



# Unfold

**Author:** *Summer Rose*

**Category:** Romance, New Adult, Mystery

**Description:** They must solve the mystery before it's too late... for everyone.

After her father's mysterious death, Katrina Dawson moved to the small and quiet town of Redwood. Hoping to find some peace, she found anything but! First, her classmates started missing... And then their murders were connected to her father's death! Kat had to scramble to unveil the secrets that almost ruined her life... After that harrowing incident, she once again foolishly thought life would become normal for her. But her mother's new boyfriend had secrets of his own... And the twins who just moved to town proved to be much more menacing than anyone expected!

Luckily, Kat has made friends with four boys who were always there for her. And although she's been in dire situations that threatened her life twice now, none of them scared her as much as watching her best friend take a bullet for her... Mason soon awakens and all seems to be well in the small town of Redwood. But her romantic choices soon catch up with Kat... She has a fight with one of the boys, and now she has to make a choice that could change her life. Will Kat be able to choose the right one for her?

She doesn't even have time to think about that when secrets begin to unveil and she finds herself in the most confusing and unexpected situation... How is this possible? Could she have seen it coming? Kat is scared out of her wits, but once again she finds the courage to solve the mystery and save herself...

Will it be too late? Will she be able to get herself and the mysterious stranger out of this bizarre situation? Or will they fall victim to strange forces that seem to have made their home in Redwood?

**Total Pages (Source):** 10

# Page 1

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## PROLOGUE

Hiding like a coward, I saw it all but I made no move to help. What could I do anyway? These were dangerous men, not boys. It was quite clear that they were not to be messed with. Besides, even if I could have done something, my legs weren't working. So I sat there and watched.

“Where is it, Connor? Tell me now, and I'll spare you. We'll put this all behind us as if nothing happened.”

The lean, tattooed guy who was responsible for my broken ankles said to the man in the wheelchair before him.

Two other men stood apart from the tattooed guy, although they all had tattoos. One of them, short and stocky, kicked out his foot in frustration as his hand gripped the gun. “We are wasting precious time, Jason! This bastard doesn't have it. Kill him and let's end this once and for all.”

The third guy, who was the biggest of them all, brushed back his dark hair in frustration before turning to glance around the room frantically.

“Kaleb is the right man. We've been at it for far too long. We have to get out of here.”

The lean guy, Jason, screamed in frustration, his large hands connecting with the cheeks of the guy in the wheelchair, who was bloodied and bruised.

“Dammit Connor, where’s the fucking package?”

Connor’s mouth curled back in a mocking grin before spitting out blood onto Jason’s boots.

“Just kill me already, you bastards! You already ruined my life once. You are never getting anything out of me again.”

There were so much bitterness and hatred in his voice. Even though I didn’t know what he was referring to, I could almost feel his pain. I didn’t think I could stand seeing Connor murdered.

“Fine, if you are going to be so stubborn we no longer need you,” Jason said as he pointed his gun to Connor’s head, bracing to make the kill.

Quickly, I shoved my fist into my mouth, muffling the whimper that threatens to escape. Those guys beat me so hard I had fallen unconscious, and they probably thought I was dead. It was best to keep it that way if I wanted to stay alive. Hopefully, help will come soon, I think again, just as I did months ago when my best friend, Mason, was shot by a mad serial killer.

In the seconds that followed, I deeply regretted choosing to hide like a bloody coward rather than helping Cooper. When the sound of the gunshot pierced the air and the body in the wheelchair went limp, I felt like my heart leaped out of my body and shattered into a million pieces.

Someone screamed so loudly that I was surprised the glass windows didn’t break. Then I realized it was me who was screaming, forgetting all about staying silent and keeping safe.

They did it, they killed him, was all I could think. Connor was dead, and I had never

felt so afraid in my entire life.

“Shit,” I heard Kaleb say when I was out of breath to scream. I could hear my own erratic breathing through the rush of blood pulsing in my ears. “I thought you killed her.”

Jason kicked the wheelchair, which rolled off, colliding with the wall. I watched as Connor’s limp body tumbled to the ground. “Fuck Randy! I told you to check. Now she’s seen everything.”

“It... it seemed like she was dead,” the big guy, Randy, stuttered.

Kaleb groaned as he gave Randy the stink eye. “I’ll take care of the girl,” he growled as he began walking toward me.

Oh shit, what have I done?

I began to drag my body as far away from him as I could, knowing deep down that I could not outrun the man silently stalking me. From his dangerous smile, I could tell he sensed my fear, and he enjoyed it, reveling in the power it gave him.

Whimpering, I struggled to go faster - urging my useless legs to work - but it was no use. I knew what would come next, but I wasn’t ready for it. What on earth had I been thinking following Connor when my instincts had warned me not to? Two attempts had been made to end my life already, and I had prevailed. But I wasn’t optimistic about my chances this time.

Kaleb was almost halfway to my body when a bang shook the building. He stopped abruptly, shock registering on his face and those of the other men.

“We need to get out of here. Now, Kaleb,” Jason shouted at his partner. I discreetly

heaved a sigh of relief. Maybe I wasn't meant to die today after all.

However, the moment was short-lived as Kaleb continued walking toward me, faster now.

"No, no..." I whispered, shaking my head pitifully as I begged for my life. "Please..."

He didn't listen; he just kept coming as I continued to scamper away from him, dragging my injured legs. Another bang filled the room. Someone was coming, maybe to rescue me. I screamed for help at the top of my lungs, praying whoever was there would hear me.

"Shit Kaleb, let's move," a now apprehensive Jason called out just as the knob to the door rattled. When it was clear Kaleb had no intention of being swayed from his path, the other two ran straight out of the window without looking back.

## Page 2

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I turned to look at Kaleb, praying to whoever would listen that he wouldn't go through with it. When his finger squeezed the trigger, I shut my eyes, awaiting the inevitable. I had no idea what I was about to die for it.

Bang, the gun went off, but instead of falling to my death, I felt a weight on me, pressing me to the ground.

It was Kaleb's body. I screamed.

### CHAPTER ONE

I must have fallen asleep on the chair because I barely caught myself before falling off it in my doze. Wiping my face with my palm, I adjusted myself and sat up straighter. I wasn't there to sleep. I was there to watch over a friend.

The hue of the sunrise flowed in, lighting up the darkened room. Quickly, I rushed to turn on the lights before the nurses arrived since I wasn't supposed to turn them off for any reason. I had broken the rule because I couldn't sleep with the lights on.

With the lights back on, I sat down on the chair and watched the motionless body lying on the bed before me. It had been weeks now, and he still hadn't moved a muscle. The doctors said there was nothing that could be done after the operation. He had to wake up on his own now, but it was becoming less and less probable.

Memories flashed in my mind. They seemed like long-ago nightmares, except the evidence that it had happened lay on the hospital bed, unmoving.

I had been carelessly running toward the distracted man who held a gun to my mother's head in the hopes that I could save her. Instead, I had only succeeded in drawing his attention back to me. And then he had fired the gun.

Just a few days ago, I had told my mom it would have been better if I had died that night. Then I wouldn't have to watch my best friend suffer silently. If only I hadn't made that careless move, Mason wouldn't have run in front of me to take that damn bullet. Of course, my mom had immediately protested and said that it hadn't been my fault. It still didn't change the fact that I felt guilty beyond measure.

This – everything - was my fault. Somehow, ever since we'd moved to Redwood with my mom after my father's death, I had brought danger to the people around me.

Sighing, I picked up the book by the bedside table and opened it, preparing to read to him for the millionth time. As I went ahead to read the tale of *The Princess and the Frog* to a comatose Mason, I struggled to understand why the fairytale book was his favorite. When I had asked, Aaron had told me he wasn't sure, but it had something to do with his parents. The same parents who had only shown up once since their son had been admitted to the hospital.

The book, according to Aaron, was Mason's most prized possession. So I read it to him every day, even though I couldn't imagine the lively, energetic, social, and charismatic Mason enjoying this book. Mason was the most carefree person I knew; always happy and making funny jokes. He was without baggage, and now I had unintentionally added strife to his life.

Shaking off my thoughts, I continued reading the book - which I had already committed to memory - to him in whispers. As I read, I hoped that he could at least hear me. The doctors said it was a possibility. Thankfully, it was the weekend, so I didn't have to worry about leaving him to go to school.

Just as I read the last line, there was a knock on the door. My mom, Aaron, and Jake all walked in.

My mom was tired; it was written all over her face. One would think it was her son lying limp on the bed. But Mason had saved her daughter's life. Of course, she would be concerned about him. "Hey honey, how are you?" she asked as I stood up to hug her.

I shrugged in response, struggling to keep the tears at bay before turning to face the other boys. I fell into Jake's open arms first; I always found comfort in them. His familiar scent wrapped around me as I buried my nose in his neck.

Untangling myself from his embrace, I proceeded to hug Aaron, who planted a kiss on my forehead, a gesture that never failed to leave me breathless and my heart pounding. "It's going to be fine, Kat," he assured me. Since he was the closest to Mason, he and I had been spending a lot of time together lately, and my feelings for him seemed to be evolving. We hadn't acted on them, though. It was not the right time for that and I still had to figure out where Jake and Mason stood.

"So..." my mom heaved a sigh as she took a seat in the chair I had vacated. "Any news yet?" she asked, but her expression conveyed that she didn't expect anything new.

"No," I confirmed her suspicions through gritted teeth. "How can his parents do this?" I asked no one in particular as I began to pace across the room, my hand clutching my blonde hair. "He's their son! You'd think they would put their political nonsense aside just to be here with him. What kind of parents are they?"

Every day that went by without hearing a word from Mason's parents only made me angrier. The first and only time they had been to the hospital to see him, they couldn't be out fast enough. They made promises to be back, but still, they were nowhere to be



found. My mom had spoken to them on several occasions, but they kept postponing their visit.

Aaron pulled me to a standstill. “They’ve always been like this Kat. Everyone in town knows. They hardly see anyone, even their own son.”

“Well, that’s just fucked up.”

“Language, Katrina,” my mom reprimanded tiredly. I rolled my eyes rather than make a snarky comeback.

Jake smirked at me, causing my eyes to light up in amusement, but I didn’t have the energy to laugh or smile even. I sighed and proceeded to sit beside Mason on the bed, pushing back his blond hair.

“Everything is going to be fine, Mason. I’m not going anywhere,” I whispered to him.

I was about to stand up when I felt a hand grip my arm and a whisper.

“Kat...” Mason was awake.

## CHAPTER TWO

Seeing Mason’s eyes open after they’d been closed for several weeks was so relieving and profound that it took all I had in me to keep from jumping on him and hugging him tightly.

## Page 3

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I paced continuously while the others sat behind me in the waiting room. The doctors had sent us out of Mason's room to examine him, but I didn't have the patience to wait for the news. He had opened his eyes, held my arm, and whispered my name. Soon, I hoped, the doctors would tell us Mason was fully recovered and could go home. I longed to see those wires he was hooked up to removed from his body. He looked so frail with them and nothing like the lively Mason I had come to know.

I felt arms around me and I could tell immediately that they were Jake's because his heavy, masculine scent filled my nose. It was something I had learned to do, distinguish each boy by their scent. While Jake smelled like wildflowers and rain, Aaron had a lovely scent of roses, and Mason smelled like cinnamon and morning dew.

Melting into his arms, I let Jake hold me and paused my pacing as we awaited any news. I cocked my head to the side and saw my mom was nodding off. Aaron returned with cups of coffee and offered her one. The smile she gave him was both thankful and fatigued. Once again I felt so much anger directed at Mr. and Mrs. Welsh for choosing to attend their socialite events rather than spend time with their sick son. As far as I knew, they were the only family Mason had. At least the boys and I were here for him.

Shifting in his arms, I turned around to face Jake. "Do you think he's okay?" I asked in a faint, helpless voice, looking to him for some reassurance.

He brushed the tendrils of my hair that had escaped from my ponytail away from my face, before dropping a tender kiss on my lips. "Of course he will be okay. Mason is stronger than you know, Katrina," he pulled back and said. For once I didn't feel like

kissing Jake back. Not because I didn't want to, but because I was too tense.

Aaron walked up to us and I immediately fell into his open arms, whilst searching for any sign of jealousy in Jake's features; I saw none. The boys really seemed to be okay with my indecision, at least for now. I had no idea why. I had seen Jake with Noelle a while back and freaked out because I couldn't bear seeing him with any other girl. I was sure it must be the same for Aaron and Mason, too. So, I didn't understand how they seemed unbothered by my feelings for all three of them.

This time, it was Aaron's arms that wrapped around me. I needed the solace he provided and the embrace was short and tender. Seconds later, I heard footsteps leaving the hospital room and making their way into the waiting room.

Untangling myself from Aaron, I rushed toward the doctor, the boys trailing behind me. My mom slept in the chair, her weariness too deep for the coffee to overcome. My own cup lay forgotten on the tray by the foot of the chair.

"Is Mason going to be okay?" I asked Doctor Francis, getting straight to the point. If there was something wrong, I needed to hear it without beating around the bush.

The doctor scratched his scraggly white beard and placed a hand on my shoulder as he addressed all three of us. "Mr. Welsh is going to be fine. He is fully aware of his surroundings and is quite responsive. That is a good sign that the surgery went well." At our relieved smiles and laughter, he raised a finger, causing my heart to skip a beat and my happy expression sour. "However, he is still in quite a lot of pain so he must stay here for a few days before going back home. As soon as his pain has become manageable, he will be discharged."

I nodded, taking in every word the doctor said. At least Mason was awake and would stay awake; that was all that mattered. "Thank you, we really appreciate it."

“Is it okay if we go and see him now?” asked Aaron as I pleaded with the doctor with my eyes.

He sighed. “Of course, but I should warn you that he is still pretty fragile. So don’t do anything to agitate him,” he said pointedly and we quickly agreed. “I’ll need one of you boys to come with me and take a look at some paperwork.”

“I’ll go,” Jake offered and he left with the doctor.

I asked Aaron to wake my mom and tell her the news. I couldn’t wait any longer to see Mason. I walked toward his room and opened the door gently, not sure what to expect.

The wires were gone - well most of them anyway - and he didn’t look frail anymore. He was pale, but the smile on his face reassured me that my Mason was back. He was sitting up, one hand outstretched for me to take.

I quickly rushed to his side, placing my hand in his. He pulled me closer and captured my lips with his in a kiss that made me crave for more.

He pulled back, our foreheads connected. “Kat,” he whispered.

### CHAPTER THREE

The ride to Mason’s house - or mansion rather - was quiet and content. I sat in between him and Aaron in the back seat. My hand held Mason’s tightly, unwilling to let go, while my mom sat in the front seat and Jake drove.

It had taken another week in the hospital before Mason was discharged. Going to school when he was awake had been even worse than when he wasn’t. I barely listened to anything the teachers said and I was pretty sure I was going to fail the

calculus test we'd had that Friday, but I didn't care. All I had wanted was to get back to Mason and be in his arms again where I was sure nothing bad would happen to him. As stupid as it seemed, I did believe that I could protect him by staying at his side.

His grip on my hand tightened when the car jostled, as if afraid to let me go, so I turned to him smiling before raising my head and kissing him with a deep blush. He smirked when he saw the color tinge my cheeks, but did not point it out. My eyes met my mom's in the car mirror.

I quickly averted my gaze; it was possible that my mom had seen me kiss all three boys and had no idea what was going on. Even I didn't understand the situation between us. Still, I wasn't ready to let go of them yet. Was I being selfish? Maybe, but I couldn't help myself.

We finally pulled up to Mason's mansion, and the door opened when Aaron leaned out of the window to press a button by the gate. Damn, talk about fancy. I was from a wealthy family too, and my parents enjoyed spending money, but our home had never been so huge and cold. It had been warm and modest.

Jake drove in and memories of the last time I had been in this house came rushing back. A girl had pushed me into the large swimming pool to "avenge" her friend's death, which she thought I had been responsible for. I had struggled and was unable to swim because of the trauma over my father's death, whose body had been found in his car and at the bottom of a lake. The next day, I heard the news about the girl's death, and she had been right, both hers and her friend's death had been my fault. I had caused it.

I shook my head, refusing to think about one of our close friends, Liam, who had turned out to be a psychopath killer. As if he knew what I was thinking, Mason pressed a kiss to the side of my head, and I instantly felt better.

A middle-aged, average height woman with auburn hair dressed in maid's clothing ran out of the huge house to meet us.

"I didn't know you had a maid, why didn't she come to the hospital to see you?" I asked, and almost instantaneously, the boys shared a look. "What?" I asked, feeling suspicious.

"She was busy," Mason simply muttered, staring right ahead at nothing in particular.

I scoffed loud enough for everyone to hear. "You don't know that. You were on a hospital bed, in a co..." I stopped, finding it hard to say the word 'coma.' "How do you know she was busy? And even if she was, she could have at least found time to visit you at the hospital." The woman had reached the car by now, and she had clearly heard me. She lowered her head in shame and guilt. Good, let her be ashamed.

## Page 4

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Mason's hand left mine "It's okay Kat, trust me," he said and smiled. I was about to argue, but one look from my mom stopped me.

The woman helped Mason out of the car as Jake and Aaron ran to assist her. I followed as they led him into the house, only stopping when my mom called out to me. I turned around and walked up to her, where she now stood by the driver's side, taking in her weary features. "I'm sorry to put you through this mom," I said. My beautiful mother now looked like a shell of herself.

"That boy saved my daughter's life. What else would I rather be doing?"

"Thanks, mom." I pulled her skinny body into a hug, Christ, when did she eat last? "Listen, mom. You don't have to come out here anymore. You can just stay home and rest, I'll stay and take care of Mason from now on," I asserted, leaving no room for argument.

She nodded with a smile, probably amused by how mature I sounded. "That's fine by me. I'll do what I can by cooking meals for him. He seemed to like my dishes that one time he came for dinner." Her loving smile mirrored mine at the memory.

When I made to leave again, she pulled me back. "Bebé, what's going on... with the boys, I mean? I thought you liked Jake and wanted to be with him. He isn't particularly discreet when sneaking into your room every night." She smirked at my agape mouth. "But now it seems to me that you like all three of them?"

I lowered my head, not knowing how to respond. "I don't know how to choose," I confessed. Maybe my mom could offer insight. I scrunched up my nose at the

thought. I really needed female friends.

“I understand how difficult making this decision will be Katrina, but even though those boys try to pretend they are okay with it, I can feel their hurt. They all want to be with you, and they are all in love with you. You might think it’s better to prolong your choice so they won’t get hurt, but it really isn’t. You’re only hurting them more.”

She patted my head gently. “I trust you to make the right choice Kat.”

My eyes widened. I had always begged my mom to call me Kat instead of Katrina, but she never did. She smiled knowingly at me before getting into her car and driving off.

As I made my way into the mansion, I thought over my mom’s words. She was right, I couldn’t prolong this anymore. I had to make a choice, and I had to do it fast, or I would be hurting the ones I love.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Mason’s bedroom was nothing like I expected. As neat and large as it was, there were no personal touches to the room at all. His king-sized bed sat in the middle of the room against the wall with curtains draping down before it. An expensive-looking rug was placed at the foot of the bed, and a purple-colored bean bag sat a few inches away, which Aaron now occupied. The reading table only had an electric lamp on it, and Jake took the seat before it. Apart from these, Mason’s room was completely bare of anything else.

Sure there was furniture, but there were no pictures of him and friends or family, none at all. The children’s book, *The Princess and the Frog* sat lonely on the nightstand, and that was about it.



There was no place else for me to sit and the boys hadn't noticed my entrance yet, so I walked toward the bed and sat, smiling to the boys as I did. "Your room is huge," I said, interrupting whatever conversation they had been having. It was twice as big as the living room at my mom's house. But I still liked our home, it was warm and cozy while Mason's looked like a hotel suite.

"My everything is huge darling," he winked at me, and I rolled my eyes, glad that he was well enough to make jokes. I had missed them.

Aaron chuckled and stood up at the same time Jake did. "Hey Kat, would you mind staying with him? I have to get back to Renee. I've left her alone for too long," he said, referring to his cute, little four-year-old sister.

I nodded in agreement before turning to face Jake. "It's okay, you can go too. I know your mom needs you," I said, knowing Jake's mom sometimes suffered panic attacks. Only her son could calm her down. "I already checked with mom, and she said it's okay, so you're stuck with me buddy," I said to Mason, hoping he would allow me to stay.

"No other way I'd have it, babe." His devilish smirk caused me to blush, and I couldn't hide it even if I wanted to. I could already tell that taking care of a sleeping Mason had been much more challenging than taking care of an awakened Mason would be.

I saw the boys off, and by the time I came back to his room, Mason was struggling to sit up. He was making no progress, grunting in pain.

"Hey, what do you need?" I ran to his side.

He looked irritated, but not at me, or at least he didn't look like he was irritated with me. He kept glaring at the t-shirt he had on. "I need to get this off," he murmured.

Understanding how helpless he was and how much he hated it, I nodded and moved closer to him before gently taking off the shirt to reveal a muscled, very chiseled chest and pecs. A part of his abdomen was wrapped in a bandage, but I could tell that six-pack abs hid beneath it.

A weird sound escaped me, causing my face to heat up once again. It was somewhere between a moan and a gasp. If he heard it, he didn't react. Probably because he already knew how embarrassed I would be.

The shirt was off, but I found myself still touching his warm body, unable to take my eyes off him. Slowly, my fingers wandered across his chest, which was usually tan but had become pale ever since his stay at the hospital. My heart beat faster, and I felt my mouth dry up as I trailed my fingers over his wrapped abdomen, then moved them dangerously lower.

What was I doing? I couldn't seem to stop. A groan from him jolted me back to reality, and I quickly cleared my throat to break the intense atmosphere. "I'm sorry about your parents," I said, quickly grabbing on to a conversation that could stop me from turning into a blubbering mess. It worked because as soon as I thought about Mason's parents, anger swelled inside me. "I mean, you'd think they would be there for their only son when he needed them the most." A scowl formed on my face.

"It's fine Kat, just drop it," Mason said, sounding irritated and tired.

"No, it's not fine. There is nothing fine about it. You were in a coma for weeks, Mason, and we all thought... I thought I would lose you." I swallowed back the tears that threatened to fall. "How could they just act as nothing had happened? How could they abandon you like that?"

I should have stopped talking, or I should have at least raised my head to see the storm brewing in Mason's eyes. Instead, I had gone on like an idiot.

“I said it’s fine, that’s enough Katrina,” Mason bellowed. I had never seen him this angry before, and it looked like I was staring at a stranger.

### CHAPTER FIVE

Remorse shone in those beautiful blue eyes as soon as he saw my reaction. I wasn't scared of him; I could never be scared of Mason. I was just shocked because he seemed like a completely different person than I knew at that moment.

"Kat, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you." He looked so sad and guilty that I couldn't fault him. I must have struck a nerve by talking about his parents.

I took the hand he offered. Since he couldn't get up from the bed, I sat back next to him. It didn't take long for him to pull me against him so that I was lying by his side with my head on his chest and his arms around me. I had never felt safer.

"I could never be scared of you, Mason. I love you." It was as simple as that.

I felt his smile before he kissed my hair. "My parents are a sore spot for me, Kat. I don't like to talk about them. They've never really been around for us; the only thing they care about is their political careers."

"Us?" I asked, confused by the word he had used. "Who else?"

"It doesn't matter," he whispered. "It's been like this for as long as I can remember. Once, when I was ten, I jumped off the treehouse Aaron's dad built for us back at their place hoping that would bring my parent's home, but it didn't. On the rare occasion that they were home, I stole my dad's car and took it for a reckless spin when I overheard them talking about leaving the next day. I thought that if I got myself into an accident, they would stay, but they still didn't. After that, I knew there

was nothing I could do to stop them from being so indifferent.”

He stopped talking for a while before he continued.

“Aaron said you read to me all the time back at the hospital. Do you know why that’s my favorite book?”

I shook my head.

“It’s the only book my mom ever read to me when I was little. Deep down a part of me still yearns for the love and care I know they won’t give me.”

My heart broke for him as I wondered what kind of parents would do that to their son. “That’s awful... but you don’t seem...”

“Bothered? Depressed? Bitter?” He asked the questions I couldn’t, answering them himself. “It’s been years Kat, and I’m older now, smarter. Dwelling on it won’t change anything. That’s why I surround myself with people I love. When I’m with you guys I never think about my parents or how much they’ve hurt me.” He sighed, and I pulled myself up to stare at him. I could understand now why he dated so many girls, searching for affection in the wrong places, but I knew I was different. I could feel it whenever I was with him. “Besides, I’ve got this huge place all to myself to throw awesome parties and stuff.” He grinned widely, and I managed a smile.

“You’re one of the strongest people I know, Mason, and I’m never going to leave. You won’t lose me,” I promised fervently. It was the same thing I had said to Jake not so long ago and just as I meant it then, I meant it now.

Suddenly, he pulled me to him and sealed those words with a deep kiss that I couldn’t help but return. I felt my face flush, and my breasts heaved as my breathing changed. I moaned when the tips of our tongues met and it seemed to excite him more too.

Filled with barely restrained passion, I let him roll me over, his naked upper body pressing me to the bed. I gasped as his kisses followed the trail of my throat to the back of my neck, tickling behind my ear.

“Choose me,” he whispered.

“What?”

I was so deep into how he was making me feel that his words confused me. I reached for the nape of his neck, trying to bring his lips to mine again, but he drew back from me.

“Choose me,” he said again, and this time, I understood what he meant.

I shook my head uncertainly. “Mason...” What he was asking for seemed too hard because as much as I wanted him, I couldn’t imagine not being with Jake and Aaron.

“What?” he pulled himself up with his elbow to stare down at me. “You know how much I love you, Kat. How much you mean to me. If you’re worried about the other girls I used to be with, I can assure you that they meant nothing to me. Not the way that you do.”

“I know Mason; I trust you, but I can’t...”

A scowl formed on his face “You don’t want me,” he grunted, trying to move away from me.

“No, you know that’s not true. I do want you, Mason, I do, it’s just... I want them too.” I felt so ashamed of saying the words, but he deserved to know the truth. “It is a hard decision for me to make.”

He finally managed to sit up with his back to me. “Well, you better make up your mind fast, Kat. I’m not going to wait forever,” he said before standing up with great difficulty and walking into the bathroom, closing the door behind him, shutting me out.

A tear fell on my cheek. I had never felt so lost and alone.

## CHAPTER SIX

It would have been better if I hadn’t come to school, I thought as I walked toward the cafeteria, tray in hand. I hadn’t heard a word in all three classes we had earlier that day because I couldn’t stop thinking about that kiss with Mason and the way we had left things. I had hurt him, and my mom was right, I would keep hurting them all if I didn’t make up my mind soon. I knew what I had to do.

With my tray now filled with food, I walked up to our table where Jake and Aaron already sat, only to stop at the sight of the familiar platinum blonde-haired girl that sat beside Jake. “Noelle, what are you doing here?” I asked, my voice dripping with anger.

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A broad smile formed on Jake's face as he gestured for me to sit in the chair next to Aaron. "Look who came back to school," he said as if it was the best news he had heard in his entire life.

"Yeah and I'm asking why?" I didn't care that I was being a bitch to Noelle. There was no love lost between us. She and her twin brother had been the reason that the murderous serial killer had come to town in the first place.

Jake sighed while Aaron continued peering into the large chemistry textbook before him as he ate. "Don't be like that Katrina."

"Why not? If it weren't for her and her brother, my mom wouldn't have been in danger and Mason wouldn't have been shot. Now she strolls in here like it all doesn't matter. At least your brother had the decency to leave Redwood for good. I guess you just can't resist taking what isn't yours," I said, referring to her obvious crush on Jake. She hadn't even bothered to visit Mason once.

He sucked in a sharp breath "You can't blame her for what happened Katrina. She was a victim just like your mom and Mason."

I still wasn't backing down "She should act apologetic then. She didn't visit Mason and I'm pretty sure she didn't even ask about him because everything always has to be about Noelle, doesn't it?"

She must have had enough because Noelle rose and fled the cafeteria. Jake looked torn between chasing after her and staying with me. I knew why I was lashing out; it was partly because of Mason and partly because I was jealous of how close she and



Jake had gotten. If it hadn't been for me, Jake wouldn't have been so open and friendly with her.

"That wasn't fair, Katrina."

"Well, what happened to my mom and Mason wasn't fair either. I can't believe you are taking her side." I glowered at him.

He looked beyond angry when he spoke again "This isn't about taking sides, Kat. It's about Noelle and how she must be feeling. You think this was easy for her?"

He never called me Kat. Something in the way his eyes sparkled as he defended her made me gasp. "You have feelings for her," I said, feeling my heart break into pieces. He didn't deny it, or maybe he hadn't recognized it himself yet, because he simply stared at me. "I can't believe you like her Jake, what about...?" I couldn't finish my sentence.

Jake scoffed "Us? We both know there hasn't been an 'us' for a while now. When was the last time we even hung out together? Just the two of us? Noelle and I are just close, that's all."

"That's so unfair Jake. I've been taking care of Mason. I know I said I would give everyone a fair chance, but I haven't had the time..."

He stood up, towering over us as Aaron finally raised his head. "I'm done with this Katrina. I'm done waiting for you to make up your mind. When you do, you know where to find me," he said, picking up his bag to leave.

Tears were running down my face now. With my feelings hurt I screamed after him, "Well let me make it easy for you! It's over! You and I are over! You can go back to your precious Noelle for all I care."

Jake didn't look back as he strode out of the room, leaving me crying pitifully into Aaron's shirt with the whole school staring at us.

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Aaron dropped me off after school and I ran into my room, ignoring my mom's concerned questions. I buried myself under the covers, snuggling against the pillow as I began to cry again.

I heard the knock on my door, but I made no move to open it. My mom came in anyway. Her soft, delicate hands caressed my hair as she laid down beside me.

"I don't want to talk about it," I said, sniffing back my tears. I wasn't in the mood to hear my mom tell me how wrong I had been, stringing all three boys along. I already knew that. I just wanted to wallow in my despair.

"It's okay honey, we won't talk about it," she said. She held me as I continued to cry even louder. Suddenly, my mom's beautiful voice burst into a sweet, melodious song that I recognized from a few years back; she was singing my lullaby.

I mustered a small smile as I relaxed into her arms while she rocked me to bed. It was exactly what I had needed.

Sleep soon found me, but when I woke up the next morning, I felt sad and hurt all over again. Jake hadn't come through my window the previous night.

Maybe this was it, maybe things were really over between me and him.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Anticipation radiated through me - even though my stomach was tangled in a ball of

nerves - as I got out of my mom's car. I stood staring at the modest house quite similar to the one I lived in with my mom.

"Have fun bebé," my mom said with a huge smile before driving off. I had eventually told her what happened between Jake and me. Somehow, I had been convinced to go on a date with Aaron, the only one I'd hardly spent time with lately.

Luckily, Aaron's parents were out of town, and he was home alone with his little sister, so he had suggested we watch a movie in his house.

Stepping forward, I mustered enough courage to knock on the door. It was almost immediately opened by a cute little girl, clutching a Barbie doll to her chest. She jumped into my arms. "Hey, Renee, you've gotten so big," I said because what kid didn't like to hear that they were getting more mature.

She beamed at me "That's what everyone says! Look, I've grown taller too," she waved her doll toward the wall that showed markings of both her and Aaron's height measurements. Her British accent made her even cuter.

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I grinned at her. “That’s wonderful, I’m so proud of you,” I said as she buried her head in my neck, sniffing me.

“You smell like cake,” she whispered innocently, and I laughed. She probably smelt my vanilla shampoo.

Aaron ran down the stairs, looking freshened up but wearing a scowl on his face directed at the little girl in my arms.

“I told you never to open the door without me, Ren,” he chastised.

“But Kat’s not a stranger,” she pouted, then tossed him a scowl of her own that made them look so alike. They both had brown hair, pointed noses, and deep green eyes. I was reminded of the first time I had met Aaron, of how handsome I had thought he was. My heart flipped when those green eyes met my blue ones.

“You look beautiful Kat,” he whispered, looking at me like I was some sort of exquisite treasure when I was only in a t-shirt, jeans, and boots with my hair pulled back into a ponytail.

I returned his compliment with a shy smile. “Thank you, Aaron. You look good too,” I said.

He took Renee from me and let her know that it was her bedtime, which the poor girl threw a tantrum over. She wanted to play some more with me, but it was getting late, so I offered to bathe her and read her to sleep, which she agreed to.

“I’m sorry about that, she’s normally not that stubborn,” Aaron said as we descended the stairs together after putting Renee to bed.

“Are you kidding? I love that kid,” I answered, letting him know it was okay. “So what are we watching?” I asked, taking my seat on the couch.

“Sci-fi,” he said, unsurprisingly. Luckily, I enjoyed science fiction too. “I’ll go get the popcorn ready.”

He came back with a large bowl of popcorn several minutes later and settled in under the blanket beside me. “Can I say something before we start?” he asked.

I turned to face him “Sure.” He seemed serious, and I hoped I hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Relax,” he said, reading my mind. “It’s about Jake...”

I rolled my eyes with a sigh

“No, let me finish,” he said, continuing when he was sure I was listening. “I understand how hurt you are right now, but please don’t be mad at him. I’ve watched him with Noelle for a while now, and I think I get why he likes her. Even though he doesn’t seem to know it yet. Both of them have something in common, something that draws them to each other and something none of us will ever truly understand.”

He paused and then continued, “They’ve both felt pain, and they find solace with one another. That’s not to say you didn’t bring him comfort, but it’s just different between them. Could you please not fight anymore? With Mason still recovering and you and Jake on the outs, our group is getting divided.”

“It’s because of me,” I whispered, feeling guilty. I had divided the group with my

indecision; Mason was on bed rest, I had sent Jake off to Noelle and Liam was in prison because, in his own warped way, he had been trying to protect me. “I’m so sorry.”

“No, don’t be Kat. I didn’t say any of this to make you feel bad. I just want you to stop hurting and realize Jake is better off with Noelle.”

I nodded, he was right. The connection between Jake and Noelle was something else entirely. They completed each other in a way I didn’t understand. It must have been why I was so jealous of them together. I just wanted Jake to be happy, and if she made him happy, then so be it. “Ugh, I can’t believe I have to like Noelle now,” I joked, causing Aaron to laugh.

I watched him, studying his features in detail. Christ, he was so beautiful, I thought. Soon he stopped laughing, and we gravitated toward each other. I don’t know who initiated it, but soon we were kissing. It was heavenly, bringing memories of our first kiss, but I realized something as we got lost in each other. For some reason, it wasn’t enough. Something was missing.

He probably realized it too because he pulled back and watched me with a sad smile. “It’s not me, is it?”

“I’m sorry,” I shook my head.

“No, never apologize for how you feel Kat, ever.” He held my face in his hands. “You should go; he’ll be waiting for you.”

“But, we didn’t even get to watch our movie...”

“I’m not going anywhere Kat,” he said, staring at me with intensity in his eyes. “Now go... damn, he’s one lucky guy,” he muttered and I smiled.

As I was about to leave, I turned to him and said, “I love you, Aaron,” he said it back, but this time we both knew it was a declaration of friendship. “Oh, and I can’t believe you still let your mom take your measurements.”

I laughed at his shocked and embarrassed expression, carefree and happy, before skipping off to profess my love to the other boy.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The large doors opened to reveal him, the boy I had realized I was utterly and irrevocably in love with, Mason.

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“Kat, what are you doing here? It’s late,” he said, concern written all over his face as he pulled me into the house.

“You,” I said, not wanting to waste another second. “I choose you, Mason.” I waited carefully for him to comprehend my words. When he did, laughter echoed through the otherwise silent house, bubbling out of him as he took me in his arms and swung me around.

He stared into my eyes with those beautiful, bright blue eyes that melted my heart. “I love you, Katrina Dawson,” he said.

I raised myself on my tippy toes before planting a kiss on his sensuous lips. A kiss that felt right and completed me. A kiss that moved the earth beneath me and made my world turn. I knew then that nothing I felt for the others could ever be compared to what I felt for Mason. The thought both scared and excited me at the same time.

“I should take you home, it’s really late,” he said, already going to open the door and lead me outside.

“No, it’s fine. I already told my mom I’ll be staying here tonight,” I said, raising my eyes to meet his.

He lowered his head to kiss me again, and my hands found the buttons of his shirt, undoing them. “Come,” he said as he led me toward his room. We stood in the middle of it, wrapped in each other’s arms, kissing without a care in the world. When my hand fell to his belted trouser, he sucked in a breath. “Kat...”



“I want you.”

“Are you sure? We don’t have to do anything now,” he said, but I wouldn’t be deterred.

“Yes,” I nodded. “I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.”

He stretched out a hand and waited for me to take it, and when I did, he led me to the bedside, pulling my hair tie out so my locks flowed freely over my shoulders. “Beautiful,” he murmured.

Slowly, he unbuttoned my shirt and jeans while I kicked off my boots. My clothing fell to the ground. In a few swift motions, we took his clothes off too.

We then stood in front of each other, entirely naked.

He carried me and I gasped as our bodies met, skin-on-skin contact sending an electric sizzle through me as he laid me down gently on the bed. His fingers wove through my hair, the blonde locks splaying around my shoulders.

Easing my head back, he tilted my eager lips to meet his. A deep groan shuddered through him when I met the thrust of his tongue with mine as we claimed and consumed each other in a fiery passion.

Releasing my mouth, his head sank lower to suck on my neck. That might leave a mark, but I didn’t care. His hand grazed my thigh then slid upward to cup my breasts, teasing the pointed nubs of my nipples that hardened instinctively to his touch.

My hands rose to link around his neck, my fingers buried in his soft hair as my hips lined up against his growing bulge. I moaned in ecstasy as he took one nipple in his mouth, fingers teasing the other.

I couldn't wait anymore "Mason..."

I heard a wrapper rip, and then he entered me, thrusting gently at first until I begged him to move faster. To go harder and deeper into me.

Waves of emotion crashed through me, igniting an unquenchable fire at the center of my being as we fell into one another.

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Thirst woke me later that night from the deep sleep I had fallen into after making love to Mason twice more. I wandered aimlessly down the hall right outside Mason's room until I realized I was lost. Soft music could be heard from the room to my right, so I curiously opened the door and came face-to-face with something unimaginable.

A laptop sat on the cluttered table in one corner of the room, and I walked up to watch the images on the screen. I recognized Mason's parents in the video even though I had only seen them once and I couldn't believe my eyes.

"What the hell are you doing in here?"

I gasped, looking like a deer caught in the headlights, and turned around to find the livid voice that spoke, "Mason?"

"Wrong. Try again," the boy in the wheelchair said, his blue eyes filled with brewing anger.

"I don't... I don't understand," my voice trembled.

"I'll ask you again, what the hell are you doing in my room?"

## CHAPTER NINE

It took me a while to understand that the boy in the wheelchair wasn't Mason, but his secret paralyzed twin brother Connor.

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“You’re not a very smart girl, Kat, are you?” he asked, eyeing me as I sat boneless on his bed.

“I don’t... what’s going on? How come no one knows about you, and how do you know my name?”

He rolled his eyes, clearly exhausted with my questions “A few people know about me, it’s just best if most people don’t. I know your name because Mason won’t stop talking about you whenever he comes to see me.”

“Comes to see...?”

“Ugh, enough already.” He pushed back his hair in frustration. Suddenly his eyes lit up.

“If you help me, I can tell you everything you want to know,” he said with a mischievous smile. I nodded like a zombie, drained of emotions.

“What do you need?”

His chair whizzed toward the laptop and he removed the flash drive connected to it, cutting off the video that had been playing on the screen.

“Those were your parents, in the video, what were they...?”

He cursed under his breath. “Help me, and I’ll tell you everything I know,” he repeated, and I nodded. I needed some answers.

“I need you to take me to this address,” he handed me a piece of paper.

“Don’t ask why and don’t wake Miss T and Mason. If you do it, I’ll tell you everything you want to know.”

I would have said no if I had known what was about to happen. I would have refused. But I had been so desperate for answers that I didn’t question him. I simply snuck Connor out of the house quietly.

It was when we finally reached the address - which was a warehouse - that he told me everything.

“Listen carefully, Kat. There’s no time to explain why my existence has been kept a secret from you until now. Hopefully, Mason and I will be able to do that later in the day. But I’m about to do something dangerous, and I need you to contact the cops just in case something goes wrong.”

“What?!” I panicked. “You told me you’d give me answers! You didn’t say anything about involving the cops. Are you some sort of drug dealer vigilante?” I asked, despite knowing my assumption was stupid.

“There’s no time Kat. I’m sorry for involving you in this, but I didn’t want Mason to have anything to do with it, and you already saw the video.”

“Yes, the video. Explain to me what in God’s name that was.” Everything was happening so fast and I was so confused.

“Knowing will only put you in more danger. Now do as I’ve asked and call the cops,” he ordered, wheeling himself into the building as I made the call, hoping the cops would arrive soon because I was starting to get really scared.

I stood outside, contemplating whether to go in or to run while I had the chance. I had just decided I couldn't leave Mason's brother here all alone when a muscled hand suddenly yanked me inside and I felt a blow to my face.

I screamed, pain piercing through me as I fell to the ground. Scrambling to my feet, I tried to run from whoever had punched me, but they grabbed me by both ankles and twisted them. The sound of my bones popping out of their sockets echoed through the room, and I shrieked in agony. The shock came over me and I lapsed into unconsciousness in a matter of seconds.

## CHAPTER TEN

Funny how life works, I thought.

Just days ago, only a few people knew about the existence of Connor Welsh, Mason's paralyzed twin brother whose parents had kept a secret because they didn't want their public image tarnished. That same son had died protecting their legacy as I later found out the flash drive had been an incriminating video to blackmail their parents.

Connor had been receiving threatening emails from the people that wanted the video. When it became clear that Mason's life would be in danger if he didn't do something, he bravely put himself in the line of fire. Now, half of the town stood in the cemetery watching a boy we all barely knew being lowered into his grave. The cops had rescued me, but they had been too late for him.

Jake came to stand beside me, his hands offering me support so I could forgo the crutches for a while. "You okay?" he asked. After my brush with death, I had made up with Jake, even giving him my blessing to be with Noelle. He didn't need it - Jake would do what made him happy - but I wanted him to know I was happy for him too.

Was I okay? I didn't think I was, but I was so tired of the pitiful looks everyone had

been giving me that I didn't mind lying. "Yes, I'm fine," I said to him, offering him the ghost of a smile.

"You should go to Mason, he's all alone."

We both turned to watch my boyfriend, who stood between his stoic parents. My heart ached for him, but I still couldn't bring myself to talk to him, not after what I had done. If only I had confronted him about Connor instead of leading him to his death.

"I can see what you are doing, so stop it. Mason doesn't blame you for anything that happened and you shouldn't blame yourself either. We can't change what has happened, we can only move forward."

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I smiled sadly. “When did you become so wise?”

He chuckled “I have always been wise, Katrina,” he said, nudging me gently with his elbow.

“Thanks, Jake. For everything,” I said to him. I reclaimed my crutches and trudged away from him when I saw Noelle approaching. Things were still awkward between us, and it would take time to change that.

At the last minute, instead of going to Mason, I changed course and walked toward my mom’s car, wanting to get away from it all. I felt a finger tap my shoulder, and I raised my head to meet a figure in a black hoodie. It was a man, but I couldn’t see his face. He handed me an envelope and ran off.

“It’s not over yet little girl.” Those were the words written on the paper in the envelope, and I felt lightheaded as I read them.

They were coming for me.

To be continued....