospital and sleep on that uncomfortable couch.”

Riley smiled, and then she frowned and started crying. Loud and hard. She pulled her hand away from Jett and went to cover her face. Jett was alarmed. She sat up and reached for Riley’s hand.

“Riley?” Jett asked, “Riley, what’s wrong?”

Riley continued to cry for a couple more minutes, just gasping and sobbing until she could finally form words.

“I was so worried about you, Jett,” Riley said when she could finally speak again.

“Hey,” Jett said, “it’s okay. I’m right here. I’m okay.”

“But you almost weren’t,” Riley said. “You almost weren’t okay and there’s nothing I could do about it.”

Riley uncovered her face and Jett took her hand back. “Hey,” Jett said, “it’s not your responsibility to watch out for me and make sure I’m okay. That’s my job.”

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“But I want it to be mine,” Riley admitted.

Jett looked at her, confused. “What are you talking about?”

“I want to watch out for you and take care of you,” Riley said. “I can’t imagine my life without you in it, and I want to make sure that you’re going to always be around.”

Jett looked at Riley and went silent.

“I think I’m in love with you, Jett,” Riley said.

Jett’s eyes widened and she lightly squeezed Riley’s hand.

Jett leaned back against the hospital bed and looked up at Riley, but didn’t let go of her hand.

“I’ve been scared,” Jett said and she watched Riley frown.

“Of what?” Riley asked.

“Of loving you,” Jett said. “Of being vulnerable.”

There was a pause and Riley looked at Jett in apprehension. She wanted Jett, but she didn’t know what to do if Jett didn’t want her back.

“I’ve had relationships in the past,” Jett said, “even longer ones than what I’ve had with you, but I’ve never felt the way I feel with you, and that’s terrifying.”

Riley nodded. After all, she could relate. She just hoped this wouldn't be the end between them. She didn't think her heart could handle that.

"I know that in order to have a proper and actually lasting relationship I need to learn how to open up, how to be vulnerable with the person I care about," Jett said. "And I've already been more open with you than most people in my life, and that's scary and I'm not entirely sure how or why that happened, but I'm terrified of it."

Jett took a breath and waited for a moment. Riley nodded for her to go on. She didn't know if she could take it, but she was going to listen to what Jett had to say.

"But," Jett said, "I think I'm willing to try being a little terrified and vulnerable. Because I do love you, as scary as that is, and I want to be with you for a very long time."

Riley listened and more tears streamed down her cheeks, but these were happy tears. Jett loved her back, and she was willing to try for a relationship with her.

Riley reached across from where she was sitting next to Jett's bed and hugged Jett.

"Is that okay with you?" Jett asked.

"Yes, of course," Riley said, "but I should warn you that I tend to be absolutely shit at relationships- about the same as I am at cooking. I really don't have a clue what I'm doing."

Jett laughed. "We'll figure it out together, then."

"Sounds like a plan," Riley said with a large smile, and the two hugged for a moment until Jett started to get uncomfortable.

Riley moved back, but kept her hand on Jett's.

"I think I want to go back to sleep," Jett said.

"That's fine," Riley said, "I'll be right here when you wake up."

Jett shook her head. "Look," she said, "I know that you love me and all, but please actually go to sleep. I know that the couch isn't that comfy, but I want you to at least be somewhat rested before tomorrow."

"I don't know if I can sleep," Riley said.

"Then at least try?" Jett pleaded. "Please?"

Riley rolled her eyes, especially when Jett tried begging with puppy dog eyes.

"Fine," Riley said, "I'll try."

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“Good,” Jett said, “because I’m sure my family will be exuberant, and I need you to be awake enough to control them because I doubt I’ll really be in the mood for a bunch of loud people in the morning.

Riley laughed. “Fair enough,” she said. “Then I shall try my best to wrangle them up for you.”

“Thank you,” Jett said before she laid back and closed her eyes. It didn’t take much time for her to fall asleep.

Riley decided to keep her promise and moved from the chair to the couch. She, however, didn’t fall asleep as easily, but after about half an hour her exhaustion caught up with her and she nodded off—only to be woken up a couple of hours later by a large group of people bursting into Jett’s hospital room, just as loud as Jett predicted and barely a minute past eight in the morning.

Riley sighed and sat up, looking at Jett’s mom, Brody, Becky, Hannah, Emma, Ember, and Natalie.

“Lucinda and Josephine are planning to come by later in the day whenever they have a break from work,” Becky said and Riley nodded, a little groggy.

“You said Jett woke up last night?” Jett’s mom asked.

“Yeah,” Riley said, “but she went back to sleep. I’m sure she’s still tired.”

Riley heard a loud groan come from Jett’s bed, and everyone in the room fell silent

and looked to Jett.

“She is, in fact, still very tired,” Jett said.

Brody grimaced. “Sorry bro,” he said. “Maybe we should come back later?”

“I would really appreciate that,” Jett said.

Becky laughed. “It’s good to see you awake, kiddo.”

“It’s good to be awake,” Jett said. “Oh, I do have some questions for you about the fire.”

“I figured you would,” Becky said.

“Did the woman I gave my mask to survive?” Jett asked. “Is she okay?”

“Yes,” Becky said. “Some smoke inhalation issues, but she will be fine. You saved her life, Jett. There were about a dozen casualties, and the mayor and I went on the news last night to address the situation. No fatalities. I’ll text you a link to the recording of the story.”

“Thank you,” Jett said.

“Of course, kidd. We’ll leave to let you get some rest and come back later. In the afternoon.”

“I love you,” Jett said.

“We love you, too,” Becky said.

Jett's mom gave her a light hug and whispered something in her ear. Jett reared up and gave her mom a hug back.

"I love you, Momma," she said.

After everyone else left, Riley stayed standing by Jett's bedside, but she wasn't sure what she should do. Jett smiled at Riley and Riley smiled back.

"Do you want me to leave, too?" Riley asked, "I can come back later."

Jett frowned. "Do you want to leave?"

"Not really," Riley admitted.

"Then can you stay?" Jett asked.

"Of course," Riley said. And she did just that, going back to sit in the chair next to Jett's bedside.

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JETT

Jett wasn't sure how long the hospital wanted to keep her there. She had talked to several doctors, but none of them could give her a release plan. They wanted to keep an eye on her after her surgery, even though aside from a bit of a headache and a new scar, she felt mostly fine.

Jett had already been at the hospital a full day since she had awoken, and a nurse was supposed to come by soon to take her to do a CT scan. During visiting hours, Jett often had family in her room, and she was happy to be surrounded by so many people who loved and cared for her.

The door to her room opened and it was Lucinda. She was as immaculate as ever in her heels and pencil skirt with her perfect long wavy dark hair.

Lucinda had been working extra to cover for Riley as Riley had barely left Jett's side.

"I can come and help in the ER if you need it," Riley said to Lucinda.

Lucinda shook her head. "Nonsense," she said. "I've got everything under control. You just take care of your girl."

Riley smiled. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," Lucinda said. "Just if ever Becky is in the hospital, promise me you'll take over for me."

“Deal,” Riley said immediately and gave Lucinda a relieved smile, “and thank you so much.”

“Of course,” Lucinda said. “What else are friends for? Besides, at this point, you’re practically family.” Lucinda looked pointedly to where Riley had her hand atop Jett’s.

Riley blushed and smiled and Lucinda laughed.

“Or are we still pretending to be friends?” Lucinda raised an eyebrow and looked pointedly at Jett.

“I realize I was dumb doing that, and very unfair to Riley and I’m sorry for that,” Jett sighed and confessed. “Riley is the best thing that has ever happened to me, I was just too afraid to admit it. Even to myself.”

“I’m so glad you found someone,” Lucinda said. “Both of you. I think you two are going to be good together. I can sense it.”

Jett smiled.

“So, any updates on your care yet?” Lucinda asked.

“Not a whole lot,” Jett said, “but they’re taking me back for a CT scan sometime soon to see how well my funky little brain is healing.”

“That’s good,” Lucinda said. “I’m glad they’re taking care of you or I’d be fighting some doctors.”

Jett laughed. “I think Riley would beat you to it.”

Lucinda laughed. “Probably. Or we could both take turns.”

Riley laughed and shook her head. “I promise, Jett is being well taken care of,” she said. “Besides, not to brag, but we have a great hospital and staff here.”

“True,” Lucinda said with a nod as Jett’s nurse came into the room. There had been so many nurses coming and going that Jett couldn’t really remember any of their names, but this one was an absolute sweetheart.

“Nice to see you, Katherine,” Riley said. “You here to take Jett for her CT?”

“Sure am,” the nurse, Katherine, said, and Jett was so glad that Riley seemed to have a knack for knowing pretty much everyone at the hospital and inadvertently reminding her of the nurse’s name.

“In that case, I’ll be leaving you two,” Lucinda said, “but I’ll come by later.” Lucinda checked her phone.

“Oh, Becky said that the family will be coming over around supper time, so if you want any requests that aren’t hospital food, let her know and she’ll whip something up before they come over.”

“I’ve been craving salt and vinegar chips,” Jett said. “Can you ask them to bring some for me?” She looked at Riley before handing her her phone. “And hold onto this for me?”

“Of course,” Riley said, taking the phone before opening her own phone to presumably text the group chat. Jett was kind of nervous to leave her phone, but she knew she wouldn’t need it when she got the scan and she trusted Riley to keep it safe.

As Katherine began to unhook Jett from everything so that she could wheel the bed out, Jett heard the phone buzz and watched as Riley looked at her screen and let out a short laugh.

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“Ember just said that’s not food and that you had better request a proper meal or she will be kicking your ass and you won’t get your chips,” Riley said.

Jett couldn’t help but laugh at that, too. Ember sure took her honorary big sister duties seriously. But now Jett had to think about what food she wanted, which was hard because she actually didn’t have much of an appetite.

“How about mac and cheese?” she asked. That was easy to make and Jett wouldn’t feel as bad if she couldn’t eat much of it.

“Sure thing,” Riley said. “I’ll let them know.”

“Thanks,” Jett said.

“Ready to go?” Katherine asked, unlocking the wheels on Jett’s bed.

“You got it,” Jett said.

“Perfect,” Katherine said. “Say wee.”

Jett laughed. “Weeee,” she said, and then they were out.

Fortunately, the CT scan didn’t take too long. Honestly, Jett thought, the longest part was getting to the machine and waiting for the scan. It certainly felt that way.

When Jett got back, she was relieved to see Riley waiting for her. Logically, she knew that she would be. Riley had barely left her side or her room since Jett woke up,

but she was still worried that she'd open her eyes and that Riley would be gone, that everything was a dream.

Jett had almost died, and she could have easily lost Riley and any chance at happiness. She didn't want to lose Riley now.

Riley smiled and returned her phone while Katherine rehooked Jett up to everything.

"Are you in any pain?" Katherine asked.

"A little bit," Jett said, "but I think I can hold off a little bit before you give me any more pain meds."

"Okay," Katherine said, "but if that changes, don't hesitate to press that call button."

"Will do," Jett said.

Katherine left, and Jett watched as Riley sat down in the chair next to her bed and turned to her phone. She was looking at articles and reading them on her phone, but every now and then she would look up at Jett and give her the sweetest smile. Jett smiled back every time. There was a quiet peace between them and she liked it.

Jett could have gone onto her own phone to read articles and play games, but she couldn't help but keep her focus on Riley. She didn't know what had gotten into her lately and why she had been so hesitant to form a proper relationship with Riley. It was obvious to everyone, including Jett's family, that the two cared deeply for one another.

Jett felt so foolish for how she had been feeling before the fire. She couldn't believe that she had been doubting her relationship with Riley, their compatibility, and that she had let her anxieties get the best of her.

Jett cared deeply for Riley. She knew it now. And she could accept that now.

What had gotten into her before? She supposed that she was just too scared to really accept her feelings. She was too scared about what a future with Riley could mean, and she was scared of being hurt, of having her heart broken.

She was also scared of the relationship failing and it being all her fault. Jett struggled with relationships and she knew it. She knew that her failing relationship with Sky was her fault and she didn't want that to happen with Riley. She didn't think Riley deserved that, but also seeing how much Riley cared for her, Jett realized that Riley didn't deserve for Jett to pull away like she had done so often in the past.

Jett was tired of running from her feelings and vulnerability. Even though she was scared, she was ready to take this next step.

Riley looked up from her phone and the two smiled at each other once again. Yeah, Jett was definitely in love.

"Becky just said that she sent Ember to the store for your chips and that they'll be heading this way when Ember gets back and Becky finishes the mac and cheese," Riley said.

"Awesome," Jett said. "I think I'm definitely going to ask the nurse for some more pain meds before they get here."

"That's a good idea," Riley said. "Do you need me to get the call button for you or do you have it?"

"I got it," Jett said. She couldn't get over how attentive Riley was being.

* * *

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The nurse left after giving Jett her next dose of pain meds with perfect timing; Jett's mom walked in right as Katherine left.

Soon after, the room was filled with people. It felt like one of their Sunday gatherings except a lot more crowded and everyone else had eaten before coming over.

Aunt Becky placed a single-sized bowl of mac and cheese in front of Jett, and Ember rolled her eyes as she handed Jett her chips.

Jett laughed and thanked her cousin before she started to eat a handful of chips before the mac and cheese.

"Erm! Jett Thompson!" Becky's voice was loud and booming across the room.

"Look," Jett said, "I'll eat the mac and cheese. I've just been wanting these all day." Salt and vinegar chips were Jett's favorite, and she hadn't had them in a hot minute. Even before the fire, she had run out days ago and hadn't felt like going to the store. She was really glad her family was all willing to indulge her.

* * *

By the time everyone left and the room was empty, save for Riley, Jett was exhausted and quickly fell asleep. Her family was wonderful, and normally they energized instead of drained her, but she supposed her body was different while she was healing. Now she could only stand to be around Riley's gentleness non stop, but she was still often sleepy.

Riley didn't mind. She told her to get as much sleep as she could. Jett's body was healing and needed sleep to do it, and the more it healed, the quicker Jett would be discharged. So Jett didn't fight her tiredness. She really wanted to go home.

More specifically, she wanted to go home with Riley.

It was also strange. While Jett loved her job, she strangely didn't feel her usual need to go back to it. It felt like she had fulfilled her purpose in sacrificing herself to save a life, or maybe that was the pain meds talking and she would feel different when she was able to go back home.

* * *

The next day was pretty uneventful. The doctors said that the damage to her head wasn't too severe and that her burns were healing nicely, but that they still wanted to keep her an extra day for observation. Jett was absolutely not happy to hear that news, and Riley had to help her keep her calm.

Jett understood it and why, but she just really wanted to get out. She wanted to get back to her life and the people she cared about. Even though Riley was with her every step of the way during her recovery, even pressing the nurse's call button every time Jett so much as grimaced in pain, and even though Jett's family visited often, she missed her own place. She missed Riley's place, and she missed being able to walk freely and without machines trapping her to a bed.

"It'll be okay," Riley said when Jett heard the news and tried arguing with the doctor. "You just have to wait one more day."

"We'll even let you go in the morning," the doctor, whose name Jett couldn't remember, said. "We just need to keep you over for one more night."

“See?” Riley said. “Not even twenty-four hours and you’re good to go.”

Jett just nodded. She was still frustrated, but that did make her feel better. It was already past lunchtime on Tuesday, so she didn’t have to wait that much longer. Just a few more hours, a night’s sleep, and then she’d be in either hers or Riley’s home. Maybe she could even take a nap to make the time pass faster. That actually didn’t sound like a bad idea.

* * *

When Jett was woken up again, it was from hearing Josephine’s voice as she talked with Riley.

“What all have the doctors said?” Josephine asked.

“She’s recovering great. They’re going to release her tomorrow morning,” Riley said and Jett opened her eyes to watch the exchange. Josephine and Riley both looked a little uncomfortable talking, but Riley had always known Josephine as her big boss, it would take time for her to adjust to Josephine being family. Jett couldn’t expect Riley to be completely comfortable with her family and vice versa.

“How have you been coping?” Josephine asked Riley and there was kindness in her voice that usually when at work was hidden well between her icy exterior.

“Okay,” Riley said, relaxing visibly. “Worried a lot at first, but not as much now that she’s been doing better.”

“Good,” Josephine said.

“I can come back to work after she gets released tomorrow,” Riley said and Josephine shook her head.

“Stay off longer,” Josephine said. “Help her get settled in at home and come back Thursday. I’ll put you on the weekend schedule to make up for your missed time, but if anything happens, let me know and I’ll send you home.”

Jett watched as Riley nodded and smiled, relieved. “Okay,” she said. “Thank you.”

“Of course,” Josephine said. “Now I have to get back to work, but you watch out for her.”

“Will do.”

“Bye,” Josephine said.

“Bye Josephine,” Jett said and Josephine whipped her head around to look at Jett.

“And how long have you been awake?” Josephine asked.

“Not long,” Jett said. “I just woke up.”

“Okay,” Josephine said with a shake of her head and roll of her eyes. She walked over to Jett’s bed and leaned down to give her a hug.

“Sorry I couldn’t stay long, but I’ve got a hospital to run. I’ll make sure to see you tomorrow before you get released,” Josephine said. “Make sure all the paperwork is properly done and all that.”

“Thanks,” Jett said with a smile and hugged Josephine back before she left.

She looked at Riley, who stuck her tongue out at Jett in a teasing manner. “You eavesdropper,” Riley said with a laugh.

“Yeah, yeah,” Jett said. “Aren’t you going to give me a hug?”

Riley looked shocked. “Yeah, of course.”

“You know, I think you’re the only one who hasn’t given me a hug yet,” Jett said.

“I didn’t want to hurt you,” Riley said. “I’m worried that if I give you a hug I’ll be so

excited that I'll squeeze too hard."

"Well I'm a lot better now," Jett said, "so you're welcome to squeeze as hard as you want."

"If I did that, your eyes would probably pop out of your head," Riley said.

Jett laughed as she looked at Riley's strong tattooed arms as though to assess her strength. "Okay, maybe hold back a little, then."

"I will," Riley promised, and she gave Jett a hug. She wasn't as gentle as everyone else had been, but she was definitely holding back and Jett appreciated that. Jett wanted to lose herself in Riley's arms forever.

Jett then sighed after Riley pulled away. "I can't believe I still have one more day," Jett said.

"Well, It's actually only about sixteen hours now," Riley said. "It's already five o'clock and your doctor came in the room while you were sleeping and said they are going to try and have your discharge papers ready for you by eight, nine at the latest."

Jett threw her head back against the hospital pillow and let out a groan of relief. "Thank God," she said.

"I think the doctors definitely know how impatient you are right now," Riley said.

"Good," Jett said. "They should."

Riley laughed and it was the most beautiful sound in the world.

"Stay with me, while I'm recovering?" Jett asked and Riley squeezed her hand and

smiled, her green eyes shining.

“There is nowhere I would rather be.”

15

RILEY

Riley was watching TV at home while crocheting some more socks. Jett was supposed to home in about another hour, so Riley was just trying to relax and pass the time while she waited for her girlfriend. It still made her giddy, being able to call Jett her girlfriend.

It didn't feel real, dating Jett, and half of the time Riley felt like she was going to wake up and realize everything had been a dream, but it wasn't. Riley smiled to herself as she watched her show. It was another shitty medical drama. Riley wasn't sure why she was so addicted to those things, but she loved them.

Riley thought about Jett and all that she'd learned since meeting her. She'd grown so much as a person, even in aspects of her life that didn't involve her relationship. From her first interactions with Jett, she had learned how to be a better doctor. She had always been a good doctor, but sometimes she had a tendency to rush into things.

She'd always had a desire to be a medical pioneer and sometimes that led to her overlooking tried and true techniques for something more bold. Jett's interactions with her in the workplace led to her having a more balanced practice. Riley was still always trying to find the best way to help her patients, but she had come to realize the best way was not always some experimental technique.

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Besides even that, as their relationship progressed, Riley learned how to let Jett in emotionally. She never thought she would ever be able to have that type of relationship with someone. Riley's previous relationships were always short-lived and devoid of emotional vulnerability. Riley had always wanted a proper relationship before, but she didn't think that would ever be something that was actually on the cards for her.

And Riley couldn't get past Jett's family. She had felt so welcomed. Riley couldn't help but wish she'd had a family like that growing up. Even though they were a little overwhelming sometimes, the Thompsons were genuinely the most loving and welcoming people. Riley had never felt such a sense of acceptance before meeting them.

Even if Riley didn't feel so strongly about Jett, she could see herself staying with her just for her family. But, of course, that wasn't the case. Riley absolutely adored Jett. She wanted to be with her forever. That much was totally clear.

* * *

Riley heard Jett's car pull up on the drive and she felt butterflies. The same butterflies she still felt every time she saw Jett. Jett came in, smiling widely as though she was sunshine itself. Her brown eyes were back to their sparkly selves, she had recovered so well and her hair was beginning to grow back from the surgery, but she still preferred to wear baseball caps when she went out as she was doing now. She was holding a bouquet.

"Oh my God," Riley said. She had never gotten flowers before in her life, she was

always the one buying the flowers and she felt overwhelmed by the sentiment.

Jett smiled and walked inside, handing Riley the flowers. "I had to grab something for Aunt Becky from the store before I left and I saw them and wanted to get them for you," she said. Riley wasn't familiar with flowers whatsoever, but they were yellow and blue and absolutely gorgeous.

Riley started to tear up. "Thank you," she said, and then paused. "Nobody ever got me flowers before. I don't think I even own a vase." Riley worried. She didn't want the flowers to die so quickly. She wanted to keep them as long as possible.

"I figured that might be the case, so I actually bought a vase, too," Jett said. "It's in my backpack."

Riley laughed, "You really do think of everything!"

"That's me," Jett said. "Prepared for every occasion, don't ever doubt it."

She was totally back to her old self and Riley was so happy to see it.

Riley held the flowers as Jett sat her backpack on the couch and started rummaging through it until she pulled out a light blue porcelain vase.

"Thank you," Riley said. She wasn't sure how to react. All of this was so new to her and it almost was too much, even though she loved it. She loved Jett too even though all of these feelings were a little too new for her.

"Of course, sweetheart," Jett said. "Here, let me set it up for you."

Riley watched as Jett took the flowers back from her and walked to her kitchen. She put water into the vase and cut the stems of the flowers before delicately placing them

in the vase, arranging them carefully before she put the arrangement on the bar between Riley's kitchen and dining area.

"Perfect," Jett said and gave Riley a big smile. Riley smiled back and Jett placed a delicate, sweet kiss on her forehead and then her lips.

Riley smiled up at Jett as Jett pulled away and placed another kiss atop her head, over her hair. Riley decided that she wanted a kiss and pulled Jett down by her shirt so that she could connect their lips.

Jett smiled into the kiss and pulled away after a moment, still smiling as she looked at Riley.

"Right," Jett said, "Today for lunch we are making meatloaf. Are you ready for your next cookery lesson, sous chef?"

Riley laughed. Jett was so beautiful like this, filled with confidence and love.

"Of course, Head Chef. I can't wait!"

"OK, well lets start with chopping the onion and peppers. Remember how I showed you to use the knife and keep your fingers safe?"

Riley nodded as she gathered the onion and peppers from the fridge.

Jett's hand touched hers as she passed the knife and chopping board to Riley and there was still that electric connection they had always had. It felt almost deeper and more meaningful now.

However, as Riley got to chopping, it was clear she still hadn't really gotten the hang of it. It was funny: Riley could go into an operating room and cut into a human body

with absolute precision, but she had the hardest time getting the hang of how to cut a damn onion.

“Do you think you’d ever want a cat?” Jett asked suddenly.

“A cat?” Riley was caught off guard. “I don’t know, why?”

“Well, I know you talked about you thinking you were going to be a cat lady when you got older, but you don’t have time for one,” Jett said. “But maybe if we got a cat together... I’ve wanted a pet for a while, but a dog would definitely be way too much work.”

“A cat together?” Riley said, on one hand really wanting a cat with Jett and on the other hand feeling completely overwhelmed.

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“Yeah,” Jett said, “in the future or something.”

“I don’t know,” Riley said. “We’d probably have to live together officially for that to work out.”

“Well yeah,” Jett said and Riley’s heart raced, “I’d love for you to officially move in with me. Like forever.”

Riley felt nervous for just a minute before she smiled and looked to Jett, “Like properly? Like all of my stuff? Like I give up my apartment?”

“Absolutely!” Jett said. “I have a two bedroom house. There is loads of space for your stuff,” Jett waved her hand around as if to indicate all of the space for Riley’s stuff.

Riley looked around Jett’s kitchen. Since staying to care for Jett, she had felt totally at home here. She hadn’t missed her apartment once, but there was something she had missed. “Yeah,” she conceded, “you are right about that. But if we do this properly, we’re keeping my bed.”

“Deal,” Jett said with no hesitation. Riley didn’t think she would argue that. Riley had a really great massive bed.

“Which couch though?” Jett asked.

“Oh, I don’t care,” Riley said. “I’m not emotionally attached to my couch.”

“I’m not either,” Jett said. “But you know what I’ve always wanted?”

“What?” Riley asked.

“One of those couches with the pull-out bed,” Jett said. “It would be great if Natalie came over to stay the night or something or even Emma, as she gets older. Or if we just wanted to watch TV lying down.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever slept on one before,” Riley said.

“They’re great,” Jett said. “We used to have one in my house when I was growing up until it broke. It was an ugly plaid, but me, mom, and Brody would pull out the bed on weekends and nights we didn’t have school and just watch movies all night until we all fell asleep.”

Riley smiled and felt warmth running through her body. “That sounds fun.”

“Oh it was a blast.”

“When would we get a cat?” Riley asked suddenly and Jett took her hand and smiled at her. “Well, we are both free tomorrow, we could go to a rescue and maybe meet some cats? And we could get stuff wrapped up with your apartment and sort out the move, if you are ready of course?”

Jett’s beautiful brown eyes were warm and full of love as she looked at Riley.

Riley pulled her baseball cap off and leant in, kissing Jett tenderly.

“I’d love that,” she said.

JETT

Jett fixed Riley's collar in the parking lot of the conference center while Riley laughed.

"I don't know what I was thinking," Riley said. "I thought a tie would look nice and fancy, but it definitely did not."

"It definitely looked like you were trying too hard," Jett agreed before tossing the tie into the backseat of her car, "but you still look gorgeous without it."

Jett couldn't get over how Riley blushed lightly when she complimented her, and a part of her hoped that she never stopped reacting that way.

"You ready to go in?" Jett asked after closing the door.

"Sure am," Riley said and smiled at Jett, blushing slightly. Jett knew what she wanted, so she held out her hand. Riley took it, and the two of them started to walk toward the front doors together. Jett was excited and nervous.

This event that the hospital and fire department were putting on was the first time that Jett and Riley would be together somewhere publicly as a couple. Jett knew that the gossip at work and at the hospital was going to skyrocket, but she didn't care.

She was happy to be happy with and through someone that she cared about, and she knew that Riley felt the same. She knew that she could handle the personal and professional challenges that were thrown at her, and she had been through too much not to allow herself a shot at happiness.

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Besides, most of the gossip surrounding Jett now was about the fire. So many people called her a hero and checked in on her and how she was doing. She didn't feel like a hero, and she was happy to have returned back to work last week, but she also didn't feel like she had something to prove anymore. She felt more confident in herself and like she really was helping people.

She had known that before, of course, but knowing something and truly feeling it were not the same thing. And now Jett felt it. And with Riley by her side, she felt more complete than ever before. Jett smiled wide as they walked into the conference center and saw their friends, family, and coworkers.

The conference center was decorated very fancily in red and white, the colors for firefighters and the medical staff, and the blue logo of the Phoenix Ridge Hospital was next to the red symbol for the Phoenix Ridge firefighters on the door. The event was held as an appreciation for the fire department and hospital.

Many prominent members of the community were also at the event, and Jett could see her Aunt Becky talking to the mayor from afar. Jett made a note to avoid her aunt until after she was done talking to the mayor. Jett had met the mayor before a couple of times and she was a lovely lady, but she also knew that Riley sometimes got nervous around authority figures, and she didn't want to make her even more nervous than she probably already was.

Riley squeezed Jett's hand and pointed to the bar.

Jett laughed. "Trying to recreate memories, are we?"

Riley laughed and squeezed Jett's hand again before she whispered in her ear, "Well, I wouldn't be opposed."

Jett shook her head and whispered back, "Too bad this place doesn't have a rooftop we can get to."

"You can always steal a ladder off the firetruck," Riley said.

"That's a lot of work to have some incredible sex when we can just go back to my place after this and have all the sex," Jett said.

She was feeling completely back to herself now and their sex life had continued exactly where it had left off, and if possible elevated to all new levels.

Riley laughed and shrugged. "I'm impatient," she said and Jett shook her head.

"You sure are," she said, "but I'm definitely going to have to call a rain check on that."

"Damn," Riley said her green eyes sparkling, but of course, she wasn't actually upset.

Jett just laughed at their antics, but she did walk with Riley toward the bar. Drunk Riley was fun, after all. And Jett also wanted a drink. Of course, it was champagne, which definitely influenced her decision.

The two got a glass, and Jett made sure to ask if there was a limit. The bartender told her no, but that if she started swaying or slurring her words she would be cut off.

"Fair enough," Jett said to the bartender and raised her glass to the woman before walking off with Riley.

Riley greeted a few of their coworkers as she walked with Jett, but after a minute, someone stopped Riley with a smile. Jett couldn't remember her name, but she did look familiar. She thought that she was maybe a nurse.

"Hey, Leah," Riley said with a smile.

"Hi," Leah said and stared at Jett and Riley's intertwined hands with a pointed look. "Please tell me that you two are officially together. I've been holding out of the work gossip about you two out of respect, but I'm so tired of having to keep my mouth shut."

Riley laughed, and Jett barely understood what was going on between the two of them. "Yes," Riley said. "We are absolutely together, we have moved in together and I don't really care about you gossiping anymore." Riley looked at Jett, who saw it as her cue to speak.

Jett shrugged. "Gossip away."

Leah smiled and sighed dramatically. "Finally."

"And thank you for keeping it a secret when I asked," Riley said. "I know you really didn't have to, but I appreciate it."

Leah waved her hand at Riley's thanks. "Don't worry about it," she said. "I'd hate it if someone started gossiping about me when I was just starting to get with someone. Now that it's official, however..."

Riley laughed and Jett smiled. She didn't know what had gone on between the two of them, but she was glad that Leah kept the secret for Riley. That said, Jett didn't realize Riley had been just as worried about workplace gossip as she was. Jett frowned, upset that she was so focused on herself that she hadn't really thought about

what Riley thought or was going through.

Jett didn't think about how the workplace gossip would have affected Riley, especially since most of it came from the hospital where Riley worked all the time. But Jett decided it was okay and she needed to forgive herself for that. She was going to be more considerate of Riley in the future, even if she did have a lot going on in her own brain.

"Oh, and we are picking up a new furry member of our family tomorrow," Riley smiled proudly, while squeezing Jett's hand. Jett felt full of love as she joined in.

"Yes! His name is Romeo! He is a beautiful fluffy ginger stray, we are collecting him from the Forever Paws rescue tomorrow." Jett smiled.

She loved animals, going to the rescue with Riley, they had found it tough- so many of those poor cats needed a loving home, but it was Romeo who had stolen their heart. He was recovering from a collision with a car, he was missing fur still from his surgeries and Jett felt an affinity with him.

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She and Romeo would recover together, and maybe in the future, they would be able to take on some more animals in need of a home together.

“Oh, I love cats,” Leah said, smiling. I would love to come and visit Romeo once he gets settled in.

“You would be super welcome,” Jett said, smiling.

* * *

Suddenly, Jett felt a small body collide with her leg and small, six-year-old arms wrap around her.

Jett looked down and saw Natalie sitting on her foot. Her arms were wrapped around Jett’s leg and she looked up at Jett with the biggest puppy-dog-eyed expression that she could manage. Of course, since Natalie was six and already adorable, Jett was inclined to do whatever the little girl wanted.

Jett smiled down at her and she heard Riley laugh as she saw what had just happened. “Hey kiddo,” Jett said. “How’s the weather down there?”

“Snowing,” Natalie said with complete seriousness and Jett had to laugh.

“Really?” Jett asked. “Cause it’s sunny up here?”

Natalie nodded her head and gave Jett the puppy dog eyes again.

Jett sighed and looked at her cousin's daughter. "What do you want?"

Natalie pointed to the distance, where Jett could see Josephine and Ember talking with another guest that Jett didn't fully recognize.

"Can you carry me to my moms?" Natalie asked and Jett sighed dramatically.

"Can I carry you to your moms?" she asked and then smiled. "Depends. Do you wanna stay attached to my leg or have me give you a piggyback ride?"

Natalie put on her thinking face and pondered the question very seriously. It was a big question for a six-year-old. "Piggyback ride," Natalie finally answered, unraveling herself from Jett's leg and jumping up with raised arms.

"You got it, kiddo," Jett said and lowered herself to the ground so that Natalie could get onto her back and wrap her arms around Jett's neck.

Jett positioned Natalie's legs around her waist and grabbed on before she stood up and then they were off.

"I better get going," Jett heard Riley say to Leah as Jett journeyed toward Natalie's moms. When Jett got to Ember and Josephine, after taking a few wrong turns and going in circles a couple of times in order to hear Natalie's laughter, Riley was there waiting for her with a smile.

Once Jett put Natalie down in front of Ember, Natalie ran up to Ember and wrapped herself around her mom's leg that time, causing Jett to laugh. She looked at Riley who was smiling at Natalie before she turned to Jett.

"I wish I was as good with kids as you are," Riley said, and there was a little bit of hope, but also sadness to her expression as she said it.

“You will be,” Jett said. “You just don’t have any experience yet.”

“I think you’re great with me,” Natalie said from atop Ember’s foot, clearly having overheard Riley, “I mean you have my picture on your fridge so that means something.”

Riley smiled at Natalie and for a moment she looked like she might cry, but then that moment was gone. “Thank you,” she told Natalie, “but we absolutely do have to color again, because I think it’s unfair that I only have one picture on my fridge.”

Natalie’s expression brightened and she smiled wide. “Yes!” she said and looked at Jett. “Maybe I could stay over at your house and Riley could do coloring with me?”

“If it’s okay with your moms,” Jett said and Ember looked shocked and put on the spot.

“Oh, of course,” Ember said and Josephine nodded in agreement.

“Yeah,” Josephine said, “and honestly, the more medical professionals the better when it comes to watching our daughter. You know how clumsy she can be.”

“Hey!” Natalie exclaimed and everyone laughed as she stuck her tongue out at Josephine and Josephine reached forward like she was going to grab it. Natalie pulled back and started to run away.

Josephine ran forward after Natalie while Natalie was laughing. “Hey!” she said. “You come back here, you little rascal.” This caused a lot of the people onlooking to laugh as they let Natalie weave through the crowd while her mom chased her.

Nobody ever minded Natalie, and of course, Jett would have a word if there was anyone who did. That little girl was her family. Jett saw Aunt Becky and Lucinda

coming over to join their little group at the same time as Josephine caught Natalie and started carrying her, giggling, back to the group.

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“It’s good to see you two,” Aunt Becky said to Riley and Jett. Jett and Riley weren’t at the last Sunday gathering because Jett wanted to rest before she was scheduled to go back to work and Riley had taken Lucinda’s shift. “But I trust I’ll see you two tomorrow at your mom’s house,” Aunt Becky said.

“Of course,” Jett said. “Last weekend was just an anomaly.”

“Good,” Aunt Becky said. “We were all worried about you.”

Jett laughed in disbelief. “You’ve all visited me multiple times a week while I was recovering.”

“Yes,” Aunt Becky said. “And we were still worried.”

Jett shook her head but smiled. She knew that she was lucky to have such a loving family, even if sometimes they were too loving. She wouldn’t trade it for the world.

“Well, we’ll definitely be there tomorrow,” Jett said.

“Though I’ll have to leave early,” Riley said. “Lucinda and I made an agreement for me to be there the first half of the day, go to the hospital, and let her go for the next half of the day.”

Becky nodded. “I know,” she said and gave Riley a teasing smile. “Or did you forget that Lucinda and I are married?” she asked before gesturing to her wife right next to her.

Riley blushed and uttered a quiet, “I’m sorry.”

Lucinda rolled her eyes and shook her head at Aunt Becky. “Be nice,” she said.

“I was only teasing,” she explained to Riley.

“Yes,” Lucinda said, “but not everyone is used to your teasing.”

“It’s okay,” Riley said. “I might as well get used to it if we are going to be spending more time together.”

Aunt Becky smiled and patted Riley on her shoulder. “There you go,” she said.

“Anyway,” Becky said, “how are you two doing? Still friends or what? Because I’m pretty sure I saw some hand-holding in between you two earlier.”

Riley blushed again, and Jett did a little bit, but she was also expecting this type of questioning and was happy to answer, even to Becky. “You’ll be pleased to know, we are officially together and Riley is moving in properly and in true lesbian form, we are getting a cat together tomorrow!”

Lucinda squealed with excitement and Becky laughed.

“A cat?” Lucinda cried out. “Photos, please, I need photos.”

Riley happily brought up her phone and Jett watched happily as she pulled up photos of Romeo to show Becky and Lucinda who were the definition of mad cat ladies.

“So, as you can see, poor Romeo has been through a few surgeries to save his back legs and tail, but he is doing well now and should recover well.” Riley looked like the handsome doctor Jett had fallen in love with as she explained all about Romeo’s

medical needs.

“Oh, Romeo! What a handsome sweetheart! Little love! I can’t wait to meet him!” Lucinda gushed.

“I also can’t wait to meet the handsome little guy,” Aunt Becky said. “And also I’m super happy to see you two U-Hauling and getting a cat. You are perfect for each other. Welcome to the Thompson family, Riley!”

Jett definitely blushed a lot more at that, and Riley was beginning to resemble a tomato while Lucinda clicked her tongue and gently pushed Aunt Becky’s shoulder.

“Be nice,” Lucinda said. “Some people just need to take their time in figuring things out.”

“Well they were taking too much of theirs,” Becky said.

Jett didn’t know how to react or respond so she let out a short laugh. Besides, Aunt Becky was kind of right. They had definitely taken too long to admit that they wanted to be together.

“Well regardless, I’m happy for you two,” Aunt Becky said, and she gave Jett a quick hug.

“I have a favor to ask you,” Josephine said. “I’m sorry that it’s last minute, but would you two mind taking Natalie tonight after this and bring her to your mom’s house tomorrow?”

Jett was surprised at the sudden request, but she wasn’t upset by it. In fact, she was happy. It had been a while since she had gotten to take on her role as the cool aunt and she loved hanging out with Natalie. But she did have to ask Riley.

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Jett looked at Riley with the unspoken question and when Riley nodded with a smile, Jett smiled back. “We’d love to,” Jett said.

Josephine sighed in relief and Jett saw Ember’s shoulders drop slightly. “Thank you so much,” Josephine said. “It’s just that this has been the first proper night in so long that I’ve been off work and we were thinking about going out together, but I completely forgot to ask earlier, I’ve been so busy.”

“Of course,” Jett said. “It’s not a problem, and I love watching Natalie. Any time you want, even if it’s just to catch up on some rest, let me know and I’ll be there. You two know that.” Jett laughed slightly. “Though I would usually prefer a little notice. But it’s not a problem.”

Josephine grimaced. “Yeah,” she said. “We actually thought about it a few days ago and I told Ember that I’d ask you but then I forgot and didn’t realize until we were literally on the way here.”

Jett waved her hand in dismissal. “It’s no problem at all, we will have a great time, even if I do have to stop the champagne early to take my childcare responsibilities seriously,” she said and Josephine smiled.

Aunt Becky laughed and nudged Riley. “I hope you know that if you two ever get married, you’ll have to have gallons of champagne at the wedding or Jett will riot.”

“Aunt Becky,” Jett said, “it’s definitely way too early to think about marriage.”

“I know, I know,” she said and turned back to Riley. “Just remember that when it’s

not too early.”

“I will,” Riley promised and Jett shook her head. She was right, it definitely was way too early to start thinking about marriage, but she did realize, as she looked at Riley, that she could see herself marrying Riley.

* * *

“And now, we are moving onto the award part of our ceremony,” the host said. “If Mayor Greene would come up,” they said and the mayor made her way to the stage. “When I call your name, if you would come up to the stage, please,” the host said.

Jett was actually a little surprised. She didn’t know this event was going to have an award ceremony. She didn’t know if that was a new thing or if she didn’t read the invitation well enough. Probably the latter, she figured. Jett mostly found out about this thing through her family, anyway. They all knew that she was terrible about checking her mail.

The host started calling out award titles and names, and Jett finished her food after the first couple of names were called. She decided to check her phone to see how long this thing had been going on for when she got distracted by an email. It wasn’t anything too important, just a reminder to pay her phone bill, but for some reason the bill was more money than what she was used to.

Jett was trying to figure out what was going on and why her phone company was trying to charge her so much money when suddenly, the table that she was sitting at erupted in applause. Jett was startled and looked up from her phone to see Riley and her family all clapping and looking at her.

Jett was confused and was about to ask what was going on when Riley tugged on her shirt and pointed at the stage. Jett was confused and certainly looked it.

Riley leaned into Jett's ear and whispered. "They called your name. Go to the stage!"

What? Jett thought, there's no way. She couldn't have won an award. What would it have even been for, anyway?

But after another tug on her shirt and some silent prodding from her family, Jett got up from the table and walked, very confused, to the stage.

Jett felt in a blur as the Mayor shook her hand.

"I commend you for risking your own life to save others, you are truly a hero, Jett Thompson and Phoenix Ridge is lucky to have you." The mayor smiled at Jett kindly and placed a medal round her neck.

The whole room burst into further applause.

Jett felt the medal around her neck and picked it up. She read the inscription. "For Exceptional Bravery, Jett Thompson." Jett's face burned further.

Jett made it back to the table in a daze amongst everyone trying to congratulate her.

Riley's proud smile was the one she headed straight for.

"I'm so proud of you. I love you," Riley said as she squeezed Jett's thigh under the table.

Jett thought of her father for just a second and tears began to form in her eyes. She leant into Riley and Riley put her arm around her, kissing the top of her head.

"I've got you, beautiful, I've got you."

And Jett knew that she had.

EPILOGUE

RILEY- 3 YEARS LATER

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Riley couldn't hold back her laughter as she looked at Brody. She thought that he and Jett were just joking, but she should have known how far jokes fly in their family. What started out as a quick comment from Jett three years ago turned into a complete promise from Brody—and sure enough, he was wearing a light blue dress.

It actually took her, Jett, and Brody a fair minute to find a dress that actually suited Brody and didn't look absolutely terrible on him, but now that they had, Riley had to admit that Brody kept his promise. He rocked that dress.

Brody looked at Riley as she kept laughing.

“Keep laughing,” he said, “but we won't be laughing when you change into your wedding suit and I steal the show. Everyone's going to be looking at me instead of you and Jett.”

“Oh, I'll still be laughing when that happens, I get to marry Jett and live happily ever after!” Riley said and Brody laughed.

“Honestly, fair enough,” Brody said. “I now have so much respect for women who wear dresses. This feels so weird.”

“It's also a formal dress,” Hannah said, standing behind him with a three-year-old Emma on her back giggling as she occasionally put her hands over her mom's eyes. “Casual dresses and skirts are more comfortable.”

“Ah, I can't wear dresses or skirts,” Riley laughed. “Never have done. They really aren't me.”

“Fair enough,” Brody said. “I do have to admit, my jewels are enjoying the freedom.”

Riley scrunched up her face in disgust.

“Ew,” Jett said. “Ew, ew, ew.”

“What?” Brody asked. “What’s wrong, bro?”

“You,” Jett said. “I don’t want to hear about your ‘jewels’ ever or about how free they are.”

“Well, they are,” Brody said. “They’re swinging happily and everything.” Riley knew that Brody was now continuing just to gross his sister out but she couldn’t help but also be grossed out. She had begun to think of Brody as a brother, too, and she definitely didn’t want any details on the wellbeing of his nether regions.

“Ew,” Jett said again, “just stop. You also have a child here who doesn’t need to hear what you’re saying.”

Brody laughed and shrugged. “She doesn’t even know what I’m talking about anyway,” he said, turning around to face his wife and daughter as he tickled under Emma’s chin. “Do you, baby girl?”

It was now Hannah’s turn to roll her eyes. “Cut it out anyway,” she said. “It’s your sister’s wedding day. Now is the time to be serious and not tease her.”

Brody rolled his eyes. “Like she didn’t threaten to spill wine on my suit when we got married.”

“It was revenge for this,” Jett said and Brody laughed.

“Whatever,” he said. “But fine, I’ll stop talking about how absolutely awesome my balls feel in this dress.” His voice rose as he said the last part and Hannah and Riley both smacked the top of their heads.

“I’m going to strangle you,” Jett said.

“Why?” Brody asked, “I said I’d stop.”

“I will make you take the dress off,” Jett said.

“No,” Brody said. “Besides, I have a promise to keep. I’m going to rock this dress all day.”

Riley laughed and shook her head while Jett rolled her eyes.

“Whatever you say, bro,” Jett said.

“Okay,” Hannah said. “I know that you’re fascinated by Brody in a dress and that we’ve still got time before the ceremony starts, but you two should start getting ready before the guests arrive.”

“The guests won’t be here for another three hours,” Brody said.

“Which is why they need to get ready and we need to finish setting everything up,” Hannah said.

“I thought we set everything up last night,” Riley said, confused. She had never been part of a wedding, so she barely knew what she was doing. That’s why when Jett suggested they get Hannah to help with everything as a sort of wedding planner, she had jumped at the suggestion.

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“There are still a few more things to do,” Hannah said, “and I also want to double-check everything before the photographer gets here in two hours.”

“Fair enough,” Riley said. “You’re the boss.”

Hannah gave her a smile and laughed slightly. “You know, I think I’ve been more concerned about this wedding going perfectly than either of you two have been.”

“I think so, too,” Jett said. “But I can’t complain about it. You’ve been the bridezilla so neither of us have had to be.”

“And I never really thought I’d ever get married or thought about what I’d do if I did, so I don’t really have any specifications about what I wanted to happen,” Riley said.

“Except the color scheme,” Jett said.

“Except the color scheme,” Riley agreed, “but that was more your fault than anything.” Riley had wanted the theme for their wedding to be yellow and blue, just like the flowers Jett had given her for the first time. Riley’s own suit was a beautiful dark blue and Jett was going to be wearing a lemon yellow dress. They were unconventional and Riley liked it.

Jett smiled. “I’ll gladly take the blame for that.”

Riley smiled and gave her fiancée, her soon-to-be wife, a hug. Riley couldn’t believe that before the day was over, she would be married to Jett. It all felt so surreal.

“Okay, hug it out,” Hannah said. “Me and Brody are going to head out and make sure everything is perfect. You two get ready. Also, the hair and makeup ladies will be arriving in less than an hour, so the clock is ticking.”

“You know, I could have done my own makeup,” Jett said. “Or just not wear any.”

Hannah squinted at Jett. They’d had that argument before. An argument that Jett lost, considering that Hannah still hired a few people to do their makeup. “She will do neutral make up on you two! We have been through this. You’ll look great in the photos and it will be so natural, no-one will ever know you are wearing any. I, at least, want my makeup done.”

Jett rolled her eyes. “I’ll let them do my makeup.”

“Good,” Hannah said and Riley laughed.

“See you two again in a little bit,” Hannah said before leaving. Emma waved at them from her mom’s back.

“Bye-bye,” Emma said and Riley gave a little wave back before Hannah, Emma, and Brody left the room.

* * *

Riley and Jett turned to the task of getting dressed. It was nice that they both thought the idea of how you’re not supposed to see each other before the wedding was a little dumb. Like, it was cute, but the two of them had decided that they wanted to walk down the aisle together since neither of them had fathers to walk them down.

Riley turned to see Jett slipped into her lemon yellow long dress. She looked incredible. Riley took a deep breath and smiled as she helped Jett zip herself into the

dress.

She gave Jett a hug. “You look so beautiful,” she said. “Absolutely gorgeous.”

“And you look so very handsome.” Jett’s beautiful eyes were warm as she ran her gaze over Riley’s dark blue suit. Riley was so happy about the suit, Ember had helped her choose it by taking her to a tailor who specialized in women’s suits. It had been made to fit her body and Riley felt like she couldn’t have chosen anything better.

It was just a small wedding with family and close friends and they were both happy with that. Emma and Natalie looked beautiful as bridesmaids.

Riley was excited and nervous, and as the makeup and hair people came and went, she got even more nervous, especially as Hannah ushered her and Jett into the back room to hide before the guests started to arrive.

Riley looked at Jett as the two of them listened to the commotion outside of the room as their guests started to arrive. Riley could hear Hannah’s voice talking to Jett’s mom.

Riley continued to look at Jett, and she smiled. Jett smiled back and wrapped her arms around Riley’s waist.

“I love you,” Riley said.

“I love you, too,” Jett said, “and I always will.

Riley smiled. She was a little nervous about the future. Before meeting Jett, she barely knew how to have a relationship, much less a marriage. But she knew that with Jett by her side she’d be able to figure it out. The two of them would get through anything together, and Riley was confident that they’d be together until they died.

Which, of course, wouldn't be for a very long time.

After what felt like hours of waiting, all of the guests were seated and Hannah grabbed the two women from the back room.

“Okay,” Hannah said before she gave Riley and Jett a smile. “You two ready?”

“Yeah,” Riley said.

“Definitely,” Jett said. Riley looked at her soon-to-be wife and the two shared a smile.

* * *

When Riley heard, “You may kiss the bride,” she practically leaped into Jett’s arms and placed a lingering kiss on her lips, causing many of the observers to applaud and let out sounds of awe. At the very least, Riley would never forget that kiss, she could feel its ghost on her lips as she pulled away from Jett and Jett pulled her back, giving her another long kiss and causing many of their onlookers to laugh.

* * *

It was around ten o’clock before everyone decided to call it a night. Hannah walked over to Riley and Jett with a sleeping Emma on her shoulder.

“I need to take this little one home,” she said. “But everyone else is going to take care of the cleanup. You two head home. You have a flight to catch early in the morning.”

“Thank you for everything,” Riley said, and she gently petted Emma’s head before giving Hannah a gentle hug, careful not to jostle Emma.

“Of course,” Hannah said. “And it’s so good for you to officially be a part of the family.”

“You can say that again,” Becky said loudly and Riley startled. She hadn’t seen or heard Becky walk over. Becky gave Riley a hug. “It’s so good to have another niece, but you don’t have to call me Aunt Becky,” Becky roared with laughter at her own joke.

Riley smiled and blushed slightly. She felt like she might cry from overwhelming happiness. “Thank you guys,” she said, “and thank you for really treating me like family, even at the beginning when we barely knew each other.”

“You’ll always be family,” Jett’s mom joined in, “but you two should get going real soon. You do have a honeymoon to get to before the sun even comes up.”

Riley actually had no clue what they were doing for their honeymoon. All she knew was that Jett planned it with the help of her family and all of them had kept it an airtight secret. They packed Riley’s bag for her and everything. The only thing that Riley knew was that she was going to have to wake up at five in the morning to get to the airport in time for their flight, but where they were going or what they were doing was a complete secret.

When Riley and Jett got outside to Jett’s car, Riley and Jett both started laughing. Their family and friends had decorated the car with window paint, writing “Just married!” across the back windshield. And, someone—Riley thought it looked suspiciously like Lucinda’s handwriting—wrote “Lesbians coming through!” across the passenger side windows.

“Oh my God,” Jett said.

“I didn’t know people actually did that,” Riley said. “I just thought it was a movie thing.”

“Oh yeah,” Jett said. “You should have seen Brody and Hannah’s car after they got

married. Actually..." Jett paused for a moment and started walking to the driver's side of the car, "I want to see something."

Jett walked to the driver's side, and Riley was curious, so she joined her, and when she got there, she saw Jett shaking her head and laughing. Riley saw that someone had written "ew, lesbians!" on the window. Riley was very confused.

Jett kept laughing, but after a while she calmed down and was able to speak. "So when Brody and Hannah got married, I wrote 'ew, straight people' on their car and Brody and Hannah always promised that they'd get me back."

Riley laughed. "Well they sure did," she said. "Your family definitely takes jokes really far."

Jett shrugged and smiled, but then she looked at Riley. "You know," she started, "they're you're family now, too, so you have to get used to it."

"I think I have a little bit," Riley said, and she smiled at the thought of Jett's family being her family. It took Riley decades and a marriage, but she finally had a family and one that she loved and that loved her back. Riley didn't care that sometimes they took jokes too far or that she would sometimes get asked embarrassing questions at the dinner table; she loved the Thompsons so much and she was ecstatic to be one of them.

Not in name, of course. She had considered changing her last name, but Jett wouldn't have it, saying that she had put too much into a career under the name Parker that to change it would be a disservice. It was okay, though; Riley'd had that name her entire life so she was a little happy to keep it anyway. Besides, she had a ring and Jett to remind her that she was married.

Riley smiled at Jett as she kept her eyes on the road and Riley tried guessing where

they were going like she had been the last several weeks.

“It’s not out of the country is it?” Riley asked.

“I’m not telling you,” Jett said, which was her frustrating response to every question Riley asked.

“Oh, come on,” Riley said. “We have less than seven hours until we have to be at the airport. Don’t you think you’ve kept this secret long enough?”

Jett laughed. “Okay,” she said. “Do you really wanna know?”

“Yes,” Riley said.

“We’re going to Disney World,” Jett said and Riley’s jaw dropped open.

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She had never gone to Disney World, but when she was in high school, her class had gone on a trip there and her foster parents had refused. She'd always wanted to go and she was so mad that she had lost that chance.

"Shit," Riley said and Jett looked concerned.

"What?" Jett asked. "Don't tell me you don't want to go."

"It's not that," Riley said, "but now that I know where we're going I'm not going to be able to fall asleep- I'm just too excited!"

* * *

When they got home, Romeo wound himself around their legs, purring wildly.

"Here, have some more biscuits, Mr Handsome Beans," Jett said, opening the cupboard where they kept the cat biscuits and Romeo tucked in happily.

"Jett," Riley said, seriously for a second, and Jett looked around, her brown eyes warm and full of curiosity.

"I just want you to know, I'm so happy to be your wife. I'm so grateful for everything. This honeymoon will be amazing, I know. And, well afterwards, when we get home, we have our final adoption home assessment. I just can't wait for our children to join our home."

When Riley and Jett had moved in together and realized how happy they had been at

adopting Romeo and being able to give him a loving home, Riley had realized they could do the same for children in foster care.

She had worried about bringing the possibility of adoption up to Jett, it felt like a huge thing, but Jett had been so on board from the start.

They had gone through the process and were in the final stages of adopting a sibling group of three sisters aged 7, 3 and a baby. Anna, Ava and Amara. It would be a huge adjustment to their lives obviously, but they wanted to give these girls a loving home and a family, because they had never had that.

They were both taking some time off work while the girls settled in, and then afterwards they both planned to go back to work just on a part time basis, so they could give everything to caring for their new family.

Jett smiled and came and sat on Riley's knee. She smelled like the fresh floral fragrance of her perfume and something else, something unmistakably Jett.

"I can't wait either, sweetheart. We are so lucky that we will get to be their moms."

Riley smiled and nuzzled into Jett's neck.

She had a home, a wife and a family, and she had found her happiness.