

her second chance



MICARAE

HER SECOND CHANCE

MICA RAE



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For Wyatt~

*Thank you for listening to me yammer on and on about Brock and Hannah
when they were nothing more than the spark of an idea, lurking in my brain.*

Your insight and ideas helped me make their love story what it is today.

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Prologue

Hannah

Bzzz.

Bzzz.

Bzzz.

I ignore my phone as it dances inside my purse, alerting me to an incoming call. There's only one person it could be. I'm late, like later than late. No doubt he's calling to make sure I'm on my way, pretending not to be frustrated I'm running late as usual. He knows me well enough to not be surprised by my tardiness. I knew I should've left earlier.

Tonight is a big night, one I'm going to mess it up if I don't pull myself together. This anniversary has to be perfect. Wanting to surprise him with my good news, scratch that, *our* good news, I spent way too much time practicing how I was going to tell him. By the time I perfected my speech, I was already behind schedule.

When the buzzing starts up again, I grab my phone out of my purse. Not letting him say anything, I blurt, "I'm five minutes away."

He snorts. "Be honest. You haven't even left the condo yet."

I huff. How does he always know? "I have, too."

Our doorman opens the door for me to exit. "Good evening, Ms.—"

"Shh!" I wave my hands to quiet him, knowing I'm busted.

The chuckling in my ear tells me he heard Kirk. "Hannah." He pretends to scold me, but I can hear the amusement in his voice. At least he's not mad I'm just now leaving. Of course, he rarely gets mad at me. My idiosyncrasies have always been a source of entertainment for him. He loves me, flaws and all.

In a rush to meet him, I step off the curb without looking left or right. Loud honking makes me jerk my head up in time to see two headlights headed right at me. Making eye contact with the driver, I step back and falter as I trip over the curb, ending up on my back, looking straight at the night's sky. My heart thunders in my chest.

Shit! That was close.

Getting run over would definitely ruin our anniversary, tainting my good news. I look to the side and see my phone just out of reach. Hopefully, that

new screen protector and case I got for my birthday works. Otherwise, I'm pretty sure my screen is toast.

"Hannah!" a muffled voice calls out, thick with worry.

"I think I'm going to be late," I croak, closing my eyes. The thundering of my pulse flashes technicolor behind my eyelids.

Fuck.

Chapter 1

Hannah

“IT’S NOT YOU, IT’S ME. I NEED SOME TIME TO WORK ON MYSELF.” I STARE across the table at the man, who suddenly feels like a stranger, as he continues his monologue as if he’s not breaking my fucking heart. “This isn’t the end. We’re simply postponing things for a little while.”

I stare at him, taking in his perfectly manicured appearance. Not a single dark hair on his head is out of place. His suit is designer, along with his tie, watch, cufflinks, and belt. I can’t see his shoes, but I’m sure they’re designer as well, shined to perfection. He’s like a cardboard cutout from a men’s magazine. Fake.

A flash of me throwing my snifter of single malt scotch in Hunter’s face makes me chuckle. Who does he think he is? He needs to work on himself? Fuck that. No one says that and means it. There has to be another woman. That’s the only explanation.

“Let me get this straight. You’re thirty-one years old and need to find yourself? Do you hear how ridiculous you sound right now?” I want to punch him in his smug, over manicured face. He’s had plenty of time since college to find himself. If anyone needs to find themselves in this relationship, it’s me. I’m the one who’s slowly had their identity erased by their partner. Not him.

His sigh signals he’s growing tired of this conversation, as if breaking up with his fiancée is interfering with whatever he’d rather be doing. “I feel like we want different things.”

I scoff, flaring my nostrils. “Obviously.”

I take the gaudy 2 karat diamond off my finger. He opens his palm, reaching across the table as if I’m actually going to give him the damn thing. Instead, I slide it inside the small pocket of the Birkin bag he got me for my birthday. Neither of those items reflect my taste. They reflect his. He’s been molding and curating my personality for so many years now that I don’t even know what my style is. Old Hannah has long since been forgotten, replaced with this bleached, tweezed, plastic version of herself. I miss the former me.

He widens his eyes when he realizes he’s not getting back the diamond. “You’re not seriously keeping the engagement ring I paid for, are you?”

“I thought this wasn’t a ‘breakup,’” I mimic, using air quotes for the sentence. Childish? Maybe, but I don’t care. I want my old life back, the one where I created beautiful art in paint splattered jeans. In that life, I was free. In this one, I’m a prisoner.

Hunter squirms in his seat, clearly not pleased I’ve gone off script. “I just assumed you were upset and ending things with me. If that’s the case, I should get back my ring.”

Bingo. He wants *me* to be the bad guy in this. No fucking way. That title is all his.

My nostrils flare. “You mean the one you gave me when you got on one knee and asked me to be yours forever? You know, after you asked my father for his permission as if I don’t have a brain in my head to make my own decisions? Um, yeah, I think I’ll keep *my* ring. I’m sure I can get a few grand for it.”

He sighs that patronizing sigh of his that he always uses when I do something out of character for the perfect trophy wife he’s shaped me to become. Wife. Ha. Fat chance. Not in this lifetime. My anger gives way to sadness. All our plans were for nothing. Every sacrifice I made was unnecessary. I don’t even know who I am anymore.

I blink, fighting back the tears that threaten to slide down my face and ruin the makeup I spent an hour on earlier, cultivating a look to please this man who doesn’t even see the real me. “I don’t understand. Yesterday you were planning our honeymoon. You booked the flights. Now, you’ve suddenly changed your mind? Why? How?”

He grits his teeth. “Please lower your voice. You’re causing a scene.”

I close my eyes, anger back in full force, pushing my sadness aside. Who can stay sad when they’re filled with enough rage to spit fire? “Well, we wouldn’t want that now, would we?” I toss back the remainder of my scotch, signaling for the waiter to bring me another.

Hunter gestures toward my empty glass. “Don’t you think you should take it easy? You’ve had enough and are causing a scene.”

“Don’t you think you should shut the fuck up?” Real mature, Hannah. Obviously, there’s some truth to his admonishment even if I refuse to accept it.

“See.” He waves his hand at me. “This is what I’m talking about. You’re so. . .”

I set my hands on the table and lean forward. “I’m so what?” I challenge.

Swear to god if he finishes his sentence, I'm going to jump across the table and wring his neck. The women from episodes of *Snapped* I used to binge watch suddenly feel very relatable.

He shakes his head, rethinking things. Good call. Before he can speak, his phone lights up with an incoming text. The name Misty catches my eye. He realizes a beat too late that I read the name. I'm already snatching the phone before he moves to grab it. I tap in his code and the message displays.

Misty: Are you finished with her? I have something you need to see.

"It's not what you think." His voice is flat, telling me he doesn't even care that we both know he's lying. He's gotten what he wants, and now it's time for this to be finished.

I toss the phone at him and stand. "I'll have my things moved out by the end of the week. Until then, you can stay with Misty." Her name tastes sour on my tongue. What grown woman is named Misty? I shake my head, hating that my misplaced rage at Hunter has reduced me to being catty toward this other woman. She has no idea what's in store for her. I should feel sorry for her. *Should*. But I don't. Good riddance to Hunter. She can have him.

The waiter arrives just as I'm about to leave. I snatch the glass out of his hand, swallowing it in one gulp like it's a shot of tequila and I'm on spring break in Cancun. The liquor burns as it goes down, and I have to force myself not to gag.

"Hannah—" Hunter's exasperation makes me want to do something childish so I can embarrass him even more.

"Hunter," I mirror, making a face at him. Who the fuck names their kid Hunter? Hannah and Hunter. Gross. What was I thinking? All the warm fuzzies I ever felt about him have drained from me. Now I'm left with unadulterated hatred.

"Please sit down so we can discuss this like civilized adults." He crosses his arms, clearly fed up with my improper behavior.

"Yeah, no. I'm going home to *our* apartment so I can pack *my* shit."

"We have to talk about how we're going to split our assets." He smiles sadly like I'm a child.

Assets? Gag. Who is this guy? "I don't have any assets. As you so lovingly point out whenever we're around friends, I have a degree in Art History, and the only thing that's good for is spending your money and

lunching with friends.” I smile sarcastically, fluttering my eyelids at him.

I should’ve taken the internship at the Tate Modern the summer after college graduation, but no. I had to move to Texas with Hunter so he could work for his daddy. Instead of starting my career, I followed this asshole. Twenty-two-year-old me was a fucking idiot. I’d like to go back in time and shake some sense into her.

“Ten years,” I mutter under my breath.

“What’s that?” His condescending voice makes me want to scream.

“I said, ten years. As in, I wasted an entire fucking decade on you and now I’m going to be thirty-one living with my parents in bumfuck Oklahoma.” I never thought I’d move back. City life fits me, but it’s hard to live in the city with no money.

Oh, god! I’m going to have to go live with my parents on the ranch. My dad will expect me to start dating our neighbor’s recently divorced son so we can marry and merge the two ranches. This keeps getting worse.

“Hannah, please sit down,” Hunter hisses through gritted teeth.

“Look, I need a few days to pack. I don’t want to see or hear from you. Stay away,” I warn.

Hunter crosses his arms, leaning back in his chair, letting me know he’s about to drop a big one on me. “And what about Bruno?”

My mouth drops. “Are you kidding me? You want my dog?” I’ll be damned if that son of a bitch gets my fat, one-eyed Yorkie. Bruno is my baby. There’s no way I’m allowing that. “You gave him to me on our first anniversary. He’s mine. You can’t take him back now.”

Hunter pinches the bridge of his nose and closes his eyes. “He’s my dog too, Hannah.”

“When’s the last time you walked him? Or fed him? Or paid him any fucking attention?” I pick up his drink and toss it back, choking it down as my anger reaches its boiling point.

He rubs his hands down his face, a sign that he’s tired of this conversation, tired of me. “Fine.” He holds up both hands in surrender. “You can keep the dog.”

I grab my purse and storm out of the restaurant. The effects of pounding three drinks in such a short time hits me. Hard.

Once outside, I fumble with my phone, ordering a car to come get me. Our penthouse isn’t too far away, but in the ridiculous stilettos I wore because Hunter thinks they make my legs sexy, I’d probably break my neck.

Drunk plus heels will certainly equal death.

Luckily, I don't have to wait long for the car to arrive. The driver takes one look at me and decides it's in his best interest not to engage in conversation. Good call, buddy. I'd probably start blubbering about how I'll never find love. Or worse, start waxing poetic about the one that got away.

I text my friends frantically on the six-block ride, but none of them respond. I'm not surprised. Sue has a new baby, and Allie is on her honeymoon in Fiji. I'll probably be the spinster friend who gets uninvited to everything now that I'm not part of a couple. Nobody in their thirties wants to invite the sad single friend. My social life is officially dead. Fucking Hunter. He ruined everything. Not that it matters. The only friend I want to talk with is Grace. Unfortunately, that can't happen. She wouldn't answer my call.

I don't even respond to the driver when he pulls in front of my building. Kirk stands in front of the building, grinning. He's always smiling. Usually, I like that about him, but tonight, I want to smack the happiness right off his face. Misplaced anger or not, I have a lot of it coursing through my veins at the moment.

"Good evening, Ms. Carpenter." It takes a fraction of a second for me to realize he doesn't look me in the eye. In fact, I can't remember the last time he did.

I stumble to a stop as it hits me. "Did you know?"

His eyes widen. I look down and realize I'm grabbing his lapels. I step back, trying to reign in my crazy train. No need to get an assault charge to cap off this shitty night.

My nostrils flare as I breathe hard. "Has he brought her here?" I ask, teeth clenched.

Kirk looks away.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me. He paraded another woman into my apartment, and you didn't even have the decency to tell me. What the fuck? I bake you cookies once a week."

Kirk steps back and opens the door, still not meeting my gaze.

I snort. "Bros before hoes, I guess."

I storm past him, my head throbbing in time with my racing pulse. This time of night the entry way is empty allowing me to wait for the elevators in privacy, muttering under my breath all the things I wish would happen to Hunter and a few I wouldn't mind spilling over onto Kirk, who I now see as his accomplice. When the elevator arrives, I'm still alone. Thank god for

small favors.

I punch the button to the penthouse so hard I break a nail. Stupid fake nails. What artist has nails this long? I frown. What artist goes three years without creating anything? Or has it been longer? I've been too busy playing the perfect future Mrs. to Hunter that I haven't done the one thing that feeds my soul.

By the time the doors open to my foyer, I want to rip shit off the walls. Instead, I unlock my door and go straight to the bar. I grab the first bottle I see, not even bothering to read what it is. Bruno picks up on my dire mood and scampers off to the bedroom, presumably to hide under the bed. Not that I blame him. Hell, I'd hide from me too.

I try not to puke when the amber liquid hits my tongue. Ugh! Fucking tequila. I haven't had this shit since Jason and I went to Mexico for Spring Break our junior year of college.

Jason.

I close my eyes and slump against the wall, sliding down until my ass hits the polished marble floor.

Jason.

I haven't thought of him in years. Why did my mind turn to him now?

The tears I've been holding back since Hunter shattered my illusion of a perfect life hit with a vengeance. Despite feeling like I hate him right now, I love Hunter. I've loved Hunter since the moment he saved me from tripping over some passed out pledge and falling down the stairs during a party at his fraternity house. He was everything I thought I wanted. Tall, handsome, and wealthy. As a girl who grew up on a ranch, never having much of anything, Hunter represented a life I thought meant success. But more importantly, he represented safety.

Fresh off my breakup from the only guy I'd ever seriously dated, I needed to feel wanted, to feel worthy, to feel safe. Hunter filled that void and then some. He swept me off my feet. And at some point, during all that sweeping, I forgot who I was. I became the woman he wanted me to be and felt lucky every step of the way. When did I become so weak?

Still, as much as I love Hunter, I never felt one tenth of the passion I felt with my first love. Hunter was comfortable. And I think deep down, I knew he could never shred my heart if he left me. Not the way Jason did. When Jason left, I was abandoned, struggling to survive. Yes, I realize that's a bit dramatic, but it's true. He ran over my heart and left it barely beating,

clinging to life.

I take a long swill of the tequila, grimacing through my tears. Now, the safe choice has left me, and I'm alone. I'll never get to walk down the aisle wearing that white dress.

Dress.

I stand and stumble into the bedroom, tequila in hand. The black designer garment bag mocks me from my walk-in closet. I twist and turn until I get my zipper down and step out of the dress I wore to dinner with Hunter.

I rip the bag off its hook and unzip my dream dress. It's a delicate lace, strapless dress that's fitted down the hips and bells out with a mermaid skirt. The lace has hand sewn beads making the dress sparkle when the light catches it. I clumsily step into the dress and pull it up, ripping a delicate piece of lace. The weight of the dress causes me to lilt to the right, swaying as I try to remain standing.

Has it always been this heavy?

I grunt, taking another swig of tequila before trying to secure the back of the dress. I can't do all the buttons by myself, so I go up as far as I can. I hold the front to my chest and take in my disheveled appearance in the mirror. My mascara has run down my face, and I've rubbed half of the eyelash extensions off my right eye. The scar from the tattoo along my collarbone is barely visible, having been removed long ago, but I know what it used to say.

Jason.

Does he still have my name branded onto his skin? I doubt it. He's probably married with kids by now. I bet he's stupidly happy. Good for him. He deserves happiness. I can't even remember why we broke up anymore. The details of our relationship have become muddled. Still, I can't forget the feel of his lips pressed to mine. The urgency of his kiss, breathing life into me, is seared into my brain. It probably always will be.

I take another gulp of the wretched liquor and reach for my laptop before sliding down the wall to sit on the floor. Bruno peeks out from under the bed before crawling into my lap. His tongue darts out as he kisses my salty tears. My head bobs and my eyes droop. I pull up the social media website I rarely check and type Jason's name into the search bar.

Jason Adams.

My eyes are heavy as I try to blink away what feels like sand. There are fifty-seven Jason Adams on this site. I click the first one. It's a kid who looks like he's still in high school. The next Jason Adams is a guy who's middle-

aged and balding, wearing a shirt emblazoned with a rifle. Definitely not him.

I sigh, blinking. I blink again, longer this time as I wait for Jason Adams' number three to load.

Blink.

Blink.

Blink. . .

Chapter 2

Hannah

RUBBING MY LIPS TOGETHER, I GROAN. MY MOUTH IS DRY, AS IF I WAS munching cotton balls in my sleep. I blink in rapid succession, shaking my head, an action I immediately regret. My head throbs. What the fuck did I do last night?

I reach up to wipe the sleep from my eyes and notice the absence of my engagement ring. Hunter breaking up with me comes back to the forefront of my mind, distracting me from the fact that my perfect manicure has been replaced by chewed to the quick, bare nails.

I groan.

“I still feel fucked up,” a voice says, causing me to bolt upright in bed, a move I immediately regret as it has me grabbing my head in hopes of keeping my brain from dripping out my ear.

I turn to see who’s in the room with me. My freshly painted beige walls have been replaced with dingy gray ones, chipped and scuffed. I’m not at home. What the hell? I blink several times, looking around. The old walls and crown décor are familiar, yet not. What did I do last night?

“Where am I?” I rub my temples as my brain bounces around my skull.

A giggle draws my attention to the other person in the room. I see a twin-sized bed less than five feet from the one I’m lying in and strawberry blonde hair spilling over the pillow. When the person rolls over, I gasp.

“Grace?” Am I still dreaming? I haven’t seen Grace since we had a falling out our senior year of college. The details are fuzzy, but it involved lots of passive aggressive moments before one big argument that sent us in opposite directions. She didn’t approve of me giving up my internship to move to Texas with Hunter. I told her she could do way better than her off-again, on-again relationship with her boyfriend Cory. At the time, I thought she was jealous because Hunter was such a catch where Cory was a total loser. We never spoke again after the yelling match outside our sorority house. I ran into her once a few years ago at homecoming when Hunter and I were visiting the campus, but she wouldn’t even look at me. I tried to apologize for the shitty things I’d said. Sadly, it wasn’t enough. I traded my best friend for a guy, and not even one that was worthy.

“I didn’t realize you were so drunk last night,” she says, rubbing her temples.

I study her face. She looks exactly the same as she did when we were pledging. “You look so good.”

“Now, I know you’re still drunk. I feel like I was rode hard and put up wet.” She rubs the back of her neck, rolling her shoulders as if to drive her point home.

I roll to the side of my bed, placing my feet on the floor, moving into an upright position at a snail’s pace. The room sways, and I reach out, catching myself by placing my hand on the corner of the desk beside the bed. “I need coffee and an explanation of how I ended up here. Why are you even talking to me?”

She sits up, smoothing her hair out of her face. She holds up a finger. “One, I have no idea how we got home. Last thing I remember, we were using our fake IDs to get into Murphy’s.” She holds up a second finger. “And two, best friends tend to speak on a regular basis. Especially when they’re roommates.”

I squint, studying her face to see if she’s pranking me or something. I notice the mirror over her shoulder. My hands shoot to my face when I see my reflection.

“Oh! My! God! My skin! My hair!” I look, well, I look thirteen years younger. My bleached blonde hair has returned to its natural dark brown, almost black hue. The Botox injections that pulled my eyebrows into a surprised look have relaxed and the fillers are absent from my now thinner lips. I don’t look like a Dallas trophy wife anymore. “What in the actual fuck?” I whisper, pinching my cheeks.

I’m beautiful.

Grace looks at me through the one eye she’s pried open. “You’ve definitely looked better,” she teases.

I open my mouth to explain when the phone on the desk rings.

She groans, rolling over and pulling her pillow over her head. “Can you please tell your mom that calling on Saturday morning before ten is strictly forbidden?”

The answering machine clicks on, and I hear both of us singing No Doubt’s Spiderwebs, telling the caller to leave a message.

Beep.

“Hannah, honey, it’s Mom. I hope you’re not still in bed, wasting the day

away. Your father was at the Jameson's yesterday and said Andrew is home on leave. You should call him. Any who, I'm off to my book club. This week we read a book about teenage vampires in the Pacific Northwest. I'll put my copy of it in the mail to you. Let me know if you need new underpants. Call me when you get this. Love you, sweetie."

Beep.

Grace laughs, the sound muffled by her comforter. "Underpants?"

I forgot how energetic my mother was before her bout with breast cancer. She was never the same after chemo. She still rises with the sun and makes my dad three hearty meals a day, but she doesn't get out and socialize like she used to. I wish I'd spent more time with her when she was more active, that I'd answered her calls once in a while. My parents and I have never been close. They don't understand my need to leave rural Oklahoma. Their vision for me has always been to marry the neighbor boy and eventually merge our ranches. No, thank you.

Clearly, I'm dreaming. That's the only explanation. I fell asleep trying to find out about Jason and now I'm having this nostalgic dream of the 'good ole days'.

That's it!

I'm dreaming about the best time in my life, which means he's bound to show up in this false reality if Grace already has. If this is a dream, I'm going to make the most of it. Who knows how long I have before I wake up?

"Let's go to The Bean," I tell Grace. Jason loved to hang out there when we were freshman, so that's probably where he is right now.

"Okay, but I'm not showering."

"Me neither." I forgot how I used to roll out of bed, throw on a hoodie, tie my hair up in a bun, and go places. Hunter would die if he saw me right now. I'm wearing pajama bottoms with Santas and a fraternity date party t-shirt that's two sizes too big. All I need is a bra, and this is good enough.

We get ready in record time, singing to Grace's hangover playlist on her iPod. When did they stop making those things? For a dream, this all feels so real. Last night's tequila sure did a number on me. It's almost like Déjà vu. I feel awake, reliving the same day I lived over a decade ago.

Weird.

After catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror before we walk out the door, I have to force myself not to change clothes or put on makeup. College me wasn't vapid or concerned with her appearance like I am now. Back then

I lived in the present. Living in the dorms and then the sorority house were some of the best years of my life. If I'm dreaming of this time in my life, I'm going to be true to myself and stop trying to be some perfect shell of myself like I was for Hunter.

Grace laments about her boyfriend, Cory, as we walk across campus to the coffee shop located in the basement of one of the dormitories. They tore the thing down a few years ago to build on-campus apartments. I have a lot of great memories here. Most of them involving. . .

Jason?

Standing at the entrance to The Bean is the guy I fell asleep Googling, as if thinking about him was enough to conjure his appearance, which I'm sure was the point of me making this trek, so I shouldn't be surprised to see him.

I guess it makes sense for me to dream about him. Dizziness hits me when he turns, and our eyes meet. His mouth ticks up on one side, and I recognize the smirk he used to give when he found something interesting. I feel jittery and shaky, like I could vomit. Though that might be more from last night's bender than anything else. Well, that and the fact that I look like total crap. New Hannah is struggling to get used to being old Hannah again.

"Who is that?" Grace asks, crinkling her nose in distaste when she notices our prolonged eye contact. Jason is definitely not the type of guy she likes.

"That's—"

"Where the fuck did you go last night?" A deep voice booms behind us, making me jump.

I whip around to find Grace's boyfriend Cory frowning at her.

She shoots me an apologetic look and a shrug. "I'll meet you inside."

I nod, eager to turn my focus back to Jason. Only when I turn around, I see he's gone. Shit. Stupid dream Jason couldn't wait for two minutes? This fantasy is feeling less fantastic and more ho hum by the second.

I sigh, pulling open the door of the dormitory. The sounds and smells seem so real. It's like I'm really here in Wilham. I take in the familiar surroundings as I make my way to the coffee shop. The smell of stale cigarettes blasts me in the face when I open the door. The Bean was the one place on campus where you could still smoke inside when I was a student here. Yuck. I don't miss this. Too bad I couldn't edit some of this shit out of my dream. My subconscious must be a stickler for detail.

In line, I see the blond, spiky hair I remember feeling soft under my fingertips, and I hear the deep timbre of his laugh. I try to get as close as I can

without being conspicuous, but there's a girl in front of me who keeps her distance. Maybe I should shove her out of the way. We are in a dream world, after all.

I try to invade her space and force her to step closer to Jason so I can as well, but she refuses. She's wearing pink scrubs and looking intently at a tablet that seems so out of place in this dream world. It's like she's completely unaware of her surroundings.

I slip past her, deciding she can yell at me for cutting the line, but she doesn't. Instead, she remains rooted in place. When she looks up, she stares through me.

Weird.

I step right behind Jason, waiting for the perfect moment to introduce myself. He rocks on his heels, tapping the scuffed toe of his Adidas in time with the song playing on his headphones. His baggy jeans sit low on his hips and his wallet chain sways in time with his movements as he keeps the beat. The t-shirt of some random underground band I'm not cool enough to have heard of stretches across his lean but muscular chest. From the gages in his ears, to the tattoo on his forearm, he screams bad boy, something I loved before he broke my heart and sent me into Hunter's waiting arms.

His deep voice sends chills down my spine when he orders his drink. I miss the way that deep voice used to whisper sweet nothings in my ears, even if it sounds different than I remember. My panties practically flood at the sound. I get a flash of that voice from my memories whispering, 'I love you' first thing in the morning.

I'm so entranced that I almost miss the fact that the barista is waiting for my order.

"Caramel Latte," I say, handing over my student ID.

I miss the days of swiping my ID card for food and drinks. Now, I get an allowance from Hunter. It's generous, but that makes him think he deserves a say in my spending. Well, I guess I used to get an allowance. That's all over now. My entire world feels shattered, like I have no idea where I really belong. Maybe that's why my mind brought me back here.

I step to the side to wait for my drink, watching Jason take his cup and walk to a booth. He sits down, pulling out a textbook and highlighter. I forgot how serious of a student he was.

I take my drink, and it spills over the side, scalding my hand. I set it on the counter, licking the sweet liquid that just burnt me from my tender flesh.

The sensation causes me to pause. I didn't think you could feel pain in a dream. I've never had one this realistic.

Jason notices me staring and tips his chin at me before going back to what he's reading. I leave to go find Grace when I realize this is a dream that's almost exactly like the first time I met Jason. Since there are no repercussions for dream actions, I decide to throw caution to the wind and approach him like I did the first time we met.

I slide into the booth across from him. He looks up, raising his eyebrows.

"Hey," I say with a wink. Then, remembering it's a dream, I add, "I'm Hannah, your future wife."

He laughs. "Jase. And I'm not interested."

I smile, not letting his easy dismissal deter me. I know how this goes. "Well, Jase, now that we've established our destiny, what do you say you take me on a date?"

He looks me up and down. "I'm not into sorority girls."

I frown. I forgot how we didn't really speak much when we first met. It wasn't until we ran into each other at a party one night that the sparks flew.

I stand. "I guess we'll see."

I leave to find Grace. On my way out the door, I hit my knee on a table. Shit. That hurt. I pull up my pant leg and find a bruise forming. Everything feels way too real. I'm beginning to suspect this isn't a dream.

But if it's not, then what the fuck is going on?

Chapter 3

Hannah

WHILE MY SORORITY'S NEW MEMBER EDUCATOR, WHOSE NAME I CAN'T remember, tells us about the upcoming social hour we have with some fraternity in thirty minutes, I mull over what is happening. It appears I'm a thirty-one-year-old who woke up in my eighteen-year-old body after a night of drinking. That is completely ludicrous and yet it's the only thing that seems plausible. What else would explain the reason I haven't woken up yet? And the fact that I know my pledge sister Gayle is about to be scolded by our president in 3. . . 2. . . 1. . .

"Gayle, is there something you'd like to share with the rest of us?" Her voice is sharp, as if she's annoyed with having to engage with her least favorite new member.

Another pledge snickers when Gayle's cheeks turn a deep red. I shoot the girl a withering look. That is not how we treat sisters.

Her friend speaks up on her behalf. "Gayle's ex-boyfriend is a Sig Chi. She's worried about the social hour with them."

Our new member educator rolls her eyes. "Well, they're our number one choice for homecoming next year, so suck it up and represent your sisters." She makes eye contact with each of us before continuing. "Making a good impression on them is your number one goal."

Gayle nods, swallowing hard.

It takes every ounce of my restraint to keep from laughing. Who the hell cares about that shit in the real world? Like, I get that it's important to pick the right house for homecoming, but will they even remember whether or not we took first place ten years from now? I doubt it. I know I sure don't. Hell, I can't remember any of the houses we paired with for Homecoming during my four years here.

Though our pledge educator does have a point. We do need to make our house look good, and Gayle is pretty dramatic. I know for a fact she sleeps with her ex after tonight's social hour, and they get back together for the thousandth time. I'm pretty sure they ended up getting married after college and are now divorced. I think her social media is filled with pictures of them with their two boys and the hashtag #coparentingwins or some other asinine

thing. I'm sorry, but this is why I'm not having kids. I'd hate to pretend I like Hunter right now for the sake of some little ones. Plus, kids are way too leaky. No thank you.

When we're finally dismissed with enough time to primp before social hour, I pull Grace aside. "I have to tell you something that I know is going to sound crazy."

She rolls her eyes at the death grip I have on her arm. I guess Gayle isn't the only drama queen. Apparently, I deserve that moniker as well. "What's with all the drama today, Hannah? I swear you were acting legit psycho after we went to The Bean. And what the hell was up with you sitting with that guy with the spiky hair? He looks like a delinquent who belongs in prison more than he does on a college campus."

I ignore her dis about Jason. Right now, I have more important things to focus on. Like avoiding Hunter and not doing anything to mess with my future. "That's what I want to talk to you about. Look, I know this sounds insane, but I'm actually thirty-one. Last night my fiancé broke up with me, so I drank myself to sleep. When I woke up, I was here. In the past with you. That guy you saw me with is the love of my life, who I stupidly let get away. Except this morning was when we first met. I think I was sent back in time to make things right with him." My words all rush together, and I'm sure she has no idea what I just said. I rub my temples, then remember Grace and I aren't exactly speaking in the future either. "Well, him and you."

"Hannah, you sound mental and. . . wait, me?" Her eyes widen and mouth drops open. "Why do you need to make things better with me? Aren't we besties in the future?" She looks so sad I almost feel guilty for telling her that part.

"Grace, I haven't spoken to you since junior year when we got into a huge fight. By the time I apologized, the damage was already done." I don't tell her what we fought about because the last thing I want is to lose her now. Call me selfish, but I need her to help me get through this. Plus, I've missed her. Yeah, I have other friends, but no one compares to Grace. When she left, I lost one of the most important people in my life. I don't want to repeat that.

She shakes her head. "I don't buy it. There's no way you and I stopped being friends. Unless. . . Did you sleep with Cory?" She raises her eyebrows, flaring her nostrils.

I make a face. "Ew, no!"

She crosses her arms. "And what's wrong with Cory? Do you think

you're too good to sleep with him? He's better than that derelict you were chatting up earlier."

I grab her shoulders, shaking her. "Grace, focus. I'm a time traveler stuck in the past."

She laughs so loudly several of our pledge sisters stop looking in their mirrors to stare at us. Grace circles her finger in the air. "Carry on, ladies. Nothing to see here." She turns back to me. "Hannah, we got fucked up last night. I'm pretty sure you're just hungover. Time travel isn't a real thing."

"Then how does that explain the fact that I know Gayle is going to sleep with her ex tonight? Or that you and I are going to go to a party and meet up with Jason and his roommate? You'll leave early to see Cory, and I'm going to go home with Jason where we'll talk all night?"

She shakes her head. "God, Hannah, you are seriously a prude. Talking all night? Why don't you lose that v-card already?"

"Grace, focus," I scold.

"Okay, right. Look, I don't know what is going on with you, but I promise we're never going to stop being best friends. That, and I know you're the same you from yesterday. You're hungover, not time traveling. That's what happens when you go to an around the world shot party and end the night at a bar when you're not a big drinker. This is a hangover. It happens to everyone in college." She crosses her arms, signaling she's losing patience with this conversation.

I sigh, realizing I'm not going to get through to Grace. I should've known she wouldn't believe me. Hell, I'm not sure *I* believe me.

"Good girl," she says, thinking I'm convinced this is just a hangover. She hands me her purse filled with makeup. "Now, make yourself pretty because we've got to get you a date with a Sig Chi tonight. Can't have you slumming with ole Prison Break from earlier."

I take the makeup from her. Clearly, Grace is not going to be the ticket out of the past. If I'm stuck here, I might as well make the most of things. I mean, who wouldn't want to relive the best years of their life?

Right?

LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER, THE SIG CHI'S STAND ON THE PORCH SERENADING

us with some ridiculous song to start our social hour with them. My sisters all seem to swoon in unison where I struggle to keep a straight face. I forgot how silly some of this Greek life stuff was. It's not until they're walking toward us with roses that I see Hunter.

Shit.

I forgot he was in this part of my past. Even though we ran in the same social circles, he was such an unimportant part of my life until Jason and I stopped dating. Maybe this is what I'm supposed to do here. I'm supposed to keep myself from ending up with Hunter. That should be easy enough. I'll just avoid him at all costs. Then we never meet, and I never end up in this mess.

When he approaches me with a rose in his hand, his eyes are cast down, so I shove Grace forward, making sure she's matched with Hunter, and turn to the guy next to him.

"Hi. I'm Hannah," I say, not even bothering to look at who's standing in front of me. At this point, anyone's better than Hunter.

"I'm Brock." The deep voice sends shivers up my spine, causing my eyes to jerk up to see the man before me.

I take the rose he holds out to me as I try to look him up and down as inconspicuously as possible while I ignore the zing in my belly when our hands meet. He's tall, like really tall. His dark hair is short and styled to messy perfection. The black polo with our school's mascot emblazoned on his left pec stretches tight across his muscles. Damn, he's gorgeous. But it's more than that. He makes me feel warm, as if I'm bathed in light, with the way he looks at me. My traitorous heart pounds against my sternum.

"Brock Martin?" There's no way I'm standing in front of one of my favorite NFL players. I mean, I knew he was in school with me, but I've never met him before now. He was always so untouchable back in the day. His star was rising while I was falling in love with Jason.

He smiles, and all I want is to make him do it again. "That's me. Do we know each other?"

"No, but you're like a big-time football star. Everyone knows you." Okay, this is a nice twist. I get to be friends with a sexy quarterback and have a second chance with my first love. This I can do.

He rubs the back of his neck, fighting the blush spreading across his cheeks. It's endearing to say the least. "I wish." He squints, glancing around at his fraternity brothers, who are talking with their dates. "Did one of the

guys put you up to this?”

I shake my head no. “I mean, I know you’re on the football team, and I think if the quarterback gets hurt next week, you’ll take his place and be a rockstar.” Shit. I forget what I’m supposed to know. Reliving my past shouldn’t be this hard.

His face softens, replacing the skepticism with amusement. “Here’s hoping. I mean, not that Willis gets hurt, but that I get to be a starter one day. That doesn’t usually happen for walk-ons.”

“Well, I say don’t give up.” I smile, giving him a playful punch to the arm. I pull my hand back, shaking it. Damn, is this dude carved from marble?

His grin widens. “I like you Hannah.” Why do his words make me feel invincible?

I smile. “Good. Now, I hate to ruin this fun, but do you think it’d be okay if I snuck out early? I need to. . .” I stop myself because I don’t want to tell him I need to do some recon to make sure Jason will be at the party tonight. That makes me seem like a stalker. Plus, I don’t want to accidentally run into Hunter. If I’ve learned anything from the movies, what I do while I’m here will seriously affect my future, something about a space-time continuum. But if I’m being honest, I don’t want Brock to stop flirting and looking at me like I’m someone special. Not yet, anyway.

His face falls for a fraction of a second, but he plasters his smile back on so quickly I’m not sure the falter was real. “Sure. I’m tired from practice earlier anyway. Can I walk you back to your dorm?”

“You don’t have to.” Even though I mean it, I’m still disappointed at the thought of turning him away. His presence is calming. I can’t explain why, but for the first time since I woke up in this bizarre world of my past, I feel like I’m where I’m supposed to be. Being with Brock makes me feel like I’m back in my real life, which makes zero sense.

He smiles. “I insist. After all, it’s on the way.”

I squint at him. “How do you know that?”

He shrugs, shoving his hands into his pockets and rocking back on his heels. “All freshmen are in Wilham or Drummond. I’m in the athletic dorm, which is right across the street from them.”

I have the strongest urge to kiss him. What the hell is going on with me? I blink twice, trying to stop myself from imagining his taste. Even though this is the first time I’ve met him, I have the strangest feeling I know how his lips feel on mine. “Oh, um, yeah, sure. We can fulfill our social hour obligations

to our houses and then go our merry ways.” Not to mention, I get to bask in the warmth his presence brings for a little longer. I’m not ready to say goodbye.

I catch Grace’s eye and point toward our dorm. Her eyes light up, and she gives me a thumbs up, nodding vigorously. I roll my eyes and shake my head no, but she’s returned to her conversation with Hunter. I wish I could hear what he’s saying. He looks like he’s delivering bad news. Weird.

“What was that all about?” Brock asks, gesturing toward Grace.

“My roommate is a dork. She probably thinks I’m taking you back to the dorms because she told me I need to just get over myself and lose my virginity already.”

Brock’s cheeks turn red, and he coughs.

Oops. I probably shouldn’t have said that out loud. “Sorry. I forgot how eighteen-year-old boys are when someone mentions sex.” God, he’s cute.

He puffs up his chest. “I’m nineteen.”

I roll my eyes. “Same difference.”

He gestures to his muscular form. “I’m hardly a boy. Haven’t been for a long time.”

I giggle when he drops his fake outrage and laughs. Also, he’s not wrong. There’s nothing boy about him. He looks exactly like the NFL quarterback throwing touchdowns on Monday night I know him to be.

The conversation flows well between Brock and me. For a football phenom, he’s surprisingly down to earth. Though, I guess he’s not a superstar yet. Weird. I wonder if, years from now, I’ll sit around and tell people I knew him when. Maybe that’ll be my claim to fame.

I snort.

“What?” he asks, flashing me a wide smile with perfect teeth.

“I was just imagining sitting around in the future telling people I went on a ‘date’ with NFL superstar Brock Martin in college.” I giggle.

“Or what if this is the story we tell our grandkids one day?” He bites his lip, smiling.

I grin. He’s smooth, I’ll give him that. “Sadly, I’m pretty sure you end up marrying a supermodel.” I can’t stop my lips from dipping down into a frown. Thinking about him and his wife makes me jealous.

He scoffs. “Yeah, right.”

“Seriously, you do. You get drafted by the Lions, and your signing bonus is a couple of million dollars. I think you date a movie star for a year and then

marry the model. The two of you are on damn near every magazine.”

He eyes me skeptically, so I continue.

“The woman you end up with is perfection. She embodies everything young women want to be and exactly who men want to be with. You’re happy.”

The way he grins at me makes my insides quiver. I want him. There’s no way to deny how much I’m attracted to him. Too bad I can’t be with him. That’s not why I’m here.

“She sounds horrible. Why would I settle for a trophy wife when I could have you as my prize.” His tongue darts out, tracing his lower lip, and I swear my panties don’t stand a chance.

Warmed to the core by his words, part of me wants to say to hell with Jason and stay right here with Brock. The other part warns me I’m treading in dangerous territory.

I shake my head. “That’s not going to happen. You wind up with the model.”

He raises his eyebrows. “Oh, yeah? And what about you?”

My face falls. “I fuck it all up and end up thirty-one, getting dumped by my fiancé, who I’m not sure I ever really loved.” I shake my head. “I gave up an internship in London for him only to be alone forever.” Tears sting my eyes as I remember just how far off track my life has become.

He stops, turning toward me and grabbing my elbow. “I know we just met, but there is no way a girl like you ends up alone forever. I’m pretty sure guys will beat down the door for a chance at getting your attention. I know I’m going to.” He lets go of me and starts walking again. After a few steps, he stops short and turns back to me. “And any guy worth a damn won’t let you give up London for him.”

I smile, sadly. “In another week, you’re going to be riding high on your new football fame as our star quarterback. I promise you won’t even remember me.” The words may be true, but that doesn’t stop them from souring on my tongue. Why does the thought of him leaving me behind bother me so much?

He scoffs, shaking his head. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget my future wife.”

I laugh at his silliness, making his grin widen. “I had no idea you were such a charmer, Brock Martin.”

“I like how you say my name.”

“And how is that?”

“You say my name like I’m someone important.” He bites his lower lip, blushing.

I step closer to him. “Because you are.”

He reaches over and squeezes my hand, sending tingles to all my bits before letting go. “You are too, Hannah, whatever your last name is.”

“It’s Carpenter.”

“Hannah Carpenter. I like that.” He rubs his chin, thinking for a moment. “I think I like Hannah Martin even better,” he says, starting to walk again before I can remind him I’m not his type.

We get to the front of my dorm and, as antsy as I am about meeting up with Jason later tonight, I don’t want to say goodbye to Brock. This is the best conversation I’ve had with someone of the opposite sex in a long time. I’d forgotten how nice it feels to be not just flirted with, but listened to.

“Well, Brock Martin, this is where we part ways.” My words may say goodbye, but my body lingers, wanting to prolong my time with him just a bit more.

“It’s been a pleasure, Hannah Carpenter,” he teases, bowing like cartoon royalty.

I grin, biting my lower lip as I nod my agreement. “It really has.”

He walks away and then turns and jogs back to me. “So, I know I’m about to become a football superstar and I’m marrying an actress—“

“Supermodel,” I correct with a laugh.

“Right, supermodel. But I was wondering if maybe you’d give me your phone number? We could hang out before I make it big. You could help keep me humble. Plus, tomorrow night, the athletic dorm serves steak and lobster for dinner. I could bring you with me as my plus one.”

I think about how the first time around, I sat in my dorm room for a week before Jason called me after that first night we hung out because he was the king of playing games. It would be nice to hang out with Brock and keep myself distracted while I wait. Since I know our futures don’t align, what could it hurt?

I tilt my head to the side. “I’m never one to turn down steak and lobster.”

He pumps his fists in victory. “Great. It’s a date.”

I frown, opening my mouth to correct him.

He holds up his hands. “Not a *date*, date, a friendship date.”

I nod, digging in my purse for a pen and something to write on. I jot

down my number on an old receipt, signing my name with a heart. Our fingers touch when he takes the paper from me, and I shiver. He grins at my obvious reaction to him, but I notice the reaction isn't one-sided. He's as affected by me as I am by him. The way his nipples stand tall on his pecs and pink crawls up his neck tells me he feels what I'm feeling.

Pretending I didn't feel his touch all the way down to my toes, I give him a pointed look. "You better call me. My taste buds are set for surf and turf. I'll be terribly disappointed if you don't follow through."

"I'm going to call you. But, just so you know I'm serious, plan on meeting me right here tomorrow promptly at 4:41 PM."

"Why 4:41?" I mash my lips together to keep from grinning. His charms are definitely not lost on me. That supermodel is one lucky woman. I shake my head. Why am I jealous? It's not like I have a future with Brock.

He shoves his hands into his pockets, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet. "We need to get in the line before the offensive line does, or there won't be any food left."

I laugh. "I'll see you then, Brock Martin."

He takes my hand, kissing my knuckles. "I look forward to it, Hannah Carpenter."

I remove my hand from his before I do something stupid like mount him here and now. Instead, I head into my dorm, feeling Brock's eyes on me the entire time.

When I get into my room, I catch my reflection in the mirror. I'm wearing a goofy smile, and my face is flushed. Brock Martin is definitely good for my self-esteem. This do-over is going to be fun.

Brock

Hannah's so vibrant and her personality is so bold it would be easy to forget how small and fragile she is. The moment I first laid eyes on her, everything about being with her felt right. It was clear to me fate brought us together. I wanted to protect her, to keep her safe from the evils of the world. Unfortunately, I'm learning all too well I can't always be a hero. Even now, as I watch the internal battle waging inside her, there's nothing I can do to soothe the tension behind her eyes.

When I spoke to Dad earlier today, he reminded me I have to let things happen on their own time. That includes Hannah. Everything in me says I have to fight for her, and my instincts are usually right. Trusting my gut makes me a great quarterback. Still, it doesn't make waiting any easier. I have keep reminding myself to be patient.

There's just one problem. I've never been a patient man.

Chapter 4

Hannah

“TELL ME AGAIN WHY WE’RE SNEAKING AROUND THE BACK OF THE HOUSE TO get into the party?” Grace hisses, sidestepping a puddle that’s most likely urine since the rest of the yard is bone dry.

I try not to gag. College guys are disgusting.

“I told you.” I whisper back, frustrated she still doesn’t seem to get it. “Jason and his roommate are already back here. I want to approach him before that Misty girl gets here. She has a crush on him and she’s why we broke up the first time. Jason and his roommate threw a party when I was out of town. I came back and found out she spent the night at their apartment. I was convinced Jason had sex with her, even though he swore he didn’t. That was the beginning of the end for us. Once I stopped trusting him, we fell apart.” Though now that I think about it, why was I so adamant they slept together? What clues did I find that I seem to have forgotten? And why does that memory seem so hazy, like it belongs to someone else? Shouldn’t I remember breaking up with the love of my life better?

She nods as if what I just said wasn’t completely unhinged. “In the future’s past?”

God, I love Grace. She may not believe me, but at least she doesn’t act like I’ve lost my mind.

I grab her arm, pulling her close to the house. “There he is.”

“Where?” Her voice is so loud everyone in the yard turns to look at us. Jason included. She grimaces, shooting me a pained look. “Sorry.”

I sigh. “It’s okay.” And really it is. I’m not mad at her. I’d just hoped to have a sexy entrance, so he’d be enraptured by me when I walked up to him. Instead, I look like a stalker, hiding in the bushes. Great.

I take a deep breath. Here goes nothing.

I sidle up to Jason, who’s gone back to his conversation with his roommate, and place my hand on his arm.

“Hey,” I say. “Jase, right?”

He nods. His smirk tells me he sees right through what I’m doing. “That’s what my friends call me.”

“Is it short for something?”

“Jason.”

I wait to see if he remembers my name, but if he does, he doesn't say it. Come to think of it, maybe I didn't tell him. “I'm Hannah.”

“Oh, right. Hannah.”

He turns back to his friends, who look at me like I'm an alien. I don't remember it being so hard to get to know him in the past. It's like this version of Jason plays much harder to get. I hope that means it will be so much sweeter when we finally get back together.

Grace steps into the circle to save me from crashing and burning. She starts talking to the other guys, edging Jason out with her body. She really is the best wing woman.

“I'm going to get a beer,” I whisper to him. “You wanna come?”

He chugs the last of what's in his cup. “Sure.”

Looks like we are back on track. I turn toward the keg without glancing over my shoulder. If memory serves me correctly, my ass was his favorite thing about me, and I don't want to hinder his view.

Jason steps behind me at the keg, taking the cup from my hand to fill it for me. His chest brushes against my back. Our closeness makes me smile before worry tugs at the corners of my mouth. The old spark I remember feels more like a flicker. Something is off. It's like my body doesn't recognize him the way my mind does.

Weird.

I frown. Something's wrong, but what is it?

He tilts his head to the side, scrutinizing me. “Is everything okay?”

“Huh?” I blink several times. “Oh, yeah. Sorry. I was thinking about one of my classes.”

He raises an eyebrow, not believing me for a second. “At a party?”

I inwardly groan. What the hell is wrong with me? I'm thirty-one years old, for fuck's sake. I should be able to talk to this guy who I know falls in love with me easier than this. When did I become such an anxious mess? Why couldn't I come back and embrace the carefree attitudes of my youth?

He hands me my beer, saving me from having to come up with something else to cover for my distraction. I'm drained, and the night is only beginning. How in the hell will I pull off this redo?

“Thanks.” I take the cup, chugging the amber liquid, hoping for some courage. I pass the cup back for him to refill.

By the time we walk back out to where Grace talks with his friends, a

light buzz has spread throughout me, and I'm feeling good. I forgot I wasn't a big drinker at eighteen. Apparently, adult Hannah's tolerance level didn't travel to the past with me. Yet another thing I'll have to get used to if I want this mission to be a success. Being young again is exhausting.

As the party wears on, Jason and I get into a groove with our conversation. He's more and more receptive to my flirting. When I'm sure history is about to repeat itself, I signal to Grace it's time for her to sneak off as we planned and leave me to get a ride home from him.

"Can I get a ride home?" I bat my eyelashes so hard I damn near pull a muscle in my eyelid.

His eyes dart to the side. "I would, but I rode with my roommate, and his car is tiny."

"Okay, then, will you walk me back to the dorms?" I cringe at the desperate sound of my voice. Why is he so aloof all the time?

He rubs the back of his neck, still not making eye contact with me. "I would, but I think he's pretty wasted, so I'll probably have to drive him home. If you're not tired, we could meet up at the dorms in half an hour."

I cock my head to the side. I definitely don't remember things happening this way before. From what I remember, though my memories are fuzzy, Jason and I were the fairy tale couple right from the start. Maybe this is a test since I didn't appreciate him enough the last time.

Yeah. That has to be it.

I look to my right and wave, pretending to spot someone I know. "I see one of my sorority sisters over there so, sure. That sounds good. I'll see you at the dorms. Which one are you in?" I ask, as if I don't already know.

"I'm in Wilham." His tone tells me he thinks I already know that information.

"I'm in Drummond, but I can meet you in your lobby."

"Cool. I'll see you in a bit."

I walk away before I have any second thoughts. The Jason I remember was always so attentive and loving, but this Jason is nothing like that. The weird thing is all the events seem to be the same. Well, except for meeting Brock. I never became friends with him in the past. I knew he was fraternity brothers with Hunter, and we were at the same events from time to time, but by the time I was introduced to him, he was the star quarterback and always surrounded by throngs of women. I don't think I ever made it onto his radar, despite him being on mine.

On the way home, I walk in the shadows in case Jason drives past. I don't want him to see me walking alone like a loser. That wouldn't earn me any points with him. I can't believe he didn't give me a ride or offer to walk me home. Brock walked me to the dorms in broad daylight because he wanted me to arrive home safely. It's almost 2:00 in the morning, definitely not safe for a young girl to be walking alone. I roll my eyes. Adult, city-girl Hannah is such a buzz kill. She worries way too much. But still, those are valid points of concern.

Deep voices from across the street get my attention. I look up in time to see Hunter and some of his frat bros walking down the sidewalk. I jump behind a bush to keep them from spotting me. I'm not supposed to meet him yet and I don't want to screw up this timeline. If I'm here to make things work with Jason, I definitely don't need the complication of Hunter. Plus, I'm still pissed off at future Hunter. He's so cold and aloof. It's like he never loved me. His behavior when he dumped me felt clinical. How did I ever think he was a good choice?

By the time I walk up to the front doors of Wilham, Jason's already there, standing with a blonde girl whose back is to me. Without seeing her face, I have this sense of dread, telling me I know who she is. They're surrounded by a cloud of smoke. I forgot Jason smoked when we first met.

"Hey," I say, interrupting what appears to be a serious conversation.

He smirks. "I was beginning to think you decided to stay at the party."

I shrug. "We had to drop off a friend first."

The girl with him turns around and glares at me, but I ignore it. A few seconds later, I recognize the bitch. Misty.

Fuck. Please tell me I'm not too late, that she hasn't sunk her talons into Jason before I've even had a chance to spark his interest.

"Hi." I start to stick my hand out for her to shake, but rethink the action. I don't think eighteen-year-old girls shake hands. Instead, I give an awkward wave. "I'm Hannah."

"Misty." Her tone says, get the fuck out of here.

I smile wider. "It's so nice to meet you, Misty. Are you in a sorority?"

She scoffs. "Vapid isn't my thing, and I don't have to buy my friends."

Jason chuckles.

I jerk my eyes to him. What the fuck? Is he laughing at me?

He must see the fire behind my eyes because he quickly stops. "Misty is a bit opinionated," he explains as if that excuses her rudeness.

I nod. "Cool," I say flatly, pursing my lips.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," he tells her. Then he turns to me. "Want to go?"

I shoot Misty a smirk over his shoulder. That's right, bitch. He's mine.

"Sounds great." I give him my best seductive look.

Misty walks off with a huff. Jason doesn't turn to watch her. Instead, his focus is on me.

I snarl at her back. "Can you believe she called me vapid? She's the stupid one."

"She's premed and in the honors college. Misty isn't stupid. She plans to be a surgeon."

My cheeks heat. "Oh." Just because she might have wronged me the first time around doesn't mean she deserves my distaste now.

"Did you have fun tonight?" he asks, dropping his deep voice even lower, reaching out to squeeze my hip.

I nod, biting my lower lip. Deep voices are my kryptonite. "I think tonight's about to get even better," I flirt.

He holds out a hand for me to take, leading me to the boy's side of the dorms. "My RA is out of town, so it's safe for you to come up to my room. We don't have to sneak around."

I know he's a virgin at this point of the past since we both lost our virginities a month after we started dating. If I remember correctly, and I'm starting to question some of my memories, we'll spend tonight talking. Even though I know it's common for kids our age, this whole sneaking into the dorm room thing feels wrong. Maybe I should make him work a little harder.

Trying to figure out my next move, my exhaustion hits. I yawn so wide my jaw cracks. Today has been busy, and I'm feeling the effects.

He chuckles. "Maybe we should do this another time."

I want to argue, but apparently past Hannah has future Hannah's stamina. "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. I'm pretty tired."

The elevator dings, and the door opens. No one is on it, so he puts his foot in the door, then pulls me into a hug. His broad arms encircle me, and I feel a tug at my heart. This part is exactly how I remember it.

He leans down and brushes his lips across mine.

The kiss is over before I can close my eyes. I place my fingertips on my lips. It was nice, but if I'm being honest, we're still lacking that magical spark I remember us having. Something isn't quite right.

“Good night, Hannah.”

He gets on the elevator, but I stop him. “Wait, don’t you want my phone number?”

“Sure.” The way he says it doesn’t feel flirtatious. It’s like he never thought about calling me until I mentioned it.

Instead of focusing on how hard it feels syncing up with Jason this time, I dig into my purse for something to write on, only to remember I used the one piece of paper I had to give Brock my number. Shit.

I frown. “I don’t have anything to write on.”

He thrusts his palm at me.

I take his hand, scribbling my number on his wrist so it won’t rinse off when he washes his hands.

He looks at it and then back at me. “I’ll call you.”

I grin. The smile stays on my face the entire walk to my dorm.

Yep. My second chance is going to be different. This time everything changes.

Chapter 5

Hannah

AT 4:41 PM ON THE DOT, BROCK SHOWS UP OUTSIDE MY DORM. TRUE TO HIS word, he called earlier to make sure I was still planning to meet him. When the phone rang, I was hoping it was Jason. Surprisingly, I wasn't disappointed when I heard Brock's husky voice on the other end of the line. I swear I can still hear his voice whenever my mind silences. It's almost as if he's holding my hand and whispering in my ear. As much as I want to lean into that feeling, I know I'm here because of Jason.

Brock wears jeans and a fitted orange polo shirt with our school mascot on the breast. The words *Cowboy Football* are embroidered beneath. An endless supply of school spirit wear must be a benefit of being on the football team, since that's all I've seen him wear. With the way they mold perfectly to his chest, I won't complain. He looks like he just got out of the shower, as his hair is still wet.

My mind immediately goes to thoughts of him in the shower. I press my lips into a tight line. Get it together, Hannah.

I'm glad I dressed up a little. I know tonight's not a date, but I would've felt silly in jeans and a t-shirt now that I see him. I'm wearing my favorite sundress with a cardigan over my shoulders since the temperature dips lower after dark now that it's fall. It was my favorite dress the first time around. Something about the way it swishes when I walk makes me feel pretty.

"Hey, you," I say, immediately recognizing the flirtatious tone in my voice. I snap my lips shut. As much as a passionate fling with Brock Martin would be a great story for future Hannah to tell, I can't forget Jason's the reason I'm here. I can never forget that. Just the thought of forgetting how Jason brought me here causes a dull throb at the base of my skull.

"You look. . ." He smiles, looking me up and down. "Wow."

I scrunch up my shoulders, feeling my cheeks heat at the compliment. "Are you always such a charmer?"

He shrugs. "Maybe I am. Or maybe you bring it out in me."

I roll my eyes, refusing to let myself get swept away by him, or rather, my attraction to him. Friends are all we'll ever be. "I believe you promised me steak and lobster," I remind him.

Brock glances at his watch. "We're going to be late." He takes my hand, leading me toward the athletic dorm. "Let's go."

I have to jog to keep up with him. He's so tall it takes three steps for me to move the same distance as one of his strides. I tug my hand out of his, laughing. "Slow down, Speedy. My legs aren't as long as yours."

He slows his pace. "Sorry about that. I forgot you didn't grow right," he teases, patting me on the head.

I elbow him in the ribs. "Oh, shut it."

His loud laughter draws the attention of the students walking in front of us. I recognize one of them as the girl Misty from last night. She wears dark blue scrubs and the same surly look from last time I saw her.

Great.

Now she's going to run back to Jason and tell him she saw me with another guy. He's going to think. . . wait. That could be a good thing. Maybe he'll call me sooner if he thinks there's competition. I press my lips tight to suppress the smile that thought brings.

Brock squints at me. "What's that grin for?"

"Can I ask you something friend to friend?" I look up at him, swinging our arms between us.

"Of course you can, Hannah. You can ask me anything." His face is so sincere, it takes me a moment to remember what I wanted to ask him.

"That girl over there is a friend of the guy I like. She's probably going to tell him she saw me with you. Do you think that will run him off, or will it make him call me sooner?" I sound like such an innocent little twit. What the fuck is wrong with me? I need grown up Hannah, not young love-struck Hannah, if I want this mission to be a success.

He flexes his jaw, thinking about my question. "So, there's competition?"

"Well, no, but he doesn't know that." Why does that feel less than honest?

Brock clears his throat. "If he likes you, he'll pursue you harder. Another guy isn't a deterrence when you're going after the one. If anything, he'll step up his game to show you he's right for you and how perfect your life together will be. There's nothing a guy hates more than watching his soulmate slip away."

I roll my eyes. "I forgot about all the stupid games guys like to play with women."

His entire body tenses for a fraction of a second before relaxing again. "I

don't play games." The strain in his voice and the vein popping in his neck give me pause.

I tilt my head, studying him. "Maybe that's how you land your supermodel." I'd always assumed it was his athletic prowess and good looks that opened so many doors for him, but now that I'm getting to know him, I can see he's a genuinely nice person.

"Right." He frowns, shaking his head as he mutters something to himself.

I decide to let it go and enjoy the rest of our walk in the comfortable silence we share.

When we get to the cafeteria in the athletic dorm, Brock leads me to a table that seats four. "Sit here. I'll go get our dinner."

"I can go with you."

He bites his lower lip, grinning. "Actually, this is for athletes only. I'm breaking the rules by bringing you on a date here."

"Ooh, you're a bad boy. I like that." The adorable pink tint to his cheeks makes me want to kiss him. Wait, where did that come from?

He smiles, dazzling me with the way his entire face relaxes. "I sure hope so."

He's pushing through the crowd before I can respond. I reach up and feel my cheeks. They're warm and ache from all the smiling I've done since meeting up with Brock. I don't know that anyone has ever done this to me.

"Can I sit here?" A large guy holding three plates of food on his tray asks, gesturing to the seat across the table from me. I recognize him as Zeke Washington. He also goes on to play for the Lions with Brock. In fact, they're often dubbed *The Dynamic Duo*.

I nod, pretending I'm not starstruck to be meeting another one of my favorite NFL players. "Have at it. I'm waiting for Brock."

He raises his eyebrows, eyeing me up and down. "You his girl?"

I laugh. "Trust me, I'm not his type. I'm his friend. My name's Hannah."

The guy cocks his head, his dreads falling across his shoulder. "Not his type? What's wrong with that boy? He's got a cannon for an arm, but he's an idiot if you're not his type."

I shrug, pretending the thought of not being what Brock wants doesn't sting. "He's a superstar and likes shiny trophies. When models fall at your feet, it's kind of hard to resist them."

"He tell you he's a stud?" Zeke laughs, drawing attention from the surrounding tables. "The boy barely made the team. Yeah, he's getting

attention, but he's a long way from being QB 1."

I narrow my eyes, crossing my arms over my chest. Some friend Zeke is. "I wouldn't be so sure. In fact, I bet you'll be eating your words in the next week or so." The bite in my tone leaves no mistake that I won't let anyone dis Brock.

"Is that so?" He asks, unphased by my new snippiness.

I nod, giving him as much attitude as I can muster without speaking.

He pauses for a beat, then laughs. "I like you, Hannah."

Warmth floods my belly when I look up to see Brock approaching the table. He wears a big smile, showcasing his dazzling white teeth. Across from me, Zeke smiles, his teeth equally bright. I absentmindedly fan myself. These football players are way too sexy for their own good. I'm about to melt into a puddle surrounded by all these big muscles and pretty faces.

Brock raises one eyebrow, making his face look a little villainous and a whole lot sexy. "You hitting on my date, Washington?"

Zeke grins. "So what if I am? You gonna stop me?"

Brock ignores him, setting a plate in front of me. "Don't listen to Zeke. He's a great receiver, but he's dumb as a bag of hair."

I laugh, turning to Zeke who punches Brock in the back of the thigh, nearly causing him to drop his tray. "I think I like you too."

"What about me?" Brock pretends to pout.

I shrug. "Jury's still out on that."

He sets a soft drink in front of me. "Then I'll have to up my game."

I giggle. Flirting with Brock is fun. He's so easy to interact with and be around. Unlike Jason, who acts aloof, like he's too cool for me. If I wasn't here on a mission, I'd probably try to spend time with Brock as more than just friends. As things stand, I need to keep him at a distance and focus on why I'm here.

He holds up his drink. "To new friendships."

Zeke and I clink glasses with him.

THE SUN SETS, BRIGHT ORANGE AND PINK, PAINTING THE SKY AS BROCK AND I stand in front of my dorm, trying to say goodbye, but neither of us wanting tonight to end. Everything was perfect.

I rub my stomach. “I shouldn’t have eaten that entire piece of cheesecake,” I groan.

He laughs, pinching my side. “I had no idea a little thing like you could put away food like that. Good thing I get to eat free at the dorms, or I’d have to get a job just to keep you fed.”

I shrug. “It’s nice to eat what I want and not be criticized for it.”

Brock’s face darkens. “Who does that?”

“Hun—“ Crap. I almost referenced Hunter, who I haven’t met in this timeline. “Um, my ex. He didn’t want a fat girlfriend.” His exact words were, ‘No fiancée of mine is going to have an ass wider than mine.’ But I don’t tell Brock that. I doubt it would make any sense to him anyway. In this timeline, I’m too young to have an ex fiancé, and there’s no way he wouldn’t laugh in my face or run for the hills if I told him I’m a time traveler.

“What a jerk. You deserve better than him. You know that, right?”

I nod my head in agreement. “You’re telling me. I can’t believe all the time I wasted on him.”

“Are you on the rebound?”

Am I? “Um, sort of,” I stammer.

He steps closer. He’s a big guy and towers over me, but I don’t feel intimidated. He tilts my chin up, holding me in place, his eyes locking on mine. “I don’t want to be your rebound guy, so I’ll let you go out on a date with that guy you mentioned earlier.”

“Brock. . .” My voice is a whisper, and my panties are drenched. I’m not sure if I’m begging or scolding. All I know is being this close to him feels like slipping into a warm bath on a chilly day. I don’t want to step away, despite knowing I should.

He places a finger on my lips. “Shh. One date. After that, I’m making you mine.”

Inside, I’m screaming for him to kiss me. I swallow hard but don’t argue. For the first time, I wish the future was different. I wish I could enjoy Brock before settling down with Jason. But I can’t. Risking my second chance for a passionate affair isn’t worth missing out on forever. I’ve got one chance to fix my past. I need to stay focused and not fuck it up.

Jason is the reason I’m here.

He leans down, pressing a kiss to my forehead. “I’ll see you here next week for our standing steak and lobster dinner.”

“By then, you’ll be the starting quarterback. I’ll be nothing more than a

distant memory.” I try to keep my tone light, but the thought of him forgetting about me stings.

One side of his mouth ticks up into a grin. “Then next week we’ll have two reasons to celebrate.”

“Two?”

He nods. “I’ll be celebrating my new status as quarterback *and* your boyfriend.”

Not waiting for my response, he places a quick kiss on my cheek, then turns and jogs back toward the athletic dorm. I bite my lip to hide the smile on my face.

I turn to walk into my dorm, plowing into Jason so hard he has to grip both my arms to keep me from falling.

“Who was that?” His tone is accusatory.

Well, fuck. “That was my friend Brock.”

“Brock?” He scoffs. “What kind of name is Brock?”

I frown. Who the hell is he to grill me about my friend? It’s not like that Misty chick doesn’t hang on his every word. Double standard much?

I clear my throat, shaking my head. Now is not the time to act self-righteous. “What are you doing over here?”

“I came to see you.” His voice is stilted, telling me he’s still upset about Brock.

My heart warms at the thought of him making the effort to come see me. “Really?” I grin, biting my lower lip.

“Yeah, but I guess you were on a date.” I don’t miss the venom behind his words.

“Brock and I had dinner at his dorm as friends. I’d hardly call that a date.”

He smiles, tucking his hands into his pocket and rocking on his feet as if he’s nervous. “Maybe I can take you for dessert?”

The thought of eating more makes me want to puke, but I’m not about to say no to time with Jason. “How about coffee?”

He holds out his elbow. I slip my arm through his, and we head across the lawn toward his dorm.

Maybe we can get things back on track so I can get out of here. I never thought I’d say this, but I miss my thirties. Being an eighteen-year-old girl is harder than I remember.

Chapter 6

Hannah

THE BEAN IS CROWDED THIS TIME OF NIGHT, SO JASON AND I HAVE TO SHARE a table with his roommate. So much for a date. In our original timeline, this coffee meet up didn't happen, so I have to wing it. That shouldn't be too hard, since Jason and I are meant to be. Right?

His roommate Griffin is exactly how I remember him, even though I'd completely forgotten about him until this moment. He and Jason had, or I guess in this timeline will have, a falling out sophomore year. I'm not sure what happened because Jason refused to tell me. All I know is one day Griffin moved out of their apartment, and they never spoke again. Once, Griffin tried to approach me on campus to talk, but Jason walked up, forcing Griffin to leave. After that, Jason made me promise not to speak to his former best friend. He told me Griffin was a liar and would say anything to come between us. Looking back, the whole thing seems suspicious now. I was way too in love to question anything.

"What do you think?" Jason asks, nudging me with an elbow to respond.

"Huh? Sorry, I zoned out a bit. What was that?" Pull it together, Hannah.

"I asked if you wanted to come up to my room and watch some TV."

Griffin smirks.

I turn to Jason and smile. "Um, yeah, sure."

He winks at his roommate. "See you later."

Griffin salutes. "Don't wait up. I'm going to Kayla's tonight."

I forgot about the Delta Kappa Griffin dated freshman year. She was a junior, and they made the perfect couple. I was surprised when they broke up right before summer vacation. I wonder what Griffin's up to now, or in the future, rather. Is he married? It's hard to imagine the Gavin Rossdale lookalike ever being married. After Kayla, he burned through women like they were tissues.

"You're awfully distracted tonight," Jason says, reaching out and pulling me closer as we wait for the elevator.

"Sorry, I'm full from dinner." My excuse sounds so dumb, but it's not like I can tell him the truth. *I got drunk and woke up in the past. Pretty sure I'm here because we never should've broken up. Now, I'm trying to change*

history, so we're still together in the future. Except there's one teeny complication in the form of a tall, sexy quarterback. Yeah, that'll go over well.

He tucks a strand of my hair behind my ear. "I thought maybe you were thinking about that guy I saw you with earlier."

I jerk my head back in surprise. Did he read my mind? "Who? Brock?" I ask, trying to play it cool despite feeling anything but.

He snorts. "Brock," he mutters under his breath like it's a dirty word. "That frat boy, jock-looking dude was all over you." A new hardness that I don't like replaces his softness from moments ago. Did he always act Jekyll and Hyde-like?

Ignoring his quick mood change, I laugh. "No he wasn't. I'm not remotely close to his type. He goes more for actresses and supermodels." Literally.

"But is he yours? Type, I mean."

I slip my arm through his. "You're my type." It's true. Except why does that feel like a lie?

Jason chuckles, his deep voice sending tingles up my spine. "Good."

My heart flutters. "I forgot what this feels like."

"What?"

I shake my head. "Nothing." Ugh, I'm going to wreck it if I keep slipping up and talking about the past.

The elevator doors open, and the overwhelming stench of smelly boys hits my nostrils. I try not to curl my lip since Jason doesn't seem to notice. He leads me to his room. Once inside, I survey the place where I lost my virginity. I remembered it being less dirty and more comfortable. Apparently, I forgot how Jason and Griffin are total slobs. I don't want to stand in this filth, let alone get naked in one of these beds. Closing my eyes, I fight against my shudder of disgust. Maybe he'll clean next time. Or we could go to my place.

"I didn't expect company," Jason says, kicking his dirty clothes into a pile and pulling up his comforter to cover his dirty sheets.

"It's fine," I lie. This is *not* fine. It's hepatitis C waiting to happen. Who the fuck lives like this?

He sits on his bed, patting the spot next to him. "Get comfortable."

I take a deep breath, instantly regretting it, since the room smells like moldy cheese. I sit next to Jason, trying not to let my disgust at my

surroundings show on my face. College guys are so gross. It's all I can do to keep from picking up his mess and sterilizing the damn place.

Last time around, our first kiss was almost two weeks after we first met. I'd canceled our date because I was sick with a cold. He showed up at my dorm room, ready to take care of me. Despite my disheveled appearance and runny nose, he pulled me into his lap and let me use him like a pillow. When our eyes met, he kissed me for the first time. That was the moment I fell for him. It was like something out of a rom com. This seems far less romantic, but maybe that doesn't matter. What matters is we end up together forever. Right?

He tucks my hair behind my ear, leaning closer. I move toward him, but stall. His eyes are open. Did he always kiss with his eyes open? I don't think so. Will he see my pores? Do I even have pores yet? Fuck, this is awkward. It's been so long since I kissed someone other than Hunter. Ugh, now is not the time to think about that douche canoe. I try desperately to clear my mind and settle into the heat of the moment.

My heart hammers in my chest as we stare into each other's eyes, lips inching closer in what feels like half speed. At the last minute, I close my eyes as our lips meet. Not taking time to savor the kiss, Jason's tongue pushes past my lips. He tastes like coffee and cigarettes. For some reason, I don't remember Jason ever kissing me and tasting like smoke. Weird. I can't wait until he quits.

I pull away. "That was. . ."

"Perfect," he says, leaning in for another kiss.

This one's better. I relax into it, allowing him to press me onto my back. He's hard against my thigh. I adjust under him so his pelvis presses against mine. He moans into my mouth.

This is more like it. I've all but forgotten my dirty surroundings. . . well, mostly.

He leans back, hovering over me. "Is this okay?"

I nod, pulling him back down for another kiss. I tug his shirt up over his head. I forgot how fit Jason was from his years of playing soccer. Athletes have always been my thing. I place several kisses on his collar bone before returning to his lips.

While we're getting into a groove, something still feels off. It's like my memories of our connection are vivid, but right now, the details feel muted. Maybe because I don't remember these awkward early days. I remember how

we were as an established couple.

Yeah, that has to be it. Things will get better.

He presses his length against my clit. The sensation sends a zing up my spine. It's been years since I've simply made out with someone not intending to have sex. As much as I want to push things, I know past me and past Jason are both virgins. I don't want to mess anything up between us by rushing into a physical relationship. We're already altering the timeline, which could impact the future in a big way. Of course, I guess that's the point. I mean, why else would I be back here?

I grind against him, dragging my nails down his back. He moans into my mouth before pulling away.

He hovers above me. "We should stop."

I want to argue, but I know he's right. I sit up when he moves away from me, adjusting my shirt where it rode up under my bra.

He leans in, giving me a chaste kiss. "I'll walk you to your dorm."

"We can still hang out. Just because we're not going to have sex doesn't mean I have to leave." Although, maybe we should change locations. If I stay here too long, I'll start to smell like a dirty sweat sock.

"If you stay, I'm going to want to keep going."

I can't stop myself. I roll my eyes. Luckily, he doesn't notice because he's already at the door, slipping his shirt over his head. Admitting he can't stop once he starts gives rapey vibes, and is super gross. My stomach drops at that thought. Why is my soulmate not feeling like a good match this time around?

I sigh. I have no idea how long I'm going to be here in the past. What if it takes too long to get him to fall for me, and we don't end up together? What if I wake up tomorrow and I'm back home, hungover and heartbroken? Or worse, what if I'm still together with Hunter?

He takes my hand, walking me to the elevator. "Do you want to hang out with me tomorrow?"

I grin, pushing away the dark cloud that's settled over my mood. "Sure."

He kisses me again as we wait for the elevator. Try as I might, I can't get into it. I'm thirty-one, and Jason kisses like an inexperienced eighteen-year-old giving someone mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. It feels too weird. Earlier, I was able to push the awkwardness aside, but in the harsh light of the hallway, things don't seem right. In fact, they're all wrong.

I try not to act weird on the walk across the lawn to my dorm, but I'm not

sure how successful I am. Relief causes me to relax when we get to the front of Drummond. I'm ready to get a good night's sleep. I'll need the energy for tomorrow when I try to connect better with Jason.

When we stop, he pulls me into a hug, giving me a chaste kiss. "There's a party at the FTG house. You should come with me."

"FTG?"

"Fuck the Greeks."

I roll my eyes, flaring my nostrils. Fuck the Greeks, how original. I forgot how anti-Greek Jason was when we first met. Even though he eventually got used to me being in a sorority, he always complained when he had to go to date parties or formals. Eventually, I stopped inviting him, opting to go with Grace and her date instead. A few times I took guys in fraternities that wanted to go, but just as friends. I guess it was the whole 'opposites attract' thing.

"You know I'm in a sorority, right?" I remind him.

He shrugs. "Yeah, but you're not that active, are you? It doesn't consume you like it does those other girls, right?"

I grit my teeth. "I'm the president of my pledge class." At least I think I am. Has that happened yet? I'm still fuzzy on this timeline. This was thirteen years ago.

He frowns. "Oh. Well, do you want to go or not?"

Shit. Time to back track. "I'll have to see what Grace wants to do after the football game. You could always come with us."

He scoffs. "I'm not into all that school spirit, rah-rah stuff."

"I bet you'll be singing a different tune when we win the conference championship this year." I know he will. Everyone loves a winning team. Everyone.

"I doubt that'll happen. They more than lost last week. They were slaughtered."

I shrug. "It was a non-conference game. We're going to win the rest of our games. . . and our bowl game."

He smirks. "Let me guess. You can see the future."

"Yep. And you're going to fall madly in love with me."

He chuckles. "We'll see, kiddo."

"Yes, we will." I try to sound flirtatious, but I'm ready for today to be done. Pretending to be eighteen is taxing. I don't know how I'm going to be able to go to a party tomorrow. I'll have to find time to sneak in a nap.

He kisses me on the forehead. “See you tomorrow.”

“Bye.”

I round the corner into the lobby and walk smack into Misty and one of her friends.

Great.

She sets her jaw when she sees me, telling me she also saw that kiss with Jason. “You know you’re not his type, right?”

I laugh. “Honey, I’m more his type than anyone else here. You may think you have a chance, but I have it on good authority Jason and I end up together.”

She looks me up and down, taking in my preppy appearance. “He likes girls with substance, not sorority girls with zero going on up here.” She taps the side of her head, emphasizing she thinks I’m stupid.

“Being the poster child for second hand clothing doesn’t make you interesting. In your quest to stand out, you’re actually super boring.”

I push past her, trying not to cringe at how nasty I was to that girl, who is literally that, just a girl. As a grown woman, I should know better than to insult another woman out of petty jealousy. Still, she’s not getting in the way of my perfect future.

No one is.

Brock

On the drive home after my morning workout, my thoughts stray from football to Hannah. Being able to see her, be near her, but her not seeing me is hard to keep doing with an optimistic smile. Some days I feel like I'm getting through to her, where others she's even further out of reach. Why won't she open her eyes?

Whenever I see Hannah, it's like the light has been switched on. Then I remember she's not with me and everything darkens again. From the very first time I glimpsed her in front of her sorority house, I was drawn to her. She is light. And that light, it's a bomb, overtaking everything she's near. My world is dim without her. I'll do everything in my power to get her to shine her light for me once more.

Please God, I need this miracle.

Chapter 7

Hannah

DESPITE ALL THE CONFUSION RELIVING MY PAST IS CAUSING, NOTHING BEATS game days. Nothing. The tailgating, the excitement, the orange and black, and just the fun times with friends make being back here for Brock's first game worth the angst of trying to get my life back on track.

My throat is raw from cheering so hard. I remembered this come from behind win, but still managed to get swept up in all the excitement. Even knowing Brock would get to play this game, I didn't realize this was what set him on his path to stardom. This time when our quarterback gets injured and Brock takes the field, my heart races with nerves and anticipation. Being friends with the soon to be star makes this so much more fun to watch. I feel like I'm a part of the team. The icing on the cake is when he pulls off his helmet after the game and his face is highlighted on the jumbotron. That smile sets my soul on fire.

"Wasn't that great?" I grab Jason's arm, jumping up and down. "I bet Brock is so excited."

He chuckles at my over the top celebration. "It was pretty exciting. I didn't think we were going to win."

"I told you we'd win." I stick my tongue out at him.

"You called it."

I smile. "I seem to remember calling something else too. You in love with me yet?" I tease.

"The jury's still out on that one."

I bump his hip with mine. "Let me know when the verdict is in."

"Do you want to go to the party with me tonight?" he asks, shifting the conversation away from our future to the present.

I look at the line forming to wait for the guys after the game. "Can I meet you there? I need to shower and change, but I want to congratulate Brock first."

"Go hug your boyfriend, and maybe I'll see you there."

I giggle, thinking he's teasing. The laughter dies in my throat when I see his expression. "Don't be like that. Brock is my friend. I'm excited for him." When did he get so possessive? I don't like this side of him one bit.

He shrugs. "Whatever."

"Jason, don't be like that. I'm not his type." I don't say he's not mine because, more and more, I'm afraid he might be exactly my type. In fact, since I've been back here, Brock is the guy giving me pitter patters, not the one standing in front of me acting like a green-eyed monster.

"Well, you aren't exactly mine, either." His tone is flat and his look pointed.

I bristle. "What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

His face softens some when he realizes he hurt my feelings in saying that. "It means you have a way of attracting guys who wouldn't normally be into you. It's a compliment."

I squint, trying to interpret what he's not saying. "I don't have to stay."

He smiles, returning to the Jason from earlier, and I can tell he prefers I skip congratulating Brock. "Want me to walk you back to the dorms?"

I shake my head no. "I better wait for Grace and my other pledge sister. You go on, and I'll meet you at the party."

He leans down and gives me a long kiss, shocking us both. Jason was never one for public displays of affection. I smirk. Maybe letting him think Brock is in the running is a good thing. With some healthy competition, it seems like Jason is willing to fight a little harder. Before I can go home, I have to get things with him in order.

"See you there." I bite my lip, trying to hide my smile as I watch his retreating form.

I turn around to go find Grace and slam into a brick wall. Firm arms encircle my waist, lifting me off my feet and spinning me around in a circle.

"You were right," Brock gushes. "I can't believe I got to lead us to victory tonight. Did you see that pass in the third quarter?"

He's freshly showered, and his hair drips water onto me, cooling the heat rising from my core. I can't stop myself from breathing in his soapy smell. My belly flutters as I imagine running my nose up the column of his neck.

He sets me down, and I regain my wits. Brock is my friend. My body is just reacting this way because I know he was People's Sexiest Man Alive this year. Well, not this year now, but future's this year. Shit, this is confusing.

I step away. The space helps me switch back to friend mode. "You were amazing. I told you this would happen."

His grin stretches wide across his face, flashing me his perfect teeth. "You must be my lucky charm."

I hug him again, even though I know I should maintain the space between us. Before he can pull me tighter, I step back. “There’s no luck to it. You’re talented. They don’t pass out Heisman trophies to just anyone.”

His eyes widen. “Heisman trophy? Damn, you certainly have big dreams for me.”

I tap my head. “Trust me. I know the future.”

He laughs, slinging an arm over my shoulders. “Walk me to my dorm?”

“Aren’t you supposed to walk me?” I elbow him in the ribs, despite enjoying the feel of him holding me. I don’t want someone getting the wrong idea or Jason seeing us and thinking I lied earlier. As soon as he removes his arm, I wish it was back, securely in place around me. What the hell is wrong with me?

“I would if you were my girl, but since we’re just friends, you don’t get the special treatment,” he jokes.

I laugh, ignoring the thrill thinking of being his girlfriend gives me. “Lead the way.”

It’s not until we get to his dorm that I remember Grace. Oh, well. She and Cory are probably off fighting somewhere by now, anyway. She can manage fine without me.

“Do you want to come up and hang out for a bit?” He looks down, toying with the strap of his backpack.

I glance at my watch. “I need to shower and get ready for the FTG party.”

He reaches out and takes my hand, pulling my arm up so he can read my watch. “You’ve got plenty of time. I’m still riding high from our victory. Don’t make me go home all alone.” He gives me a puppy face, making it harder for me to stay strong.

“You can come to the party with me.” What am I thinking? I can’t show up with Brock. Jason will never understand.

“I’m too tired for a party. I just want to order a pizza and veg in front of the TV.” He yawns, as if needing to prove his point.

My stomach rumbles. “Pizza does sound good.”

He takes my hand and tugs me toward the door. “It’s settled. We’ll eat, and then you can go to your party.”

“Since you promised to feed me, I can’t very well say no, now can I?” Plus, I don’t want to leave just yet. He should celebrate tonight, and I love that he wants me to be a part of that. Isn’t this what friends do?

He rewards me with his heart-stopping grin. “That’s what I’m talking

about.”

The first thing I notice about Brock’s room is that it’s a single and set up like an apartment. The second is that it’s immaculate. Like, we could eat our pizza off the floors clean.

He drops his bag next to the loveseat he has in front of his TV. “What kind of pizza do you want?”

“Hawaiian with veggies, please.”

“Oh, fuck no. Pineapple doesn’t belong on pizza. We can put your veggies on a meat lover’s. If I order rabbit food with pineapple and Canadian bacon from Sam’s, I’ll never live it down.”

I laugh. “Fine. As long as there are black olives, I’ll eat your meat.” I slap my hand over my mouth when I realize how that sounds.

His cheeks turn an adorable pink. Instead of teasing me like I thought he would, he picks up the phone and calls the pizza place. I sit in front of the TV and find something for us to watch.

“It’ll be here in twenty minutes.”

I jump, tossing the remote into the air at the sound of his voice. “You snuck up on me,” I accuse, placing my hand over my pounding heart.

He chuckles. “Hannah, we’re in a 14 x 14 dorm room. There’s no sneaking in here. You were daydreaming.”

I press my palms to my cheeks, wincing. They’re on fire. What the hell is wrong with me? It’s like I forgot how to interact with a hot guy, and Brock is one fine specimen of man. Hell, he’s probably the most attractive person I’ve ever seen in real life. His t-shirt clings to his lats, showcasing his lean muscles. Even his muscles have muscles. The dude is fit. I’m in way over my head here.

Oblivious to my inner struggle to keep from mounting him right here and now, he sits next to me on the loveseat. Brock Martin is a big guy. If I remember his stats correctly, he’s 6’6” and weighs 235 lbs. His body takes up so much of the small sofa, our thighs touch. This does nothing to smother the fire building inside me.

I try to ignore the tingling in my pussy each time his forearm brushes against mine. Suddenly, this friendly dinner doesn’t feel so innocent. I have to wrestle with my hormones to keep from climbing into his lap and kissing him senseless. This man is enticing.

He places his way too large hand on my upper thigh. “Relax. I know you’re with that guy for now. I will not force you into something. Ever.”

I swallow hard, wishing I wasn't wearing shorts, yet thankful I am. The feel of his rough palm on my leg tells me if he wanted something more from me, I'd give it to him willingly. Second chance be damned. The pull of Brock's orbit is almost too much for me to resist.

I move away from him, forcing him to retract his hand. "Um, do you want to watch this?" I gesture to the TV where I've stopped the channel on some reality show where people do daredevil events in teams, trying to win money.

"Sure. I love The Challenge." The way he says it makes me think he's talking about a different challenge. God, how I want to be that challenge he conquers. Except I can't be. That's not why I'm here.

We watch in silence until the pizza arrives. That proves to be the perfect tension breaker. With food in my mouth, I'm not thinking about what it would be like to put my lips on him. It's so strange that this time around, I have this super sexy, soon to be famous guy interested in me. I'm not sure what lesson this sexy roadblock is meant to teach me. In fact, I'm pretty certain I'm not going to learn it.

"What's your major?" Brock asks, distracting me from my inner dialogue.

I dab my lips with the paper towel he gave me to use as a napkin and swallow my bite before answering. "Art. Well, Art with an emphasis on Art History. I wanted something more employable than just Studio Art. Spoiler alert, people aren't in desperate need of Art Historians. I'm never going to have a job in my field. Of course, Hunter is partly to blame."

He laughs. "Wait, did you say Hunter? As in my pledge brother Hunter? What does he have to do with anything?"

Oh, shit. "Nothing. He's sort of a jerk, is all. I'm just teasing you for being friends with the guy." I hope he buys that because the excuse is flimsy at best. I really need to be more careful.

He tilts his head to the side. "I didn't even know you knew Hunter."

"Everyone knows Hunter." I shrug.

He studies me. "He's not your ex, is he? Because, if that's the case, I can't date you when you finish with your rebound guy. Hunter and I aren't close friends, but we are pledge brothers."

I scrunch my nose, making a face of disgust. "Bro code, right?"

He laughs. "Yep. Although it might be worth upsetting the status quo for you."

I reach over, patting his forearm. "You have nothing to worry about. I

plan to steer clear of Hunter.”

He nods, grinning. Why does he have to be so sexy?

I roll my eyes, not wanting to let him see just how much that stupid, sexy grin of his affects me. “I didn’t mean it like that. Don’t get any ideas. Jason and I are going to get married one day.”

“Whatever you say, doll.”

“Doll?” I grin.

“Yeah. You’re like those china dolls my sister collects. You have dark hair, but your eyes are green. And your skin is super pale.”

I hold my arm next to his golden brown one. “Well, compared to you, I am.”

“You mean compared to a ghost you are.”

I clutch my invisible pearls and gasp. “How dare you,” I tease.

“Relax. I like it.”

I know they shouldn’t, but his words bring a smile to my face. “Shut up and watch the show.”

ENGULFED IN WARMTH, I BLINK MY EYES OPEN TO FIND MY HANDS GRIPPING the gray material beneath me. Under it is hard muscle. I drag my eyes up his chest to his face, finding Brock asleep with his mouth slightly parted. I reach up and move the hair that’s fallen across his face to the side so I can look at him without impediment. He really is beautiful. It’s no wonder he was named Sexiest Man Alive. He deserves the moniker.

I move my hips, feeling something long and hard against my inner thigh. I wiggle more, and it continues to grow. Holy shit. Is that real?

Brock’s eyes pop open, and he grips my hips, stopping me from moving. A grin breaks out on his face. “Are you dry humping me while I sleep?”

Embarrassment fills me as my eyes widen, forcing my eyebrows up. I pull away, making things worse. “What? No!” Now, I’m sitting directly on his erection. Fuck me. This dude is something else.

He chuckles. “Relax. I’m just teasing.” He turns his head to read the time on the clock of his DVD player.

4:00. I gasp. “Oh, crap. I was supposed to meet Jason.” I try to move off Brock, but he keeps me in place.

“It’s too late now.” He tugs me so the top half of my body rests on his while I continue to straddle him. This makes his hard cock hit me in the right spot, causing my nipples to harden.

I curl my back, hoping to keep the evidence of my arousal hidden. “I should go.” We both know there’s no force behind the words. I want to stay, and it’s obvious.

He yawns so big, his jaw cracks. He pulls me tighter against his chest. “Sleep. You can’t walk home alone when it’s this dark, and I’m too tired to trek across campus. I’ll take you home in the morning.”

“I shouldn’t sleep here.” Again, there’s zero fight in my words. Being in Brock’s arms is the only place I want to be.

He sighs, relinquishing his tight hold, allowing me to sit up again. “Take my bed. I’ll sleep here.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You’re too big to sleep here. Your legs are hanging off the end of the loveseat. That can’t be comfortable.”

He stands with me in his arms, then turns and places me back on the small sofa. He grabs the blanket over the back of the loveseat and covers me. “There. You stay here, and I’ll sleep in the bed.”

I snuggle into the spot he just vacated, enjoying the warmth. “Thank you.”

He kisses my forehead, tracing the back of his knuckles down the side of my face, an action that feels familiar. “Gotta take care of my future wife.”

“You mean Jason’s future wife? You’re going to marry a supermodel.”

He caresses my cheek. “I’m pretty sure I’d rather have a doll than a model.” Before I can respond, he places his finger to my lips. “Good night.”

“Night.”

He stands to his full height, and I can’t help but gasp when I notice the bulge not even two feet away from my face. How am I supposed to sleep with that in the room? Brock doesn’t seem to realize just the sight of his cock under his pants has my pussy leaking. I hope I don’t flood this dorm room.

He goes to bed, leaving me restless on the sofa with an ache at my core. Before long, the soft puffs of breath coming from behind the loveseat tell me he’s already asleep. Me, on the other hand, I feel like a live wire has touched me. Every inch of me is wide awake and thinking about Brock’s hard cock.

I sit up and look over the back of his sofa, making sure he’s asleep. Once I’m sure I won’t get caught, I slip my hand under the blanket, rubbing circles over my shorts. My nipples pebble as goosebumps rise across my skin.

It's been a while since I manually stimulated myself. Sex toys and Hunter managed to keep me aroused enough. I forgot how good it feels to come alive under my own touch.

I rock my hips, moving my hand inside my panties. I gasp when my fingers brush my clit. Holy fuck. Images of Brock from his spread in last month's Sport's Quarterly where he was photographed wearing shoulder pads and covered only by a football dance beneath my eyelids. Those visions mixed with his smile when he teased me earlier this evening have me panting. I try to keep quiet, but my moans echo in the room.

"Brock," I moan. My orgasm has me clenching my thighs and gritting my teeth. I bite my tongue so I don't scream, but my gasp fills the silent room.

My breathing slows, and I pull my hand out of my panties. Now I'm ready to sleep.

"Are we going to pretend you didn't just flick your bean on my couch, moaning my name, while I'm less than three feet from you?" His deep voice makes me jump.

I cringe. "You're awake?"

"It's hard to sleep through someone moaning like that. *Oh, Brock. Do me, you sexy beast,*" he teases in a high-pitched voice I assume is supposed to be me.

"I didn't say all that." How I manage to sound so indignant is beyond me.

He laughs. "No, but you said *my* name. Not that other guy."

"Shut up," I hiss, humiliated. "That means nothing." Except I'm afraid it means everything.

"Whatever you say, doll." I can hear the smirk in his voice.

I close my eyes. Fuck me. I'll never live this down.

Chapter 8

Hannah

THE SUN PEEKING THROUGH THE OPEN BLINDS WAKES ME EARLY, BUT BROCK continues to sleep. His face is relaxed, and he wears a pleasant smile as he dreams. Lucky bastard. I spent all night tossing and turning, trying not to dwell on the embarrassment of being caught with my hand in the cookie jar. What possessed me to rub one out while he was lying just a few feet away?

Watching him for the slightest movement, I carefully slip on my shoes before sneaking out the door. There's no way in hell I'm going to face him this morning after he heard me jill myself to thoughts of him last night. Mortified doesn't even begin to describe how I feel thinking about him hearing me. It's like every ounce of self-control flees my body when I'm around Brock. He's dangerous for me. When I'm with him, I forget Jason is the reason I'm stuck in my past. I can't forget who brought me here.

My feet feel like they're encased in cement shoes as I trudge toward my dorm. I need some fucking coffee. Forgetting I'm a mess, still dressed in yesterday's clothing, I head straight to The Bean. It isn't until I run smack into Jason I remember I look like I'm doing a walk of shame. I mean, I sort of am, so it fits.

"Jesus, Hannah? What happened to you?" His voice is filled with concern.

I bite my lip. I don't want to lie to my future husband, but there's no way I can tell him the truth. He wouldn't understand. I'm not sure *I* understand.

"I waited all night for you to show up at the party." It doesn't sound like an accusation, more like he's afraid I'm hurt or something.

"I went home to shower but ended up falling asleep on my bed. I guess I was so excited from the game and tired from my classes that my exhaustion caught up to me." Lie.

He tilts his head, evaluating what I said, as if he doesn't quite believe me. "I saw your roommate, and she said she didn't know where you were. That you never came home after the game."

"She was with her boyfriend. I bet she left right before I got back and assumed I wasn't coming home." Lie. Lie. Lie. I'm going straight to Hell.

He squints his eyes. "I thought you stayed behind to wait for her."

What's with all the questions? "I did, but we must've missed each other. I finally gave up and walked home alone." Not wanting him to ask me more, I change the subject. "How was the party?"

He steps closer, pushing my hair off my face, then leaning in for a kiss. "It would've been better with you there."

I lean into the kiss, but find myself having to push away the images of Brock that keep flooding my mind. Desperate to forget how much I want the wrong guy, I press my body against Jason's. He hardens against my stomach. I can't help but compare him to Brock and notice he comes up short. . . short and thin.

"Let's go up to your room," I whisper.

"Griffin's there with Kayla."

I frown. I can't invite him back to my room because Grace might reveal I didn't spend the night there if she's home. "That's too bad. Maybe we can make plans for tonight?"

"Misty invited Griffin and me to a concert with her and her roommate, but maybe when we get home, I can call you."

My nostrils flare. "Like a booty call?" What the fuck is happening here? This isn't supposed to be how my second chance goes. Why did Jason bring me back if we're going to end up with different people? This makes no sense.

"Not like a booty call. I want to see you, but I have plans first."

"Maybe." I step back, suddenly wanting to be anywhere but here.

He grabs my wrist, tugging me into his arms. He cups the back of my head, caressing my cheek. It feels forced and awkward, unlike when Brock did it. "I spent all of last night waiting for you. You can stand to wait a little for me."

I bite my tongue to keep from completely ruining my future with him. Instead, I nod, closing my eyes and leaning into his touch.

"Will I see you tonight?" he asks.

I give him a stiff smile. "Maybe. I need some sleep first."

"How are you still tired when you passed out right after the game?"

Oh, right. Shit. "Um, maybe I'm coming down with something. I just feel exhausted today," I lie, hoping he believes me.

He steps back. "Maybe we can hang next week. I don't want to get sick if you're coming down with something."

Well, fuck. This is not going according to plan. "Yeah. Anyway, I better go." Time to get my shit together.

Not bothering with my coffee, I turn on my heel and head toward my dorm. For someone with a second chance, I'm messing things up royally.

Brock

I wake from dreams of Hannah, reaching for her only to remember I'm in my bed alone. Despite knowing she'd be gone when I woke up, I'm still jolted by the realization that she's not here with me, where she belongs. The room feels empty without her. I shake my head, scrubbing my hands down my face. I long for the days she wakes me with kisses as she snuggles into me.

I need to be patient. She can't stay away forever. Not when we belong together.

Chapter 9

Hannah

AS SOON AS I RETURN TO MY DORM ROOM, I TAKE A QUICK SHOWER BEFORE crashing. Exhausted from not just last night, but reliving my past as well, I don't even bother to dry my hair. I slip on an oversized t-shirt and crawl into bed. A dreamless sleep overtakes me.

I'm not sure how long I've been asleep when the ringing of the landline phone on my desk tears me out of a dream where Brock and I are kissing on a beach. I sit up, rubbing my eyes. Who could possibly be calling right now?

Not wanting to face anyone after my embarrassing night last night and then the catastrophe of my interaction with Jason, I ignore it, rolling over and pulling the covers over my head. The sound of Grace and me singing to leave a message fills the room. After the beep, the deep voice that sends chills down my spine and electricity straight to my core fills the room.

"Hey, Hannah. It's Brock. I woke up, and you were gone. Just checking in to make sure you're okay. Call me."

"Not in this life," I mutter. There's no way I'm facing him after last night's embarrassment. How could I? At least I won't have to see him when I go back to my real timeline.

No sooner do I get comfortable, my phone rings again. I lift the receiver and then place it back into the cradle before unplugging the phone. Satisfied Brock got the message, I snuggle into my comforter, drifting back to sleep.

Sometime later, a pounding on the other side of the door rouses me from my sleep. Thinking Grace has forgotten her key, I stumble out of bed and throw open the door. My eyes widen when I see Brock on the other side with his hand poised to knock again. Luckily, he stops himself from knocking again in time. Otherwise, I'd be knocked in the face.

He pulls his hand back, looking me up and down, then smiling. "You got all fixed up for me." The teasing of his voice does nothing to stave off the embarrassment of being face-to-face with him so soon after last night. Kill me now.

My hand shoots to the rat's nest on top of my head, and I groan. Going to bed with wet hair is never a good look. Especially for someone with fine hair that's prone to tangle. My cheeks burn when I realize it's not my hair he's

looking at. I threw on a t-shirt in haste to go to sleep and didn't bother with a bra or panties. My nipples are on high alert, begging Brock to notice them, which he does, judging by the way his eyes are glued to my tits. I tug at the bottom of the shirt, hoping I haven't flashed him my pussy.

"I'm avoiding you." I cross my arms over my chest, shooting my most lethal glare at him.

He laughs. "Yeah, doll, I know. That's why I'm here."

"Look, I'm sure you want to rub in the fact that I was. . . you know." I gesture toward my lady bits. "But I'm beyond humiliated. If we have any hope of salvaging a friendship, please let it go." I raise my eyebrows for good measure. "And stop calling me doll," I add as an afterthought. It's not that I don't like the nickname. What I don't like is the way my heart races whenever he calls me that. I can't fall for Brock. Ever.

He steps past me into the room, sitting on my unmade bed. "I'm not here to embarrass you. I'm trying to make sure you don't ice me out." He seems so humble, I can't help but believe him. Something about him feels comforting, like he truly sees me. No matter how much I don't want to encourage him, I'd be lying if I said I want him to leave me alone.

I sit across from him on Grace's bed, not trusting myself to be near him and not try to climb him like a tree. Maybe the physical distance will keep my hormones under control.

Big mistake.

His eyes widen, and I realize I've flashed my lady bits at him. I slam my legs closed and put Grace's pillow over my lap.

He clears his throat, looking away. "Fuck me," he whispers, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Please don't say anything." How can being eighteen again be such a mess? I should be able to navigate this better, seeing how I'm actually thirty-one. Instead, I'm back to being the awkward young girl from years ago.

He rubs the back of his neck. "Hannah, I've thought of little else since I met you, and that's saying something because my dream came true last night on that field. I know you're rebounding from a relationship and think you want that other dude, but you can't deny you want me just as much as I want you." His eyes lock on mine as if daring me to argue.

"Wanting you is not the issue. I know how this plays out. We hook up, you get bored, and then I miss the chance at a stable relationship. Next thing I know, I wake up thirty-one, hungover, and alone."

He huffs out a frustrated breath. “Why are you so insistent we can’t work out? What is it about me that makes you unable to see a future for us?”

“Brock, you’re the world’s sexiest man alive, and I’m just. . . me. You wind up with a freaking supermodel. How can I compete? Jason is the reason I’m back here. I can’t mess that up. Stop tempting me.”

“What does that even mean? Do you hear yourself?”

I shake my head. “It means we can be friends, but that’s it. I can’t allow you to break my heart and leave me all alone.”

He stands, then drops to his knees in front of me, grabbing my hands. “I won’t give up without a fight. Please, just open your eyes.”

Before I can argue, his lips are on mine. He tosses Grace’s pillow aside and pulls me onto his lap. This is the kiss to end all kisses. My entire body comes alive as he hardens beneath me. I rub my pussy on his denim-covered erection and moan, feeling like a wanton sex goddess. He grips my hips, holding me still, but doesn’t let up on the kiss.

I thread my hands through his thick hair and tug, wanting to crawl inside him so we can become one. He’s rough, biting my lower lip. I’ve never been kissed like this before and doubt I ever will be again. Brock isn’t an eighteen-year-old boy. He’s a man, one who makes every cell in my body quiver.

Just when I’m ready to throw all caution to the wind and give in to my desire to be with him, he pulls away and rests his forehead on mine. “I knew it would be like this.”

“Like what?” I gulp a quick breath to keep my heart from busting out of my chest.

“Perfect.” The reverence in his voice would bring me to my knees if I wasn’t already sitting on his lap.

A knock on the door has me jumping off him. “We can’t do that again.” I don’t look at him when I say this for fear he’ll see how much I want him.

Brock stands, tugging at his hair and letting out a frustrated groan. There’s no mistaking the steel rod in his pants or the wet spot my pussy left down the length of it. He makes zero effort to hide any of it.

“Cover that,” I hiss, pointing to his tented pants.

“Are you serious right now, Hannah? Do you really not feel what’s happening between us?”

Not answering, I open the door and find Jason standing with his arms crossed. He looks at me, then Brock behind me, his lips firm. “Just friends?”

“It’s not like that.” I can feel Brock tense behind me. Without looking, I

know he's glaring at me as well. Fuck. This is not how my second chance was supposed to go. Why can't I stop messing up?

"Hannah, you're practically naked, and it's obvious you two have been making out." Jason raises his eyebrow, waiting for me to tell him Brock means nothing to me, but I can't.

I stand torn between two different futures, tears stinging my eyes. This is my one chance at a happily ever after, and I've ruined everything. "Just wait," I say when Jason turns to leave. "Let me explain."

He turns back around. "I'm all ears."

I turn to Brock. "Can we talk later?"

His mouth drops open, but he snaps it shut. Shaking his head, he pushes past me, knocking his shoulder hard into Jason's, almost knocking him off his feet. Jason is at least six feet tall, but Brock dwarfs him.

"Brock—"

He turns to face me. His eyes are devoid of any emotion. "I need to go to practice and watch footage of last night's game. I'll see you around." I don't miss the defeated look on his face or the way his shoulders sag as he walks to the elevator.

Jason clears his throat as I watch Brock go. As much as I want to run to him, I can't. I'm not here for him. I'm here because of the angry guy in front of me. How am I ever going to fix this?

Jason clears his throat. "Well? I'm waiting. What was he doing here?"

I sigh. "Brock came over to talk and woke me up. I crashed after my shower, which is why I look like this." I sniffle, reaching up to smooth my hair. "I fell asleep with wet hair." My sniffles turn into tears.

Jason scrutinizes me before nodding. "I'm sorry I overreacted. It's obvious you're not feeling good. I don't know what it is about you, but I'm not myself."

I bite my lip to keep my cries from turning into sobs. I don't want to start our forever with a lie, but I can't admit that I want Brock. Do I even still want forever with Jason? My head is a mess, and all I want is to go home, back to my real timeline where my actual life waits for me.

He pulls me into a hug. "Let's get you back into bed, and I'll go get you some soup."

I sniffle, trying to stop my tears, but not having much luck. What the fuck am I even doing here?

Brock

With each passing day, it becomes harder to be patient. I know Hannah's made for me, just as I'm made for her. What I don't understand is how fate could bring me my soulmate, only to keep her from me.

I feel Hannah slipping through my fingers, yet there doesn't seem to be anything I can do to stop it. The urge to shake her is strong, but that wouldn't do anything other than hurt her. The last thing I want to do is hurt Hannah. I just have to keep waiting.

One day, she'll open her eyes.

She has to.

Chapter 10

Hannah

WHILE JASON RUNS TO GET ME SOUP AND MEDICINE, I TRY CALLING BROCK. He ignores my calls, letting them go straight to his answering machine. After the fifth message I leave, begging him to talk to me, I give up, recognizing defeat. It's probably for the best, but that doesn't make me feel better. If anything, I feel worse.

Why is fixing my past so complicated? Why would Brock be placed in my path when I'm here because of Jason? Nothing going on makes sense. Of course, are there really rules when it comes to time traveling to your past to correct your biggest relationship mistake?

The worst part of all this is my hormones and emotions are that of my eighteen-year-old self. My mind knows how to react, but my heart won't let me. Where is the wisdom I've accrued over the last thirteen years? I mean, I know I was a hot mess when Hunter dumped me, but that wasn't how I usually behaved. I wasn't this bad. Was I?

Jason knocks twice before letting himself into my room. He must've taken the key with him. I'm not sure how I feel about him thinking he can come and go as he pleases. We're just getting to know each other in this timeline. That feels presumptuous on his part.

"Hey," he says when I roll over to face him. He looks me over, wincing. "You look rough."

I raise my hand to my cheek. No doubt my eyes are puffy from crying over Brock. I'm glad Jason thinks it's because I'm sick and not because I'm worried another guy hates me.

"Sit up and eat some of this soup." His voice is soft, and I can tell he's trying to be tender. Too bad it feels all wrong coming from him.

I sit up against my pillows, and he spoons some of the soup he bought into my mouth. It feels good to have someone take care of me for once. When I was with Hunter, he would poke and prod me before giving me some sort of Google diagnosis. Not wanting to catch whatever ailed me, he would leave me in bed alone. Warm and caring, he was not.

"Thank you," I murmur, slurping the hot liquid.

"I'm sorry I was so hard on you earlier. I didn't realize you were sick. I'm

not a jealous person, but the thought of you with someone else makes me want to hit things. You're mine."

He holds the spoon to my mouth again, and I shake my head no. "I'm full," I croak. Something about the way he called me 'his' doesn't sit right. It almost feels sinister. Surely he doesn't mean it that way.

He sets the soup on my desk and pulls me into his arms. For a place I thought I've spent years missing, I don't relish being here. I don't like Jason's possessive nature. He was never like that in the past. At least, not that I remember. I try to recall him holding me, but all I get is a pounding behind my eyes. Being in my past has twisted all my memories.

Desperate to feel connected to Jason, I pull him down next to me, snuggling into his chest. He tightens his arms around me as he kicks off his shoes. My shirt has pulled up, baring my ass to him. He moves his hand there and squeezes. I shift my leg so his hip is between my legs, allowing me to feel him harden against my thigh. Thoughts of Brock from last night hit me, and I have to force myself not to compare. Jason is perfectly satisfying. He's just not. . . Brock.

I squeeze my eyes, trying to forget the man I'm not supposed to want. Too bad it doesn't work. Sighing, I pull away some. "I should get some rest."

He holds me tighter. "Go to sleep. I'll be here when you wake."

I bite my lip to keep from screaming for him to leave. I'm too overwhelmed with guilt with him here. I want to call Brock and beg for his forgiveness. Brock's arms are where I want to be right now. Nothing about this second chance with Jason feels right. In fact, everything feels wrong.

No.

I came back here because of Jason. This is my second chance. I can't mess it up because of my confusion. But what if I'm not confused? What if things have already been altered beyond repair?

I struggle to work through my muddled thoughts, but my head throbs. My eyes are heavy, so I give in and close them.

I WAKE CLAMMY, WITH MY SWEATY HAIR CLINGING TO MY FOREHEAD. JASON'S body covers mine as he spoons me. I thought I missed this, but now that I'm here, it's not comfortable. Refusing to acknowledge that I'd rather be in bed

alone, I tug Jason's arm closer, placing his hand on the center of my chest. My heart beats beneath his warm palm.

"Are you going to wake up?" he rumbles in my ear. His voice is thick with sleep, making him sound like Brock.

I turn to face him, still in his arms, smiling up at him, hoping he can't see the discomfort on my face. It's time I move forward with Jason and give up this silly flirtation with Brock. All it's doing is hurting us both. "I think you cured me."

He chuckles. "Does that mean I can do this?" He leans closer, kissing me softly.

I smile and nod. "Yes, please." I want to hurry and fix things, so we end up together. I'm ready to be thirty-one again. I feel like I need to hurry and get back to my future. I just hope when I do, my soulmate is there waiting for me. Otherwise, what in the hell have I been doing here?

He traces a finger across my cheek, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. "Hannah. . ."

"Say it," I plead. Even though everything feels wrong, I need it to be right.

"I'm falling for you, and it scares the shit out of me."

"I'm scared too." And I am. I'm terrified I'm ruining my second chance. The last thing I want is to squander this opportunity to fix things and wake up in my future alone. Or worse, never wake up at all.

"I'm not sure how to navigate this with you." He stares into my eyes, showing me how vulnerable he is. Jason is my forever. He has to be.

I kiss him, tracing his lips with my tongue, not caring that we've both been sleeping for hours and our breath is less than minty fresh. He reaches between us, tracing a finger up my slit, missing my clit. I whimper in frustration.

I reach between us, cupping him through his jeans. He punches his hips forward, grinding against my palm.

"Hannah-" Grace yells as the door slams into the wall. "Shit, sorry." Her giggling has Jason pulling away from me.

"I gotta go," he hisses, grabbing his bag and holding it in front of his lap.

"Don't go," I beg.

He kisses me on the forehead, softening toward me. "I'll call you tomorrow."

Grace watches him leave, mouth hanging open. "What was that?"

“I don’t know,” I whisper, trying not to cry. Because as nice as our moment was, my heart is still heavy at the thought of Brock never speaking to me again.

I’m so screwed.

Brock

I shouldn't get mad at Hannah. None of this is her fault. My anger does nothing to help the situation. All it does is make me feel worse. There's a war waging behind her eyes, but there's nothing I can do to stop it. Hannah has to choose. And I have to sit back and wait until she does.

There's no solace in waiting alone. All I have is my hope. But what happens when that's gone?

Chapter 11

Hannah

DESPITE ONLY TWO DAYS PASSING SINCE BROCK LEFT MY DORM ROOM UPSET, it feels like I've been away from him forever. I've looked for him everywhere, to no avail. All I want is to make things right so we can be friends again. I can't leave here with him so mad at me.

As soon as I step into the Student Union, I spot Brock's broad shoulders as he and his teammates tower above the surrounding students. He's in one of the food lines with some of the other football players. His wet hair has grown out so some and it now curls beneath the edges of his cap, telling me he just got out of the shower. Even from here, I know he smells amazing, like being home on Christmas morning.

He looks over his shoulder, stiffening when he spots me. I raise my hand to wave at him, but he turns around without acknowledging me. I look around for Jason, making sure he's not here. I don't want him to see me with Brock after Sunday. There's too much at risk if I upset Jason. Even though I'm not sure I want him anymore, I'm still afraid to choose Brock. It feels risky to forget Jason brought me back here. I want Brock, but what my feelings for him are wrong?

All I know is I can't go back to my life with Hunter. When I think about it, my head throbs and my chest constricts, making it hard to breathe. In fact, whenever I see Hunter in this timeline, it makes me feel like I'm swimming underwater against a current. He doesn't fit here.

As soon as I'm sure I'm in the clear, I approach Brock. If he's told his football friends about what happened between us, they don't let on. In fact, they completely ignore me.

"Hey," I say, toying with the hem of my short skirt.

He gives me a curt nod. "Hey."

"Can we talk?" I chew on my lower lip, afraid he's going to tell me to fuck off. If he does, I won't blame him. It's what I deserve.

He exhales a slow measured breath, his eyes searching my face for something. But what? "I'm exhausted. Practice was brutal, and I need to eat, then go back to my room and sleep. I don't have time for this." For you. He doesn't say that last part, but I hear him loud and clear. I'm too much of a

waste of time for him to keep playing these games with me.

“Please,” I whisper, knowing I’m being unfair to him, but unable to let him go like I need to. For whatever reason, I can’t let him go. But can I really choose him? What if none of this is real?

He turns to me, taking my hand. “Hannah, you’re killing me. I need you to come back to me.” His voice is desperate, but I don’t understand what he’s saying. It doesn’t even make sense.

“Brock—“

He places a finger on my lips. “I’ll wait until you’re ready. I’m not mad, Hannah. My heart is breaking. We belong together.”

“Don’t say that. I can’t be with you now, no matter how much I want to. It will ruin everything for the future. I don’t want to end up alone. Jason brought me here. I can’t ever forget that.”

He closes his eyes, his face so pained, I feel the ache in my chest. “See, you keep saying that, but I don’t have a future without you.”

“You don’t understand.” How can I make him understand when I don’t?

Instead of arguing, he shrugs and turns back to the food line. One of the cheerleaders pushes past me and puts her arm around Brock’s middle, hugging her perfect body against his. I want to rip her hands off him and piss a circle around where he stands, marking him as mine. Stupid as that thought is, I can’t help myself from wanting to do it anyway.

The girl hanging off Brock trails a finger down his chest, getting dangerously close to his waistband. “Hey, stud. You ready to lead us to victory on Saturday?”

He smiles and winks, capturing her hand before she moves it lower and leaning down to whisper something in her ear. I want to break something when she laughs and strokes his chest.

Tears sting my eyes as rage bubbles inside me. “I knew this was all a game to you,” I hiss through clenched teeth.

Brock doesn’t even bother responding to me. Why would he? He’s already moved on. I can’t believe I’ve been such a fool.

I push my way out of the Union and head straight for the reason I came back here. Jason. He brought me here, and maybe I was right to choose him the other day. Had I chosen Brock, I’d eventually wind up alone.

By the time I walk from the Student Union to Wilham, I’m fired up. How dare Brock Martin try to derail my future. Never again! It’s time I do what needs to be done so I can go back to my life, my *real* life. Getting a second

chance was fun for a while, but I miss my life. I miss my dog. Even though I never thought I'd say this, I miss being thirty-one.

Jason stands outside the dorm, smoking with that Misty girl. When he sees me, his eyes widen, and he steps away from her. She shoots me a withering look, but nothing can make me feel worse than what I saw earlier at the Student Union.

I smirk. Too bad, honey. He's my future husband, not yours. "Hey, you." I step close to Jason, batting my eyelashes at him while using my body to block out Misty.

"Excuse you. We were talking." She grabs my shoulder, pulling me to the side.

Instead of whirling around and smacking her for laying her hands on me, I decide to take a page out of my mom's playbook and kill her with kindness. "Oh, sorry. I didn't see you there." I'm not the best actress, but I'm able to successfully sound like I'm trying to be friendly. I turn back to Jason. "Are you finished with your classes for the day?"

"I've got one in an hour."

"Wanna play hooky with me?" I lean forward, giving him a good look down my shirt.

He raises his eyebrows and grins. "You bet." He looks over my shoulder at Misty. "I'll hit you up later."

She huffs, but I'm already dragging him by his hand inside the dorm before she can say anything. This round goes to me.

His hand feels warm in mine, and I struggle to remember spending hours holding this hand. I don't know why all my memories of Jason feel fabricated when everything about Brock feels so damn real. Even as I redo these moments with him, they still feel less authentic than when I'm with Brock, which makes zero sense.

As soon as the elevator doors close, I grab his shoulders, using them as leverage so I can leap into his arms. He catches me with his hands under my ass. Not giving myself a second to rethink this, my lips are on his in a flurry. I'm past the awkwardness of our early kisses, focusing only on this moment with him. It may not feel right, but it doesn't exactly feel wrong either. More like all of this seems like a dream.

He sets me down on my feet when the elevator comes to a stop on his floor. "What's gotten into you? I'm not complaining. I'm just surprised."

"I want you." I mean, I think I do.

No, I do. Really. I do.

“Good, because after that, I need you.” He gestures to his jeans that are stretched tight across his thickening cock.

I follow him into his room and push him onto the bed as soon as the door closes behind us. Jason tugs me down, rolling me onto my back as he presses his hips against me. I move my legs apart, allowing him to settle between them.

Unease zips up my spine as he traces my skin beneath my shirt, moving his hand from my back, up my side, and to my chest. He circles my nipples through my bra, causing them to harden. Even though I think I want this, my panties remain a desert as I writhe and moan beneath him, trying desperately to get caught up in the moment. Why can't I get turned on right now? What's wrong with me? My kitty is dripping every time I so much as think of Brock and right now, bone dry. What the hell?

He sits up, lifting his shirt over his head with one hand. His body, toned from hours on the soccer field, hovers above me. I smile in appreciation, running my hands along his chest and down his tight abs, pushing away thoughts of anyone else.

Jason brought me here.

He reaches down, pushing my shirt up, and I'm suddenly shy. Virgin Hannah is still present despite me being here as well. I cross my arms, hiding from him, but he moves them to my sides, taking in every exposed inch of me.

“Don't cover yourself. I want to see you.” His voice is husky with desire.

I swallow hard, nodding. My cheeks heat as he traces the outline of my nipples, exposed by the sheer white material of my bra. I squirm, wanting to push him away, but wanting him to continue at the same time.

Jason is the reason I'm here.

He leans down, sucking a nipple into his mouth. I moan, grabbing his hair, pulling him closer to me. In the distance, I hear a key in the door, but ignore it.

“Whoa,” Griffin yells, jolting me out of the moment.

I scramble to find my shirt, pulling it over my head while Griffin stands there smiling and staring at my nearly bare chest. I shoot him a dirty look that I doubt he notices, since his eyes remain elsewhere.

“Dude, give us a sec,” Jason orders, tossing a pillow at his roommate.

I stand, rushing to the door. “I better go,” I call over my shoulder,

pushing past Griffin.

I hear him chuckling as I duck into the stairwell. Past me is horrified and present me is trying to figure out why Jason's touch felt so strange, like it was the first time he'd touched me in that way. Why can't I remember what it felt like to be with him the first time?

This time travel shit is the worst.

I book it out of Jason's dorm, running as fast as I can toward mine. Thank god Griffin showed up when he did. It's too soon for us to lose our virginities. Nothing about us hooking up earlier felt right. Maybe we need to have a more solid relationship before we do. I want to do this right. Plus, there's no sense in trying to rush forever. My old life will be waiting when I'm ready to return. Only I hope when I go back, I've fixed everything. I may be confused about a lot of things right now, but I know one thing for certain.

I'm here because of Jason.

Brock

Seeing Hannah today was harder than ever. In some ways, it feels like she's in the same place as me, but I just can't seem to reach her. Nothing I do makes her open her eyes for me. Nothing. Here I am living out the dream I've had since I was a little boy, and yet, all I want is Hannah.

Worse than not having her is watching her inner turmoil. She's not in a good place, and I can see it with her furrowed brow, tense eyes, and with the way she's fighting inside her mind. How can I protect her when she won't let me? Will she ever wake up?

Chapter 12

Hannah

LATER THAT NIGHT, AFTER LEAVING JASON'S DORM ROOM, I RUN INTO BROCK as I'm jogging up the steps to the library. Busy digging through my backpack for my student ID, I don't see him until I slam into him, dropping my bag. I bend down to pick it up and gather the spilled contents.

Brock squats down to help me collect my belongings. "Sorry. I didn't see you in time."

He's wearing gray sweatpants that stretch tight across his massive thighs and other equally large things, leaving nothing to the imagination. I swallow hard.

He clears his throat. "Um, Hannah?"

I jerk my eyes up to find him smirking. He obviously just caught me staring at his dick.

Great.

"Brock. I—"

He grips my chin and turns my head to the side. "What the fuck is that?"

My hand shoots up to my neck, and my cheeks heat.

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

I open my mouth and close it, unsure of what to say. So many thoughts race through my mind before I land on being bitchy. It's my go-to self-preservation technique when I feel backed into a corner. "You're the one who was all hugged up and smoochy with that cheerleader in the Student Union."

"I'm not the one with a purple spot on my neck, Hannah. That's not the kind of care you should be receiving. I can't allow that sort of thing."

"What the fuck does that even mean?"

"I have to go home now, but I expect this to never happen again." His tone is firm and unyielding, confusing me just as much as his words do. He stands, turning to leave, but I can't let him go. Not like this.

I grab his arm, forcing him to turn around. "I saw the way you behaved with that cheerleader. There's no way she's not one of your little girlfriends."

"So, you decided to run off and hook up with that loser guy you're so fixated on? To what? Get back at me?" There's no mistaking the hurt in his voice. "Why are you wasting time with him when I'm the one you really

want? Stop fighting fate.”

“I don’t expect you to understand. And I didn’t fuck Jason. I’m still a virgin in this timeline.”

“This timeline? Hannah, do you realize how you sound? Nothing you say makes sense.”

“Nothing *you* say makes sense,” I retort. Real mature, Hannah. What’s wrong with me?

“Hannah—“

I can’t do this push and pull any longer. He may not believe me, but I have to explain why we can’t be together. “I’m thirty-one. I got drunk after my fiancé dumped me and woke up back in my past. I’m here because Jason was the one who got away. You and I never even met in the past. I already know your future. I won’t take away your happily ever after just because I selfishly want you.”

“I’ve heard some fucked up shit in my life, but no one has ever used time travel as a reason to reject me.” He turns to leave, anger and sadness radiating from him.

My heart seizes in my chest. I can’t let him go. I grab him and pull him close. Future be damned. “How about this? One night. We fuck and get it out of our systems. In the morning, you can go back to being a sports hero, and I can figure out how to make things work with Jason so I can get back to my life. For tonight, we can simply be Brock and Hannah, two people who exist solely to please one another.” My voice is shaky as I whisper in his ear, afraid my second chance will fall apart if the universe hears me. This is risky, but if I don’t give myself tonight, I’ll regret it for the rest of my life. I want one night with Brock, even if it’s not what I’m supposed to do. Just one memory to carry with me when I go back to my future.

He steps back, putting some distance between us. “You just said you’re a virgin. I’m not going to fuck you and then send you on your merry way. What kind of guy do you take me for?”

My eyes stay trained on his, pleading for him to say yes to this insane idea. “I trust you, Brock. I’d rather lose my virginity to you in a wonderful night of passion than to fumble around awkwardly with Jason. If we do this, we can give in to our desires without ruining our chances for our happy endings. You’ll still get your dream life, and I’ll finally have mine.”

He looks away, hands on his hips. “I can’t believe I’m even entertaining this ridiculous idea,” he mutters, shaking his head.

I step closer and cup his cock. “Are you really going to deny me this? To deny us?”

He gazes upward, sighing before meeting my eyes. “I guess not. But don’t think I’ll let you walk away after one night. I want more.”

“I’m afraid this is all I can give you.”

If that’s true, why does it feel like the biggest lie I’ve ever told?

Chapter 13

Hannah

BROCK DOESN'T HURRY TO HIS DORM EVEN THOUGH WE'RE ON A MISSION TO have sex. In fact, he does the opposite, walking at a slow pace, asking me questions about my classes. This doesn't feel like a race to fuck. It's a slow seduction by getting to know each other better, something far more dangerous for my fragile hold on my mission. Brock's interest in my life does nothing to deter my heart from beating in time with his. When this infatuation between us is over, I'm going to be devastated. There's no way around it.

"Is painting your favorite medium?" Brock asks, showing me he's been listening intently as I've described my art to him.

I nod. "It is. I've recently started making some found art objects for one of my classes and I'm thinking about incorporating that into my paintings. I'm getting sick of always doing hyper realism."

"I'd like to see your work."

My eyes widen. "Really?" No guy has ever wanted to see my art, not even Jason, and definitely not Hunter. I mean, Jason would come to my art shows, but he never asked me what I was working on. And with Hunter, I'd all but stopped creating once we got together. In fact, I'd done nothing at all in the last few years of our relationship.

"Of course I do. Your stuff sounds cool. The way your face lights up when you talk about your art makes me feel like I'm missing out on truly knowing you if I don't also see your work."

Um, wow. I'm a goner. He's burrowed his way into my heart, and I don't think he'll ever leave now. "Do you want to see it? I mean, right now?" We're close to the art building, and I have a code that lets me into the studio area.

He nods. "Can I?"

The fact that he wants to see my art when I just told him I wanted him to fuck me doesn't fit with what I know about guys his age. Well, guys period, really. He should be rushing me to a private location, not trying to share something I love. Yeah, I'm definitely not going to be able to get over him any time soon.

I take his hand as we get closer to the art building. His eyes widen and his

head turns on a swivel when we walk inside. Various displays from different course levels cover the walls.

He slows to admire the artwork. "Are any of these yours?"

I shake my head no. "These are all from upper-level courses. I'm just a freshman. I won't have any work on display for another two years."

He goes from piece to piece, admiring each one. "I've never been in here before. This stuff is amazing." He stops in front of a collage that shows one of the supreme court justices screaming and crying while holding a pair of bloody panties in one hand and a can of beer in the other. "Are all artists this political?" His tone tells me he's somewhat shocked by the subject matter which was the artist's intent.

I shrug. "Most are. I think it's because we represent what's going on in the world, which is hard to show without coming across as political. We pour a lot of ourselves into our work, so our beliefs are bound to show up in our creations, whether intentionally or not. Music and books are the same way." I gesture to the collage in front of him. "I mean, *that's* not unintentional, but you know what I'm saying." I point to another painting, depicting a woman in a hospital gown with hundred-dollar bills flying out of her chest. "This one is much more subtle."

He nods, thinking over my words. "I never thought about that, but I guess that makes sense. You're showing the world through your own personal lens."

I tug him inside the studio and flip on the lights, surprised no one is in here. Usually, it's pretty full this time of night. I walk over to the racks and pull one of my larger oil paintings out to show him.

"Close your eyes," I say, suddenly nervous to show him my work. It's so much a part of me that if he doesn't like or understand it, then he doesn't really understand me. Even though we're not destined to end up together, I still want us to know each other as deeply as possible.

He does what I ask, waiting while I set the piece up on an easel. I can't help but grin at the way he puts his hands over his eyes, reminding me of a little kid. I'm going to miss him. Hell, he's right here, and I already miss him.

"Okay, you can look now." My heart hammers in my chest as I wait for him to say something.

This is my most recent piece. I started it the day after I woke up in this timeline. It's the first thing I've painted in three years. Instead of my typical style, it's more abstract. I've taken a self-portrait and incorporated fantasy

elements that represent time travel. Eighteen-year-old me looks straight out as thirty-one-year-old me sits in the corner in my wedding dress holding a bottle of tequila.

“It’s beautiful.” He stands in front of the painting, taking in every inch. “Holy shit,” he whispers.

“What?”

He points to a symbol I’ve painted throughout the background. It’s a stylized skeleton key with a lion’s head. “When did you see this?”

I shrug. “It’s something I keep seeing when I close my eyes. I don’t know what it represents.”

He turns to the side, lifting his shirt, showing me his ribs bearing the same key, freshly inked on his skin.

I gasp. This is the first time I’ve seen his tattoo. I knew he had ink there, but in the magazine photos, his arm covered most of it. What does this mean?

“I just got this yesterday.” His voice is filled with confusion, as if this moment between us isn’t really happening.

I swallow hard. “What is it?”

“My grandmother wore a necklace with this key. My grandfather made her a wooden box for her secrets and treasures. This is the key. When she died a few years ago, it was written in her will that she wanted to be buried with the box and the key. No one was allowed to open it. She wanted to take her secrets to the grave. I got this tattoo in honor of her.”

What the fuck? Why did I paint Brock’s exact tattoo before I’d met him? This can’t be a coincidence. “How—?”

He pulls me into his chest, kissing me like we’re the last two people on earth. I grip his biceps, losing myself in the moment. Nothing has ever felt more right. Fate has twisted and looped until I have no idea where I’m headed. All I know is I can’t mess up my second chance. There’s no way I’ll get another chance after this.

Just thinking about the future sends a white-hot flash of pain blinking behind my eyes, forcing me to pull back, ending the kiss. “Brock—” I rub my temples, feeling sick to my stomach.

“When are you going to start fighting for us? I need you to wake up. Choose me. . . Please.” He sounds so desperate I want to cry.

I close my eyes, hoping to ward off the pain that’s turned into a dull throb. “I can’t risk everything. What if you leave me too?” I whisper. My heart is fragile, and I must guard it at all costs. I’m not strong enough to let

this silly infatuation break it. But if it's just a silly infatuation, why does the thought of walking away hurt so much?

"Are you really going to stand here and pretend the universe isn't working to bring us together? How can you deny this?" He points at the key in the painting and then his side.

"I should go." I grab my painting and put it back in its spot, feeling Brock's eyes on me the entire time, pleading with me.

"Hannah. I can't do this without you. We were made for each other."

I gasp, unable to catch my breath. "I can't. Every time I think about letting you in, I feel like I can't breathe. My head hurts. I just can't."

"I promise, if you just open your eyes, things will be better. Please. Just try," he begs.

"Turn the lights off when you leave," I say through the tears, stinging my eyes.

Jason brought me to this place in time, but I don't seem to want him. I want Brock. He's the only person who feels real in this timeline. Well, him and Grace. But what if I risk it all and wind up with nothing? Or worse, what if I'm stuck at eighteen forever?

"Hannah, please!"

I pause, muscles tensing, but don't turn around. I can't. As much as I want to take a leap and wake up in the future with Brock's arms wrapped around me, I can't. Something is weighing me down, holding me in place. And when I think about how I ended up here, my mind turns to Jason. He was my last thought before I woke up here. That has to mean something.

But what?

Brock

Hannah needs to open her eyes. Time is running out, and if she doesn't choose me soon, she'll be gone for good. Every time I think she's coming around, we have a setback like earlier tonight. I'm afraid I'm going to have to let go soon.

“Hannah, please!” I yell, my voice echoing in the almost empty room.

She stays still, unresponsive.

I don't know what I expected. It's not like I can force things to go the way I want. Some things are beyond my control. And this is one of them. All I can do is trust that she'll eventually open her eyes.

I'll wait for forever for my soulmate if necessary.

Chapter 14

Hannah

THOUGHTS OF BROCK HAVE FILLED MY MIND SINCE I LEFT HIM IN THE STUDIO last night. His desperation was palpable, which doesn't make sense. Nothing about this second chance does. As much as I want to give in to my feelings for him, I can't. Something keeps me from being able to follow my heart.

Jason is why I'm here.

It's like a neon sign flashing in my brain, driving me away from the man I want. Initially, it was my need to fix my past, but I'm beginning to think there's more to this situation than I first realized. But what?

I'm so distracted by my thoughts of Brock and Jason, I almost walk right into Hunter coming out of the library. Luckily, he's distracted as well, and I'm able to sidestep him without stopping. He scrutinizes me, but keeps talking to the girl next to him. She's wearing bright pink scrubs, which seems odd. I know the university has a nursing program, but she looks like an actual nurse with the way she's writing down things as he speaks.

Weird.

I don't stop to think about Hunter because tonight I have plans with Jason. The entire walk home I mull over what I should wear. The clothing styles are so different from what I'm used to in the future. It's hard to believe we ever used to dress this way. I cringe when I think about the low-rise jeans I'll be wearing tonight. Hopefully, I won't spend the entire evening worried about flashing my crack. I hope the mom jeans future me wears are never replaced by the reemergence of this style.

By the time I'm back at my dorm, there's not enough time for a shower. Since the timeline from my past has strayed so far from the one I remember, I have no idea if tonight's the night we'll end up sleeping together. The thought makes my stomach sour. I don't want to mess up the reason I'm here, but I'd be lying if I didn't admit Brock is the person I want. Why did the universe have to send me back to be with Jason, only to have such a big temptation? Is this a test?

That's it!

This is a test to see if I deserve my second chance. I need to stay on the path. It's my only way home. It has to be. . . right? All I know is each day my

mind feels fuzzier than the previous one. And today I woke up nauseated. It's like my body's starting to resist staying in this timeline or something. I need to press on and finish whatever task brought me here.

I throw on my outfit, rushing so I'm not late to meet Jason. I spritz myself with perfume before racing to the front of the dorms where he's waiting. My anxiety trumps my excitement when I see him. He's dressed up for our date in baggy jeans with a nice pearl snap shirt, telling me he has high expectations for tonight. That should make me giddy with excitement. Key word is *should*.

I take the time to look him over since he hasn't noticed me yet. The butterflies in my stomach are tame compared to the ones I feel when I'm around Brock, but at least they're there. I think that's the feeling in my stomach that's responsible for my sudden bout of nausea, anyway.

I swallow my nerves. "Hey," I call, waving when he finally spots me.

"Hannah." He smiles. "You look beautiful."

Now that we're face-to-face, I'm not sure how to greet him. Luckily, he decides for me by pulling me into a hug and kissing me on the forehead. I'm so off kilter. If left up to me, I probably would've tried to shake his hand or something equally mortifying.

"You look beautiful," he whispers.

I nestle into him, ignoring the prickle I feel at the back of my head. This is how my second chance is supposed to be. I'm nearly certain I'm now back on the right path. There's an urgent feeling I have in regards to Jason that makes me think I'm doing the right thing.

"Are you ready?" he asks, stepping back and dropping his arms.

I try not to visibly relax when he's no longer touching me, but I'm grateful for the space. "What do you have planned?"

"I thought we could eat at Joe's and then go to a party at the Rugby house."

I fix my face so he doesn't see my disappointment. "Sounds good," I lie. Does he seriously think fifty cent mini hamburgers and a party constitutes a date? Is this what we used to do? Try as I might, when I wrack my brain, I can't remember a single date between Jason and me. Why can't I remember? Is that a red flag?

I shake my head, internally scolding myself. Where we go doesn't matter. What's important is we're finally getting our second chance. *I'm* getting a chance at my dream life. If only I could remember exactly what that is. My

clear vision of the future has been replaced by fragments of memories and headaches.

Jason talks about his classes and some new band he's obsessed with on our way to Joe's. I nod, pretending I care, but my mind keeps wandering back to Brock and how upset he was. Despite not being able to give either of us what we want, I still value his friendship. I hate that I've hurt him. Maybe we're supposed to be friends. Maybe Jason and I will vacation with him and his supermodel wife in the future. Yeah, that's it. We're supposed to be friends.

"Hannah?" Jason looks at me expectantly, and I realize we're already at Joe's.

"Um, what?" I push away the sour feeling thinking about Brock and his future wife gives me.

"You seem distracted. Is everything okay?" Jason's jaw is set, telling me he's irritated with my behavior tonight.

I smile and nod, hoping to soothe his frustration. "I'm just worried about my Spanish class." *Really, Hannah? That's the best you could come up with?* What is wrong with me? It's as if my brain keeps shorting out on me.

Jason rubs his chin as he seems to think for a moment. "I could tutor you if you'd like. I spent last summer in Honduras. I'm pretty fluent."

I tilt my head to the side, squinting. Liar. I know for a fact he's never left the country at this point in his life. He worked as a busboy at a Mexican restaurant last summer. Why would he pretend something different? Was he always like this? Do I really know him? "Um, okay. Sure," I agree, not wanting to upset the ease between us.

He smiles as he opens the door and ushers me inside the restaurant. It's crowded because every college student comes here for the cheap mini hamburgers. I try not to let it bother me how we end up sharing a table with Griffin and his girlfriend. It seems like our first date was planned as a double, unbeknownst to me.

Despite my initial disappointment, we end up having an enjoyable time. I don't think about Brock or Hunter once. Instead, I laugh with Griffin and Jason. I forgot how much fun Griffin was. And I've almost forgotten how he saw me nearly topless the other day. I always liked him, but after his falling out with Jason, I had to choose sides. It's not like I could stay friends with my boyfriend's arch-nemesis.

Once we've all finished eating, Jason leans over to me. "Are you ready to

go to the party?”

I work hard to keep from frowning, not wanting my disappointment to show on my face. “I was hoping we could go back to your dorm room,” I whisper.

He raises his eyebrows. “Really?”

I smile, ignoring the dull ache at the base of my skull. “Yes, really. I want to be alone with you.”

He whispers something to Griffin, who pats him on the back and nods. I feel my cheeks heat, realizing he knows Jason and I are about to have sex with each other. Does it still count as my first time? I can’t really remember what being with him felt like, so I’m thinking this counts, which makes me even more nervous. The churning in my stomach returns full force.

All too soon, Jason and I are back in his dorm room with only the light from his lamp illuminating the room. Before I even realize what’s happened, I’m down to my bra and panties, and he’s in only his boxers as we dry hump like stranded campers trying to spark a fire with sticks.

This is wrong. My inner voice is screaming for me to stop. I’m beginning to think I have everything wrong. Maybe Jason is the reason I’m here, but not for a do over. Maybe there’s something I’m supposed to learn. What if it’s to trust my instincts? If that’s the case, I’m failing miserably. Everything in my soul has been shouting for me to stop this madness with Jason. I need to follow my heart.

My heart wants Brock.

“I want you,” Jason whispers in his deep voice, the one I used to love so much, but now feels so wrong.

This is a mistake.

I push him off me and sit up. “Stop!” I swallow hard, clenching my eyes shut, taking two deep breaths. My head spins, making my body sway. “I think we should stop.”

He closes his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose. “What the fuck, Hannah? You’ve been leading me on for weeks now. The least you could do is suck my dick.” He shoots me a sad, puppy dog face that incenses me.

My eyes widen at his audacity. “I’m not ready.”

“I thought you were my girlfriend. Maybe we’re better off as friends.” He sounds like a petulant child, making me even more confident in my decision to stop things before they progress further.

“Don’t be like that. We’re moving too fast. This doesn’t feel right.”

Okay, so maybe that's a lie, but I just want to get out of here without a fight. Surely, he feels how disjointed our connection seems right now.

"You should go." He steps into his jeans and stands, jerking them up. His boxer covered erection looks absurd poking out from the open zipper. If I wasn't so upset, I'd laugh. "I'm not down for waiting longer. Prick teases aren't my thing, honey."

What the fuck? That condescending jerk. "Are you serious right now?"

"I have shit to do, Hannah. I can't hang around, playing rub and tug all night, every night."

I jerk my head back. In an attempt to keep from saying something I'll regret, I dress in silence. Thirty-one-year-old me wants to kick ass and take names, but eighteen-year-old me is busy trying not to cry. Both versions of me are sensitive, they just react in opposite ways.

If this was a test, I've failed miserably. My hopes of returning to my actual life with my shit in order are draining from me with each passing second. I'm stuck in my past with zero hopes for my future. With each passing day, my real life feels further and further away. I want to go home. No, I *need* to, even if it means saying goodbye to Brock.

I don't belong here.

When I'm dressed and calm, I walk to the door. I turn around and see Jason looking out the window.

I swallow hard. "Are we going to be okay? I mean, can we be friends?"

He stiffens, turning slowly to face me. "I don't know. My crystal ball is cracked."

His and mine both.

Chapter 15

Hannah

EXPECTING MY DORM ROOM TO BE EMPTY WHEN I GET HOME, I ALMOST JUMP out of my skin when I open it and come face-to-face with Grace. I let out a long breath while clutching my hand to my chest. “Oh, my god! You scared the crap out of me.”

She laughs. “Admit it. You peed your pants a little.”

“I will admit no such thing,” I say, trying to sound indignant before dissolving into giggles. “I missed you,” I tell her when we finally catch our breath.

She pulls me into a hug. “Oh, Hannah. I don’t know what sort of hellscape you were living in when you were in the future, but there’s no world that exists where you and I aren’t best friends. I promise you that. Even if I move away to Paris, you’ll still be my number one.”

Her words have such conviction behind them I believe her. More and more, I’m doubting my memories of my ‘future’ are accurate. “I think I lost sight of who I was,” I admit. “Or maybe I’m losing sight now. I don’t know.” I plop onto my bed, lying back. “It’s like my mind is all jumbled, and I’m missing something important.”

She mulls over my admission for a beat. “Maybe that’s why you’re still here,” she suggests.

I sit up onto my elbows. “Maybe.”

She waves her hand like she’s swatting a fly. “What are you doing home? I thought you had a date with Sir Loserton.” Her ‘just smelled a fart’ expression tells me exactly what she thinks about that idea.

I swat at her. “Don’t call him that.” Although, right now, the name seems fitting. Making an enemy is not what second chances are for, so even though I don’t want to wind up with him, I have zero desire for us to be at odds. My goal now is to make peace with everyone so I can finally go home.

“I know you’re convinced you traveled back in time for him, but what if you’re wrong?”

What if I am? “Honestly?”

She nods, waiting for me to think about what that would mean.

I sigh. “I’m scared to admit how I feel. What if that sends me back to the

future, and I lose everything I've gained since coming back here? I feel like I'm further away than ever from something or someone important. I just don't know who or what that is, and it's driving me to madness." Before this second chance, I never would have described myself as fearful or wishy-washy, but that's exactly how I've behaved since I woke up here. "There's a gaping hole in my mind, and I know whatever I'm missing is important."

"What do you think it could be? Or rather who?" She gives me a pointed look, and I know exactly what she's thinking without her having to say it.

"I'm not talking about Brock." Except that's a lie.

"Are you sure? Because it sort of seems like you are. What if he's *the one*?" She's always been team Brock, so her insistence that he's my soulmate doesn't surprise me.

"Enough about guys. I declare a girls' night." I say that knowing she has to cancel all plans and stay home with me. It was something we agreed to the first week we met. We also promised to never abuse it. If I remember correctly, this is the first time either of us has invoked it in this timeline.

"Fine, but you're explaining to Cory why he's not getting a taste of my taco tonight." Is it just me or does she sound relieved to not see that smug S.O.B. tonight? Maybe we won't have a falling out over him after all.

"I'll call your boyfriend, but that means you have to procure the wine."

"Deal."

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, WE'RE SITTING ON MY BED IN OUR PAJAMAS, PASSING a bottle of cheap wine back and forth between us. My face hurts from laughing so much as we discuss everything and nothing at all. This moment is a balm, healing a part of me I didn't realize was injured.

"Okay, let's play truth or dare," Grace suggests, opening our second bottle.

"With just us? Grace, you already know everything about me. And I love you, but if this is a ploy to get my v-card, I'm saving that for Br-, um, someone else." I almost said Brock, but decided I don't want to restart that conversation. My feelings about him are too upsetting to think about right now. I want to relax and enjoy my friend, not fret over a guy.

"True, but I was hoping I could dare you to strip naked and run through

campus.”

“Um, no thanks. I don’t want to get arrested and end up on a registry.” And knowing my luck, I’d most certainly get caught. That’s a humiliation I don’t want. Ever.

“Boo,” she teases, throwing a pillow at me. “You’re no fun.”

“Shut up and pass me the bottle.”

She takes a long pull before handing me the wine. “I know. Let me cut your hair.”

“That’s a negative. You’re drunk, and I’m not interested in looking like a weed whacker attacked me.”

She throws herself back on the bed. “Uh, I’m so bored. Tell me about the future.”

“What do you want to know?”

She tilts her head, scrunching her face. “I don’t really know. You refuse to tell me the only thing I want to know.”

“I’m afraid if I tell you what went wrong with us before, I’ll lose you again.” That and the details are fuzzy, but I’m afraid if I admit I don’t fully remember what happened, she’ll get upset and accuse me of not caring enough about our friendship to dredge up all the details. That’s not true at all. Grace is important to me. So, why can’t I remember?

She holds up her right hand. “I promise not to be mad about what happened.”

“We fought about Cory. I didn’t think he was good enough for you.”

She jumps up, knocking her hip into the desk next to her bed, rattling everything on top. “Are you kidding me?”

I wince, fearing this is where I lose her.

“How dumb am I? Why would I fight you over that? You were right. He’s not good enough for me.” She flops back onto the bed. “God, it feels good to admit that.”

“The blame isn’t just yours. I was spoiling for a fight because I thought you were jealous Hunter wanted me to move to Texas with him. You told me I was stupid to give up my internship in London for him. Which you were right about, by the way.”

“So, you were an idiot, too?” She laughs. “What the hell was wrong with us in your weird future? None of that could be real. We’re definitely not that stupid in real life. There’s no way we’d let boys come between us. And we damn sure wouldn’t let them keep us from living our dreams.”

I sit up, turning somber. “But Grace, *this* isn’t real.” I point my finger, gesturing between us.

She shrugs. “It sure feels real to me. And I’d bet my right tit tomorrow’s hangover from this cheap wine will feel real.”

I laugh. Maybe she’s right. Maybe I’ve been here all along, and my memories of the future are the result of a concussion after a night of drinking or something. That seems more plausible than me actually time traveling. This isn’t some sort of Sci-Fi novel.

She grows serious, pinning me with an intense stare. “What if I’m right? What if this is real, and you never were in the future? How would you feel about the choices you’re making?”

I sigh, trying to swallow the emotions swirling beneath the surface. “If this is all real, I’ll regret letting Brock slip through my fingers.”

She puts her foot on my leg and pushes. “I think you know what you need to do.”

If that’s true, why do I feel like I can’t let Jason get away? He’s the key to something important. I just know he is. The problem is I don’t know what.

Chapter 16

Hannah

AFTER LAST NIGHT'S DRUNKEN HEART TO HEART WITH GRACE, I WOKE UP hungover and reeling. I spent all day trying to rectify that while Jason may have brought me back, there's no way I can be with him. How can I be on the path to winding up alone again? I'm completely blundering my second chance. And what's worse, I'm hurting a guy who doesn't deserve it. Brock has been a good friend to me, and what have I done? I've tossed him aside at the slightest attention from Jason.

After hiding in my room all day, I decide to venture out to get some food. On my way down in the elevator, I think about how I don't deserve Brock. Maybe that's the reason I've pushed him away since the beginning. My subconscious knows Brock deserves to live his dream of the NFL superstar married to the famous model. I care for him enough to not want to ruin his future.

The sun is so bright, I reach up to my head and rub my pounding temples. It feels like I've been run over. I'm pretty sure I could vomit at any moment. Please don't let me run into Brock while I'm wearing paint splattered baggy jeans and an oversized hoodie, feeling like death.

Speak of the devil. I stop short when I see the man I was hoping to avoid. There's no catching a break in this reality, that's for sure.

Brock paces in front of my dorm, hands in his pocket, head down. My heart flutters at the sight of him. I'm losing this battle of resistance and, after the way Jason spoke to me last night, I no longer care. At some point, I have to decide to choose happiness.

Fuck Hunter.

Fuck Jason.

And fuck eighteen-year-old Hannah.

This time around, I'm choosing myself. Even if it's just for a moment, I'm getting my happy ending.

As if he can sense me, Brock looks up, meeting my eyes. A broad smile stretches across his face before he scowls. I hate that I hurt him. No matter what happens in the future, this moment is about Brock and me.

"Hey." His voice is soft, making my heart spasm.

“Are you waiting for me?”

“It’s Tuesday, our standing dinner date.”

I bite my lip. “I didn’t think you’d want to see me,” I admit.

“I always want to see you, Hannah. Even when it hurts.”

I look down at my paint covered clothes and fuzzy slippers. “I need to change.”

He takes my hand in his. “Don’t change on my account. You look more beautiful every time I see you.”

I stare into his eyes, heart hammering in my chest as visions of a life with Brock flash through my head as if they’re memories from actual events. I see him on one knee at the pond across the street from my sorority house, proposing to me while we’re adorned with our caps and gowns. Standing at the front of the arbor in my parent’s backyard, holding hands, saying I do flashes next. I envision him on draft day, grinning when the Lions select him quarterback. I picture our life, and it’s perfect.

It’s real.

I launch myself into his arms. “I’m so sorry,” I cry. “I’ve been so stupid.”

“Oof.” He catches me with his muscular arms, holding me to his chest.

“I don’t want to lose you. Can you ever forgive me?” I may not be ready to admit how I feel about him out loud, but I can’t deny the hold he has on my heart any longer. In some ways it feels like I fell for Brock in an instant, but in others, it’s as if I’ve loved him my entire adult life.

“How can you ask me that? I’m nothing without you.”

He holds me with my head against his sternum. His touch tells me he feels what I do, and it scares the shit out of me. Am I ready to give in to my desires and be with him? What if I ruin everything by being with him? But what if that’s where I’m supposed to be?

I step back, needing to calm the butterflies in my chest, but he keeps his arms around my waist. “Does that mean you’re going to feed me?” I ask, hoping to ease some of the tension and slow my thoughts.

He chuckles. “Doll, I’m going to do anything you want tonight.”

I bite my lip and grin. “I’m going to hold you to that.” Tonight’s the night I give him everything.

The ease I always feel around Brock settles over me as we walk to the athletic dorm. Despite our dramatic goodbye the last time we were together, he acts like nothing happened. Instead, he asks me about my art and tells me about his last football practice.

“I’m nervous about Saturday,” he admits. “What if last week was a fluke, and I can’t live up to the hype? I’m worried my dream will end before it truly begins.”

I reach over and squeeze his forearm. “Don’t be. You’re one of the best quarterbacks in the NFL.”

He scoffs. “You say that like it’s true.”

I frown. “It *is* true. Brock, the entire world is taking notice of you. Pretty soon, it will be your number on all the jerseys the kids wear on Saturdays. You’re freaking Brock Martin.”

He closes his eyes, resting his forehead on mine. “No one has ever believed in me the way you do.”

I don’t know what to say to that, so I keep silent. Believing in him is the easiest thing I’ve done since waking up in my past.

Luckily, Zeke jogs up from behind us, stopping me from having to find the words to articulate what Brock means to me. “Hannah, my girl. Are you coming to eat dinner with me?”

I laugh when Brock pulls away from me and gut punches him.

“Hands off my girl, Washington.” Although I know Brock’s teasing, there’s an underlying warning in his tone. I’m his, and it’s something I relish. His claim on me feels safe, unlike when Jason did it. I wish I could be Brock’s forever.

Zeke holds up his hands in surrender. “My bad.” He winks at me. “Looks like you’ve got our boy tied in knots. Little Brockie’s in love.”

My cheeks heat. I know that’s probably not true, but Brock didn’t deny it, so maybe. . . I shake my head. I can’t let my thoughts go there. I may be willing to give into my feelings for Brock, but I’m not about to let him break my heart when he leaves me in the dust for his supermodel and professional football career. And I’m damn sure not holding him back the way Hunter did me.

Like last time, Brock shows me to a table and then goes to get our food. Only this time, it’s a table for two. I look around, noting there aren’t many other girls around. The insinuation of what that means warms my chest. At the very least, I’m important to him.

I can’t keep the grin off my face when I see Brock exit the line, balancing a tray in each hand. He moves with a fluid grace only athletes possess as he dodges tables and other players. Brock Martin is beautiful.

“Madam.” He places my tray in front of me and his across the table.

“Thank you, kind sir.” I grin, winking.

He smiles back, then turns serious. “I’m glad you came tonight. I hated the way we left things last time.”

“I was afraid you hated me,” I admit. “I didn’t know you still wanted me to come until I saw you outside the dorm.”

“Hannah, I want you forever. I’ve tried, but I can only be so patient. I know you think that other guy is special, but you and I are soulmates. There is no me without you.”

“How do you know?” How can he be so certain?

“I’ve always known.” He acts like we’ve been together forever instead of just meeting a few weeks ago.

“But why me?” I bite my lip, trying to keep from blurting something stupid that’ll stop him from wanting me.

He reaches across the table and pulls my lip from between my teeth with a gentle tug. “We’re written in the stars, you and me.”

“I’m scared.”

“That’s how you know I’m right.” He picks up his fork, popping a huge bite of salad into his mouth as if he didn’t just completely upend my world.

I watch as he shoves a big bite of steak into his mouth next. He catches me watching him and winks. My cheeks heat, so I look down at my plate. Every fiber of my being knows he’s right, but in the corner of my mind, there’s a nagging thought. One that tells me I’m missing something important.

But what could that be?

Chapter 17

Hannah

ONCE I GOT OUT OF MY HEAD AND STOPPED OVER ANALYZING EVERYTHING, dinner was perfect. Even with feeling torn about what my purpose is here, I know being with Brock will never be a mistake, which is why I find myself riding the elevator up to his dorm room, feeling like I could jump out of my skin. Tonight is going to change everything.

Everything.

When the elevator doors open, I'm suddenly hit with an intense bout of nerves. What if he never speaks to me again after we have sex? What if I'm ruining my chance at a happily ever after? What if—?

Always in tune with me and my emotions, Brock nudges me with his arm. "Relax, doll. We're just going to hang out and talk." He takes my hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze as he leads me into his room.

I lick my dry lips and swallow hard. "I'm nervous," I admit.

"You don't need to be nervous around me."

I look up, finding his eyes intensely trained on me. "I want you. Even if it's just for tonight. It feels like I'm running out of time, and I need to be with you at least once before everything changes."

He turns me so I'm facing him, cupping my cheeks. "Baby, if you give me tonight, I'm taking forever."

My heart jumps to my throat when he leans down, sealing my lips with his. Even knowing we won't be together in the future, I give in to this moment.

He pulls my shirt over my head. "You're so perfect. I'm afraid to touch you," he whispers in reverence. My whole body flushes. I reach for the button on his jeans, but he steps out of my reach. I frown at him, confused as to why he's stopping me. "Oh, no you don't," he teases. "I'm taking my time. Trust me, these pants are coming off, but not until I'm ready to bury myself inside you."

I'm used to guys who are selfish in their lovemaking, so Brock's words stall my hands mid-air. Or am I? This feels like the first time for real. In fact, I can't remember ever being with anyone else before now. It's like my memories are fabricated. The only thing that's real is right now.

I shake my head to clear my thoughts. Being with Brock, in this moment, is the only place I want to be. As far as I'm concerned, now is all that exists. It's all that's ever existed.

Brock leans over me, compelling me to lie back against the bed so he can rid me of my jeans, leaving me in just my bra and panties. I'm too on fire to worry about anything but his touch. He presses my hands above my head into the bed as his silky, smooth skin covers mine. When he kisses me, I can't stop a moan from escaping. I need more. There's an ache boiling inside me, desperate to be soothed by the man on top of me.

While keeping my hands above my head with one of his hands, his other one travels down my side. He grips behind my knee, moving to press his hard cock between my legs. My pussy quivers when he grinds into me, his cock pressing against my clit. I moan even louder as he reaches behind me to unclasp my bra, letting go of my hands to take it off me. In this timeline, I've never been this exposed to anyone, and it excites me. I'm desperate for more and yet nervous at the same time. Thirty-one-year-old, experienced me has taken a backseat, allowing the younger version of myself to fully engage in the moment.

Did adult Hannah ever really exist?

"Beautiful," he whispers, capturing my right nipple between his lips.

I buck my hips as he spreads kisses across my chest, moving to my other pink tip. His thumb and forefinger roll the peak his mouth just vacated. Fire spreads throughout my entire body. My throat constricts as tears burn my eyes. No one has ever loved me so completely before, and I'm terrified no one ever will after this.

His touch is delicious, yet it's almost painful. "I want. . . please. . ." I beg, not knowing what to say. The sensation is too much and not enough at the same time. I want more.

I want everything.

He chuckles, his warm breath dancing across my overheated skin. "Not yet, doll," he whispers as he slides down my stomach, licking and kissing, leaving a trail of fire in the wake of his every touch. His tongue circles my belly button, and my hands grip the mattress.

I whimper.

When he kisses along the edge of my panties, I move my hips searching for pressure in the one spot that's throbbing with need to be touched, but he skips over to my left thigh, licking along the edge of my panties, teasing me.

I grab his head, and move him where I need his touch. When he licks the seat of my underwear, I shudder with a groan. “Now. . . Please!”

His long, thick finger slips inside the leg hole of my panties, shifting the fabric to the side. “So beautiful,” he says before placing a wet kiss on me.

Oh, god!

When he suckles my sensitive button, tremors spread throughout my body. Nothing has ever felt like this before. He continues to taste me, pressing a long, thick finger inside my pussy.

I place both hands on his shoulders, pushing him back so I can reach for his pants to pop open his button. “Now,” I demand, unzipping his jeans and taking him in my grasp.

“Are you sure you’re ready? We can wait.” Even in the heat of the moment, Brock puts me first. How did I resist him for so long?

“Yes,” I whisper, loving that he wants my first time to be special. As if being with him could ever be anything less than amazing.

“Look at me, Hannah.” He presses inside me, but pauses, our eyes sharing unspoken words. We kiss until I adjust to his size. I feel full, but in the most delicious way. We were made for each other.

“How did I get so lucky?” he whispers in my ear. “You’re perfect.”

“I’m not perfect. . . and I’m scared of how you’ll see me when you realize how far from it I am.”

He kisses my words away, rolling his hips just a fraction. The burn mixed with the slow drag of his push and pull movements sends tingles zipping from my clit to my nipples, lighting up everything in between.

How am I supposed to choose anything short of this heaven? Being with him is like I’m home. Every second brands me with a memory I’ll treasure for the rest of my life.

“Brock,” I whisper as my pussy spasms around him, my orgasm on the verge of overtaking me.

“Let go, Hannah. I’m close, too,” he pants, his warm breath tickling my neck, adding to the intensity of the pleasure waves rushing over me.

I cry out as I dive over the edge. Groaning, he pulls out, releasing onto my stomach.

He kisses me softly before leaving me in bed, boneless, trying to remember if this Hannah is on birth control. The last thing I want is to fuck up her future by getting her pregnant at eighteen. How can I be so irresponsible when getting a second chance? It’s like my brain refuses to

make decent choices.

Brock comes back into the room, still naked, holding a wet washcloth. He cleans my stomach while I admire the cut lines of his muscles. All of his late practices and workouts have paid off. He is a work of art. His skin is smooth and silky, pulled tight across muscles that are toned to perfection from hours of playing and training for the game he loves.

Once he's finished cleaning me, he sets the washcloth on his nightstand and then slips into bed with me. I feel safe inside his warm arms, like this is exactly where I belong. And yet, I know I can't stay. Grace was wrong. This isn't my real life.

I don't belong here.

Chapter 18

Hannah

FOR THE SECOND TIME SINCE WAKING IN THIS ALTERNATE REALITY, I FIND myself sneaking out of Brock's dorm room while he sleeps. Last night was. . . I frown, hating to admit the truth, even if it is just to myself. Last night was the best night of my life. Being with Brock felt like coming home after a long trip and slipping into my own bed covered in sheets still warm from the dryer. Even though I know he's destined for someone other than me in the actual future, we feel so good together. It would be easy for me to forget and allow myself to get swept up in being with him. Connecting with him was absolutely perfect. I don't think I'll ever regret being with him, but it can't happen again. I need to find a way to go home. As much as I love being with Brock, it isn't fair to either of us. I don't belong here in this timeline.

Grace and Cory are sleeping in her bed when I get home. I'm careful not to wake them as I slip into bed to sleep. I need a shower, but don't want to take one. I'm not ready to wash Brock off me. Instead, I burrow into bed, inhaling the scent of him on the t-shirt I pilfered from his drawers when I left this morning.

When I wake, I stretch, enjoying the delicious soreness of my muscles from my night with Brock. The dull throb between my legs from his cock reminds me last night actually happened. I sit up to find Grace doing her makeup with Cory long gone.

"Hello, Sleeping Beauty," she teases.

I rub my eyes. "What time is it?"

"Time for you to shower so we can go to The Wormy Dog. Our fake IDs are burning a hole in my pocket." She holds up the IDs of two senior sisters that look nothing like us other than the similar hair colors.

I yawn. As much as I want to say no, I'm not about to pass up this time with Grace. I have no idea what's in store for us when I wake. There's no way I'm squandering the opportunity to hang out with my former bestie.

"Your boyfriend was here earlier," she tells me before holding her mouth open so she can put on her mascara.

My pulse speeds up with excitement. "Brock was here?"

"Hmm. And here I thought his name was Jason." She smirks, giving me a

knowing look.

I swallow hard. Shit. Is this the universe telling me I didn't mess up my second chance? Maybe it's allowing me to make amends with everyone before I go back to my former life.

I drop back onto my pillows, more confused than ever. "What did he want?"

She shrugs. "Dunno. He just said for you to call him."

I frown.

"I don't get the attraction there, Hannah. The dude's an arrogant ass. He gives off a super creepy vibe. Something is not right in here." She points to her head, raising her eyebrows. Leave it to Grace to tell it like it is.

I smile. She's not wrong. As much as I've tried to deny it, things with Jason don't add up. He may be the reason I ended up back here, but we are not supposed to wind up together. After last night, I'm certain. There's no way I'd respond to Brock the way I have if Jason was my soulmate. No way.

I chew on my lower lip, not believing I'm about to tell Grace what happened with Brock, but desperate to share it with her. "Can I tell you something, and you promise not to freak out?"

She nods, even though we both know she'll freak out anyway. Grace loves being dramatic. It's coded into her DNA. There's no way she'll stay calm with news this big.

"You know the new quarterback, Brock Martin?" Of course she does. We've talked about him at length. Why am I being so weird?

She grins. "The Sig Chi you met at that social hour thing? The one who's been vibing you hard? I may have heard a thing or two about him," she teases.

"Right. Um, well, we, uh. . ." I widen my eyes, hoping she'll get the hint without me having to spell it out.

"No way!" she squeals, falling back onto her bed, kicking her heels in the air.

"You said you wouldn't freak."

"That's before I knew you were romancing our star quarterback. Please tell me what my psychic vibes are telling me is correct, and you finally lost your v-card."

I grin.

"You whore," she screams, giggling as she tosses her pillow at me.

"It was amazing."

“He’s hung like a horse, isn’t he? Isn’t he?” She nods her head, encouraging me to answer.

“Don’t be a freak. I’m not telling you about his business.” I bite my lip, trying to hold back the grin thinking about last night brings.

“You don’t have to tell me. That smug grin on your face tells me everything I want to know.”

My smile falls, tears stinging my eyes. “I don’t know what to do.” Probably because I’m hopelessly in love with a man destined for fame and fortune. One who will, no doubt, leave me broken hearted.

She gets serious once she sees my face. “Oh, Hannah.” She moves to sit next to me in bed, pulling me into a hug.

“I really like Brock. He’s so freaking perfect, but he’s going to be an NFL superstar one day and marry a supermodel. There’s no way he’s in love with me. I’m probably better off with Jason.” That’s a lie. I don’t believe that anymore. I’m not sure why I ever did.

Grace rolls her eyes. “Honey, nobody’s better off with Jason. That dude is an ass.”

“I don’t think I’m supposed to be with Brock.” Something is keeping me from him. I don’t know what, but it’s the reason I know my time here is ending soon.

“Is this about your whole ‘time travel, fix the past’ thing?”

“I know you don’t believe me, but—”

She takes both my hands in hers. “I believe you, Hannah. I’ll always believe you. That’s what best friends do. I may not understand, but that doesn’t mean what you’re saying isn’t true. What I don’t believe is that you were ever with Jason in any timeline. He doesn’t fit. It’s time you stop trying to do what you think you should and follow your heart.”

“What if I mess up my life again?”

She thinks for a minute. “Can I ask you something?”

I nod.

“Did you know Brock the first time around? Like when you were in college before.”

I shake my head no. “We never met.”

“So, he was the first guy you met when you came back here?”

“No. I met Jason at the coffee shop first.”

“But didn’t you kinda orchestrate that?”

I frown. “What are you saying?”

“What if,” she holds up a hand when I open my mouth to interrupt, “hear me out. What if you came back for Brock, *not* Jason?”

“As much as I want that to be true, I don’t think it is. For whatever reason, I know Jason is the reason I’m here.”

She sighs. “I guess we’ll have to figure this out over penny beers.”

I laugh at her suggestion to cure my confusion. “Give me fifteen minutes,” I say, gathering my robe and shower caddy.

“You’ve got ten. Otherwise, I leave without you.” Her threat is idle, but I kick into high gear, not wanting to keep her waiting too long.

HALF AN HOUR LATER, WE’RE SEATED WITH SEVERAL OF OUR SORORITY sisters around a couple of high-tops at The Wormy Dog. Certain days of the week, they have discounted drinks. This afternoon is a crowd favorite, penny beers. You pay a \$5 cover charge and then every beer you drink is only a penny. It’s a must for poor college kids.

The bar is filled with most of the Greek community. I’d forgotten how everyone got along so well, and there weren’t big rivalries between houses like there are at some other universities. Here, everyone parties together, both Greek and non-Greek. Life was so easy when I went to school here. Maybe that’s why I woke up in this time of my past. I needed a simpler stage of life for a while.

By my third beer, I’ve relaxed enough to enjoy myself without obsessing over Brock, Jason, or my future. Surprisingly, Hunter hasn’t played much of a role in this venture into my past. Luckily, neither Brock nor Hunter is with the group of Sig Chi’s surrounding the pool tables.

I’m lost in conversation with Gayle when a tap on my shoulder startles me, causing me to levitate from the barstool beneath me, spilling my beer into my lap in the process. Well, shit.

“Can we talk?” Jason’s deep voice rumbles in my ear, sending chills down my spine and not the good ones like Brock’s does.

Grace raises her eyebrows, silently asking if I need her to get rid of him. I have no doubt she’d jump him in a heartbeat if I asked.

I shake my head no, then turn on my stool to face Jason. “How did you find me?”

He points to a corner where Griffin stands with his girlfriend. Both wave when they see me. I smile and nod, hoping I look friendlier than I feel right now. My mind is on high alert. He's beginning to feel like the enemy.

"Let's go outside."

I tell Grace I'll be back, then walk to the door. I don't want to make a scene and have gossip get back to Brock. It would upset him if he thought I went from sleeping with him to meeting up with Jason, something that couldn't be farther from the truth. I never want to upset Brock again. He's innocent in all this mess.

The bar is situated on the second story of the building on the strip, so I clamber down the rickety metal staircase. It's a challenge completely sober, much less after my many beers, and I'm struggling to make it down without falling on my ass. Each step has me swaying as I grip the handrail, hoping to stay on my feet.

Once we're on solid ground, I turn to Jason, waiting to see what he possibly has to say after how horrible he was toward me the other night. Guys who pressure girls suck. I can't believe Jason is like that. He never was before. At least, I don't remember him being that way. But I'm not sure I really remember him at all. My mind is like soup, and it's hard for me to filter through in order to grab ahold of concrete memories.

"I'm sorry," he says, before I can speak. "I know I was completely out of line the other night, and I want to apologize. You didn't deserve that."

I take a deep breath, pushing my skepticism aside. "You're right. I didn't." Consent matters. I'm not sure I should forgive someone who tried to coerce me into giving him a blow job. I'm about to say as much, but something about the way he's imploring me to forgive him with his eyes makes me believe he'll become unhinged if this conversation doesn't go the way he wants. I'm not about to forgive him, but that doesn't mean I'm telling him that.

"I know I was acting selfish and immature," he continues, "and I just want you to know that I'm committed to changing. I'm falling in love with you, and I don't want to lose you."

My heart stalls at his words. They're wrong. All wrong. He's the reason I wound up back here, but it wasn't for us to end up together. After last night with Brock, I know I'll never love Jason. I just want him to go away. His declaration of love feels sinister and manipulative.

"I'll consider forgiving you," I whisper, allowing him to pull me into a

hug. "Just promise me that you'll never pressure me, then try to manipulate me into giving you what you want. That wasn't cool."

"I promise," he says, kissing me gently on the forehead. "I'll do whatever it takes to make it up to you."

"I'm going back to my friends, but I'll see you later." My words feel like a betrayal to Brock, but I need to get Jason to leave. This doesn't feel safe.

Jason doesn't feel safe.

Brock

Every time Hannah starts to make progress, she regresses back inside herself. If things don't turn around soon, I'm going to have to make the hardest decision of my life. I'm not ready to let her go yet.

She was coming around. I know it. But now it's as if I'm losing her for good. The harder I try to hang on, the quicker she seems to slip through my fingers.

"Open your eyes, Hannah," I whisper, hoping she can somehow hear me, even though she's not here. "Please." I swipe at the lone tear making its way down my cheek. "I don't know how to do this without you."

Chapter 19

Hannah

MY PAINTBRUSH DANCES ACROSS THE CANVAS, SLOWLY REVEALING THE MAN who has captured all my attention. I can't stop thinking about Brock. As I step back, his brown eyes stare intently into mine. I'm not supposed to feel this way about him. After several minutes, I take the can of red paint and splash it onto the canvas covering most of Brock's face, needing a reprieve from his searing look.

My professor comes to stand by my side with his eyes open wide. "Having a bad day?"

I toss my paintbrush onto the stool next to me with a sigh. "I think I'm done for the day." I stand, gathering my things.

As I leave, I say goodbye to my classmates. They all watch me with wide eyes because usually I'm the last to leave. My creativity has been overflowing since coming back to this time in my life. I've never painted so much in my life. With each finished work, I feel like I'm left with clues about what happened to bring me back here, but I can't seem to piece them together to form the big picture.

I'm so caught up in my thoughts as I leave the art building that I don't notice Brock until I walk into his chest. He grips my arms to keep me from falling backward. This seems to be a common greeting for us. Me running headfirst into him while he reaches out and saves me.

"So, you are still alive," he says with a frown, telling me he knows I've been avoiding him.

I chew on my lower lip, unable to look up at him. "I'm sorry I just left like that."

"Why did you leave, Hannah?" He doesn't try to mask his hurt, instead he displays it for me to see. There's something so raw about his emotions. I think he's talking about more than me just sneaking out of his bedroom.

"I don't know. I just woke up and started thinking." I bite my lip, trying to keep the truth from spilling out. I'm terrified I'll wake up in my future, and he'll be gone. I think that's why I'm resisting him so much.

"I can't keep doing this with you. Every time I think we make progress, you sneak out in the middle of the night, leaving me more confused than

ever."

"I can't explain it, Brock, but when I'm with you, I forget why I'm here. I need to remember that Jason is the reason I woke up in my past. It's important I remember that." I don't mean for me to be with him. That was wrong. It's something else. But what?

"Enough with the bullshit excuse, Hannah. You can't keep dragging me along like this. It's killing me." He pins me with a glare.

I stare at him so long he blurs into the background. It's like he flickers in and out of my plane of vision. I have to fix this. My time here is slipping through my fingers.

I reach out, taking his hand in mine and holding it to my chest. "I promise I'm not trying to make this difficult for either of us. I just don't know what to do." I look down, closing my eyes so I don't have to see how much I'm hurting him, how much I'm hurting us both.

Brock tilts my chin up, forcing me to look at him. "Shit, Hannah, I'm not trying to upset you. I just want things to go back to normal. I want our life back."

"I don't even know what that means."

In true Brock fashion, he softens, not wanting me upset. "I'm sorry to put this kind of pressure on you. I just want you in my life. We can go as slowly as you need. If you want me, I'll wait forever if I have to."

I swallow hard. "Thank you," I whisper. Not wanting to keep talking about where we stand, I shift gears. "Are you ready for Saturday?"

If my abrupt change of subject surprises him, he doesn't let on. "I don't know. There's a lot of pressure riding on me to get us into the playoffs." He shrugs his shoulders with both hands in his pocket, making him look like a little boy.

"You're going to take us all the way to the national championship this year. Trust me."

He grins. "I love how you seem to really believe that, how you believe in me."

My heart flutters against my sternum, and I know I'm about to do something stupid, like kiss him senseless right here in front of the student union if I don't remove myself from his presence. "I should go," I tell him.

"Is it time for me to let you go?" His voice is wrought with grief, and I hate myself for causing his despair. I know what he's really asking. *Do you ever want to be with me?*

"I don't know," I whisper, turning to go before he can see my tears. Despite his words cutting like a knife through my heart, I think it might be time. I can't stay in this place much longer. I don't know how I know this, but I know without a shadow of a doubt it's true.

My time here is almost finished.

Chapter 20

Hannah

NEEDING TO GET MY MIND OFF THE LINGERING ACHE BROCK'S disappointment left me with, I go to the coffee shop in the dorms. I figure sipping coffee in a dark smoky room will help me process my thoughts. I wanted to tell him I love him, but I can't do that. Not now that I know my time here is almost up. That's not fair to him. To us.

I stare off into space, both hands around my warm mug when a shadow falls over the table. I look up and find Jason standing next to me. Dread pools in the pit of my stomach.

"Hey," he whispers. "Can we talk?"

Despite wanting to tell him to get lost, I nod, gesturing to the seat across from me in the booth.

"Are you still mad at me?"

I toy with the napkin, shredding it into small pieces. How do I answer this? I frown. "I'm not mad at you. I'm just not sure where we go from here."

"What do you mean?" His face is drawn, and it looks like he hasn't slept for days, making me realize something's not quite right with him. What did I ever see in him? How could I possibly think he's 'the one' for me?

"You treated me like shit. I don't deserve that." Gone is the wishy-washy young girl. The grown woman has replaced her. And this thirty-one-year-old doesn't take shit from boys.

"Jesus, Hannah. I apologized. We were in the heat of the moment, and you just left me high and dry. What did you expect?"

"Not that," I mutter through clenched teeth.

"I fucked up. I've apologized. Can we please move past this?"

He looks so contrite, I almost believe him. Almost.

I smile, not letting my face show how I really feel at this moment. Because honestly, I'm not sure what I think about everything. He's the key to whatever brought me back in time, but now I know for sure it was never about a second chance for us. There's something else. I can't put my finger on it, but I know once I do, I'll wake up in my future.

"We can be friends." I don't mean it, but I want him to go.

He grins. "Friends is a start. Just know I'm not letting you go without a

fight." His smirk is unnerving. Why does he suddenly make me feel uncomfortable?

Once he's apologized and thinks I've forgiven him, he returns to his usual self. We talk about our classes. I do my best not to show how much I want to get away from him. I need space. How did I ever think he was a better choice than Brock?

"I need to go," I tell him, desperate to get away from his company so I can try to solve the puzzle of how to get home. With each passing day, the urgency to wake up in my real timeline grows more and more pressing.

He grabs my arm when I stand to walk away. "I'll walk you home."

Not wanting an argument, I nod. "Okay."

Jason holds my hand as he walks me to my dorm. It's not the way lovers hold hands. No. This is a grip of trying to control someone and keep them in place. Despite the cool evening, my hand feels too hot in his. We stop in front of my dorm, turning to face each other.

He smiles as he reaches up and cups the back of my neck, tracing his thumb along my cheekbone. "You do something to me that no girl before you ever has."

"I'll see you later." I smile even though every part of me is on high alert. I'm desperate to get away from him, but don't want to fight. What I really want is Brock, but I'm afraid I fucked that up royally.

He leans forward and kisses me. I move my arms up and grip his broad shoulders, pushing him away.

"I'm not ready for this," I tell him.

"I won't wait forever."

"Good," I say under my breath so he can't hear me.

"I'll see you tomorrow." He turns and leaves before I can tell him that's not happening.

How did I get myself into this mess? Better yet, how can I get out of it?

Chapter 21

Hannah

IN THE TWO DAYS SINCE JASON APOLOGIZED, I HAVEN'T SEEN BROCK. HAVING distance and space cements the fact that I don't want to be away from him. Jason's constant hovering makes that even worse. I'm trying to friend-zone him, but I'm not sure he's getting the message. If I didn't think he was the key to me getting home, I'd cut him completely loose. Until I figure out why he brought me back here, I plan to tread lightly and never be alone with him. It's not like he'll hurt me.

Jason waits outside my dorm when it's time for the football game, so I reluctantly invite him to join us. We walk over to the football game with Grace and her boyfriend Cory. They bicker the entire way. I can tell Jason is not enjoying himself, but at least he doesn't say anything about their fighting. There's safety in numbers, so there's no way I'm going off alone with him. I don't want to give him the wrong idea. The romance ship has sailed. Hell, it's hit an iceberg and is at the bottom of the ocean at this point.

"I'm sorry they're fighting so much."

Jason shrugs. "It's fine. As long as I'm with you, I don't care who we are with."

I give him a tight smile that I hope is convincing. "Smooth," I tease, trying to lighten the mood. His sudden, extreme interest in me is stifling. How did I ever think this was what I wanted?

He chuckles. "I hope this smoothness works for me after the game." He wiggles his eyebrows, letting me know he expects more than just kissing tonight.

Not happening.

He's not even getting a kiss. I pretend to spot someone I know and wave so I don't have to respond.

Once we're in our seats, I feel my muscles unwind. Watching Brock is my favorite thing. Even the fear of the future can't rob me of this pleasure.

From the moment we kick off the ball, the stadium is an explosion of cheering and yelling, allowing me a break from having to talk to Jason. I focus on Brock when he's on the field and scour the benches for him when the defense comes out. This game is important, and he's playing better than

I've ever seen him play before. That's one of the reasons he was drafted in the first round. Brock Martin plays at a level that no other college or even professional quarterback can match. It's why he's still one of the leading quarterbacks in the NFL despite being in his 30s.

When he scores the winning touchdown, I turn to Jason and jump into his arms, hugging him and sharing the excitement. Not realizing my elation is for Brock and not just our team's victory, Jason cups my ass and pulls me against his growing cock, smiling down at me. I feel my cheeks heat as I step back.

Grace turns to me and screams, "Your boy is amazing! Did you see that freaking run?"

I glance at Jason to see if he heard her, but I can tell he didn't. I lean close to Grace. "Don't call him that in front of Jason. Something's not right with him, and I don't want to start a fight."

"You know you should kick that loser to the curb. He's not the key to anything but your unhappiness."

"I have," I insist.

"Then why is he here?" Her voice is flat, telling me she doesn't approve of me even entertaining a friendship with Jason.

"Just drop it."

AFTER THE GAME, WE WALK TO A PARTY AT ONE OF THE DEFENSIVE LINEMAN'S houses. I know it's stupid to bring Jason to a football party, but Brock rarely parties after games. He usually goes home to unwind.

My hopes of not running into Brock are dashed the moment we walk through the door. He stands, holding a beer, talking to Zeke. As if sensing my arrival, he looks up at me and frowns.

I turned to Jason. "Will you excuse me for a second? I want to compliment Brock on his game."

Jason frowns. "Are you fucking around with us both?"

I cringe. "Don't be crude. I'm not fucking around with either of you. Brock is my friend, the same as you." I step away from Jason before I say something that will ruin my chance at getting back home. If he brought me here, he must be the key to leaving. I have to play this right.

"Hannah!" Zeke pulls me into a big hug. "Did you see how our boy

kicked ass today?"

I grin and nod at Zeke before turning to Brock. "You were amazing out there."

"What are you doing here? And with him?" Brock's voice is hard, and it feels like a punch to the gut.

Zeke's smile falters. "I'm gonna go get another beer." He excuses himself, leaving us to talk privately.

"He's my friend." Lie. He's the means to an end, but if I say that, Brock will try to protect me, and he can't. Not here.

"Does he know that?"

I sigh, not wanting to argue. Brock should be celebrating, not scowling. "You know that we don't have a future. I'm not what you want. I'm trying to make everyone happy."

"That's where you're wrong, doll. You're the only person I want in my future."

"You like the challenge. Trust me. When you win the national championship this year, women are going to be throwing themselves at you. You'll forget I even exist." It pains me to say that, but I know it's true.

"I may be letting you go, but that's because I have to. In another life, I'm going to find you and make you mine. It will always be us."

"I'm sorry."

"Goodbye, Hannah," he whispers.

He walks away, leaving me standing with my mouth hanging open. The sob I'm holding back breaks free. I know ending things with Brock has to be done, but why does it hurt so fucking badly?

Brock

I hate seeing Hannah frown. Her forehead is creased, and her face is marred with sadness. If only I could reach her. Maybe then I could bring her with me, but she refuses to come back to me. As much as letting her go is killing me, hanging on is even worse.

I close my eyes and try not to cry. "Goodbye, Hannah," I whisper, my voice cracking.

Why does letting go feel so wrong when it's the only option I have left?

Chapter 22

Hannah

I TRY NOT TO LET THE STING OF BROCK'S WORDS SHOW ON MY FACE WHEN I turn back to Jason. Fortunately, he doesn't say anything about the tense interaction he just witnessed. Instead, he holds out a hand for me to take, something I do because I'm tired of fighting with Jason. With Brock. With myself.

I'm tired.

"Are you ready to go mingle?" Jason asks.

I smile and nod. "Lead the way." I gesture to the party in front of us.

I spend the entire party trying not to look at Brock. My chest aches when I think of how I let him slip through my fingers. Now I have no reason to stay.

By the time Jason is ready to leave, I am physically and mentally exhausted. Watching Brock flirt with other girls felt like a knife through my heart. The worst part was when Misty glued herself to his side. Jason seemed to notice, which made me wonder if he had something to do with it. I know that girl has the hots for him and would do anything he asked. What I don't understand is what Brock could possibly see in her.

When we get back to my dorm, I'm still reeling from watching Brock avoid me and drag my heart through a meat grinder. All I want is to curl up in my bed and cry.

"Well, I'll see you around," I say, leaving him standing on the sidewalk. I don't wait for him to say goodnight. Instead, I race to my dorm room, forgoing the elevator and taking the stairs. I'm done with Jason, but I have to tread lightly still. I want to get his defenses lowered to see if I can figure out what his role in my future has to do with me getting stuck here.

I'm shutting the door behind me when a foot stops it from closing all the way. Surprised, I turn and watch as Jason pushes his way inside my dorm room.

Shit.

Jason grins, and it's menacing even though I don't think he intends it to be.

I smile, hoping to cover up my nerves. "Did you need something?" I ask,

swallowing hard.

As soon as he shoves the door closed, he lifts me up, wrapping my legs around his waist and gripping my ass. He presses my back against the wall and kisses me. I struggle against him, but he seems to interpret my movements as excitement.

He barely notices when I bite his lower lip, causing it to bleed. I dig my fingers into his neck, and he jerks his mouth off mine.

“What the fuck, Hannah?”

Thankful for the reprieve, I push him away. I’m so stupid for letting him push his way inside the room, but the wheels are in motion, and I don’t know how to stop them. I’m a grown woman and still don’t have a clue how to make my life something I want it to be. How pathetic am I?

I push him away. “Stop.”

He ignores me as if he doesn’t hear my command, pulling me into a kiss as he presses me down onto the bed.

I don't want this. I don't want him. The realization of the mess I’ve gotten myself into hits me hard. I should’ve been firm with him and ended things instead of letting him think we could be friends.

Throwing a hail Mary and hoping he’s not some sort of deranged rapist, I pretend to pass out drunk. I force my body to go limp, allowing my arms to fall to the side of the bed. I focus on breathing in a slow and steady rhythm.

Jason notices right away and pulls back, hovering over me. "Hannah, are you okay?" His voice is filled with concern. “Hannah, wake up.” The urgency in his words is unsettling. “Shit! I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to!”

I keep my eyes closed and say nothing. I focus on my slow, even breath. Inhale. One. Two. Three. Exhale. One. Two. Three. Repeat.

He shifts on the bed, getting up and moving away from me. He covers me with my comforter as I pretend to sleep on. Praying he doesn't spend the night, I focus on my breathing.

My body stays tense until I hear the door close behind him. I open my eyes and sit up in bed, a sense of relief washing over me. Except there’s something that nags at me. I replay his words. Why is he so sorry? What did he not mean to do? There’s something there at the edge of my mind.

What is it?

Chapter 23

Hannah

IN THE DAYS SINCE I PRETENDED TO PASS OUT WHILE JASON WAS OVER, WE'VE established a weird sense of co-orbiting. We acknowledge each other and are cordial, but we don't spend time alone together. He's just sort of there, always lurking. I wish he'd move on already.

I'm tired of being here, trapped in my eighteen-year-old body. I've grown restless of being stuck in my past and I'm ready to go back to my life. As shitty as it was, it was mine. Why I was sent here remains a mystery. Other than getting close to Grace again, nothing good has come from being back here. Hell, I'm more heartbroken than I was when Hunter broke off our engagement.

Not wanting to spend another lunch with Jason lurking a few tables away, I go to the library after my art history class. Completely absorbed in my thoughts, I don't see Hunter until he's standing in front of the table where I've set up my study session.

"Is this seat taken?" he asks.

I jerk my head up. "Yep."

He gives me his biggest smile as he pulls out the chair across from me, ignoring my lack of interest. Was he always this pushy?

"You're Hannah, right?"

"Yep."

"I'm Hunter." He's undeterred by my lack of manners.

"Cool."

"Are you going to the Sig Chi mixer tomorrow night?"

I shrug.

He leans forward. "You should go. It's going to be the best party on Greek Row."

"Maybe," I say noncommittally. It's a bye week, so Brock should be there. Maybe I can talk to him since he's been avoiding both me and my calls. If I could just get the chance, I know I could help him see we're better off as friends. Maybe that's the last thing I need to do before I get sent back to my actual time.

"You look like you're thinking awfully hard about my invitation."

“You’re friends with Brock, right?”

He groans. “Tell me you’re not one of his groupies. The dude’s a good quarterback, but he’s kind of a dud.”

“He’s my friend.”

Hunter snorts. “You don’t have much time left.”

“What?”

“Time is running out. A decision has to be made.” He stands.

I lean over the table and grab his wrist. “What did you say?”

“Hannah?” Brock’s voice is loud in my ear, but I turn my head, and he isn’t there. I shake my head. Now, I’m hallucinating.

Great.

Hunter gives me a sad look. “It’s such a shame.”

“What’s a shame?” I ask, but he’s already walking away. “Hunter? What’s a shame?” I holler to his back as he walks away.

“Shh,” the students from surrounding tables hiss.

I sit back down, feeling my cheeks heat. “Sorry,” I mutter.

What the hell was that?

Brock

I stare at Hannah, praying she'll finally open her eyes. She's right here, yet she doesn't even register my presence. For a second, I thought she was coming around. I said her name and I swear she heard me. It felt like things were taking a turn. As soon as that feeling hit, it was gone.

I hate this. I'm living my dream. The dream I've had since I first picked up a football, and yet, without Hannah, everything feels empty.

My mother always teased me that I had a big heart and would fall completely head over heels in love when I met 'The One'. I would scoff and roll my eyes. That was before I met Hannah. She's like the sun. When she's not shining on me, all that surrounds me is darkness. I'm afraid I'll drown in that darkness forever if she refuses to come back to me.

Please, come back to me.

Chapter 24

Hannah

GRACE AND I GET READY FOR THE PARTY, BLASTING OUR FAVORITE SONGS AND dancing around, sipping cheap wine straight from the bottle. Other than Brock, she's the person I'll miss most when I get back to my real life.

She smacks me on the ass, drawing me out of my daydream. "Where'd you go?"

I sigh. "I'm in love with Brock and can never have him."

"Why not?"

I sigh. "Because I'm destined to wind up alone."

She pulls me into a hug. "As long as I'm breathing, you'll never be alone."

I smile sadly, knowing she means it. "I've missed you."

She rolls her eyes. "I know I've been spending a lot of time with Cory, but I always have time for my bestie."

I swallow hard, feeling my tears sting my eyes. "I love you, Grace. You're my favorite human."

"Duh," she teases, sticking out her tongue at me. "Even when you and Brock are married with loads of babies, I'll still be your number one."

I bump her hip with mine. "Always." If I'm here to fix things with Grace and I wake up with her back in my life, all this mess will be worth it. I've missed my best friend.

By the time we get to the Sig Chi party, Grace and I have pregamed to the point that we're both more than a little tipsy. I'm struggling to maneuver the crowd in my sky-high stilettos, wishing I'd opted for something more sensible.

I'm nearly to the keg when a tingle zips up my spine. I feel him before I see him. It's as if my body has Brock-dar. I crane my neck, but even with my tall heels, I'm still dwarfed by the frat guys surrounding me.

Just when I second guess myself, deciding Brock isn't really near, the crowd parts, and I see him talking to the nurse girl I've seen with Hunter around campus. Even tonight she wears those stupid scrubs. My stomach tightens when I see how serious his face looks. What is it about her that has Hunter, and now Brock, so enraptured by her?

She smiles softly before reaching over and squeezing his bicep.

My heart pounds against my ribs. Has he already replaced me?

He looks up, meeting my gaze before leaning closer to the girl and whispering in her ear. Her eyes shoot to mine, and she frowns before nodding slowly.

I stand rooted in place as Brock makes his way toward me. He doesn't look happy to see me.

"Hannah?" His voice is soft, but I hear him clearly over the thundering bass of the music blaring.

I swallow hard. "Hey."

"Can we have some privacy?"

I nod, allowing him to take my arm and steer me through the crowd out onto the balcony.

The crisp night air hits my face when he flings open the doors, reminding me I'm not dressed for the cool fall weather. He sees me shiver and frowns before removing his hoodie and handing it to me.

I take it and pull it over my head, savoring his smell as it washes over me. My panties are toast when he grins. I don't know why I've fought this so hard. Brock owns my heart.

"I like you in my clothes." His eyes twinkle as he looks me up and down.

I bite my lower lip to keep from doing something stupid like blurting out that I love him.

"I don't know what to do Hannah. You've got to help me here. Everyone says it's time to let you go, but I'm not ready." The raw pain in his voice makes my stomach tighten.

"I want to be with you." A tear snakes down my cheek.

He swipes it away with his thumb as he cups my face, his eyes trained on mine. "Then do it. Be with me. Live a happy life with me."

"It's not that simple."

"I'm fighting for you, for us, but I can't do it alone. I need you to fight too." His tone is pleading, making my head throb.

I hate how I'm hurting him, but I don't know how to fix things. "I can't. I'm not supposed to be with you."

"I'm the only place you're supposed to be."

His words feel so true, but something keeps holding me back.

Hunter steps out onto the porch with the girl Brock was talking to earlier. "Oh, good, you're still here. I need to talk to you before I leave for the night."

Brock steps away, leaving me with the girl. She steps close to me and places a hand on my cheek. "Such a shame."

I jerk back, stepping away from her touch. "Excuse me."

She stares at me for a minute then steps away, dropping her hand and shaking her head before going back inside.

What the fuck? Is it me, or is everyone acting weird?

I step closer to the edge of the balcony and place my arms on the rough stone. I look up to the sky. "What am I supposed to do? What do you want from me?" I yell.

A few people on the ground below look up at me and laugh.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Laugh at the person trying to figure out life," I mutter.

I stand there until my bare legs go numb from the cold, trying to figure out how to get out of this mess. With no idea of how to fix things, I turn back to the party to drink my troubles away. I want to go home, but I don't want to lose Grace. And I damn sure don't want to lose Brock.

What am I supposed to do?

Chapter 25

Hannah

I WAKE UP SURROUNDED BY MY COMFORTER WITH NO RECOLLECTION OF HOW I got home last night. My head is fuzzy. The last time I woke up feeling like this I—

I jerk upright in bed, pulling the comforter off my head. My heart rate slows when I realize I'm in my dorm room. Still in the past. As much as I want to get back to my life, I'm relieved to be here. I have too much unfinished business. I know I'm running out of time, but I can't leave. Not yet. I have to fix things with Brock.

“Grace,” I hiss, needing my bestie.

She groans. “God, Hannah. Why are you always waking me up like this? Why aren't you still sleeping?”

“How did we get home last night?”

She sits up. “You don't remember?”

I shake my head no, immediately regretting the movement as my hungover brain bounces off the inside of my skull.

“That Hunter dude brought us home. You threw up on his shoes and called him a bastard.”

“Hunter?”

“Yeah. He seemed really nice, but you kept yelling at him about tequila and time travel. I'm pretty sure you lost any chance at starting something with him. He seemed really concerned about your well-being. If he's not into you, then I bet Brock asked him to watch out for you.”

I roll my eyes. “Hunter is a dick.”

“So you said last night,” she laughs. “Repeatedly.” She grabs the water bottle next to her bed and takes a long gulp. “How do you even know him?”

“I was engaged to him in the future.”

Her eyes widen. “He was the dude who dumped you and sent you back in time?”

“Well, he dumped me. I'm not sure how I ended up here in the past. I still think Jason is the one who brought me back here.”

Grace's normally smiling face is more serious than I've seen. “You know I love you, right?”

“What?” My head throbs as her words fill me with dread.

“I’m not saying I don’t believe you because you’re my best friend, and if you say this happened, I’m sure you believe it happened. But maybe it’s time to talk to a counselor or something. You’re starting to worry me, Hannah. It’s like you’ve created this fake world in your mind to protect yourself. Something isn’t adding up, and I don’t think I know how to help you.”

“I’m not crazy, Grace,” I hiss.

She moves to sit next to me on my bed. “I didn’t say you were. I just think you’re confused. Like your brain is trying to keep you safe from something. I’ve heard about things like this happening before. Maybe it’s PTSD.”

“From what? Why would my brain make me thirty-one when I’m really eighteen? Why would I have all these memories with Jason and Hunter? Why would I make up that you and I stopped being friends? My future is real.” Isn’t it? I think of how my memories all feel like they’re behind a foggy window. Well, all of them except for the ones with Brock. Those feel real. In fact, he and Grace are the only things that feel real about this experience.

She holds up her hands in surrender. “I don’t know. That’s why I think you should see a professional. We need to figure out what’s going on. And if you really are here from the future, maybe that will give us clues on how to get you back.” She pulls me into a side hug.

I close my eyes, trying to not cry. I’ve grieved the loss of Grace on and off over the last decade whenever something triggers a memory of our time together. Getting over losing her was the hardest thing I’ve ever done, far harder than getting over Jason was. Maybe that’s because my memories of Jason aren’t real. “If I go back to the future, and we’re still estranged, I don’t think I can take losing you again,” I whisper.

She rests her head on mine. “Hannah, I don’t know why we were stupid in your past, but I’m telling you right now. Nothing’s ever going to come between us. Not even death could tear us apart. You’re my best friend forever. Emphasis on the forever part.”

“I love you, Grace.”

“Duh. Of course you love me, and I love you. We’re sisters.”

For the first time since waking up in this dorm room eleven years in my past, I feel ready to go back home. It’s as if everything is settled.

Almost.

Chapter 26

Hannah

IT GETS DARK AS I WAIT OUTSIDE OF THE LOCKER ROOM FOR BROCK TO EXIT. Practice ended an hour ago, so he shouldn't be much longer. With the fading sunlight, the temperature drops, and I second guess not wearing a coat. All I have on is a pair of leggings and the sweatshirt Brock lent me last night.

I shift back and forth on my feet as I wait, hoping it's not too late. I've gone over what I want to say a million times. This experience, whatever it was, is about to end. I know I'm about to go back to my real timeline. All I can do is hope that when I wake up, somehow, Brock and I are magically together in the future.

As the guys filter out of the locker room, my pulse races. It's do-or-die time, and I feel like I'm about to do the latter. When Brock steps out, I feel the tension drain from my body.

"Brock," I call, standing on my tip toes, waving.

He looks right past me. It's as if he can't see or hear me.

"Brock," I yell again louder.

He hesitates and looks around then keeps walking.

What the hell? Is he kidding me right now? I know he has to hear me.

He ducks his head and starts crossing the street toward the athletic dorm. I run after him, not caring how ridiculous I look, trailing after him, calling his name. I have to tell him I choose him, that I love him, before it's too late.

"Brock," I scream.

He's just made it across the street when he turns. "Hannah?"

"I'm sorry," I yell, stepping off the curb. Brock's eyes widen in terror as he drops his bag, sprinting toward me. "I lo—" Someone honking makes me jerk my head up in time to see two headlights coming straight at me. When they get close enough, I make eye contact with the driver. Everything clicks into place just in time for—.

This is not the way things were supposed to end.

Fuck.

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XOXO

~Mica Rae

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About the Author

Love Never Hurt So Good

Mica Rae is a contemporary romance author. She writes stories with flawed characters who experience the best and worst life offers. Her books are about heartbreak, hope, and healing. No matter what she puts her characters through, a happily ever after is guaranteed.

Mica Rae is a former Texan living in Oregon with her Havanese and two Doodles. Plants and travel are her love language. In the fall, you can find her screaming at the TV while cheering for her Oklahoma State Cowboys. The rest of the year, when she's not writing or reading, her wanderlust has her traveling the globe. Her love of history has her on a mission to visit all thirteen presidential libraries and museums.

To stay up-to-date on all things Mica Rae Romance, sign up for her newsletter [here](#). When you join her mailing list, you'll get a free novella.

