

*True Love
Never Dies*

*Phantom of a
Chance*

Holiday Series: Book Eight

JISA DEAN

Ghost of a Chance

Holiday Series: Book Eight

By:

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Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Epilogue I](#)

[Epilogue II](#)

[Hauntingly Ever After](#)

[Bewitched](#)

[Coming Soon](#)

[Keep In Touch](#)

Ghost of a Chance

Holiday Series: Book Eight

Makenzie Higgens just bought a house. One of those big Southern Victorian houses that come with the starter pack for every haunting ever documented. But she doesn't mind. She loves the place, she loves the artwork and craftsmanship that go into a place like that. She loves the secret little nooks and crannies that hide all sorts of treasures. And she loves the painting of the former owner that hangs in the library...she loves it so much she's starting to think something is seriously wrong with her because she's been dreaming about him doing hot, forbidden things to her that only a lover is supposed to do. But what happens when she realizes her dreams aren't just dreams...they're real and so is the ghost of the owner!

Can Mac keep her ghost lover or will the boundary between them be just too much for them to overcome? Oh yeah! Because even death won't stop an alpha male from claiming the woman he loves! And it's sure not going to keep him from protecting her from a hidden danger that lurks just beyond!

So I did it! I went and made a ghost romance with a hot spook that knows what he wants even in the afterlife. Mainly because Mr. Dean said it couldn't be done but also because I might have an invisible man fetish that I never knew about. So grab your bucket of sweets, sit close to the fire, and fall in love with a hauntingly beautiful love story that will leave you up all

night but for all the right reasons! This is book eight of The Holiday Series and it will guarantee that you have something sweet after all those celebrations are over.

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Chapter One

Makenzie

Well...it looks like the kind of house that would have more than a few ghosts. It's old, carries an aura of its own, and the top two windows look like eyes looking down on me...and I love it!

And it happens to be all mine. Well, mine and a very agreeable bank that gave me a decent interest rate. How did this happen? Is it even real? I have dreamed of having a big rambling house like this one for as long as I can remember. When I was eight I would beg my mom to move into one but all she would tell me is that a house like that is too big for our family since it was just me and her. I wonder what she would think about me buying this one.

The thought of my mom bums me out a little so I push it down and run up the front stairs. It wasn't easy, the last couple of months, sitting by her side watching her slip away, and not being able to do anything for her. It gutted me. She has always been such a strong, confident woman but in the end, she needed me - so I was there. I stayed by her side right up until the end.

I sweep away all of the sadness that still clogs my heart when it hits me that she is gone and I'll never be able to share things with her the same way again. Oh, I can tell she's still

with me. I can feel her presence every now and then. And sometimes I'll catch a glimpse of a red bird sitting on the ground - cardinals were her favorite - and think that maybe she sent it to me as a sign she's still looking out for me.

I take a deep sigh and slide the key into the lock, preparing for my first step into my future. I think I got this house at such a low price because the owner had family that passed away here. Can't I just relate to that. I jostle the box I'm carrying around so I can push the big thick door open and step into my new home. And there goes my heart again.

I step into the front hall and look longingly up at the double staircases that curve ever so gently up to the second floor. Wood carvings and smooth flooring greet my eyes and delight my imagination. Who lived here before me? What was their life like? Did they love and fight right where I'm standing? So much history in one room. I can't wait to go through the others again.

I should wait for Talia but I swear I just can't. I'm too excited. I go into the room on the left and start giggling like a mad woman. Then I go to the one on the right and run my hands over the pocket doors that close the room off from the hall. I run through the house touching and laughing until I get to a room in the back that I didn't go into when I did the walk-through with the owner.

I turn the knob and feel my heart stop in my chest. So many books cover the walls. I may have just had an orgasm, I'm not sure. A large desk sits on one side with a fireplace on the other and French doors leading outside on the opposite side of the room from where I am standing. It just became my favorite room in the house. I run my hands over the spines of the books like a lover caressing skin. So many books. I could stay here for...well, ever!

My eyes finally drift back to the desk and again my heart stops but this time not in a good way. A large painting is hung behind the desk. In it, a man is standing against one of the columns of the house and looking down right at me. His eyes are so blue they couldn't have been the real color. No one has eyes that color. Do they?

He seems dark and broody even if his hair is the color of salted caramel and he has a small smirk on his lips. He is clearly telling me and any other person who dares to step in this room that they shouldn't be in there. This is his room. And a man like that...he always keeps what belongs to him.

“Whatcha looking at?”

I startle and yelp before turning around and finding my best friend standing behind me. I must have been so absorbed in the painting that I didn't hear her come in.

“Whoa, who's the hottie?”

Emotions boil up inside of me. Things I have never felt before. A possessiveness of my own, a need to keep him safe like a secret but not a dirty one - one you keep close to your chest until the time is right to share it with the world, and a smidge of jealousy that I can't even begin to explain.

“I think that was the former owner.”

“The dude who died here?” Her words hit me hard and cause my heart to start aching. Maybe it's just because I understand what loss feels like. Or maybe I'm losing it, who knows?

I take her by the hand and pull her from the room even as I myself turn to take one last look at those piercing eyes and that mischievous smirk. After all the house is mine now...and so is he. If only in picture form, he belongs to me now.

Chapter Two

Sterling

Being dead sucks. What really sucks is all the regrets you're left with. And I apparently have a shit ton of them. One of my biggest regrets right now is lying in my old bed dreaming away while I stand over her. She looks just like a little doll - a very sexy, and very tempting little doll.

Her hair falls in soft blonde ringlets that fan out across the pillows begging to be touched. Something I can no longer do. Her sweet fragrance haunts me much the same way I haunt these rooms, curling and twisting around me until I am convinced I'm going to have to carry this erection around with me for the rest of eternity.

I spent years worrying about refilling my family's bank vaults and restoring the Barrett name. Years of my life were spent with my head tucked firmly down and my mind whirling to find new ways to repair what my father had broken. My main goal was to make sure I didn't lose the house and that I could afford to live in a house this size. That included the repair work that needed to go into it.

Twelve years of my life, twelve years of stress and worry, and no time for anything except work all led me here...to this one moment where I would do anything to go back, to look up every once in a while and appreciate what I had, instead of

being constantly focused on what I wanted. I was successful, hugely so. I not only got our family back on top I went far beyond where my grandfather had been. Now I never have to worry about money, never have to worry about keeping the god damned lights on...but I don't have to worry anyway because I'm fucking dead.

And now I have a hot little, half-dressed strawberry blonde in my bed and all I can do is look down at her and dream of what could have been. God damn it! Ain't that just the way it goes. The little doll stirs and rolls to her back giving me a great view of her creamy skin and soft half-exposed breasts. That nightgown isn't hiding anything from staring eyes. Not that anyone is here but me.

What would I do to her if I was alive and found this woman warming my bed? What wouldn't I do? Would I be able to stop myself from crawling in beside her and unwrapping her like she's the best present I have ever gotten? Would I wake her with kisses to woo her or skip all of that and just take her for my own since she clearly belongs to me if she's in my bed? Isn't she mine now anyway? It doesn't really matter if I'm alive or dead. It's still my house and my bed. And if she's in it she is now mine as well.

The thought of waking her up by making love to her has me thinking about all the ways I could have her. What was my favorite thing about sex when I was alive? Hell, I never had it enough to remember. But if I think about what I would do to this little thing in my bed I would have to say one of my favorite things would be finding out how she tastes. Does she taste as delicious as she smells? Would she be wet for me, waiting for my cock to slide inside of her? Will she grow sweeter after I make her cum over and over again?

I bet she'll be addictive. Once I've had a taste of her I won't be able to stop. I'll want to have her on my tongue all day

long. I wouldn't be able to function if I couldn't taste the sweet cream that I'm sure she would make just for me.

I'm shocked when her eyes jerk open and she looks right at me like she can actually see me. It takes both of us a moment to realize what is going on. Her eyes widen and she pulls in a large gasp of air before she pushes herself to her elbows, "Y... you're the man from the painting?"

I nod and hold my breath as I pray that this isn't a dream and this woman really can see me.

"This used to be my house." Can she hear me?

This time she is the one who nods. "Your painting hangs in the library downstairs."

"You mean my study. Yes."

"You died." She sounds as sad about it as I am.

"Yes. This used to be my room - my bed even." She didn't even change the sheets. I wonder if she can still smell me on them.

"Really?"

I give her another nod. I can't stop myself from reaching out for her. When I touch her something happens to us. It seems like I can touch her. Not only can I touch her, but it seems she is sharing my last thoughts. It's like she is pulled into the last thing I was thinking which happens to be about eating her sweet pussy.

Something is happening to both of us as I feel a surge of power flow through me from just touching her. Something about this woman is giving me the ability to not just be seen or heard but also felt. She can feel me.

Why shouldn't I take something for myself? Why shouldn't I have one last night to take what belongs to me since she is in my bed? I'm already damned, what more can be done to me? So why shouldn't I show her what my favorite thing about sex is?

Chapter Three

Makenzie

I end up on my back, knocked flat by this...man? I have to be dreaming. This can't be real. Waking up to find a man sitting on the edge of my bed would make me lose my fluff-n-stuff in any other situation. It's like I already knew I was dreaming when I...woke up.

Whatever, I'm not going to look too deep into this because then I might wake up to the cold lonely room I chose to sleep in. When the sexy guy from the painting downstairs reached out to touch me all I could hear in my head and through the room was a question I couldn't begin to answer.

Favorite thing about sex...my favorite thing about sex...
show you my favorite thing about sex.

His head is already down by my lower stomach. I can feel the cool touch of his lips as he skates them over my lower belly. And the cold grasp of his hands as he pulls my legs apart so he can settle between my spread thighs.

Oh my God! I'm...I'm being eaten out by a ghost!

The swipe of his tongue against my skin doesn't seem cold at all. It feels warm too. Like he might burn me if he continues. I should stop him. I should spring up and run from the house screaming. But all I can do is lie back and let him do what he wants to me. His tongue runs up my center and focuses on the tight bud at the top of my sex.

Oh holy ghost sheets, Batman. He is really good at eating someone. My clit is already preparing me to give him what he wants. Hell, I'll give him anything he asks if he keeps eating me.

I turn my head and happen to open my eyes. There's a full-length mirror on one of the curved walls of the room and I can see myself spread out on the bed. There are indentions in the flesh of my thighs but in the mirror, nothing is there. Oh my God! I don't know what is real and what's a dream anymore. Is this real? Is there really a ghost going down on me?

Fear curls up inside my stomach but there's also another feeling that completely overwhelms the fear. I've never been touched like this in the real world, never had a lover, never thought about what it would be like to be spread wide for a man so he could put his mouth on me. I watch as his hand slides upward and he unties the little ribbons holding my gown together.

When I look in the mirror I can see my bare breasts, the nipples hard and rigid, set free so the air can caress across them. Gooseflesh springs forth as the hot touch of his hand trails up my stomach and cups the swell of my breasts. He makes a moaning sound that is a mixture of something I would expect to hear from a ghost and something I would expect to maybe hear in a porn video if I ever watched one -which I haven't...watched a lot.

His invisible fingers pluck my nipples into even harder little buds that ache for something but I don't know what. Then he squeezes one of them and all I can do is push my head back into the mattress and release a moan of my own. Oh God! I never realized my body could feel like this. I never understood why so many people were crazy about sex.

“Only with me. It will only ever feel this good with me!”

I open my eyes and find his bright blue eyes shining back in the darkness. Did I say it out loud or can he pick up on my thoughts as well? He goes back to tongue-playing with the swelling bundle of nerves that seem to be sucking the thoughts right out of my head. All I can truly focus on is there. His tongue slowly drags over and around until he adds the perfect hint of pressure that causes my thighs to start twitching and my back bowing. I sink my nails in the bedding and scream out for him to help me, to push me over the cliff I am teetering on.

He finds a rhythm that's perfect as he squeezes both of my nipples softly, adding just the right amount of pain to what he is doing to me. I tense and push my heels into the mattress as my body shoots across the threshold and everything below my belly button starts convulsing.

“My name is Sterling. Say it.”

I not only give him what he wants, I scream it out so that it echoes around the room. My body just keeps climaxing as he licks up the results of what he's just done.

Finally, I fall back on the pillows and look up at the rafters high overhead. It takes me a few minutes to catch my breath before I realize I'm alone. I can't see him anymore. Or maybe I never could. Maybe I've gone crazy after all the years of

stress and worry. Maybe all of this was only a hallucination and I've lost my mind.

I curl into a ball and then stiffen. Warm arms wrap themselves around me like the embracing breeze of a summer afternoon. Bergamont and musk fill my nose and despite everything, I begin to drift off. But just before I slip away from all that's happened, I hear a voice float to me out of the darkness.

“My favorite part is the taste of you.”

Chapter Four

Makenzie

I wake up late the next morning for obvious reasons. The only evidence that anything happened last night at all is how wet I am between my legs. I'm so confused by what happened and so drained that I don't feel like I slept at all. It's all I can do to stumble into the shower and try to dress before Talia comes over.

We immediately start eating lunch as soon as she gets here. It's just our thing. Anytime we're together the first thing we do is eat. It's been like that since we meet in sixth grade. Today's lunch consists of cereal since that's all I've really had the chance to unpack.

"I...um, think I had a dream about that guy last night."

Without even having to ask what guy my friend picks up on what is going on. "The one from the painting?"

I nod not wanting to actually admit to the dream out loud.

"Oh yeah, was it hot?" My cheeks turn bright pink and I can tell by the look on Talia's face there's no hiding the fact it

wasn't just about us sitting in the parlor having tea and snack cakes. "Oh my God! It was! You dirty thing!"

The spoon in her hand jostles and goes flying across the room shocking us both. We sit looking at one another for a long, silent moment before Talia's face breaks into a smile. "Whoa! He did not like that. Sorry dude." She talks louder and stares into the air like she's talking to the room. "I'm not judging. I'm just kind of...celebrating. I'm super happy she's finally attracted to some...body."

She ends up turning worried eyes to me like I might be able to tell if she offended him by calling him a 'somebody'.
"Talia!"

I can't believe she is acting like this.

"Do you think it's the ghost of the guy who lived here before? I mean, like really a ghost that visited you last night?"

I look down and stir my spoon in the leftover milk, "I'm not sure." I shrug my shoulders. "It felt so real."

Sadness hits me hard as I finally realize the guy I'm fantasizing about is one I can never have. He's kind of in a place I can't get to. A feather-light caress brushes against my cheek causing me to gasp and turn my head. It feels like someone is standing right behind my chair. But no one is there.

"Look dude, I know you're dead and all but she's my best friend and I'll have you know I will find a way to hurt you if you break her heart."

"Talia!"

“What? I’m just looking out for my bestie. You’ve never shown interest in a man before. You’ve never been out on a date - hell, you’ve never even held hands with anyone other than me.”

My mouth falls open and this time it’s me who is throwing the silverware across the room. “Neither have you. You’re just as...innocent as I am.”

“Yeah but I don’t have a ghost with a crush on me.”

“His name is Sterling.”

“He told you his name?”

“Yeah.”

Her eyes snap with merriment at the fact my ghost apparently decided to introduce himself before he sent me to heaven. Not that she needs to know about that part. Some things are still meant to be just for me and my secret lover.

All throughout the day, I can feel eyes on me, watching. I’ll catch a glimpse of something out of the corner of my eye but when I turn around the room is empty. And one time I was sure I saw him standing behind me when I looked into a mirror downstairs. It caused goosebumps to erupt all over my body and thank God I didn’t have to answer if they were from being creeped out or turned on.

When it’s time for Talia to leave and go back to her apartment I find myself wanting to run after her and stay the night there but also wanting to rush to the bed upstairs that

seemed to occupy all the real estate in my mind today. Being torn like this is awful, almost as awful as the quiet that settles over the house.

I put off going upstairs as long as I can and even then I fight sleep. I'm not sure if I want to dream of something I can never have or not. But all the fighting does me no good. I've worked too hard getting my stuff set up just the way I like it and fixing small things that needed to be fixed. My eyes grow heavier and heavier until I drift off to sleep without even realizing it.

Chapter Five

Sterling

I woke up alone this morning and I did not like it. It sucked almost as bad as being dead. It took me some time to remember I couldn't follow my little doll into the shower, why this is a bad idea. But it didn't stop me from doing it anyway. Teasing myself with the image of my blonde goddess standing in a shower of warm water and steam and doing nothing more than looking is enough to pardon at least some sins I've accrued, I'm sure.

The taste of her on my tongue is enough to hold me over for most of the day. I enjoyed the conversation between my doll and her best friend. I like her friend. I liked her, even more, when she threatened to hurt me if I harmed the tiny blonde currently sleeping in my bed.

I find I have become very possessive over my tiny human. To the point that I have started thinking she is mine - my person, my little spark of humanity, my woman. I'm not sure where that leaves us exactly but I have faith we'll figure something out. Surely we wouldn't be brought to one another without there being a way for us to be together.

I lick my lips again and think about being back between her thighs. I could tell last night that she was innocent, that no one else has touched her the way I have. I could taste it, smell it,

on her. I felt the knowledge in my bones before her friend confirmed it for me this afternoon. Not even a hand hold. Why does that make my dick so hard it hurts? And what am I going to do about it?

I've let too much slip away. I've not been living and it took me dying to realize that. Now I know what I want...I want her.

I let my fingers trail down her soft cheek, watching as she comes awake for me. Her first response is to smile for me before coming fully awake. She gasps and moves to sit up away from me. We look at one another for a long time. If all I could ever do is look at her I would be a happy man.

"I...I was dreaming about you?"

"Yeah, was it a good dream?" She blushes like she did when her friend asked her the same thing. I know what she was blushing about then so I can guess that her dream about me was just as hot as our late-night meeting from before. Instead of telling me she sits all the way up and pulls her knees into her chest.

"Your name is Sterling, right?"

I nod, loving the sound of her saying my name. "Sterling Barrett." And she is Mac. I overheard her friend say it several times today. I think it's short for Makenzie. I like it.

"Can I ask you a question?" She whispers the question giving me a good idea of what she is about to ask. I nod again giving her the go-ahead. "How did you, um...you know?"

I start to tell her but pause. How did it happen? What's the last thing I can remember? I try to think back so I can give her this little piece of my ended existence but before I can answer her she reaches her hand out across the covers and touches me. As soon as we make contact the same thing that happened last night happens again, only this time it has nothing to do with naughty thoughts and sexy time.

Whatever makes this happen puts both of us back in the car I was driving. It was a tiny sports car that I just bought two weeks before. I was upset about something. I can feel my anger rolling up inside of me. When I look over she's in the passenger seat but when this happened she wasn't with me. When it happened I didn't realize she was out there waiting for me.

“Wh...what's happening, Sterling?”

“I...I don't...I'm not sure.” I reach out and clasp our hands together. “I was mad about something. Infuriated. I had never been so mad before. I left the house mad.”

Her hand squeezes mine back. “Did you...crash?”

The car we're in picks up speed. I'm rushing to get somewhere. I have a place I have to be. I look down as I hit forty then fifty. The driveway is a long one with many curves and twists that would be worrisome to anyone else but me. I've lived here my entire life. I could drive this road blindfolded.

But something's not right. I can feel it. It nags at me, pulling my mind back to the night...when I..., “I hit the brakes but nothing happened.”

I do what I say and feel my heart pound, not out of fear for me. I've already been through this once. My fear is for the sweet, fragile doll sitting next to me. What will happen to her now that I've pulled her into this memory? I pump the breaks faster and harder but nothing happens. It was odd to me because I'd just had the car maintained. The brakes should not have been an issue."

"Something happened to the brakes?" Shock and fear drip from her voice. I don't care for it at all. In fact, it pisses me off all over again. When I realized shit isn't the way it's supposed to be I start trying to find the best way out. Surely I'm smart enough to save myself...only I wasn't. I wasn't smart enough.

Makenzie starts to scream as I go through the same actions from that night. I swerve off the road so that I don't go off the side that has only a cliff on it. As soon as the tires hit the changing surface it starts to flip over and over again. My head bangs up against the window at least twice before it breaks. Then everything turns white and all I can hear is the sound of Makenzie crying and screaming out my name in utter fear.

When both of us come back to the now, Makenzie is crying and shaking and I'm just as pissed as I was that night. She cries like she will never stop and all I can do is try to wrap my arms around her and hope she feels them, hope they give her comfort. It takes a while but eventually she stops crying. I brush my hand against her cheek once again. She nuzzles into the touch.

Our lips brush and for just a split second I can feel her the way a normal living male would be able to. How is that possible? How can I touch this woman, caress her body like I'm still living but I go through everything else? It doesn't make any sense. But somehow I can feel her tongue touch mine just as if this were all real. Her breath catches at the contact.

“How is this happening?”

I shake my head but don't move away from the kiss. “I don't know. I don't think we're supposed to be able to.”

Both of us sink into the kiss as I untie her gown again. I like these nightdresses that close in the front. The thin garment slips from her shoulders leaving her completely bare for me. My hand trails down her chest before coming around to cup her soft flushed flesh. Her nipples are hard peaks waiting for my attention.

“Tell me what it feels like. Tell me what I do to you.”

Chapter Six

Makenzie

“Tell me what it feels like when I touch you?”

Oh wow! How do you describe something so profound you don't have words for it? I close my eyes and try to come up with the right words, “It feels like electricity running through me. Having you touch me is like grabbing onto a hot wire but in the best way. Heat surges through me and trails from wherever you touch me until my whole body feels charged.”

He chuckles as he moves closer behind me. “Maybe that's why. Maybe it's the electric feelings that pass between us that give me the energy to do this.” He sounds like he is half speaking to himself.

“I don't care what causes it as long as it keeps happening.” Our mouths meld back together and his touch lowers until he's cupping my sex, spreading me open with his fingers and finding my clit so he can play. His fingers glide along the slippery channel of my pussy as he kisses up and down my neck and puts pressure on the bundle of nerves at the top. My legs turn to jello and I nearly fall forward but arms that aren't really there hold me up.

Then I'm being laid back. His mouth moves everywhere at once or maybe it's his fingers I can't tell. I was so close when he was playing with me that it would only take a heavy breath to send me over the edge. My legs are parted just like last night but instead of his mouth on me, something rubs the rim of a place nothing has ever gone before. I gasp out at the same time I reach for the pillows so I can sink my fingernails into them.

I'm completely ready to give him whatever he wants. If that's my innocence then he can have it. It belongs to him after all.

"Don't move, little doll." I stiffen at his command which seems like it's coming from all around the room. The barest tip of something is pushed just inside before lips find my clit. I cry out his name. It's the only thing I can think of, the only thing I remember. He is all I can remember.

His finger tilts up inside of me and touches a spot that seems to be throbbing for him. Every beat of my heart can be felt where his finger is pressing and gently rubbing back and forth. My body arches as he wraps his mouth around the button of nerves at the same time his finger strokes harder and I'm flying. Sensations take me over until that is all I am. It makes me feel like I am the closest to Sterling I have ever been.

"Oh God, Sterling!"

The muscles all around my center start contracting and it's like I can really feel him there. Like it's not just the ghost of him but the real man. For a second, if I keep my eyes closed tight I can pretend it's him, that he's with me...alive and healthy. But I can't spend my life with my eyes shut. No matter how much I want to.

I can tell his body moves up mine after he gives me one last gentle kiss and removes his finger. I roll so he can't see my face. Even though I love this time with him sadness hangs in my heart like a weighted anchor. My face is turned and I can tell he sees my tears but nothing is said. Just arms that circle me and offer me what comfort they can. If this is all we can ever have...it is more than enough.

Two days later my best friend has someone I don't know in tow when she comes over to help. I hold the door so both women can come through before I hold my hand out to introduce myself. I hear a loud huff right next to my ear but try to ignore it. The last thing I need is for someone in town to think I'm completely nuts.

“Mac, this is Celeste Dafoe.”

“Hello.” I take in the woman standing in front of me, trying to figure out if I really want to invite her in. There is something about her that...throws me off.

“She's the town medium - if you believe in that nonsense.”

Celeste's eyebrow arches as she looks not at me but beside me. I think both of us gasp at the same time.

“You...you can see him, can't you?”

I open my mouth to say something but end up shutting it. Isn't that supposed to be my question to her? In the end, I just wind up giving her a nod.

“Amazing.”

“Celeste has something to say that I think you need to hear.”

We move into the kitchen and around the round table in the middle of the room and take another look at the woman who has knocked me a little speechless. She can't be any older than forty or forty-five. Her hair is up in a knot with wisps of curl coming down on either side of her face. She's wearing a dark purple and green skirt that reminds me of something a Romani would wear if they were dressing the part of the fortune teller.

“Celeste lives at the bottom of the hill.”

She shakes her head at the information Sterling is giving me. “Yes, I've lived here all my life and can remember when Sterling was born. I knew his father and mother. And his brother.”

At the mention of his brother the air grows colder and a chill skates down my spine. What is that about?

“Celeste tell her what you told me.” Talia prompts her.

“I don't know exactly where to start. You told your friend the man...haunting you,” I stiffen at the word. It sounds so negative. I would never say Sterling is haunting me. Maybe the idea of the life we could have had together but never him. “His name is Sterling Barrett. He was in a car accident two weeks ago just like you described to your friend.”

I feel the impatience emanating from Sterling behind me. I could almost bet with certainty that he just rolled his eyes.

Celeste licks her lips and places her hands on the table, “Let me think...I’m going to try to explain this so you’ll understand it - not you, dear, him. He’s a non-believer even when he’s the one dead.”

Talia chuckles and brings us over a tray with tea and cookies on it.

“The world is made up of energy waves. They go up and down and can be pretty predictable but every now and then something happens. Two particles of energy share the same space. It’s called Quantum Entanglement or resonance. These energies, vibrate on the same level, do things the same way and have the same results. They are so entwined with one another, each made for the other that they can’t be separated or parted. We are made of energy, it wouldn’t be out of character or odd that some of us have a twin spark as well.”

“Soulmates.” Celeste nods while my mouth opens in shock at the word Sterling just used. He believes we’re soulmates.

“He must be tied here...to you!”

A bucket of cold washes over me. “You mean I’m the reason he can’t find peace! I’m keeping him Earthbound!?”

“No, no dear. Somethings...off. Something’s not right. He’s too loud, too present. He’s not dead.”

“What?!” It is a word that gets echoed by Talia but feels like it is ripped from me. Sterling isn’t dead?

“He’s more in a kind of limbo. Not fully in any world. That must be why I can hear him so clearly and why you can see him so easily.”

“Oh my God!” Talia stands up so fast she knocks her chair over and goes running from the room. In no time she’s back with a newspaper that looks like I might have used it to wrap something breakable in. She puts the paper on the table between me and Celeste and smooths it out so we can both look at what is written there.

“Man’s power of attorney fighting for his life as his brother tries to pull the plug. Oh my God!” That cold feeling courses over me again as my heart pounds so hard I think it might rip from my chest.

Celeste turns to look at me placing her hands on my shoulders so she has my full attention, “You have to go to him! You have to wake him up!”

Chapter Seven

Makenzie

We come up with a way to sneak me inside and past the nurses and the security that stay outside his private room. Celeste and Talia are going to cause a diversion while I sneak inside the room and then...figure out a way to wake him up. When we get there and see the guns some of the guards are using, I seriously start worrying about whether this is going to work at all.

“Celeste, why are you doing this? Why are you helping me? You don’t have to do any of this.”

The woman smiles softly and reaches out to touch my arm. “Love is the only thing that will ever make this world a better place. It can do such amazing things. Why wouldn’t I help when the world needs a little more love in it?”

I give her a smile and nod and Talia a hug before the three of us go our separate ways. It doesn’t take long before they are making enough noise that everyone is either leaving to go find them or at least looking over at where the sound is coming from. I slip into the room and let my eyes adjust to the low light.

He's lying in a bed a little bigger than the normal hospital bed with tubes coming from his arms and face. The sight of him lying there makes my heart hurt. It feels like it's going to crack under the weight of knowing he's in a place I can't get to him. It's odd to not have his presence with me, even with his actual body in the room.

I step closer to him until I can finally take his hand in mine. For long seconds I watch as his chest moves up and down and a heart monitor beeps nearby. His hand isn't warm like it is when the ghost touches me. Instead, it feels cold and lifeless. A tear slips free and tracks down my cheek before I can stop it.

"Hi." The only sound that meets my greeting is the beeping of machines. "I guess if you can hear me I should introduce myself. I'm, um, I'm the woman you've been talking to who just moved into your house."

Nothing but silence.

"Celeste thinks there's a way I can...wake you up." I take a big breath and wait for...something to happen. "How do we put you back together?"

I'm not really asking him just more talking to myself really wishing I would have asked more questions of Celeste.

I bend over his body and brush a wisp of hair back off his forehead. While I'm bent over him I feel a jolt like electricity entering my body and I know the ghost Sterling is here. He's entered my body. He wasn't with me during the ride over here, or when we came into the hospital. I wasn't sure I would ever feel him again but he's here with me now.

His voice tells me to bend lower and place my lips over his. I come as close to him as I can before I take one last look at his pale, perfect face. “Live for me. Please live for me!”

I do what he says and fit my lips over his cold ones, whispering against them, “Live for us!”

His lips go from cold to warm in seconds and he starts kissing me back. I can feel the shift when his spirit leaves my body and enters his. His beautiful electric eyes open and for one split second, we share our first real kiss.

Then my body goes limp and darkness swallows me up. My world starts to tip as my legs give out and I fall backward. Maybe I gave him back his life...by letting him have mine.

Chapter Eight

Sterling

I feel like I've been electrocuted. My eyes fly open and consciousness hits me like a rock to the head. I pull the shit out of my nose and mouth, gagging as I do. It makes the alarms on the machines go haywire and the room fills with noise. I peer over the side of the bed and see the woman who kissed me passed out on the floor.

I have no idea who she is but something...something makes me sure she's important to me. So much so that it scares the hell out of me. Something feels wrong about leaving her lying on the floor. I have her in my arms when Kane comes in.

“Ster, are you...oh God! You're awake!” A big smile spreads across his face and he comes closer to me. A wave of protectiveness rises up inside of me for this tiny woman causing me to turn and place her in the bed I just left. “Uh... did I miss something? Who the hell is that?”

I brush the golden curls back from her forehead before answering, “That I do not know but you can be damned sure bet I plan to find out.”

“How the hell did she get in here? Was she sent by your brother?”

The very thought of this little...doll of a woman being anywhere near my brother makes me insanely angry. What am I going to do if she belongs to him?

“How long have I been out?”

“Two weeks and three days. I was starting to really worry we weren’t going to get you back.”

I don’t take my eyes off the woman. She needs to be seen by someone. Why did she faint when I woke up? Why hasn’t she opened her eyes yet?

The door to the room opens and in steps one of the nurses. Shock and something else flash across her face. “You...you’re awake!”

“Indeed I am.” I have always been good at observing others, it’s what makes me so good at business. And this woman is hiding something. Her eyes flutter about the room never really meeting my own. Finally, she lands on the woman in my hospital bed.

“Who is that?”

“My fiancée.” The lie rolls off my tongue. In fact, I have to wonder about how easily it falls out considering I am a man that has never even thought about marriage.

“You...you’re...,” she gathers herself, “I’ll alert the doctor that you are awake.”

“Do that. And tell him he’s needed to check in with my future wife as well, she was so overcome by me finally being awake she fainted and I fear she hit her head. Tell him to hurry.”

I wait until the door closes before turning back to my best friend and right-hand man.

“Call the office. Have Amber take my mother’s ring from the safe and bring it here.”

Uh...what now?” There is no need for me to even try to make him go since I can already tell he won’t be leaving me.

“If the doctors and nurses come in, they’re going to want to take her, and then we won’t be able to find anything out until it might be too late. I don’t want to take my eyes off this woman until I’m certain of where she fits in with all of this nonsense my brother has started. Have Amber bring me that ring down here ASAP.”

“On it!”

He leaves to make his calls. I am certain in less than fifteen minutes I’ll have the ring here. Images from the wreck flash through my mind as I try to focus on the tiny woman lying on the bed. Before I left I was on the phone with one of my attorneys. My brother was pretending to be me and had made a business deal without my knowledge. Not only was I pissed I was infuriated when the man went on to tell me he had seen a listing for the home I live in.

I was going to the office when the brakes failed on my car and I lost consciousness. That bastard. The only person I can

think of that would want to even try to kill me is that good-for-nothing brother of mine. My eyes track back to the woman.

If she is a part of all of this, I will find out and make sure she is no longer anywhere around that snake.

Kane walks in, still on the phone. “Yeah, hold on just a minute. Your brother has been trying to pull the plug for the past two weeks. He just found out that you are awake. Wonder how he knew that?”

Well, it couldn't be this little thing because she's been here from the moment I come awake.

“My guess would be the nurse.”

“That bastard. I knew. I knew he was going to try something. It's why I kept security on you morning, noon, and night. And our guys to boot.”

“And I am very thankful for that my old friend.”

Me and Kane have been with one another since our college days. Some guys tried to jump me one night as I was heading to my apartment near the school and Kane saw them. I held my own with at least two of them but there were five. Kane came to help and he's been by my side ever since. Another nurse comes in before we can continue any further.

“Oh thank heavens for small miracles...,” she looks me up and down, “well, maybe not so small.”

“This is Lynda. She has been my tireless crusader while having to deal with your bloody brother.”

“Thank you for all of your care and help, ma’am.”

“Oh please call me Lynda. Ma’am makes me sound like a grandmother and I’m not THAT old yet!” She gives me a wide grin and then realizes there is someone new in the room. “Who is that?”

“We’re not sure just yet. She was on the floor when Sterling woke up.” The fact that Kane is telling this woman this information tells me a lot about how much he trusts her.

“Was she somehow part of the commotion that sent everyone running?”

Kane just looks at her and shrugs. “Hard to say but Sterling wants to find out just who she is and why she’s here.”

“Has the doctor been called?”

“Funny you should ask. That one nurse from the other day was just in here asking questions and now his brother knows he’s awake.”

Lynda’s eyebrow goes up and her hands land on her ample hips. “Oh really?”

“We told her to bring the doctor but it wouldn’t surprise us if the doctor never got that request.”

“I’ll take care of it...,” She turns towards the door and I hear her mutter under her breath, “and that new nurse as well.”

I’m going to have to find out if I can steal Lynda away once everything is settled. I’m not sure what I would do with her but I like to take care of those who are loyal to me. And it sounds like this woman is very loyal.

My eyes inexplicably track back to the woman laying in the hospital bed. I can’t help but wonder which side of this little argument she will be loyal to - my brother if he in fact hired her, or...me, a stranger she has never really met. I’ve never cared or given a shit what other people thought of me but I find myself having an overwhelming need to make this woman like me, to trust me, to be loyal only to me. What the hell’s been going on since I’ve been asleep for the last two and a half weeks?

Chapter Nine

Makenzie

I come awake lying in a bed, the sound of machines still somewhere nearby. The ceiling is a stark white and reminds me better than anything that I'm not in the bed I woke up in this morning. I try to remember what might have led me to be where I am. Was I in an accident? Did I get hurt?

Movement from the corner of my vision causes me to realize I'm not alone in the room. When I turn my head everything comes rushing back to me. I don't think it's possible for me to ever forget those eyes. The impossible blue/gray orbs snap to me once he becomes aware that I am awake.

I push up on my elbows not really liking the feeling of being so off balance around this man and realize there is another person in the room with us. One I don't know.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

My heart starts to sink before going utterly still for long seconds. He doesn't remember me. He doesn't remember anything about his time as the ghost that haunted my house... um, I guess it's his house now that he isn't really dead.

“I...,” what the hell do I tell him? I could try to tell him the truth - and come off looking like a complete psycho - or I could give him some of it and hope it jogs his memory about me...about us. “I...I bought your house.”

“You what?!” This is not the man I know, not the same person that came to visit me at night. This man has cold eyes and when he speaks to me there is no softness in them. He is not the Sterling I fell in love with.

I fight back the tears that clog my throat. “I met a man about a month ago selling a big, Victorian house online. I was hesitant about believing that something this big and beautiful could be up for sale in my price range but eventually, the sale came through and I...was the owner of the house...your house.”

“Sterling would never sell his house. You lie.”

I take offense immediately to this man -a stranger- calling me a liar, “I would never!”

“What was the name of the man who sold the house to you?” Sterling asks in a stern voice that breaks my heart.

“Emory, Emory Barrett.”

He shares a look with the man that called me a liar. “Emory, that bastard!”

“How can we be certain you aren’t working with Emory?”

I'm really not a fan of this new man, "I put the deed in the secret safe behind the painting of the man with striking blue eyes and dark brown hair." I turn my full attention on Sterling. "Behind the picture of you. It has all the signatures on it."

Before Sterling or his...friend can say anything else a doctor comes bustling in. "Ah, Mr. Barrett. I have the results from some of the tests we took from your fiancée."

Fiancée? He has a fiancée? I didn't think the hurt could get any worse but I was wrong. I don't think I will ever be alright again after finding out this man -the man I thought was all mine- has a woman he wants to make his wife. I flinch at the word and look down so no one else can see the tears that are demanding to find a way out.

When I look down everything that was swirling through my head screeches to a halt as my eyes take in a big princess-cut diamond sitting on my finger.

"Oh, you're awake." The doctor realizes I'm sitting up in the bed finally. Sterling comes to stand by the side of the bed and even goes so far as to take one of my hands in his. The electric pulse that used to happen when we touched is missing. Well, maybe not missing but isn't as strong as before. "Well, that's good. None of the tests showed anything to be concerned about. I think it was just some exhaustion probably brought on by her worry for you."

"So there should be no reason that I couldn't take her home with me."

The doctor purses his lips together before shaking his head no. "It will probably be better for her to go home so she can rest there as long as she has someone to watch over her."

“Excellent.” The word makes the doctor happy but it just sounds like a threat to me. This isn’t a man that you would want to mess with and he’s not sure if he can trust me so that puts us on opposite sides naturally. He waits until the doctor goes out the door before turning to me and shifting his grip from my hand to my wrist.

“They would have made me leave if I hadn’t come up with the story of you being my fiancée.” It’s like he doesn’t want me to even think the wrong thing. “And I have too many questions to let you go just yet.”

“Like how the hell you came to be in the room with Sterling for one? Why did you come here?”

His friend asked the one question I can’t answer. Sterling pulls me from the bed but doesn’t let my wrist go. “Show me! Show me the deed and where you put it.”

I open my mouth to say something but close it again. I could argue all day trying to convince them I’m not working with his brother but what would be the use? Nothing I say will change their minds. I just need to hand the deed over and get the hell away from this...double of the man I lost my heart to. Because it breaks me that he looks so much like that man but is acting nothing like him.

He all but drags us out to a waiting car and pulls me inside with him. I have a second to look around and spot Talia and Celeste standing outside with shocked expressions on their faces. Before I can say a word to either of them I’m in the car with Sterling sitting so close our legs are touching.

I don't regret bringing him out of the coma. I would never regret saving him. But I'm heartsick and mourning what could have been, of what I had and lost, what was so close to being mine but simply wasn't meant to be. The entire way all I can think about is what I've just given up to save a man who doesn't even remember who I am. And fight back tears that struggle to break free.

Once we're at the house, Sterling still won't let me go. It's like he thinks I'm going to run away because I'm guilty of something. He waits until I let him in and we go straight for the office. He doesn't comment on the fact some of my things are in his house or that the lock was changed. When we get to the room his friend goes over to the picture and pulls it back showing a hidden safe about half the size of the painting behind it.

They wait for me to open it since I changed the code once I moved in and ran upon it. Once I have it open I step back and let the two men go through the folder with the paperwork in it. There is a commotion at the front of the house and when I step out of the room I see that Sterling must have brought a couple of guards with him in another car.

Talia steps on the instep of one of the bigger men and when he lets her go she comes running to me. "We saw them take you, are you okay? You look so upset."

I open my mouth to tell her but am cut off by Sterling. "You! What are you doing here?!"

I follow his line of sight and see that he is looking over at Celeste. It's not Celeste that answers though. It's Talia. "We're here for our friend. You basically kidnapped her and brought her here to your house. It's perfectly natural that we would worry about her."

She looks at him like she might come after him next. Sterling breaks my heart again when he waves his hand dismissing all of us. I lean over and whisper to Talia, “He doesn’t remember. Anything.”

Her face scrunches up into a sad frown at my words and she puts her arms around me. “Why don’t you have your lawyers contact Mac if there’s something you need?”

“Mac?” Sterling says my name like it’s new to him.

“You’re friend signed fraudulent documents, of course we need her here.”

“Who the hell are you?” Leave it to Talia to cut right to the chase.

“I’m Kane, Sterling’s best friend and head of his security team. Who the hell are you?” In another life, these two would have some off-the-charts chemistry going on between them. Anyone can see it with the way the two of them are going toe to toe with one another -literally.

“Well, I guess you’ll find out if you’re any good at your job, now won’t you.” Before they can get into it fully the room starts filling up with people. Men in suits are on phones while a pretty redhead comes rushing over to Sterling. As soon as I see the two of them together I can tell they must be close.

I step back until I am out of the room and in the hall with Celeste who has also stepped back from view. Talia is led out by the large man she stepped on earlier. “Leave before you spend the night trying to come up with bail money.”

She yanks her arm out of his grasp and shoots him a dangerous go-to-hell glare before coming over to us. “I would suggest we get the hell out of here and lay low for a few days until they find out whatever it is they need to know to prove our innocence in this little drama.”

I start to walk with them and remember everything I own is here. Clothes, furniture, electronics, it’s all in this house. Talia grabs me by the hand. “You can stay with me until we can safely grab your stuff. Come on.”

What else is there for me to do but follow her out of the house of my dreams where the man that I love lives with no idea I even exist other than being another problem on his agenda to plow through? I guess I’m the ghost now.

Chapter Ten

Makenzie

We stop off at Celeste's tiny house first. "I'm so sorry, Mac."

I put my hand up to stop her from saying anything else. "I'll never regret being able to wake him up." Tears start to brim over the rims of my eyes. I take the ring off and hand it over to her. I have no idea why he didn't take the ring back once the doctor walked out. Maybe he was just laser-focused on getting to the deed.

"When he comes here, give him this and tell him...", my voice cracks as I try to suck a sob back from escape, "Tell him I hope he has a wonderful life."

The image of the redhead floats through my head and breaks my heart all over again. I allow Talia to lead me to her car so she can drive us to her apartment. They are cute little one-story studio style apartments with flower planters on the windows and fans on the front porches. Wonder if they have any openings since I'm going to have to look for a place to live. As soon as she lets us in, she's pulling me in for a hug.

"You want me to order us a pizza."

I shake my head. For the first time in our friendship, I can't think about eating anything. I just want to find a place to lay so I can pretend none of this happened for just a little while. "I...I just want to sleep, if that's alright."

"Of course that's alright, hun." She hands me a nightshirt from a dresser close to her bed. "I hate seeing you so sad."

"I feel...even more alone and by myself than I did when my mom died. It feels like a part of me that I never knew I needed isn't there anymore. And I need it to breathe."

"I never want to fall in love. It seems just awful."

"It feels like...I can't breathe now."

"It sounds just awful. We need alcohol more than food. Come on." She pulls me over to the island and plops me down on the stool. She takes out a bottle of rum and vodka and starts mixing up some stuff before handing me a drink that looks like the sun on a summer beach.

"I don't think..."

"Perfect, this will keep you that way -not thinking- which is the only thing that will help you start healing."

By the time we're on our third glass, I've stopped crying and that pizza is sounding better and better. "Do you think you still have your cherry?"

My eyes widen and go to my best friend.

“I mean since he was a ghost when the two of you were fucking around.”

I stop short of telling her that we never actually made it that far in our...relationship. “Doesn’t matter -because I don’t have my heart anymore.” I swirl my drink with the straw, “I left that with him.”

We sit and look at one another before Talia finally breaks the silence, “God that’s cheesy as hell.”

Finally, she pulls a laugh out of me and we both stumble off the stools to try to find the couch. Before we can sit down there’s a knock at the door. Both of us look at the clock in the kitchen. It’s close to ten at night. “Who the hell could that be?”

She walks cautiously over to the door and looks through the peephole. Then she’s undoing the locks. She doesn’t open the door all the way though which I find really odd. It causes me to move closer.

“Are you Talia Benson?”

“Yes. Can I help you?” The voice on the other side of the door seems deep and full of authority. I have to wonder if Sterling sent the police for me.

“We’re responding to a request for a welfare check, ma’am. Is your friend, Makenzie, with you?”

Finally, Talia opens the door far enough to show the police officers that I am standing beside her.

“Mr. Barrett wanted to make sure the two of you were cautious and careful for the next couple of days and nights.”

“Cautious? Cautious of what?”

The younger officer looks over at the older one, who gives him a nod like he’s giving him permission or something, “His brother has disappeared and the sheriff issued a warrant for his arrest based on the evidence you gave Mr. Barrett.”

“You’re the only witness to the fact Emory Barrett impersonated Mr. Sterling.” The older officer puts it more bluntly for us. I’m in danger.

“Thank you, officers. We’ll make sure to lock up for the night and take extra care for the next couple of days.”

They nod and turn to leave but stop so they can listen for Talia to draw the lock.

“That’s super fucking creepy.” She double-locks the door. “I’m freaked out and scared for you. Are you scared?”

I want to tell her the truth but instead, I lie, “A little.” Inside I’m too sad to care about someone coming for me, I’m hurting too badly to be worried about someone trying to kill me.

“A little? Are you serious right now? Someone might be out there trying to kill you and you’re only a little bit scared.”

“Talia, I fell in love with a ghost, I lost my home, and I have no clothes or anywhere to live.” Talia’s face scrunches every time I give her another incident that has happened in my life

over the course of four or five days. “I went from having it all to having nothing. So a death threat really isn’t all that upsetting at this point in my life.”

Silence meets my statement. Then she reaches to put her arm around me, “We need more rum.”

For the first time all day, I can honestly say I am completely lost on what I might actually need to make this all better but I’m almost completely sure it’s not more rum. Still...if it makes Talia happy, what could it hurt.

Chapter Eleven

Sterling

How the hell did Makenzie slip away from me? Everyone is in my face trying to figure all of this shit out when all I want to do is spend more time in her presence. It's odd that I feel so lost now that she's not in the room with me. What the hell has she done to me?

“Sir, we've been to your brother's house and his girlfriend's house. He's not at either of them but there are signs he may have known we were coming. The television was still on and there were still ice cubes in his drink.”

“Of course he knows we were coming. That stupid woman Lynda tripped probably had time to call him and tell him everything was going to hell as soon as you opened your eyes.”

Makenzie was telling the truth. The fucker forged my name. He made it look like I sold the house to him and then he sold it to Makenzie.

“The nurse flipped on Emory. She's with one of our detectives telling them about how he paid her to make sure you never came out of that coma. Lucky for you, you have

friends that wouldn't leave you alone so she could go through with the job.”

“He'll be coming after Makenzie to make sure she can't make a statement.”

“Shit!” I look at my friend when he says that my ass of a brother might be coming after my...um, Makenzie.

“I can send some guys over for a welfare check if you know where she's at.”

“She's probably with her friend, Talia Benson since she doesn't...,”

“Have a place to live.” I finish for Kane. God damn it. “She might be at Celeste's.”

“I can send a unit by this Benson woman's home while you look for her at Celeste's if you want.”

“I have the address if that makes it any faster.” Kane speaks up and starts repeating the address back to the Sheriff. As he starts making calls I leave with Kane. Even though Celeste's house is technically at the end of my driveway, it feels like it takes forever to reach. I am the one knocking on her door like a crazy person once we pull to a stop.

“Mr. Barrett?” She seems surprised to see me.

“Is Makenzie here?” I give her no time to make niceties.

“What?”

“Makenzie? Is she with you?” I try to stop myself from pushing the door open so I can look for myself.

“Come in please.” She holds the door open and walks away while still talking to us. “She was here but I think she went home with her friend afterward.”

“How long ago was that?” Kane is the one who asks this time.

“Probably about an hour or so ago. She asked me to give you this back.” She holds out the ring I put on Makenzie’s finger while she was lying in the hospital bed. I stare at it and try to figure out why it seems so wrong that it’s not on her hand any longer.

“I realize you can’t remember much from the time you were in the coma but I do wish you would remember the connection you have with Makenzie. It was strong enough to keep you anchored to her while you haunted her, it should be strong enough for you to realize what she is to you now.”

What is she talking about? Normally I would call her a freak and walk the other way but something about what she says makes me want to understand more, makes me want to try to remember why. “Haunted?”

She nods, “Mmm, you were so attached to her that when I first came to see her, you were right by her side. She told me you would stay with her at night when she slept in the round room at the top of the tower.”

Round room at the top of the tower? That's my room. She slept in my room? Like she felt it too. This string connecting me to her seems to have always been there.

“She said it's the first place the two of you ever...,”

Her words fade as I think about our firsts. The first place...I ever...tasted her. How the hell can I tell what she tastes like if I've never met her before? Celeste's words fade away as memories of being wrapped around the tiny blonde with the curls that bounce around her face when she's excited or I push myself against her when she's cumming bombard me.

My little doll. The woman who woke me up with a kiss and who accepted me when I was...nothing -literally nothing because I couldn't touch anything...except her. The memory of the flavor of her bursts on my tongue and sets a fire inside my belly, “I have to find her!”

“Oh good, you remember!”

I do remember but is it too late to make it up to my little doll? Can I reach her in time to keep her safe from my own fucking brother?

Chapter Twelve

Makenzie

Another knock comes about an hour later when we've drunk at least one more rum drink. Talia rolls her eyes and heads for the door. If this is another welfare check they really need to communicate better with each other.

Before she can make it all the way to the door, it's kicked in and an angry-looking man steps into the room. He shoves Talia out of his way, knocking her against the wall where she hits her head hard before sliding down to the floor.

"Talia!" I start to run towards her but the man aims a gun right at me, stopping me in my tracks. The last thing I want is for him to shoot at me and hit Talia by accident. I've already gotten her hurt.

"You stupid bitch! I had everything going just the way I wanted and you had to fuck it all up!" I have a pretty good guess who is currently standing in the room with me. He's tried to hide his face with a ski mask but I recognize his voice from when he walked me through the house. "You had to fuck it all up!" he repeats it like it's hard for him to believe.

He doesn't look anything like his brother. Where Sterling is tall and commanding, this man is short and square-ish. He's

not impressive at all and if we were out on a street I wouldn't look twice at him. His eyes are all wrong too. They're small and beady like a rat's instead of warm and electric like Sterling.

"I...I don't know what you're talking about...Emery."

He rips the mask off his head. "Why? Why did you stick your stupid nose where it didn't belong, you dumb cunt!? You had the house - why would you fuck it all up?" he waves the gun at me with a little too much ease for my comfort. He looks like a man who knows how to use the weapon and doesn't give a damn if something happens -like it going off accidentally and hitting me before he's ready. "Why would you fuck over a good thing?!"

Surely someone has to have heard him break down the door and start screaming. The only real question is whether the police will make it here in time to stop him from shooting me or is it too late? I have to think of something -some way to stall. Even with everything that's happened I don't want to just accept my demise and be done with life.

"Because...because it's the right thing to do...and because....I love him!"

Who cares if Emory knows how I feel about his brother? If this is the end then at least I can die knowing that I told one person how I feel. At least I said it out loud once even if it's not to the man I really need to tell it to.

"Love him?! Love him?!" His voice rises every time he says it. "You've never even met him. You two don't know each other - he doesn't care who you are! You're just some bitch who squatted in his house for a few weeks. You're nothing to him. He could care less if you live or die!"

His words hurt. They hit too close to home to not hurt. Especially when Sterling woke up and forgot everything we had together. It was like it never even happened, except for me.

“That’s the thing about love, Emory. It’s not a question that demands a reply back. When you really love somebody you don’t do it because they do - you do it because it’s the truth and you have no choice but to love that person.”

“Wow!” he gives me a long look up and down like he might be reconsidering his actions before he opens his mouth and completely disabuses me of that theory. “You really are stupid aren’t you.”

He takes aim at me one more time causing my heart to drag to a standstill.

“You think Sterling cares about anything other than money? You think he gives a damn about a silly woman who fell in love with...what? His fucking painting? He’s never going to even think about you again once I shoot you and all of is behind him. No one will remember you!”

Well, damn. His words suck because of how true they are. I squeeze my eyes shut and wait for the pain to hit but all that comes to me is the sound of a loud scuffle taking place. I seriously doubt Emory is ‘fighting’ with his actions so what the hell is going on? I crack my eye open just a little and see two men scuffling on the ground close to me.

It takes me a full second to realize Sterling is on the ground wrestling with his brother for the gun he had pointed at me. Before I can try to help him or even move from where I am

rooted to the floor I hear the gun go off and I scream as more people flood into the room. Another shot goes off as everything explodes in a cacophony of sound and motion before I am hustled out of the room and outside into a waiting ambulance.

Chapter Thirteen

Sterling

Police are questioning her in an ambulance where she's getting checked out while my brother is being taken away on a stretcher and loaded into yet another ambulance. The one Makenzie is in was the same one I was taken to when they found out I had been grazed by the first shot fired.

I was stitched up and bandaged before they started asking me questions. Another team is working in the house to make sure Talia is alright. Kane is with her now making sure she is taken care of the way she needs to be.

“Thank you, Ma'am. If we need anything else we'll contact you or your fiancé.”

She looks startled and starts to mutter to the attendant. “I don't...I, um...” The cop is already gone, leaving her sitting wrapped in the blanket with lights flashing across her face.

“I guess I should thank you.” She jumps when I speak to her.

“Thank me?”

“For taking care of my house for me while I was...asleep.”
I’ve had to think fast but I have a plan now.

“I’m pretty sure it’s me that should be thankful. You did stop...your, um, brother from hurting me.” She winces a little when she talks about my brother. I’m sure she’s thinking about not hurting my feelings over the fact one of my family apparently went batshit crazy. But she has no need to worry about that. It’s been a long time since I thought of my brother as someone who is close to me and when someone tries to kill you more than once it really drives a wedge between the two of you.

I heard the conversation she had with him right before he tried to shoot her. The whole love thing. It was one of the driving forces for me to take Emory down. And one of the reasons I need a plan.

“What are you going to do tonight?” We both turn to look at the busted door covered in caution tape. “You guys can’t stay here.”

“I...,” she starts gnawing at her lip, “I guess me and Talia will have to go to a hotel room for the night.”

I take her by the arm and lead her away from the lights and noise. “I’m sorry, I think Kane took Talia back to the house so she could be checked out by our medical professionals.”

I can guess that is where he plans to take Talia eventually but I’m not sure if he’s left with her yet. “We can go back to the house so you can find her,” she looks shocked that I would suggest something like that.

“I don’t think...”

“Your clothes are there too. I’m sure you’ll want to put something on other than,” I run my eyes up and down her body, “a flimsy nightshirt”

The oversized shirt hangs to the middle of her thighs and off one shoulder. She must have borrowed something from Talia because this isn’t the typical nightgown she would be in... now, how did I know that. I know it the same way I know I don’t wear anything to bed. If she was in the things I somehow know she wears I would not be okay with her standing here. As it is, I’m not happy about the fact they wanted to question us separately. Thus my telling them she was my fiancée.

I can see her start to waiver and hold my breath, hoping Kane doesn’t pop out with Talia now. During this entire time I’ve been walking her backwards towards the car I took to get here. “I’m sure Talia will be glad you came to pick her up.”

“Um...okay. I guess I do need something else to wear.” She allows me to bundle her into the car, going so far as to buckle her seatbelt for her.

When I get in, I see that I have a text from Kane telling me he’s taking Talia to the condo we have in the city so they will be closer to the hospital if she needs it but I clear it; I can’t focus on that right now. I have to stay focused on the little doll sitting in the passenger seat beside me. I speed to the house in no time and have her inside and up the stairs before she can figure out what I’m doing.

“You left the house so fast you didn’t pack any of your stuff.”

She drags her hand along the footboard of the bed with a sad look on her face. “Yeah, I thought, um...maybe I could hire movers to come to get my stuff out...you know, after everything settled down.”

Her nightgown is laid out on the bed like it is waiting on her, she leans over to grab it as I come behind her to stand. When she straightens it's to bump into me. I take the opportunity to drag the scent of her hair into my lungs. “Oh, I...,”

“Sorry. I was just...remembering the last time we were in this room.”

“What?!”

I come closer so that I can invade her space even more. My chest brushing against her back, “I don't remember all of the time I was in the coma,” I bring my arms up and around her so that she is trapped between me and the bed, “but I do remember the taste of you.”

“Wh...what?” It comes out as nothing more than a whisper. I lower my head to her neck as I turn her head gently to the side to give me better access to the sweet skin there. The scent so familiar and so stirring.

“I remember how your skin feels against mine, how your lips will taste when I take them,” I lower my hand to splay it out over her lower abdomen, “how this sweet little pussy will taste when it pops, giving me the richest, sweetest cream.”

“Oh...oh, um...Sterling...?” She sounds unsure. “What's... um, happening?”

My hand lowers until I'm cupping her warm pussy. She's so tiny compared to me. My hand completely covers her little mound.

"S...Sterling..."

"You know, I love it when you say my name. I remember that too. How you would scream out my name as you cum for me. There's no way I would ever forget that. All you had to do to remind me of just who you are to me was scream my name."

I spin her around and give her a shove so that she's falling back on the bed.

"You know what...I need another taste."

Her face is a mask of shock and confusion. "What?"

No reason to beat around the bush now, "I'm going to need another taste of this creamy pussy, baby doll." I go for her shirt. "And you're going to give it to me, aren't you?"

It's not really a question but I'm going to let her think she has some control over this. "Sterling, I...I don't think this is a good idea."

"The first time I did this I didn't really ask did I. I just took my taste. And you loved it! Maybe that's the best way to handle this."

I take her panties in my hands and pull them until they rip from her, before I take her by the knees and pull her legs open. The smell of the sweetest pussy in the world rises up to greet me like a long-lost lover and I can't pretend I'm not that man - the one driven by baser instincts to mate with the woman who calls to me...who was made to be mine.

My lips land on hers and she cries out. I wallow in the scent of her, in the feel. This woman is already mine! "It feels a little different now that I'm a flesh and blood man, doesn't it, baby?"

Her only reply is a strangled cry as I work on bringing her to the highest brink of pleasure before taking the dive with her. I use the width of my tongue to lap at her like a cat before I use the tip to follow the path of her center and circle my tongue around her clit at the top. She reaches out and sinks her fingers in my hair. She couldn't do that when I wasn't fully here. It wasn't the same and we can both tell.

"Oh...oh God! Oh Sterling! I...I'm..."

She's cumming. I can tell by the way her body tenses and the tightening of her body around my tongue. She's going to flood my mouth with so much of her pleasure I'll still be wearing some of her on my face tomorrow. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm cumming, Sterling! I'm cumming!" She yells out her release at the same time her body gives me exactly what I want and cream fills my mouth and paints the sides of my cheeks.

I move quickly up her body, taking her nightshirt with me until it's over her head and gone. I release my cock from the tight confine of my pants and position my aching, leaking tip

at her entrance before taking her mouth and sharing the taste of her between us.

“I was so loud.”

I kiss down her neck. “We’re the only ones here. Kane took Talia into the city so they could be close to the hospital just in case she needed to go tonight.”

“Wh...what? But I thought...”

“He text me to let me know.” I take her mouth again. I push just the tip inside the very edge of her. She gasps out a breath of air that fans across my face. “It’s not going to be like before, Makenzie.”

I take her by the chin and turn her so she can look at the mirror where our reflections are. Her thighs are spread so wide to accommodate me. I whisper close to her ear, “Look at us. Watch as I take you.”

Chapter Fourteen

Makenzie

He butts against my barrier before he thrusts through it. It takes my breath and yet somehow I'm cumming again. Warmth flows into me at the same time my body tightens and contracts. My back arches off the bed as he punches through the last of my resistance and bottoms out inside of me.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck! I'm still cumming. Fifteen years worth. Pent up seed, waiting for you, for the moment I could deposit it in you.”

In the mirror, his ass is flexed tight and he's just as tense as I am. Oh my God, I think he came inside me. I think...that was the warmth. “Wh...what's happening?”

He isn't pulling out but rocking back and forth, pressing hard, and then rocking again. I'm still cumming. His lips brush against my cheek as he talks to me. “You're cumming hard, baby doll. Now that you have something real between your legs you're cumming so hard for me.”

“Sterling!” It's the only word I can get out before I explode, stars bursting behind my eyelids and for seconds I stop breathing, it's so big. I'm being lifted and moved before I really have time to come back down. He's turning us so that

both of us are in front of the mirror. Up against Sterling's bigger body, I look really...small. He pulled out for only a second before pushing back in me again and his fingers are playing at my clit.

My body is climaxing before my mind can catch up with what's happening. He grunts as he repositions my legs so they are spread further apart. The move pushes me down on his cock even more and hits something deep inside of me. His big hands come up to cup my breasts as he works his hips so that he's pistoning up inside of me. His fingers pluck at the hard peaks of my nipples causing sensations to course throughout my body. He squeezes just hard enough to make my hips jerk in tandem with his, making the thrill even more delicious because of how deeply felt the movement is. It's going beyond just sex. I might be new to all of this but surely this isn't normal - this soul-deep connection that seems to be entwining me and Sterling together.

This time when I cum it's with every fiber of my being. I cum so hard my toes curl, my back bows and were it not for Sterling holding me I would be face first on the bed because all of my energy is gone. Not only do the muscles around my pussy contract, it feels like everything is convulsing. The only thing I can relate it to is being electrocuted.

I slump in Sterling's arms, my head lolling back on his chest but he doesn't stop, even though I felt him cum when I did. If I look close enough in the mirror I can see him leaking down the insides of my thighs and out around where we are connected.

“No more.”

“What?” I'm not shocked he can't hear me. I spoke so softly.

“I can’t take any more.” This time I say it louder for him.

“Yes you can and you will. I’ve waited a long time for you.” He’s moving us again, using his arms to brush things off the dresser so he can lay me over it. My feet don’t touch the ground like this but I’m at the perfect height for him to really pound into me. This time I can do nothing but just lay there as my body convulses around him, continually milking him dry.

The next time I come to I’m in the shower lying on the tiles while he’s soaping my breasts up and cleaning my body for me. He’s still inside of me though, occasionally rutting his hips so that my body shivers and gives him what he wants. I can tell I’m close to another release when he lowers one of his hands down to my nub and jostles it back and forth until I arch my hips up off the floor and hug and milk his cock with my pussy. He grunts and closes his eyes before warmth is spreading within me again. How many times has he cum in me? How long have we been going at it? It can’t be good for him to empty himself in me that many times since I’m not on anything...right? But damned if I have the energy to fuss or try to carry on a conversation about what should be done instead of what is happening.

When I wake up the next time, Sterling is gone. The bed is empty and for the first time since moving into the house, I feel alone. Everything aches, muscles I never knew I had in my body are tender and tight and my bones are like jelly. I can tell I have been good and truly fucked.

But why? Why did he...spend the night...doing what he did to me? Was it just because he was celebrating the fact he was alive -fully alive and no longer in a coma? Was it a holdover so he could get me out of his system and put all of this behind him? Is he a player and I’m just convenient? I have so many questions but all of them start with ‘why’?

A light bounces off the ceiling and shines in my eyes causing me to pay better attention to where it might be coming from. That's when I see the ring on my finger. It's the same ring I woke up with when I was in the hospital but there are no officials here for him to have to lie to. The ring casts a rainbow of light around the round room making it impossible to ignore.

I sit up and wince but hold my hand up anyway so I can see every detail of the ring hugging the third finger on my left hand. Commotion downstairs has me jumping from the bed and looking around for clothes. Thankfully my clothes are still in the dresser where I put them when I thought I would live here.

The fact that the house I fell in love with is no longer mine takes me by surprise and sadness envelopes me. All of the noise downstairs has me pushing that away so I can focus on the now. Maybe Sterling hired movers for me and that's what all the sound is. When I step off the last step I am greeted by a whole house full of people coming and going.

I follow where everyone is either going or leaving. It's the back room, the one with Sterling's painting in it. There are a couple of men in suits that reek of being a lawyer who are standing close to the desk where Sterling himself is seated.

“Sir, I know you've been through a lot but...,”

Sterling whips his head around and gives the man a look that could freeze water, “Get it done or I'll find someone who can! And you'll never work anywhere else again.”

“Yes sir.”

The beautiful woman from yesterday realizes I am standing by the door and makes a beeline for me. I brace myself for a confrontation, especially if she knows I was with Sterling. “Wonderful, you’re finally awake. We have so much to do if we want to make the deadline.”

“D...deadline?” I try to look around her for Sterling but she’s really tall.

“There are several things we need to confirm: color schemes, music, any special requests you might have or want to do during the ceremony.”

“Ceremony?”

She gets a look on her face that clearly tells me she is exasperated and irritated but not at me. She takes me by the arm to pull me out of the office. “He didn’t tell you did he? Did he even ask or...?”

“Amber!” Sterling’s voice cracks out like a whip but this woman doesn’t even flinch. In fact, she rolls her eyes. “Whether I have or haven’t asked is none of your concern.”

He steps around her and comes to stand near me while the beautiful woman squares her shoulders and presses her mouth. “Really? Really, Sterling? You don’t think I’m going to let you just steamroll over this poor girl without asking her to marry you the proper way?”

“Did I interfere with you and Gina?”

The woman loses all of her stiffness and deflates a little before working herself back up, “That was different.”

“How so?”

The two of them go toe to toe. “She was older. And she had family to watch out for her. I had to jump through damned hoops before her brothers were alright with us marrying.”

“Through hoops? You stole her away and did it without anyone knowing about it.”

“Um, I hate to interrupt but what is going on? What are we talking about?”

The woman starts tapping her foot and a look of I-told-you-so crosses her face.

Sterling takes me by the hand and leads me to the kitchen. “Why do I have the ring on?”

He turns to look at me, “Because it’s yours.”

“What?” I’m going to need a redo on this whole morning because I am so lost.

“It belongs to you...like you belong to me.”

Chapter Fifteen

Sterling

Before I can explain myself to Makenzie, Kane is bursting through the door with Talia behind him. “Sterling, he’s gone. He got loose and they can’t find him.”

I don’t need Kane to tell me who is missing. “How?” He’s talking about my brother.

“They said when the nurse went to check his vitals this morning his cuffs were hanging on the bed and the deputy they put at the door was knocked unconscious.”

“So they don’t know how long ago he escaped?”

Kane shakes his head. Damn, this complicates things and the last thing I need today is a complication. Not with trying to get Makenzie to say yes to marrying me. I watch as Talia comes over to Makenzie and looks her over.

“Are you alright? I was so worried about you but Kane said he knew you would be with Sterling and there would be nothing to worry about.”

“Kane?” Makenzie does the same with Talia.

Talia’s cheeks turn a bright pink and her eyes slide over to Kane’s.

“We need to up the security and make sure the girls don’t go anywhere without one or both of us.” Kane takes the words right out of my head.

“Sterling, what is going on?” I’m by her side in the blink of an eye. I don’t want her to worry. “Why is the pretty redhead telling me I have to pick out color schemes and music?”

“Oh my God! Are you getting married?” Well, damn! Talia pretty much took any delaying I might have been going for away.

“What?! No. We’re not...,” She halts what she is going to say because the light bounces off the ring I put on her hand and draws her attention to the fact she’s wearing an engagement ring. “Sterling?”

Talia takes her hand so she can look at the ring better. “Uh, girl, that’s an engagement ring.”

“Sterling?”

“I don’t want to actually ask you because you might say no.” I pull her away from the others so we can talk in a somewhat private manner. “I don’t want you to be able to tell me no because...I want this so bad.”

I take her in my arms and pull her close.

“I need you to say you’ll stay with me, that this means as much to you as it does to me. I need you to want me.”

She reaches up to brush her fingers against the stubble of my chin. I never got around to shaving this morning because as soon as I was able to open my eyes I knew what I needed to do. I needed to make Makenzie mine in every way possible. I needed to make sure she would be taken care of if something ever happened to me so she’s on all the bank accounts and insurance policies. I wanted to put my last name on her before she could ask if this was going too fast or started to have doubts about us.

“I do.” Her words make everything stop - the noises, the chatter of all the people standing around, the worry that she might not be fully mine. All of that quietens down when she says those two words.

I kiss her while sweeping her up into my arms. As I’m setting her down, glass breaks and standing in front of the sliding French doors is the disheveled image of my brother. I automatically shove Makenzie behind me. How the hell did he get another gun?

“Hello, big brother. Did you miss me?”

Kane does the same with Talia, shoving her behind him. If this nutjob thinks he is going to hurt my little doll he’s stupid as well as unhinged. Makenzie’s arms come up to hug me to her and she tries to protect me the same way I am her.

“Emory, what the hell are you doing here?”

“Well, I was just coming to say hello to the new bride, brother dear.” I need to find out how he got loose and who is helping him with information that might be close to me. “It’s the least I can do since the little witch ruined my life!”

His tone turns deadly the longer he talks and I realize I have to do something soon or he’s going to hurt all of us.

“You see, the little...bitch told me last night that she loved you and it seems you feel the same way about her since you gave her our mother’s ring,” He starts to walk towards us forcing me to back up with Makenzie still behind me, “which is great for me because I’m going to kill her to punish you. I used to think that all you cared about was money but I see the way you look at her, I see the way you touch her. You really love her. And the worst thing I could do to you would be to let you live knowing your happy ever after can never be real!”

He levels the gun.

“You’re going to have to kill me to even get to her.”

“No! No!” She cries out and tries to come around me.

“Isn’t that cute.” He sneers. “I guess I’ll have to shoot you in the leg first so I can reach my almost sister-in-law.”

I reach for a glass tray sitting on the island and fling it at him. It shocks him enough that he loses his grip on the gun sending it skittering across the floor. There’s never been a lot of love between us. Emory has more of my father in him than my mother and me. They would rather stay drunk and borrow money than work for what they have. Still, I never thought it would come down to us fighting for our lives thanks to each other.

I make a grab for one of the kitchen knives but Emory is there pulling me away and punching me. I punch him back. The thing that I have going for me is I'm not just fighting for myself. There is no way in hell I'm letting him hurt my little doll. I hit him in the ribs again before flipping us over and giving him a swift jab to the jaw.

He pushes me by the face off of him and tries to crawl back on top of me. I can hear Makenzie yelling for us to stop and for someone to help. He makes a dive for the knife I knocked off the butcher block and swings it at me. It catches me on the forearm making me cry out. I fight through the blinding pain so I can knock him back.

As I do, Makenzie calls out my name and I see her holding something in her hands. I raise my good arm as she throws the gun to me. When Emory rights himself it's to find me holding the gun. "Don't. Don't make me do it."

He takes a step back before he raises the knife and heads toward Makenzie. I don't pause or hesitate before I pull the trigger and my brother falls to the ground. Makenzie looks over at me for a second before she's running to me. Tears are coursing down her cheeks as she takes a dish towel and lays it over my wound. She's shaking and keeps kissing me and touching me to make sure I'm alright. I'm still here and I'm alright.

The police come rushing in about the same time Kane and Talia come back into the room. I was so focused on keeping Makenzie safe that I didn't catch the two of them leaving to call for help. My brother coughs and blood comes up with it. I don't think he has much longer to live. Medics come in right behind the police and take him away.

I realize it sounds bad but the one thing I'm thankful for is the fact he didn't die in the kitchen. The last thing I want is to have my brother's angry ghost coming back and constantly trying to hurt one of us. Another team of medics comes over to look at my arm. They tell me I'm going to need stitches and I tell them I have just the woman who can do that for me without me ever leaving my house or my little baby doll.

Thank God I meet Lynda and talked her into coming to work for me. Having loyal friends and employees has its perks, one of them being I will be able to take my sweet girl upstairs and make love to her to celebrate both of us still being alive a lot quicker than if I had to go to a hospital. And that is just exactly what I plan to do, as soon as Lynda patches me up.

Epilogue I

Makenzie

Four Weeks Later

I am so nervous my stomach is lurching. I wanted to wait until Sterling was all healed up to have the ceremony but he wouldn't hear of it. He threatened to kidnap the priest if I didn't agree to have the wedding before Christmas. My bouquet has yellow and orange leaves scattered throughout the roses and lilies and the whole wedding is fall themed.

Amber is great. When she has an idea about something she just goes all out and makes it this spectacular celebration. I'm not sure how she does it but I'm so thankful she does. And Gina, her wife, is...well, like me - the quieter, reserved partner that is more careful when it comes to our hearts. We've spent quite a bit of time with both women doing couples nights with them and Kane and Talia.

And now here we are, I have over one hundred people waiting on me and I'm going to throw up everything I've eaten for the past two days. It's that bad. I try to take some deep breaths and meditate the sick away. Celeste would be proud of how hard I'm meditating right now since she's always trying to get me to start to keep me from being so stressed out.

As if I conjure her out of thin air, she's standing in front of me when I open my eyes. "Mac, honey, are you alright?"

I give her a wobbly smile before I have to take off running for the bathroom. Before I can sit back after emptying my stomach of all contents, strong arms come around me and a hand helps to hold my hair back. Celeste went and found Sterling when she realized I was sick.

"You alright, baby doll?"

"Ugh, I have no idea. I think I may have eaten something that didn't agree with me or the stress of the wedding is getting to me." He sets me on the sink and hands me a warm rag to wash my face with, then hands me my toothbrush.

"Or maybe it could be something else."

My eyebrows furrow. What else could this be? The flu? Something worse?

He rummages around in one of the cabinets, "Perhaps it's about time we use one of these." When he comes back over to me he's holding a pink and white box in his hands.

"What...what is that?"

I take the box from him and look it over. When I do my eyes widen and a feeling of shock and awe shoots through me. It's a pregnancy test.

How long has he been keeping these stashed here? Are they some kind of weird hold over from his old life without me? I

understand he said it was years since he was...with someone but maybe it just felt that long ago?

Anger bubbles up inside of me at the thought I might not have been the first lady he thought he got pregnant. "Don't those things have expiration dates on them?" I say it as snidely as I can.

"I have no idea but they should be good considering I only bought them after you missed a period."

"A...after I...oh my God! I did miss my period." I sit on the edge of the sink stunned. "Wait, how did you know...?"

"Kane told me he wasn't as lucky as we are and that Talia got hers and that she said you guys were so close you normally get them around the same time. That was a week and a half ago."

What the hell? Their like old women sitting around discussing our periods, trying to knock us up. "And you didn't think it might have been the stress of thinking you were a ghost, finding out you were alive and I could bring you back, almost getting shot by your brother -twice- and planning a wedding? That never crossed your mind?"

"Yeah, that's why I got more than one. So if at first we don't succeed we can try, try again."

I roll my eyes at him and clutch the box to me. What if we are pregnant? Talia wasn't. Is she sad? She didn't say a word about any of it. I find myself becoming sad that me and my best friend might not be as close as we once were.

“Oh, by the way, they are expecting. It was just spotting.”

I fight to keep the grin off my face. “You mean spotting?”

“Yeah, spotting. Which we read is common but he took her ass to the doctor anyway and the doc confirmed it. She’s knocked up.”

“Why didn’t she tell me?”

“Because I didn’t want to take away from your big day.” A very pissed-off Talia is standing in the doorway of the bathroom. “I can’t believe he told you. I told him we were going to tell you all after the wedding so you could have your special day and Kane had to go blabbing to you!”

I fight back tears as she comes over to give me a hug. Damn, that orange bridesmaid’s dress looks good on her. “I’m just glad it’s not because we’re not close anymore.”

She rolls her eyes at me and gives me a big bright smile. “As if. Now, find out if our little nugget is going to have a cousin to run around with when he or she finally gets here.”

I take the test but I don’t look at it until after we say ‘I do’. We have the ceremony in the backyard and the day couldn’t be more beautiful. As soon as he sweeps me into his arms and carries me into the house we both rush to the bathroom upstairs to find out what the test says.

It turns out Talia’s little nugget is going to have a playmate about eight months from now. Married and expecting all in one day? It might be too much for some women but I’ve found the best way to live is in full color, out loud, and with no

regrets. I was the woman with a ghost for a lover after all. Nothing surprises me anymore...well, almost nothing. Sterling still finds ways of making my life unexpected but then he was the ghost in that little scenario.

Epilogue I

Sterling

Ten Years Later

I watch as my wife paints cat whiskers on our little girl. She has reminded me several times she can't be a cat without her whiskers. Our oldest child, Marian, is going as a witch so Sarah has someone to hold her hand. While our three boys are going as a dinosaur, a dead body...and Santa.

Sarah's twin is going as Santa. I couldn't talk the five-year-old out of it. He says he thinks it's the best job in the world - to be able to try out all the toys before you give them away. I think he has a future as a toy engineer myself. I jostle Adam on my hip while I wait.

He's our little miracle, or if you're asking Talia and Amber, our 'oops' baby. I was so worried after Makenzie gave birth to the twins and after seeing all of the things she had to go through to bring them into the world I didn't want to chance another baby. I couldn't live knowing something I did took my little doll away from me, away from us. So we talked about both of us having surgery or some other alternative. I was scheduled to go in to get clipped when we found out she was carrying Adam. Thankfully everything went perfectly with the pregnancy and we got our little t-rex out of it.

Makenzie straightens and I catch a glimpse of the front of her Morticia Addams costume. I let out a grunt that would make Lurch proud even if I am dressed as Gomez. She catches me looking and hears my groan. And her mouth kicks up into a wicked little grin. She comes closer to me and leans up against me playing with my tie. “Do you like my costume, Mr. Addams?”

I narrow my eyes before nipping at her mouth, “You are in so much trouble little doll.”

“Ooh, what’s going to happen to me? Are you going to punish me?”

“Absolutely,” I growl out so only she can hear my promise and take Santa’s hand. I have plans for my little doll tonight that don’t have anything to do with children or costumes but everything to do with tricks and treats.

This woman...she taught me how to live, she gave me a reason to come back, she loved me when she didn’t know if there was ever going to be a chance for us. There is no way I am going to let a day go by without showing her how much I love and need her. We have a love that connected us across time and space, distance and death. This woman isn’t just my happy ever after, she’s my happy ever always.

The End!

Continue reading to revisit the beginning of the Holiday Series, *Hauntingly Ever After* and my first Halloween book from this year, *Bewitched*.

If you enjoyed *Ghost of a Chance*, please consider sharing with your friends!

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Hauntingly Ever After

Holiday Series: Book One

By:

Jisa Dean

Hauntingly Ever After

Holiday Series: Book One

Clover is in over her head. Not only is she just starting her career but she also just bought the big, scary house everyone swears is haunted. But Clover doesn't believe the house is bad. She's been in love with it ever since she was young...just like Knox, her best friend's brother. He might look rough on the outside and have a bad reputation but something about him calls her to him, er, calls her to the house.

Until she finds out all those rumors about ghosts and things going bump in the night ...they're all true and might just be too much for her to handle. So does that mean the things about Knox are true too or can she lean on him when the responsibility of owning a big haunted house gets to be too much? Will he stay or will he break her heart and make all of the dreams she's had for the two of them just another faded memory that still haunts the house.

Happy Halloween! It's that time of year and I have been watching all the scary television shows to bring this one to you. If you like your candy corn a little on the rough side and you don't mind getting lost in the maze with me sit down and let Clover and Knox take you for a hauntingly good ride. (Okay, that's the last of the Halloween puns I'm making for the year).

Chapter One

Saffie

I sit in my car and question what the hell I've done for the hundredth time. On either side of me is overgrown grass that's in desperate need of a cut. Can you even mow grass in the fall or will it die? Isn't that a thing? Shit, add that to the list I am going to have to Google. Along with how to fix a breaker, where the breaker is, and what causes breakers to blow? Fuck, for that matter I need to know how to replace a breaker box. Can I replace a breaker box?

I sigh so loud it fills the entire car. I have no idea what the fuck I am doing. I am twenty years old. I should be out partying with friends before I head back to my dorm. Instead, I am sitting outside in an overgrown field with an ancient house waiting to eat me while I pretend like I am adulting.

I take a moment to lay my head down on the steering wheel before I take a deep breath and pull the rest of the way up the driveway. There's not really a parking spot so to speak so I just pull up to the front of the house. It's an 1892 Queen Ann with round porches and towers coming off one side. It looks like a tragic story of a painted lady right now but hopefully one day it will look just as good as it did in 1892.

For the umpteenth time, I heave a sigh and sit looking at what I've done. I bought a house. But not just any house. I

bought an old house; sat in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by lawns on all sides and woods to the back of the house. It takes nearly five minutes to get down the driveway. That might be because the gravel is rutted out and pitted so bad you think it will break your car in two but it's still a long ass driveway. What's wrong with me?

I step out and walk to the porch...and fall back in love all over again. I have loved this one house for half my life. Ever since I found out about it. Since I was a little girl I've wanted this to be MY house. Even as a teen when I heard all of the ghost stories that go along with the place I still wanted it. And when I moved away for college I told my parents that the only way I would be moving back is if it were in the house of my dreams.

Luckily, the house of my dreams needs some work - okay, it needs a lot of work. So I got it cheap and got hella lucky that it was still on the market three years later. I lovingly run my hands along one of the columns on the porch. I still can't believe it's mine. All five bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms of it. Not my mom or dad's, not a whole shit ton of college kids, no one else's but mine.

I walk across the porch and pull the keys from my pocket. Even the locks are old. I might want to make that the first thing I look into fixing. It's all good and fun now while the sun is shining but after the sun goes down it's going to creep me out that I don't have any better locks or an alarm system just yet. The heavy door swings open and the stairs greet me right away. The banister is almost as big as I am around and supporting a whole shitload of stairs leading up to the second and third floors. Everything is covered in a thick layer of dust. It is going to be hell cleaning this out with my allergies.

I might as well plan to take the following day off so I can be miserable. I know that's what is going to happen when I start

stirring up all the dust and dirt from all the years she sat empty. I already think of her like a...well, her. She's a proud old lady, maybe an aunt who might just know you better than your own parents, or the grandmother you run to when life at home is rough for whatever reason. The house might be old, but there is so much love in it and love waiting to be given still.

I place my hand on the railing and trail it up until it rests on the round globe at the top of the spindle. The detail in the design of something so mundane is why I love this house. How many other people stood where I am standing and wondered the same things that I am wondering? How many of them figured it out and moved on to live and love in this place?

The sense of history is as thick as the dust...but it can stay. The dust has to go. "Hey Neighbor." The voice causes me to jump because I wasn't expecting anyone but me to be here. I turn and run right into my best friend in the whole world, Parker Sloan. We both squeal and hug each other tightly.

"God I can't believe you're back! I'm so excited! How does it feel to be twenty?"

I giggle with Parker. "Surprisingly the same as nineteen."

We both laugh at the stupid question considering she turns twenty next month and hug again. It's not like I stayed gone once I left for college, I visited. I didn't even really go that far. It was still in the same state just five hours away and not always easy for me to get back home with how I constantly studied or worked.

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sneezes three times in a row in rapid succession, “Holy cow, the dust is thick with this one.” I laugh again at her lame attempt to insert a Star Wars reference into normal conversation. Parker is as big a geek as I am.

“So,” she turns around again, “what’s the first thing to do? What are we thinking? The floors? The walls? The windows?”

“Um, I’m not really sure. I...I’m kind of lost about what needs to be done first...or second and third.”

“Hey, why don’t I call Knox to come over to help? He’s really good at all of this shit. You know he owns his own construction company now.”

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“I...uh, don’t know if that’s such a good idea, Parker.”

“Oh come on. You can’t be all judgy because of the whole prison thing right?”

That is the last reason I have for not wanting him here. “Absolutely not!” I can’t even believe she would ask me that.

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all of the women in town thought he was a freakin' hero because of it.

I sure did. As if I needed another reason to hero-worship him. I was already halfway in love with him when he got in trouble but afterward it just kind of solidified the infatuation. Not that I could ever tell Parker about it. I mean what would she even say if she knew I thought her brother was hot enough to have wet dreams about.

"I...um, don't have a lot of money left to spend on renovations and I don't want to put anyone out or have someone think I am trying to ask him to do this because I'm friends with you. I guess I don't want him to think I'm taking advantage of him."

"Oh bullshit! That's the last thing Knox is going to think. Here let me call him."

"No! Parker! I don't want to..." it's too late. She's already hit his number.

"Hey brother, whatcha doing?" I can't hear his side of the conversation so I can't begin to guess how he's answering. She could have interrupted him doing something naughty with a girlfriend, or unwinding after a long day at work, or he could be trying to find a girl to do those naughty things to at a place he unwinds at. I walk off not wanting to hear if he tells her he's with someone else.

I realize it's fucked up and crazy but it will kill me to think of him with some other girl. He's been out for a while now - almost a year I think. There is no way he hasn't got a girlfriend. Fuck, for all I know he might have gotten with the girl he was protecting. I don't think they were a thing just

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"Hello?" God, I sound like I'm still a fourteen-year-old unsure dork who can't find a date to save her life.

"Hey, how's it going?" God, he sounds like sex on a stick. His voice is so deep and growly it goes straight to my lady bits.

"Um, good." There is an awkward silence that I should fill but I'm unsure of what to say.

"Parker tells me you just bought the Pierce place."

"Yeah," I can work with this, "I've been in love with it for years."

"It is a beautiful house. She said you might need someone to come in and take a look at some things. Check some stuff out for you."

Damn, he just cuts right to the chase. No more pleasantries. "Well...um, I just want to be upfront with you right from the

start. I don't have a lot of money to pay someone so..."

"Clover," God, the way he says my name makes my palms sweaty, "it's just a walk-through. Those we offer for free."

"Oh, well I'm sure you're busy and I wouldn't want to take you away from..."

"Clover, are you trying to get me to not come to your house."

"Oh God, no! You can come over any time you want to." My voice ends on a high note. Not attractive at all. He laughs on the other end of the line and I realize he's been teasing me. Even if he can't see my cheeks they turn bright pink.

"How about tomorrow? Say nine?"

"Oh, okay. Sure. Tomorrow works for me. I'll um, see you then...tomorrow...okay, bye." I shove the phone back at Parker who is laughing her ass off at me. She talks to him a little longer before hanging up and throwing her arm around me.

"Come on, Clo. We'll order pizza and start sweeping this dust out of the rooms so you can at least sleep without sneezing your ass off all night long."

Bewitched

By:

Jisa Dean

Bewitched

Halloween is all about getting treats from strangers. But when one grabs Saffie and kisses her breathless it feels a lot more like a trick than a treat. What would a sexy vampire want with her anyway? She's a short, nerdy nineteen-year-old who would rather be reading than be at the party she finds herself at. The vampire in question...he's a hot cop who has his whole life going right for him. He could have anyone he wanted so why would he look at her?

But he is looking and does a lot more than look when shots ring out and Saffie's life is in danger. It's not just the cop in Cooper that takes over when the little thing dressed as a witch is threatened. His alpha comes out too. So what is a swarthy vampire to do? Take her home with him and make a snack out of her of course.

It's the most joyous time of the year...no, not Christmas - although that's a favorite of mine too! I mean Halloween! And this season, to get you in the mood I'm offering up a sexy witch, a horny vampire, a hidden treasure, and a hold-up! If that's just the thing you need to satiate your sweet tooth then pull up a chair, bring your candy bowl closer, and find out how Cooper shows a girl a good time!

Chapter One

Clover

I sit in my car and question what the hell I've done for the hundredth time. On either side of me is overgrown grass that's in desperate need of a cut. Can you even mow grass in the fall or will it die? Isn't that a thing? Shit, add that to the list I am going to have to Google. Along with how to fix a breaker, where the breaker is, and what causes breakers to blow? Fuck, for that matter I need to know how to replace a breaker box. Can I replace a breaker box?

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[*Lakeside Daddy*](#)

[*Down by the Lake*](#)

[*Lakefront Property*](#)

[*Back to the Lake*](#)

The Librarian Series

[*Booked*](#)

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The Brothers Series

[*Blue Venus*](#)

[*Crimson Deep*](#)

[*Violet Ends*](#)

The Within Series

[*The Animal Within*](#)

[*The Monster Inside*](#)

[*The Human Between*](#)

[*The Peace Within*](#)

The Hospital Series

[*Urgent Care*](#)

[*Code Blue*](#)

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