



THIS REALITY
BOOK 1

MEMORIES
OF
MAGIC

REBEKAH
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Memories of Magic
This Reality Book 1
Rebekah Margaret Doss

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Memories of Magic - This Reality (Book 1) by Rebekah Margaret Doss

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Please note that this book is intended for more mature audiences: adults over the age of 18 years

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To My World: "because without her, I would have never learned to love."

Not that she'll be reading this story, due to the contents - but without her, I'm not sure this story would have ever happened, since it's based on a dream about her

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Beginning Note

This is a **multiple love interests** type book. It's like a love triangle, but without the choosing and with three male interests. So keep that in mind.

Content Contains: the book has mentions of miscarriage, kidnapping, and memory loss

This first book is a slow-burn, for the most part, with tension sprinkled about.

Chapter One

We weren't running away. There wasn't really anything to run away from. Not anymore. She was safe now. We were safe. I knew this. But, I still had to remind myself that we were not running away.

We just needed a break. That was it. And there was no better way to have a break than to go on a road trip.

Even though my daughter did not like the idea of leaving for the entire summer once school had ended. It might have been the fact that I had our packed bags and ready to leave before she had exited her last Zoom class. Or, because she had hoped to spend even a small amount of time with friends.

That was two weeks ago, and we had been having fun visiting ghost towns and museums since then. These were places that still seemed normal and so far back in history they couldn't have been tainted by the world being exposed to magic.

There may very well have been magical items in the museum, or a random magical being that lived in the now dead towns. But, they were gone now. There was nothing. So, there was no magical anything, and that meant they were completely ordinary. They were safe.

Finding out that magic was truly out there, woven among us in the world, was one thing. Finding out that there was a full-blown war between the different magical beings, and that humans were, more often than not, casualties of that war, was something completely different to process.

Witches. Of course there may have been witches in the world. They'd always seemed to have had a big part in the history of mankind, even as told through the lens of myths and legends of different cultures. There were entire histories from different areas just based on witch hunts. But these were just folklore, tales for the fanatics, and answers for the unanswerable questions.

Believing in witches was to suspend belief in the natural and allow belief in the supernatural. These stories allowed for the imagination to conjure fanciful ideas of things that could have been, or may have been - there was never anything concrete, any evidence, that witches ever existed.

Magic had been well-known to be fiction.

Then the videos appeared, first on social media, before they were picked up and broadcasted to the national news. Witches fighting against the faeries. Or, at least that was what we were told. They definitely did not all look like those little pixies that Disney, or even Neopets, promised me.

Some of the faeries seemed to be more human looking compared to some of the monstrous counterparts. Yet, the vast subset diversity within the faeries had no impact, at all, on the image portrayed by the complete set. They all had something about them that just made them look...magical. Dangerous. Terrifying. Mystical.

Four months ago, everything was a boringly normal January. Bills needed to be paid. Meals needed to be planned and cooked. A sassy, pre-teen daughter needed to be raised, even though she believed she was a capable adult.

Overnight, life changed for everyone. There was a war going on around us. A magical war. The only world wide preparation we were even remotely exposed to was the Battle of Hogwarts at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. A fictional war. Our reality was turned upside down; it didn't help when the reality of the magical war was compared to one from a children's book.

The naysayers, as were expected, showed up - even on national news - as fights between witches and faeries escalated into more places.

The tone of the world soon shifted from skepticism and conspiracy theories; two months after the initial war between the witches and faeries started, the faeries showed up at random schools. My daughter's middle school was one of those schools. They thought they could try and kidnap hundreds of children in one day.

Witches, the same ones portrayed as old hags throughout history, were the ones that arrived in time to save most of the children from vanishing with the faeries. But the damage had been done. The only bodies recovered had been of the magical kind - no children were injured, though some were discovered to be missing.

When magic revealed itself in the form of a world war among fantastical creatures never before seen, school systems around the world remained open while deciding the legitimacy of what had been presented to the populace. Only for remote learning to be implemented during the final four weeks of the Magic War, by then there was just no point in denial. After all that was done, I'm sure I wasn't the only parent that would not have let their child go back to school, anyway.

Everything seemed different, even though it had been a month since the news first reported the witches as the victors in the Magic War. All the defeated faeries that we were terrified of were suddenly gone. There weren't even many faerie casualties that were reported to have been found. A few people had reported seeing some places with piles of silver ash. The theory was that the faeries were sucked out of our world and back to their own. Or that our ground just absorbed them.

As soon as the witches were declared victors, they disappeared, as well. After proudly, and publicly, displaying their full magic while fighting against the faeries, and saving a vast number of our children from faerie kidnappers; it all seemed to be another thing that would, once again, be left for future folklore.

Not one person came forward as being a member of the society of witches, nor having any known association with a witch.

They had won their war, a war we didn't understand, and then they faded back into society. They became invisible, walking among throngs of people that were looking for them. That was it, they were able to become invisible. Given that differences are perceived by everyone on different levels, there wasn't even the smallest detail out of the ordinary to find.

Which begged the question how people in the past had the ability to spot a witch to place on a pyre. There was no doubt that after the Magic War, the witches used their magic to blend back into the background of neighbors and friends.

So, I decided a vacation with my almost twelve-year-old daughter seemed like a desperate need. A road trip for some much needed calming, boring, normalcy. No stress. No worries, that weren't the regular adult concerns.

Since some people were still jittery over everything that had happened, the roads had little traffic in the middle of May - a bonus to our impromptu trip. There also hadn't been any more of those strange empty doorways that popped up in odd places only to explode minutes, or days, later.

I took a quick glance at my daughter beside me, knowing there was no way I would have taken this trip if there were still gaping holes that randomly exploded.

Chapter Two

“I’m going to need another credit card just to pay for gas.” Coming out of my thoughts, I spotted a gas station. “It’s \$5.65 a gallon,” I groaned.

“You should have stopped at the last one. I told you that would be the cheapest gas that I could probably spot for you for a while.” Rosalyn leaned her head against the window and sighed.

“Yes, I remember.” Reaching my hand out, I tapped the GPS and glanced at her. “We still have three hours until the next stop. Did you find another audio book to start?”

Rosalyn looked over at the GPS and then grabbed the snack bag at her feet. She took out a bag of chips and placed her phone in the cupholder.

“I didn’t feel like starting a new book just yet.”

I looked over at her, an eyebrow raised, and watched her for a moment as she chewed.

“I thought I downloaded a couple of the books you had been asking for? Was there a different book that you were wanting?”

“The book I really want has another six months until it’s released. Which is stupid. How am I supposed to read it if it isn’t out yet?” Rosalyn leaned back in the chair, releasing a long exhale. “Maybe it’s for the best that I didn’t start a new story right now, anyway.”

“What? Why?”

There were times that Rosalyn or I didn’t pick up a book, but it usually meant we were busy. With school being over, unless she was still annoyed about the road trip, she would usually have a few books lined up.

Seeing Rosalyn from the corner of my eye, I watched as she sat up straighter and seemed to pull herself together. Her eyes

focused on the next exit signs before she folded the top of the chip bag and turned back to me.

“Just feel like we won’t have the time to truly enjoy a book right now. Maybe in a little while. Can we stop for food?” Looking back out the window, she motioned towards the road.

There was still the snack bag, which I waved at, and she shook her head. “Guess you can’t wait three hours until we get to the bed-and-breakfast? They advertised it as being near a taco place. And I chose it for your birthday.”

She gasped dramatically, bringing a hand to her chest, “Tacos? I do love tacos.” She reached over to pat my arm. “But don’t let me die on the eve of my birth by starving me now.”

I rolled my eyes, chuckling at her antics, and moved over into the right-hand lane.

“Did the sign happen to let you know where you wanted to stop?”

“There was something called Quick Dinner Diner with a cheeseburger and fries on the sign.”

“Ten minutes to burger and fries for the starving, soon-to-be, twelve-year-old.”

Rosalyn had remembered the name correctly. The small diner was called Quick Dinner Diner. The diner didn’t look like those places with a 50s retro style; it had more of a pizza eatery vibe.

Parking along the front of the building let us see it looked well kept. It didn’t look to be all that busy at six o’clock, either. But it also looked like we were on the outskirts of a smaller town, and unless the highway was busy, they probably only entertained the locals.

A small, not crowded eatery sounded better than a large crowded retro styled restaurant. And my child had told me not to let her starve.

As I reached into the backseat to grab my purse, Rosalyn’s hand landed on my arm and her fingers curled into my sleeve.

She had her head turned towards the diner and a corner of her bottom lip between her teeth.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” I turned back around in my seat, placing my hand over hers and giving it a soft squeeze.

“Nothing, just -” she started, tugging her hand away and tucked loose hair behind her ear. “Just wanted to apologize for having us stop here. You seemed excited for the bed-and-breakfast place.”

I pushed my cell phone into my purse as I looked towards her, again. “Can’t have you die, remember?”

That got a small smile from her, thankfully. She would, hopefully, be back to her old self soon. I was so used to my cheery, amusing child and this quieter girl was heartbreaking.

She became more subdued ever since they walked her out of her middle school after the faerie threat, understandably. Sometimes I would see her just staring. Not staring at anything in particular, just staring off. Then it would vanish and you could see her try to slip back into her happy self - but the sadness seemed to not be far off.

“I know you’ll always save me.” She opened the door, and pushed her cell phone into her pocket as she got out of the vehicle. “You know you’ll always save me.”

Confused, I got out of the vehicle and looked over at her. “Well, of course I’ll always save you. Come on, you nut.”

I held the door open for Rosalyn to step through and followed her into the diner. There were quite a few empty tables. In total, there were only three couples and a few solo diners. Most likely the regulars, the ones who came in every night like clockwork and could order without looking at the menu.

A young man glanced up at us from over the register and shot to his feet, his eyes huge. He nearly ran into the counter, tripping over himself, trying to go around it.

“You,” He croaked, pointing at Rosalyn. Which caused me to step forward. “Kids. Kids are not allowed in here. Anyone

under twenty-one is not allowed. You can't. You have to go. Now."

I placed myself in front of my daughter and quickly looked around again. It looked like a diner. The name indicated that this was a regular diner. Maybe we had got it wrong; maybe this was a bar, though it clearly looked to be a sit down restaurant.

There was a menu taped to the window from the inside of the diner. I guessed it was placed as a temptation to pull people in after seeing what they had to offer. Like placing diamond necklaces in windows at a jewelry store. It was clearly not a bar, when the only sign posted in the window was a menu and not a sign restricting age.

"Can I ask why it's twenty-one and up? You guys don't look like a bar, but we'll leave if we need to." I turned to usher a frowning Rosalyn back to the door. "But you should really put a sign in the door, or a window, other than the menu to let people know."

The man glanced over his shoulder towards what I assumed were the kitchen doors as he shooed us back towards the restaurant doors. "There is a sign, it's right -"

He stood frozen beside the door, arm mid-raise to point at something. His hand rushed past me to the door and pushed it open completely. He stepped outside and looked down the sidewalk. Turning, he pushed past us and looked along the wall near the door.

"Let's leave him to it and see if we can find something nearby," I said to Rosalyn as we scooted around the fidgety man, who was now on his hands and knees looking under the nearest booth.

"Wait." A voice came from behind us.

Rosalyn and I both froze. It felt like we should. But, it wasn't only us. It felt like the whole diner froze at the voice.

We both turned to see who had called out to us. As the door closed behind us, the host slowly got to his feet, staring at me with wide eyes. He looked terrified as he shifted his eyes from

Rosalyn to me, and then to the ground. I was really hoping I wasn't costing him his job because Rosalyn had stepped inside the diner.

"We were just leaving, don't worry. This man told us that children weren't allowed." I waved towards the host. "So, we'll just be leaving. We didn't mean to cause any scene."

The man stood in front of the closed kitchen doors, one side of his lips twitched into a small smile. He moved toward the register, his red buzz-cut hair glinted in the light, and grabbed two menus.

"Nonsense. You both are already here and hungry. We have that rule so we don't get overrun with toddlers crying or young children misbehaving. Your young lady seems like she won't cause much of a disturbance. If any."

I looked over at Rosalyn, but she was staring at a booth. "Uh, sure, if it isn't any trouble."

"No trouble. Follow me." He walked to the booth in the corner and placed the plastic menus on the table.

"Thanks," I said, sliding my purse across the table to lean against the wall. "How did you know we were hungry?"

"Who stops at a restaurant and isn't hungry?" he grinned. "Ian has an errand to run for me right quick, but Erica will be with you shortly."

The man left through the kitchen when Rosalyn picked up the menu and snorted. "Of course you're looking for something to eat when you go out to a restaurant, Mom."

Thankfully, an older lady had made her way over to ask for our drink order quickly enough that we weren't sitting awkwardly with the constant eyes on us. By the time we had placed our orders, most of the other diners had decided we would not be making any other entertainment for them and stopped staring completely.

"Did we save room for dessert?" Erica asked, while she took our empty plates.

Rosalyn sighed and shook her head, and I laughed, rubbing my own stuffed belly. There was a reason they advertised their cheeseburger on the highway sign. That was one of the best burgers I had ever had.

“I think we are both full, so just the check would be good.”

Erica chuckled and nodded, heading back to the kitchen with the empty plates.

“I would ask if you want tacos tomorrow, but I might still be stuffed.” I said, as I pulled my purse closer to find my wallet.

“Sure. Next time we go out, we should get tacos. It will give me something else to look forward to,” Rosalyn nearly whispered, playing with the straw wrapper. “Hey, are your tarot cards in your purse?”

“Tacos are something everyone should look forward to.” I swatted her hand quickly, crushing the wrapper. “We don’t have to get tacos if you don’t want them, though. I’m really just trying to have a fun trip with you, honey. It hasn’t been horrible, has it? I know you wanted to spend the summer with friends, but I just wanted to get away for a little bit. Oh, yup, the cards are here.”

Rosalyn leaned back in her chair, taking the tarot deck with her. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes while shuffling the cards. I pulled my hand back and toyed with my bank card between my fingers. Needing something to fidget with seemed to be a trait we shared.

I watched as she took a few deep breaths before she opened her eyes and gave me a tiny smile. She placed the deck of cards in the middle of the table, took one from the top, sat up straighter, and moved the card to her lap.

“The trip has been fine, really, Mom. I know you worry about me, and I’m sorry. You’re always going to worry about me.” She reached up and took her ponytail down, handing me the sparkly green ribbon she had tied on her hair band. “Can you keep this safe for me? Jessica gave it to me, and I don’t want to somehow lose it.”

“Sure.” I placed the ribbon into the tissue pocket of my purse. Though I could have sworn it was one that I had bought her. “And of course, I’ll always worry about you. I’m your mother.”

“I don’t think Erica remembered to come back with your check.” Rosalyn tilted her head to the front, ignoring me. “You may have to go up to pay. I mean, if she’s busy.”

We both looked around the diner. The same people were there as when we arrived, and they kept looking at us whenever they thought we weren’t paying attention. Maybe it was time to leave and head to the bed-and-breakfast.

I pushed my purse over to Rosalyn as I scooted out of the booth. Before I could take a step away, she grabbed my arm.

“Mom, thanks. For not letting me starve? Always protecting me. I love you.”

Pausing, I looked down at her. “Well, you’re slowly getting back to your randomness. When have I ever let you starve? Haha, goodness Rosalyn. I love you too. Don’t move, and we’ll be leaving shortly.”

Shaking my head, I walked back towards the front of the diner to see Erica standing behind the counter. Not busy at all, just sitting there and glancing around every so often. When she noticed me approaching, she stood and ran her hands over her apron.

“I wasn’t sure if you were coming back with the check. Maybe I misunderstood. I know that some places you pay at the front and not at the table.” I held my card out towards her. “So, anyway, I just needed to pay.”

Erica snatched my card and then glanced around again. “Right. Sorry about that. Got busy.”

Sometimes your face has an automatic reaction to things, and I tried to catch my face before I gave her the “really now?” look. No one had entered, and no one had left, since we arrived. I knew I didn’t stop the facial shift in time because she gave me a small shrug and a half smile.

“The internet connection went down, and then our system crashed. Been waiting for it to reload. If you could just wait a moment while I use the crash box to get a hard-copy of the payment.”

“Oh, of course.” Rosalyn would definitely be telling me to stop automatically judging people, again, once we got back to the vehicle. “Gotta hate when that happens. The knuckle busters are the worst to deal with.”

Erica gave a tight smile as she started pulling out multiple drawers on her side of the counter, and frequently glancing behind me. She ran her hand inside each drawer a second time as she glanced past me, and then closed the drawers once more. She had placed my card in front of me, so I decided to hold on to it rather than let it just sit there. Not that anyone was truly going to walk by and snatch it, or memorize the number, but some habits were hard to break.

As she went to reopen the same drawers, once again looking towards the back, I went to turn around to motion Rosalyn to wait with me at the counter. Before I fully turned, Erica slammed her hands on the countertop in front of me.

“Oh. Sorry. Slipped,” she stated, sitting back in the chair.

She didn’t have the card imprinter or any makeshift receipt for me. But she still sat down and then gave me a funny look. A look, like she was waiting for me to tell her something.

“Uh...the payment?” I motioned my card at her.

“Ma’am, you were leaving? Everything was taken care of.”

“I don’t know what you mean. I came up here to pay our bill and then you said you had to find the manual stuff to take a copy of the card for when your system came back online. So...what? I’m confused.”

Erica tilted her head, her eyes squinting beneath furrowed brows. “There’s nothing wrong with our system. The manager told you that your meal would be on-the-house because of the multiple mistakes getting it out to you. You don’t have a bill for your meal.”

I didn't really know what to say or do, so staring at her while I tried to go over what she had said was the only option. None of that had happened. The only mistake was when we entered the diner, with the whole 'no children' thing they had going on.

And Erica had definitely just been telling me their system was down, which was why I was standing there. Standing there while she looked for how she was going to take my card payment. But, now? How do you even argue you need to pay your bill if someone is telling you that there is no bill?

"Okay then," I tentatively stated, turning to get Rosalyn so we could leave.

I only got a few steps as it fully registered that the booth was now empty. Not completely empty. My plate, cup and purse were all sitting near the stack of tarot cards - but, Rosalyn?

Rosalyn was not there.

Chapter Three

My heart was in my throat, and I was at the booth before I realized I even thought to move. She wasn't there. It was stupid to look under the table for a five-foot two child, but I did.

She wasn't there.

Spinning around, I started panicking. "My daughter."

The diners all glanced up and around, but no one said anything. No one got up to help me. No one seemed concerned, other than to give me strange looks. I did not care how crazy I seemed right then.

I had thought I almost lost her before. Not again.

Not. Again.

"She was - she was right there. Right there." I spun back to the table, pointing at it. "Did no one see where she went?"

They glanced at each other and then sighed, ignoring me. They just turned their backs? A child was gone! And they were ignoring me.

I turned towards the front door. But that was where I had been, right there the whole time. Rosalyn couldn't have gone out the front door without passing me. Not without me seeing or hearing her. I had been right there.

Restroom.

Taking a deep breath, I glanced around for the restroom. Rosalyn would definitely be telling me later that I made a scene over nothing. And I would remind her not to leave a room without telling me where she was going.

The restrooms were in the opposite corner across from where we had been sitting. Running across the diner, I knocked open the door to the women's restroom.

It was empty.

My heart started racing again, not that it had slowed down by much. Two stalls, both open. No one was in the restroom.

No.

No. This was not happening.

“ROSALYN!” I panic yelled, turning from the women’s room to head into the men’s.

Erica turned the corner into the restroom hallway and blocked my path.

“Ma’am, we need you to stop yelling. Stop making a scene - hey, stop, you cannot just barge into the men’s room.”

She tried to dance back and forth to block my path, and I pushed her aside. I was going to check every single room this diner had. No one was stopping me.

The door pushed open, and Erica tumbled onto my back.

Empty.

Erica was trying to say something. There was too much noise in my head. Fear. Panic.

It was empty.

“ROSALYN!”

I sprinted around Erica back into the diner, and now the other people were openly watching me.

“You all, you saw me come in with my daughter. Almost as tall as me.” I motioned to about eye level. “We were told to leave because you don’t allow kids. She was sitting right there. Across from me. Eating. The other man told us to go ahead and stay to eat.”

“Ma’am.” Erica grabbed my arms. “Ma’am, you came in here alone. There was no girl with you.”

“What? What - no. There was literally a whole thing about me having a child with me.” I took a step back and fell on my butt onto the booth seat.

“Ma’am, if you had someone with you, then why is there only one set of dishes at your table?”

They had to be kidding me. I knew I could be crazy...but not delusional. The normal amount of crazy. Skipping out on work to take your child on a road trip because the world exploded with magic and you needed time with your child, kind of crazy. Not - not make up a fictional child kind of crazy.

Pushing away from the table and skirting around Erica, I ran towards the front of the diner. To the big door near the register, the kitchen. If Rosalyn wasn't in the diner, hadn't left out the front door, wasn't in either restroom, and I could still see my empty vehicle outside - then the kitchen would be searched next.

“ROSALYN!” I yelled as I pushed through the kitchen doors.

It was mostly a big open space of a kitchen with a small island in the middle. I circled it just to be sure. Four men. No Rosalyn.

No. What was going on!?

I started swinging the cabinets and drawers open. It didn't matter that it was illogical for her to be in a drawer. My chest felt like someone was trying to break it open, and if I stopped searching, I didn't know what would happen. I just would not stop searching.

Rosalyn was here. I could feel it. I just knew she was here. I could worry about what was going on after I found her. I just had to find her. I wouldn't lose her.

Clutching at my chest as hot tears burned along my eyes, I took in the kitchen again. Everyone was shouting at me, but nothing was registering anymore.

I could only shout back at the voices. “Where is my daughter?!”

Just as two of the men started towards me, at Erica's insistence it seemed, I spotted a small door beside the door leading back into the diner.

Rushing towards it, I threw it open as everyone in the kitchen yelled and tried to grab me. I ran down the dark stairs

yelling for Rosalyn, the tears breaking free as the stairs took a turn and continued further.

What. The. Hell.

It wasn't even a cellar.

“ROSALYN!” I ran along the hallway that the stairs let out on.

There were random doors spaced on either side of the ridiculously large hallway. Jiggling handles as I went, only to find that they were locked, was not helping my panic.

“STOP. You cannot be down here. Did we call someone!? Get them here right now. She's not cooperating.”

I did not stop. All the better if they called the police. The police would help me find Rosalyn.

“ROSALYN!”

As I went to grab the next door handle, it pulled open and a rather huge man stepped out, gripping my arm. I looked up, and up, into the face of a very stern-looking man as he whipped me around to face my followers.

“Someone care to explain what is going on?” He shook my arm hard enough that my whole body jolted. “And how this happened?!”

“Sir. She was looking for her daughter.” Erica pushed forward, then cleared her throat. “I mean, she is looking for a daughter she believes she has.”

“No. No, I'm not crazy.” I tried to pry the man's hand off my arm, but it was like iron and starting to hurt. “Where the hell is Rosalyn?!”

The man gave me another shake, stopping my movements, gave an annoyed sigh, and then, “We'll fix it,” as he flung me across the hallway.

There wasn't enough time to brace myself, since I was suddenly flying. I crashed through the bookshelf that was on the other side of the hallway, and pain exploded across my body as I landed in another room.

All I heard, as the world went dark and silent, was,
“Where?”

Chapter Four

It felt like I had cotton in my ears, and my body was aching. Groaning, I tried to roll over as the sounds became clearer, and found I couldn't move.

Why couldn't I move? I was barely able to flex my fingers.

Wait. Something was...missing? I needed to find something? Someone?

"Daughter," I barely croaked out, blinking my eyes against the bright lights. The whole room was bright, blurry, and noisy.

"She's waking back up," came a voice from the left.

It was too bright in the room to keep my eyes open, but I turned my head towards the voice.

"Where is -" My mouth and throat felt dry, my voice sounded raspy. I tried to move anything, but I still couldn't. It also didn't help the pain that was slowly creeping across my body.

"Hey! Get that nurse back in here! She's coming to, again."

"What-" But there was a flurry of noise around me, and no one was listening. I groaned as I struggled to move again.

Someone, or someones, grabbed my arms, keeping me immobile as a mask was placed over my mouth and nose. Shaking my head did nothing except make me dizzy, and I didn't even know if there was as much effort trying to get free. Everything felt heavy and torturous.

And far away. Everything was fading, again.

Was I calling out? I wanted to call out. I felt like I was. I felt like I needed to.

"Did we find the father...the husband...inform...accident...trauma..."

I could feel myself popping in and out of some kind of awareness, but not fully conscious. My body wouldn't respond, or maybe I couldn't remember how to be, and I felt like I was straddling a deep sleep.

The dreams didn't make sense. Or maybe they did. Sometimes they felt more like nightmares and that my heart would explode because of how hard it was pounding. The blackness would sweep me under, and I couldn't always really remember why I was hurting when it would start to recede.

Until it happened again.

And again.

Chapter Five

We were at a school, or it may have been a school if not for the fact that it looked like a forest had overtaken it, and I couldn't find her. There were so many of us. All screaming names. I don't know who I was looking for. Just...find her.

The hallways became quiet and empty once I got inside, but I heard the footsteps behind me. It was an instinct not to let them get me. Just had to find her.

She was here. I knew she was. I could feel her presence. Every step I took, it became darker around me. They were going to keep me from her.

They took her from me. I just had to find her.

They wouldn't be able to keep me from her.

I'd know her when I found her.

One more corner.

A shadowed hand caressed my cheek, and I stumbled.

I tripped over a snaking root.

I fell.

The blackness swallowed me.

Chapter Six

I was reading a story to the toddler on my lap. She had a toy teapot on her lap with one hand holding her mini cup. We would turn a page, she would pretend to pour tea into the cup, and we would both pretend to take a drink before we continued to the new page.

“Salt in your tea?” she giggled, pointing at the sugar cups on the page

“Salt? No, silly girl.” I tapped her nose, causing her to giggle harder. “Those are sugar cubes. No one wants salt in their tea.”

“You do!”

“No, I don’t think I do.”

“You do, you do!” She insisted, wiggling her whole body in excitement.

“Why do I?”

“Because you love me!” She brought the teacup to my lips, and I laughed.

“Salt in my tea because I love you? Okay.”

After taking a pretend drink of an empty toy teacup, I kissed her forehead as she threw her arms around my neck, still giggling.

Then there were arms coming out of the darkness. There were too many. Too strong, as the hands grabbed at the girl in my lap.

“No!” she cried, clinging to my neck.

“Stop! Please. Stop,” I cried, trying to keep the girl against me.

It was just the two of us, in the middle of nothing. Shadows kept reaching out, pulling her away.

We were both crying, and she tried to wrap her small body around my middle. Grasping her tighter as she clung to me, I tried to move us away, but there was nowhere to go.

The shadowed hands pulled us apart.

And they took her.

They took her away from me as I screamed into the crashing darkness.

Chapter Seven

He was holding me against himself as we swayed under the stars. There were other couples in the clearing, and some among the tables outside the dancers. He leaned his head down, kissed my cheek and whispered in my ear. It sounded like he was talking through water because I didn't understand.

Looking up at his face, his black hair strayed over his honey colored, almond eyes. There was a slight tension there, even though they seemed to have a sparkle in them. He gave me a soft smile and lifted my left hand for a kiss before spinning me into the arms of another man.

Nearly as tall as the last, his burgundy hair barely ruffled as his head fell back with a laugh. He pulled me against his body, resting a hand on my back and one against the back of my head as I leaned it on his shoulder.

We danced slowly until someone stopped us for pictures. He walked me towards a table with a cake and kissed my forehead as we stopped in front of it. The honey-eyed man winked at me as he handed the man beside me a knife.

We were cutting the cake together.

The wedding cake.

The nothingness engulfed me as the man brought a small piece of cake towards my mouth.

Chapter Eight

There was a constant buzzing, sometimes they were in the background of voices. Even if I tried, or I thought I tried, to get them to hear me - nothing ever happened. Or maybe I wasn't speaking like I wanted.

"Doctor Sato, we've already spoken with Doctor O'Shea regarding Eleanor's condition. We agreed to transfer her care over to him, even though it would be preferable to have a better suited physician for -"

"Better suited?" a chuckle from a man that sounded younger than the first. "What exactly makes either of us less capable of helping her?"

"You know I mean no disrespect," the older man sputtered. "But, there is a conflict of interest."

"Conflict of interest?" another younger man's voice scoffed as the sound of a door closed. "Sato and I are more than capable of taking care of this. Actually, we are the ones best suited to handle this. My medical research and Sato's therapy alone would be enough."

There was a throat clearing and papers shuffling among the beeping and buzzing noises before anyone spoke again. I almost thought I was alone again. Being able to hear people but not make my body cooperate was only slightly better than being thrown into dreams and nightmares I didn't always remember when I came back around.

"Yes, well, of course," the older man said. "I look forward to hearing of the success in this matter."

There was the close of a door and then the shuffling of paperwork, again. Someone pulled a chair or something across the floor and plopped into it, making a huffing sort of noise.

"So, Oliver, the wifey is in a coma," the first man spoke, his voice coming from beside me. "What's the plan here?"

I felt sympathy for both Oliver and his wife. That wasn't something anyone should have to go through. Not knowing when they'll wake up. If they'll wake up. Because they're sleeping, or whatever coma people feel.

Sleeping because they cannot wake up.

Like I could not wake up.

Was I in a coma?

Who was Oliver?



“What are you doing?” It was one of those men from earlier.

Or was it earlier? The void came and went, but I didn't know if it was the same day, how long ago I last heard anyone, or how many dreams I tumbled through.

“I thought that if today was the day, Eleanor would probably appreciate having smooth legs,” came that other man's voice from somewhere really close.

The voice was really, really close, and there was a smoothing sensation along my right leg. My legs were wet. A hand lightly ran down my leg.

What was going on that my legs were wet? Were they always wet?

“Are you seriously shaving her legs, Jin?”

He sounded annoyed with Jin. But, also, honest question - why was this Jin shaving my legs? Who randomly decides to do that?

“I wasn't going to wax her legs while she slept. Just because she's not really here, I wasn't about to hope she didn't feel that pain.”

Then a towel was patting along my legs. Maybe it was nice to have someone else worry about removing my leg hair. Was it sweet he didn't want to torture me? Absolutely. Or annoying because he thought I was hairy? Possibly. But why was he even doing it to begin with?

“That wasn’t where I was going with that question,” the not-Jin said as a blanket was tugged over my body.

“We’re attempting to wake Eleanor out of the coma again.” My left hand was suddenly being held. “It seemed like a small thing to do for her if she wakes up, Oliver. Shaving and waxing takes time and energy, so one less thing for her to care about right now.”

“This is why people can’t take you seriously, Jin,” guess his name was Oliver, snapped. “Just start setting up while I get the serums in order for the drip.”

They were waking me up. Whoever these two were, Jin and Oliver, I was just glad that they were helping me. Obviously, one was also trying to make my life slightly easier by shaving my legs. Which did and didn’t make any sense, but I wasn’t complaining.

Not that I could complain. Not out loud, anyway. I had tried numerous times whenever I was in this semi-wake sense to talk to anyone, but nothing ever happened.

I didn’t know how much time was passing, but the hand left mine and all I could hear were the noises of things being moved or opened. Something cold began traveling along my veins and the quiet blackness washed over me again.

Chapter Nine

The lights were really bright. I tried to slowly blink, to adjust to the brightness, and paused. I could open my eyes. This felt like a big deal. Considering I couldn't remember when I last opened them, let alone blinking, it probably was an accomplishment.

“Hey, there you are, sweetheart.”

I slowly turned my head towards the voice. It sounded vaguely familiar. The man leaning over me did not look familiar, though.

He gave me a small smile and pulled a pen out of his lab coat. A doctor, based on the room and bed I was in, and how he was dressed in scrubs beneath the white coat.

“Take a few sips and then I'm going to check the eye responses, alright?” He held a foam cup with a straw out to me.

“Um, alright.” My voice sounded rough. And nothing like his. He sounded like he had a slight accent.

Slightly raising an eyebrow, he just seemed to stare curiously. Waiting.

“Well.” Sighing, he ran a hand along his jaw. “We were waiting for you to finally join us. Had us worried for a good bit.”

Pulling the cup closer, I took a long sip before I felt more comfortable in trying to speak again. “Thanks. I don't think I meant to make anyone worry.”

The doctor watched me for a few moments before taking the empty cup and placing it behind him. I didn't know what he wanted, but he looked disappointed in something.

“Okay, well, let's get to these checks.”

Shining a small flashlight at my eyes, he asked me to follow the light or his finger. He checked my pulse. Nothing was said

other than the few times he whispered, “Good.”

“Where am I?” I asked once he stepped away.

Before he could answer, the door swung open and another man in a doctor’s coat stormed in. The door closed with a loud bang, causing me to flinch back.

“Hey, not so -” the first doctor was cut off.

“What are you doing? Why didn’t you wait for me to get here?” the new doctor snapped out, then glanced at me before scowling at the other doctor.

Both doctors had the same lilt type of quality to their words, the same accent. Either I was in a strange place, more than just the hospital, or they were. It didn’t seem as if doctors would be the outsiders, so maybe I was traveling.

“She woke up when I came to check on her. I sent you a message. You’re here now. Chill. We have a bit more to explain, anyway.”

The newcomer looked like he wanted to argue, instead he brushed past to stand on the other side of my bed. He looked over the monitors that were to the side, behind my head.

“Uh, excuse me,” I tried again, slowly trying to sit up straighter. My body was stiff and thankfully, the first doctor raised the bed up more. “What’s going on? Or maybe where am I?”

The newcomer ran a hand over his face before giving the first guy a hard stare. “So, what have you done while she’s been awake?”

“Checked her over. I was going to wait for you for the rest.” The first guy took a seat beside me. “I’m Doctor Sato and your sunshine there is Doctor O’Shea. We’ve been the doctors overseeing you. Could you tell us the last thing you remember?”

Doctors that were overseeing me. I could gather they were doctors, and I was in a hospital room or something. That much was obvious. But I didn’t remember why I would need medical care. Especially if it would require a hospital stay.

“I was...” I stared down at the blanket, trying to remember anything from before opening my eyes in this room.

When did I last close my eyes? Where was I at when that happened? It had to have happened at my home - that was where you usually went to sleep?

Where was home?

Panic started to bloom, and it became difficult to breathe, as I realized I couldn't remember anything that would be relevant. There was nothing from before that could give me the answers I wanted. Just...nothing.

“Hey, sweetheart, it's okay. Breathe with me.” Grabbing one of my hands, Doctor Sato gently tapped it until I looked up at him.

He took a deep breath through his nose and slowly exhaled through his mouth. He nodded at me as he continued breathing until I was following along.

Doctor O'Shea gently lifted my other hand, pressing his fingers along the inside of my wrist.

“Just making sure your heart rate is still normal,” he said softly, then added a mumbled, “Since Jin decided to disconnect you from nearly everything.”

“Ignore him and just breathe for us until you feel calmer,” Doctor Sato smiled.

I only nodded and leaned back into the pillow. Right. I could handle this. We'd figure this out. Everything would be fine.

They both placed my hands back on the bed, and Doctor O'Shea took a seat beside me. The doctors stared at each other for a moment across the bed, a silent communication, before looking towards me.

“No memory of anything before now?” Doctor O'Shea asked.

“I don't know.” I wrapped my fingers into the blanket. “Everything is black. Blank. I only remember...just opening my eyes. But I had to have gone to sleep somewhere. Right?”

I could feel the panic rising again. This could not be happening. There had to be something I could remember before this place and this moment.

“It’s okay,” Doctor Sato said, patting my arm.

“Why can’t I remember anything?” I felt my eyes beginning to burn with tears.

Doctor Sato glanced over at Doctor O’Shea, who stood up and walked to the end of the bed. Doctor O’Shea closed his eyes briefly and then began pacing.

“Eleanor, you were rushed to the emergency room because you were in an accident,” Doctor Sato sighed.

Eleanor.

Eleanor was in an accident.

He said I was in an accident.

Eleanor.

“And I’m Eleanor?”

They both froze. Doctor O’Shea stopped pacing, turning to stare at me with a mixture of emotions. Doctor Sato had stopped rubbing my hand, and I wasn’t sure if he hadn’t started to breathe deeply himself now.

“You don’t know your name?” Doctor O’Shea came back to sit in the chair he had vacated. “So, when you say that you don’t remember anything, you mean absolutely nothing? Nothing about yourself.”

“We knew some amnesia would likely happen. Now we know the extent.” Doctor Sato ran a hand through his black hair. “And why she didn’t seem to recognize either of us.”

I looked between them. They said they were the doctors in charge of my care. Did I know them before this? Or maybe they were doctors of mine previously? Could be why they didn’t seem like the doctor types - with how they spoke to me and each other, trying to balance the line of professional and personal. I peered at them again, to see if staring gave me any notion of familiarity at all.

Doctor Sato had tousled black hair that almost touched the tips of his ears and swept across his left eyebrow. His almond-shaped, golden eyes kept glancing between Doctor O'Shea and me.

Doctor O'Shea had some sort of dark burgundy hair, more along the top of his head than the sides. He ran his hand over his face, momentarily covering his closely shaved beard and mustache. He was bouncing his hazel eyes between Doctor Sato and me, too.

They didn't look familiar. But, I didn't even know myself.

Literally.

"You told me who you were. Why would you do that if I knew you?" Pausing, I recalled what else was said. "And what accident?"

"You didn't appear to know who I was when you woke up, or after. So I was telling you who we are in relation to the medical situation, and if you did know," Doctor Sato gave a small shrug, "You would have said so before I gave you our names. Would have also been obvious from the beginning, really. We would have known you knew us by now."

I guessed that made sense. Not that it answered who they were to me or what happened for me to be in this situation.

"And, the accident?"

"Do you recall anything about any recent major news?" Doctor O'Shea asked after a slight moment of silence in the room.

"There was a death of a well-loved celebrity at the beginning of the year?" I closed my eyes to think it over. If I was even still in the same year anymore.

A celebrity had died within a month before she would be one hundred years old, and she had definitely been one of the golden staples. News didn't seem like it must have been too important if I could only remember a celebrity from the media.

The media.

The media with the cameras. With news being reported in the moment, in most cases, because people could record live wherever they were. Like, if something unnatural suddenly happened.

“Magic,” I whispered. I could feel my eyes going big as I searched the room for some kind of dangerous proof.

“There were witches. And all these different types of faeries.” Suddenly I felt like maybe I was in the hospital for being crazy. “They had some kind of war. Then they both disappeared a couple of months later.”

They both nodded, and I relaxed slightly. So I wasn’t in the hospital for imagining something completely insane.

“Yes. Well, do you remember anything about the portal traps?”

“The what?”

“There would sometimes, not too often, appear a doorway or hole out of nowhere. They were portals. The witches had apparently set a curse that would have any new portals collapsing into themselves. So, every time a faerie tried to create a new portal to hop on over to this side - it would implode.”

“Which was not the best for either side, really. The faeries probably regretted the decision of making a portal, and yet they obviously kept trying. All the random explosions are enough proof of that. But, then on this side, you could be injured for being where a portal popped up,” Doctor Sato continued when Doctor O’Shea had paused.

“That’s what happened.” Doctor O’Shea leaned his elbows on his legs. “You were out, and a portal opened in the road right in front of you. Knowing what we do about them, you were already too close to avoid it. Even if you had been further away, the things usually cover a whole block. Your vehicle was totaled. It rolled a few times and was crushed. And that is only because you may have been in the eye of the pulse. You were -”

Doctor O'Shea shook his head and looked up at the ceiling. No one else said anything. I don't think I could have said anything. That didn't sound like something someone survived. Not with the condition I was currently in. There weren't any casts or pain bad enough for me to place myself in the vehicle.

And I didn't remember any of that. I remembered the exploding gaping voids that would randomly pop up. They would frighten everyone every time they appeared. They would pop up, then about ten seconds later there would be this whirlwind and then it would explode.

One popped up in a house once. No one had been home, thankfully, but the house was rubble - except for the area in the kitchen where it had appeared. That looked like someone had tried to crush the kitchen.

"You were unconscious, barely breathing, when the ambulance arrived. They had to get a hydraulic cutter to remove you from your vehicle. You had a couple of fractures and a few breaks. A punctured lung. There were some other problems, too. So you were placed in a medical coma, and then you wouldn't wake from it," Doctor O'Shea continued, staring at the wall as he spoke.

I looked between them. There was no way that could have happened. Sure, I was stiff and sore. But, I wasn't in a broken kind of pain. There wasn't a cast on me. It takes time to heal bones.

Months.

This accident couldn't have been recent.

"How long ago did that happen?" I wasn't sure if they had heard me since it came out more whispered than I intended.

"It happened on May 20th," Doctor Sato said, when it looked like Doctor O'Shea would not answer. "Today is August 6th. Seventy-eight days ago."

Two months.

More than two months had gone by while I had been sleeping. And I couldn't remember what happened to me. Which was probably not something I wanted to remember,

honestly. But I was now missing over two months of time and everything else in my life that I couldn't remember.

"Two months?" I choked out, clutching at the blanket. "And I can't remember anything? Why am I still not broken?"

"The faeries didn't leave the world with all their belongings. We found some use in the medical field with things that were found. We had your bones healed within the first three weeks. But we think the trauma over everything kept you comatose. Your body's way of coping with everything," Doctor Sato said softly. "Since the accident, well, it also caused a miscarriage."

My hand automatically went to my stomach as I jerked back into the pillow. That couldn't have been true. I would have remembered being pregnant. That seemed like something you would remember. Almost having a baby.

A baby. My eyes started burning again as they watered, and my chest ached. My whole body felt like it was doused in ice, a numbness started to form.

I lost my baby? I could feel the pull on my heart, this felt too real. The pain and anxiety starting to course through me felt too raw.

"I was pregnant?" I barely got out as a tear fell free. There was a lump that felt like it was choking me. "Does the father know? Oh God, I don't remember..."

Doctor Sato gently rubbed my back as I brought my hands over my face once the tears overwhelmed me. I might be alone. I didn't ask if I had any family. How was I even going to get in contact with anyone if I didn't know who I was? Who they were? I wouldn't know who I could call, or should call. Was someone missing me?

A throat was cleared before I could dwell any further, and then Doctor O'Shea was gently pulling my hands down.

"Eleanor, my name is Oliver. That's my friend, Jin. Our friend," he said, lightly holding one of my hands. "And you're Eleanor O'Shea. My wife."

"Just out like that? Really man?" Doctor Sato, Jin, shook his head slowly.

Surely I didn't hear him correctly. I couldn't even know for sure if he was being serious. It had made little sense for a doctor to lay out everything that had happened to me and then end with that.

"Excuse me?" I nearly stuttered while blinking through the tears.

I pulled the blanket up to my chest, like it would block out any more confusion. Or protect me from my running thoughts. Too much had just been told to me. Too much to fully process.

Doctor O'Shea, Oliver, sighed. "It's been a rough couple of months. But, between the two of us and our teams, we fixed everything that we could. And we'll work with the amnesia."

"You just told me that I was in a nearly life-ending situation, that I was pregnant, was broken, asleep for over two months, and now - Now, we're also married?" I rambled, looking between them. "But, you're my doctors?"

"Doctors can get married," Jin smirked, and then turned to Oliver, "Talking is my thing. I'll calm her down."

"Calm me down?" I wanted to do something. Anything. I felt this need to just take some kind of action.

Anything. I wanted to lie back down and cry. I wanted to yell at them. Was there a reason to be angry at them? I was just suddenly angry. And confused. And hurting.

"We've never had to mix our professions with something that would be personal. Or this intense. We may have gone about addressing you less like we should have. It just hit a few personal buttons," Jin sighed, standing up.

Oliver pulled a folder from a rack beside the door and started flipping through the pages. Jin refilled the foam cup and handed it back to me.

"Amnesia isn't too common for us, but it isn't the first time we've worked together for a patient. We would have taken over this case, anyway. I tend to work more on the talking through, dealing with the emotions, in a more therapy sense. As a psychiatrist. And Oliver," he motioned toward the man behind him.

“I am mostly a neuroscientist,” Oliver stated, walking over to hand the folder to Jin. “Dabble in genetics, when the need arises.”

“And we’re,” I started, unsure of everything right now.

“And we’re married.” Oliver gave a small nod. “And now that we know the extent of the amnesia, Jin and I will work out a medical plan. One that can be an outpatient case. We’ll have you discharged in forty-eight hours.”

“We’ll leave you alone now. You should rest,” Jin said as they walked towards the door. “Doubt you want us to, so a nurse will be in later to remove the catheter. And do other fun stuff, too.”

“We’ll be back to check on you,” Oliver nodded at me.

With a wink from Jin, they closed the doors and left me alone. I pressed an arrow button on the side of the bed to get it to recline back again. Pulling the blanket up to my chin, I closed my eyes as the tears took over.

They truly just dropped all that on me, and then left. Things that I should have already known. Things I would have known if not for nearly dying. One of my hands pressed against my stomach. Maybe it was for the best if I couldn’t remember everything. I didn’t want to know how much worse this ache would be if I could remember.

Chapter Ten

A nurse, Amara, came in not long after they had left, and removed the catheter. That was uncomfortable enough, without having to realize that my legs felt stiff when she helped me shuffle-walk to my room's bathroom.

Amara had a shower seat already waiting in the shower stall and helped me bathe. By 'helped me', she basically washed me on her own because the walk to the bathroom had been draining. I didn't realize how much the shower was making me feel slightly normal.

Of everything, being awake was surreal. I literally didn't know what I was missing. Because I couldn't remember anything.

It was hard not to dwell and sink into myself during the next two days. There was a constant stream of nurses either to help me to the restroom or to help me stretch my muscles. I was told that they exercised what they could while I was asleep, but there's only so much you can do for sleeping muscles. And, apparently, some kind of faerie lotion was some kind of miracle drug.

Oliver and Jin would stop by with food, more often Jin, but never stayed for too long. They did try to help fill in some missing memories. It seemed Oliver and Jin were from close Irish families that had transplanted to South Carolina. Both were born here, but being raised among pure Irish families and constantly visiting Ireland - they had that slight accent.

They said we had met while in middle school, and according to Jin, that I was completely boring as cultures went - which is why I did not have any accent. But I somehow wormed myself into their friendship.

We were all extremely close, and then Oliver and I started dating my sophomore year when they were juniors. Jin said that I made Oliver wait until we both completed four years of

college, even though Oliver proposed my first year and wanted to get married two years in.

These were things that, while interesting to learn, I wished I could remember. It was like a story being told to me, not something that involved me. They each promised that they would help me transition and work with my amnesia. The amnesia, and everything that caused it, only made me feel sad. Not that that was a strong enough word for the fathom ache I felt.

The morning of being discharged came, and I was met by Jin as he came into my hospital room with a small overnight bag with a change of clothes for me. Leaving me to change, he went to get the discharge paperwork processed.

Getting out of the hospital gown was promising, even though it was now the only thing that was familiar to me. As sad as that was. It was probably the anxiety of stepping out, back into my world - a life I couldn't remember, that had me counting to five before unzipping the bag.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I pulled the bag onto my lap and peered inside. Clothes weren't scary, so there was no reason to be apprehensive. Except, even the clothing looked foreign to me.

I couldn't even recognize my clothing.

With a sigh, I pulled out the clothes and dropped the bag beside me. A simple pink top and black leggings had been wrapped around matching navy lace undergarments. The question came to mind of who had packed the bag Jin had brought.

Even knowing, or at least being told, that Oliver was my husband didn't make it feel less awkward for some reason. And, if packing my clothes was awkward - I really hadn't thought about living with him.

I was moving in with a stranger. Well, no, I already lived there. Before. Only it was new. Again. Starting over in a home that I couldn't remember, with a husband I didn't know.

“Hey, what happened?” Jin was suddenly crouching in front of me.

He slowly reached for my hand, giving it a small squeeze. I hadn’t heard him come into the room, and I wasn’t even changed yet.

“Sorry.” I held up whatever clothing piece I was clinging to. Which ended up being the bra. “I started having some minor anxieties.”

“About a bra?” He looked like he was holding back a smile.

Groaning, I let my head fall into my hands and mumbled, “No. Well, yes. It opened the thought process. We’re strangers and I don’t know how to be - me? I guess.”

Jin pushed the bag up off the bed and sat beside me.

“Help me follow your train of thought. I left you to get changed. What happened to get us here?”

“Nothing, it’s fine. I’m fine.” I took a deep breath and sat straighter. It wasn’t a lie, I would be fine. Just had to keep reminding myself that I would be fine. “It was just a weird moment.”

“This may be a weird situation, for all of us, but I am here to help you. I’m here as both your friend, and as your doctor, you know.” He gently nudged my shoulder with his. “I am literally here for you to talk to. So, talk to me?”

How did you tell someone that you didn’t know, but apparently knew you, that everything just felt ‘off’? And that, that ‘off’ feeling was because you didn’t know how to be yourself.

That thinking of even getting dressed into clothing that should be your’s was weird because it felt like putting on a stranger’s clothing.

Was the pink shirt a favorite of mine? Did I like leggings because they were comfortable, or did I wear them to exercise? Were the lace bra and panties a romantic gift either for or from Oliver, or did I enjoy lace under-things?

“You did say something about you being a therapist.”

When I noticed Jin's nod from my side, I closed my eyes and said, "Looking at the clothes made everything a bit more real. I don't recognize these. Are they my everyday clothes? Is pink my favorite color? Do I do yoga?"

There didn't seem to be a less awkward way to ask about the underwear, so I didn't mention them. Jin was Oliver's friend. He was my friend. I didn't know how close of a friendship we had, other than what little background I was told. How would I know, in my current state, if Jin was ever asked for opinions on gifts of the lingerie type.

"Ah. One day, one moment, at a time. That's how we, you, are going to handle this. I have full confidence that Oliver and I will get you to a point where you feel more at ease with yourself."

Jin stood up and pulled me off the bed with him. He grabbed the clothing and neatly separated them.

"For some reason, you have more professional or business type clothing in your wardrobe. Probably Oliver's doing. Anyway, I traded out the conference room outfit that was originally packed, with this set." He motioned to the outfit.

"When given the time, you are more comfortable in clothing that is easy to relax in. Which is what the majority of people prefer. Which doesn't really add up to the slightly nicer underwear set, but sometimes something nice makes you feel a tad more secure about yourself."

Grabbing at my clothing with one hand, Jin shooed me towards the bathroom with the other. Once I got to the door, I turned to find Jin right behind me with my clothes held between us.

His eyes roamed my face a second before he spoke again. "How are you feeling about getting dressed now? Think you can manage on your own?"

"Better. I think."

When one of Jin's eyebrows arched slightly in question, I just gave a small smile and took the clothing from him.

“I mean, I don’t currently feel as anxious over clothing.” I stepped back into the bathroom. “No promises about later, though.”

“One moment at a time, sweetheart.” Jin smiled and turned back to the room, leaving me to shut the door to change.

I could do that. One moment at a time. Although, I had a feeling that maybe I wasn’t a ‘go with the flow’ type of person. If this was a restart in my life, I would have to learn to take each day as it came.

“You can do this, Eleanor,” I whispered to myself as I changed. “We’ll be fine.”

Jin was leaning against the hospital room’s door, tapping on his phone, when I came out of the bathroom. At the sound of the door closing, he tucked his phone in his pocket and smiled. “Feel better?”

“I think I feel strange.” I ran my hands along my sides, feeling nervous about leaving. “But, maybe better also.”

“It’s a start. Slip your shoes on, I’ll grab the bag, and we can head to Oliver’s place,” he paused and took a pair of flats from the bag before flinging it over his shoulder. “Your place.”

Sliding my shoes on, Jin’s words seemed to register more. “Is Oliver not coming to get me?”

I didn’t know him well enough to understand the twinge of disappointment. Or maybe it would have been more normal to feel some disappointment in not having your husband take you home from the hospital after months of being in a coma.

“He got busy running tests at the lab.” Jin moved to open the door, ushering me out of the room. “Oliver doesn’t trust anyone other than himself when it comes to working in direct contact with any of your samples.”

“Oh! Doctor Sato, I didn’t know you would be stopping by today.” A nurse popped up from behind a desk. Pausing, her eyes quickly roving over the both of us. “Are you leaving?”

Jin motioned to me. “We just discharged my reason for my constant disturbance. Now you guys won’t have to listen to me

complaining about the lack of a truly comfortable chair. Or better reading material.”

Frowning, the nurse leaned closer. “But you are going to Amy’s engagement party this weekend? It would be a good place to get any contact information from anyone that you don’t have. You never know when you may want to give someone a call, and then you find out you don’t have their number.”

“Luis mentioned the party.” Placing his hand along my back, Jin directed us toward the elevator. “I’ll see what I have going on, but I may be busy. Everyone knows I’m about ten minutes away, not that I see another emergency. You all know where my office is located.”

“Oh, okay, well hopefully you can make it.” She gave a small wave as the elevator doors opened. “I’m sure Doctor O’Shea is happy to have his wife out of here, too.”

“I mean, I think I’m a little apprehensive about it.” I hadn’t realized I had spoken aloud until Jin rubbed my back with a chuckle as the nurse snapped her eyes to me.

Jin gave a quick wave before pressing the button labeled “P” as the doors closed. We rode the elevator nine floors to a garage, and new scents assaulted my nose. I suddenly realized how much the hospital smelled cold and chemical-y, and now I was smelling exhaust and humidity. Clean, fresh air felt like such a simple and strange thing to look forward to.

Pulling his phone from his pocket, Jin tapped at the screen while guiding me to a silver SUV. “Oliver asked me to keep him updated,” he stated as he opened both the passenger and backseat door, placing the overnight bag in the back.

I slid into the front seat as he walked around the vehicle. After he got settled into his seat and started the ignition, I asked something that had just occurred to me. “Where’s my phone? Or do I not have one?”

Jin snorted. “This day and age, it would be very rare to find an adult without a phone. More and more children have cell phones than even a decade ago. But, I believe Oliver got

everything that was with you...before,” he side-eyed me, his ‘before’ meaning the accident. “Cell and purse will be at the house. I didn’t think to bring them with me. There didn’t seem to be a reason.”

There didn’t seem to be a reason, since I didn’t know anyone in my life, he meant. I probably didn’t know the passcode to unlock my phone, so hopefully it would unlock with my fingerprint. There wouldn’t even be a way for me to answer security questions. They reminded me of my name a couple of days ago.

“We’ve got about twenty minutes to the penthouse, and instead of letting you sit in silence and unnerve yourself, we’re going to play a game.”

I glanced over at him, unsure and slightly curious. “What kind of game?”

“Something to get to know each other better, a would-you-rather question game.”

“You already know me, though.”

Jin grimaced quickly before he shrugged and grabbed a bottle from the middle console. “Right now, we’re strangers. Yes? Regardless of the past, no matter what I tell you - you don’t know me. And the same is true that I don’t truly know the Eleanor beside me. Even if I wish I did.”

True. What he was saying made sense, because it was the truth. I didn’t know him. I knew his name, occupation, an approximate age - mid thirties? - and that he was my husband’s and my friend. The husband that was also unknown to me.

He pulled another bottle from beside him and offered it to me. Twisting the cap off, I nodded at him and took a small sip. Water. Not sure what I was expecting, but it was appreciated.

“Okay. But, how am I supposed to answer questions?”

Jin’s only reaction was to arch an eyebrow in question.

“I can’t even tell you my birthday. How am I supposed to answer ‘this or that’ questions? What if I choose something

that I'm allergic to?"

"You're thinking too hard about it, sweetheart. First, these aren't questions that are going to come into existence or come true. I mean, they usually don't, anyway. If I said I would choose to get hot coffee poured on me rather than swim with sharks, does not mean it's going to happen.

"And, the point of the exercise. Game. Is that we're not going to think over the question too long. Just go with whatever your gut, feelings, or instinct leans to at the moment. There isn't any meaning behind the answers. This is a friend session and not a Doctor Sato one."

Right. At the moment. One moment at a time. I was overthinking a silly game. This would be fine. And it would pass the time.

"Alright, I can do that. We can start?"

With a chuckle, Jin said, "That's my girl. Lady's first. Ask me a 'rather' question."

Why was choosing something to ask so daunting? I bit the corner of my lip as I thought. "Uh...tea or coffee?"

"That's an 'or' not a 'rather'." Shaking his head, he added, "And you didn't even go for an alcoholic choice. Depends on the tea, and then it also depends on the coffee. Type, temperature, who made them. Okay. Coffee. It can make people more pleasant to deal with."

"Because of them drinking it, or you?"

"Both," he smiled. "Coffee has tamed wild beasts. And now it is your turn to answer."

Jin tapped a finger along the gear shift. He glanced at me before canting his head with a small laugh. "Tea or coffee?"

"You said it wasn't a 'rather' type of question."

"I did. But, I still answered."

"Coffee." Even though it seemed like a surprise that that was my answer, I hadn't thought it over, but it felt true.

"Oh? Any reason? Or can we start, eh restart, coffee dates?"

So Jin and I had coffee outings. This was something I would have to ask Oliver - was he also a coffee drinker, or did he order tea while we got the coffee?

“You said that it tames wild beasts.”

“That I did.” He nodded and rolled a hand in my direction. “Next question.”

“Gas or groceries?”

“Gas.” Tapping the side of the steering wheel, he added, “I could just eat Oliver’s food. Okay, a trip on the Titanic or vacation at Pompeii?”

“Is Pompeii before or after the destruction?”

“So that history wasn’t affected, interesting.” Jin stated.

“You said you were in friend mode.”

“Can’t blame me for storing information. It’s still a valid question. I’d go with Titanic, just to see if I would have made a difference. Let’s say, choosing between Titanic and leaving before it sank, or Pompeii vacation until the ash started falling.”

One disaster over another, before their demise. Two different time periods. Two different sceneries. Two different civilization types. Not that Titanic was a civilization.

“Don’t overthink it, remember.”

“Pompeii, I think more ancient times would have been interesting to observe. Togas...” I paused. I wasn’t really sure why ‘togas’ felt like it was tugging at a memory, but it was causing a feeling.

That feeling of searching for a word, knowing the word, and it just wouldn’t come to you. And ‘togas’ was such a random thing to cause that reaction. I couldn’t even remember where my train of thought was going with the word to have a sentence.

I turned my focus out the window, trying to concentrate. Togas. Sometimes you could throw a sheet around you and pretend it was a toga. But that wasn’t it. Halloween, people

dressed up. Maybe it was a Halloween memory trying to come back.

“Elle?” I hadn’t realized that Jin had placed the side of his hand against my leg and was nudging it. “Where’d you go?”

Turning towards him, I gently shook my head and ran a hand down my face. I wasn’t able to clear the fog. “I thought maybe I had a memory.”

Jin shifted slightly in his seat as we turned into an underground parking area. “Well, our goal is to work on those memories. What were you remembering?”

“I wasn’t remembering. Or, at least I don’t remember. It felt like I should remember something.” I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. “It’s confusing. I don’t know what I was trying to remember. Togas made something try to wake up in my memory, maybe. For all I know, I dressed in a toga one Halloween.”

“It’s okay if you don’t remember. These things take time, and you honestly have the best doctors working with you.” Jin winked at me as he parked the vehicle in a ‘Reserved: Suite 500’ parking spot near elevator doors.

“Just be sure to always let me, or Oliver, know if you remember anything. As far as togas go, I would remember if I had seen you in one. That is not something I have yet to see. And Oliver isn’t here yet. He should have already been here.”

The parking spaces on either side of us were empty, both with ‘Reserved’ signs. One of the signs had ‘Oliver O’Shea’ under the ‘Reserved,’ while the other had ‘Suite 500’ like the one Jin had parked in.

I slid out of the vehicle while Jin walked around and grabbed the bag from the backseat. The parking area was large, and plenty of spaces between the different ‘Reserved’ sections. It looked clean and bright. Which seemed like it should be important, so you didn’t have to worry about any horror movie moments.

“Come on, let’s get you settled in and I’ll give the good doctor a quick call.” He pressed the call button for the elevator

and, once inside, swiped a card near a screen. The elevator buttons were beneath the touch screen display. Jin pressed the button '5' and pressed his thumb to the screen when it flashed.

"This seems like a lot of work to get an elevator moving." I tilted my head, watching the screen display the weather for the rest of the day and then for the rest of the week.

"You have to be granted access to the elevator. There are ways around that, of course. Which involves security. Once you slide your access card, it locks the elevator, so no one tries to go with you while also acknowledging you are granted access to use the elevator without help. Then you pick your floor and it needs to get your print to make sure you aren't using someone else's card to get into someone's home."

The doors slid open unto a large foyer type area that looked like a miniature waiting room. Only there was only one large window and seemed to have a few different doorways. The double doors in front of us had a teal credenza beside it with mail on top.

"Door nearest the elevator is the stairs. You only can access your own floor, the first floor lobby, the parking area, and the roof from those. All other doors to other floors are locked, unless you have your key in hand." He motioned behind us, and then towards the far left wall.

"Those are the stairs that the building staff and deliveries use." Jin used one hand to point to the right while sliding a card along a reader beside the double doors. "Those are the backup emergency stairs, only they lead into the backyard and not the parking garage. An access code can be used to get into the building, and into whichever floor the access code opens a door to."

He pushed open one of the double doors and motioned me inside. There was a lot to take in just from the doorway. I hadn't realized I had been hoping that it would feel familiar until I felt the hope sinking. It was open and felt homely - but it was like walking into a new house. There was no familiarity.

Walking further inside the entry, I glanced down a hallway to my right and saw an edge of a table or desk in the room at

the end. There was an island further in front of me, which Jin placed a bottle on before turning back to me.

“It’s a pretty easy layout, since it’s open. The door to the left of the living room is the master room.” He started moving towards said door, swinging the bag off his shoulder. “I’ll take your medicine out and put this back in the closet. You explore your new home. I mean, it’s currently new to you.”

With a quick shake of his head, Jin disappeared into the master bedroom, leaving me to take in the open space.

The kitchen had marble countertops, white cabinets and drawers, and sleek black appliances. The four island chairs had white upholstery and golden legs. Even the table to the left looked sleek, and too big for only two people.

The black table had eight chairs that matched the ones at the island, only normal height. There looked to be a mini drink bar set against the wall behind the table.

That looked like something to examine closer. I couldn’t remember if I drank alcohol, or a preference of type, but it was in my house...

Maybe it would help my nerves if I started feeling too anxious.

Walking past the table, I placed my hands on the back of a navy blue sofa. A very long sofa. It was twice my height, easily fitting five or six people. There was a matching oversized round chair on either side, with a coffee table at their center.

The couch faced a mostly brick wall that had a black entertainment center against it, a sliding glass door off to the right. A curved television was in the middle of the entertainment center. Which was strange to look at. I’d never seen a curved television before.

Or, okay, obviously I had. It was at my house. Nothing was actually new. Another thing I had to remember.

So strange to not know something that I had known before. It was confusing and frustrating.

“Oliver said that he got caught up and should be leaving soon.” Jin strolled out of the room and plopped down on the couch. “So I’ll keep you company until he shows up. You can go explore your room and I’ll pull up ‘Nailed It.’ That is always fun to watch.”

Oliver hadn’t visited the hospital as often as Jin had, and he hadn’t been the one to bring me home either. Surely Oliver wasn’t the only one that was busy between the two of them. I stopped at the bedroom door and looked back at Jin.

“I’m sorry if I kept you from any work you may have had today. Maybe it would have been easier on Oliver and you if I had stayed at the hospital until a more convenient time.”

Jin snapped his head towards me, furrowing his brows. “There was no medically necessary reason for you to stay there any longer. I happened to have the day off today, and Oliver can get a little obsessive and sidetracked when he’s working on something important. If he wasn’t working directly with your blood samples today, he would have been quite, annoyingly, punctual. Please, do not think that you are any kind of inconvenience to either of us.”

Chewing on the edge of my lip, I nodded and walked into the bedroom. My room. Our room, really. Oliver’s and mine. I would probably, most definitely, snoop around that bar area later. Our bedroom.

Except, the room I walked into looked like a mini library with an arched opening on the other side. There were floor to ceiling windows along the right wall, with a full wall of white bookcases -complete with rolling ladder- along the left. A purple chaise lounge sat between two gray oversized chairs in the center of the area.

This was a room I wanted to stay in. Maybe find an alcohol I liked, sooner, to bring in here and stay. Especially whenever it rained. That sounded very relaxing.

And instead of getting lost in examining all the books, I continued toward the archway. Not an easy choice to make. But, I would have more time to explore the books if I finished with the bedroom.

Maybe I liked books. There was a comfort that I felt in that room. Both familiar and not, at the same time. I felt drawn to the books.

Books.

Books. There was a story I was waiting for.

“Another six months until it’s released...” I whispered, stumbling forward. My head felt fuzzy and my heartbeat sped up.

I didn’t know why I said that. No, I did. It was about a book. A memory? No, I couldn’t actually remember anything.

I took a deep breath and leaned my forehead against the arch frame. This was fine. I was trying to remember something, and Jin said it might not be easy. He hadn’t said it may have a physical reaction, though.

Six months until a book was released. I would definitely have to reread the series, since I didn’t even know what I was waiting for a release of. Maybe it wasn’t a series. It may not have been an important moment and was completely random.

That thought barely passed before I whispered, “How am I supposed to read it if it isn’t out yet?”

Opening my eyes, I ran a hand down my face. “I don’t know why I said that.” I confessed to myself. Looking over the books, I took a deep breath, turned, and walked into the next room.

The books were definitely a trigger for memories. Nothing concrete, and nothing that made sense. Which made me apprehensive about the room now. Remembering things shouldn’t be a cause for concern, and yet now I was a little terrified.

“I was doing better. Thanks, books,” I said. Then the rush hit again. “Feel like we won’t have the time to truly enjoy a book right now.”

Again.

Why did I say that? That was the third time now that I spewed a complete sentence without consciously meaning to.

It felt like I was repeating something I had heard.

Something I had heard before.

The more I tried to follow the thought that I had heard it before, the more my head pounded. I pressed my fingers against my temples to relieve some of the pain.

“Eleanor?” I barely heard Jin’s voice from beside me.

I squinted my eyes open and tried to figure out when Jin had come in. Tried to figure out when I had closed my eyes, and when I ended up on the floor, were also things I didn’t know.

“What’s wrong, Eleanor?” He kneeled beside me, taking one of my hands from my head.

“Head,” I gasped out. “Pain.”

He gently held my wrist. “Your pulse is beating a little too fast.”

It looked like his eyes were roaming over my face, but I was barely keeping my eyes open enough to focus. His expression seemed to shift between concern and anxious.

“You were remembering something.” It wasn’t a question.

“No.” I winced at my voice echoing in my ears. The pain was receding, but still there. “Or I don’t know if I did. When I tried to remember - whatever it was - this happened.” I motioned vaguely to myself.

“So you don’t remember anything?” Jin released a deep breath as he helped me to sit up.

“No, and I don’t think I’m looking forward to remembering much, if this is the outcome.” I brought my knees up to my chest and sighed.

That wasn’t pleasant.

Chapter Eleven

Jin led me to the massive bed and had me sit down. “I’m going to get the medicine from your bathroom. Don’t move.” He closed his eyes and squeezed my hand for a moment, before quickly heading to the open doorway further down the wall from the archway.

At least the pain was a low thumping, and my heart didn’t feel like it was speeding anymore. My body tingled slightly, traveling from the hand Jin had squeezed. It felt like I was starting to relax, my mind calming.

I moved back against the pillows, my eyelids feeling heavy suddenly, when Jin came out of the bathroom.

“Two pills,” he said, setting them in my palm. “One for pain and one to help with the memories.” He held out a small plastic cup once I put the pills in my mouth. “They make you a little drowsy. We’re working on that.”

Drinking the pills down with the water, I tried not to let it bother me. I didn’t need to be drowsy. I already was feeling tired, probably from the minor attack of a memory incident, but I didn’t want extra sleep.

I had already slept for a couple months straight.

“I don’t want to sleep right now.” Moving my legs off the bed felt like wading through water.

Shaking his head, Jin blew out a breath. “Look, I understand. I do. But, as a concerned friend, that is also your doctor - I’m telling you, you should take a nap. Don’t give me a scowl, Eleanor.”

The scowl hadn’t registered until he mentioned it. My body felt...loose. Which was weird. The connection between thinking about doing something and it getting done was lagging. I tried to brush his hand away as I braced a hand on the nightstand to steady myself as I tried to stand.

“You really are going to be stubborn, aren’t you?” Jin stepped back, crossing his arms. “Fine, I won’t lock you in here. Mostly because I give you only ten minutes before you’re out. So, do you want pajamas before you pass out, or just to get to the couch so you can pass out there?”

Rolling my eyes, I slowly stood up. Teetered and had to shake my head to clear the fog creeping over me. That drowsy was hitting fast. This felt stronger than just being drowsy. “I’m...fine.” I reached an arm out to Jin, having an odd faith that he would help.

“You are going to cause so much more trouble for us,” he sighed. He still wrapped an arm around my waist, letting me stumble-walk back to the living room.

It was more of Jin letting me think I was walking to the other room. In reality, I don’t think my feet touched the floor once we started moving. Fighting off the sleep that was clawing at me felt strange and different.

If I hadn’t decided before, I realized I did not like the side effects of medicine. Or, at least this side effect. Even trying to fight it off was making my energy crash.

I nearly fell over on the couch when Jin released me. The couch was so comfortable. It was soft, too. I tried to lie down, but I’m pretty sure I just fell sideways from the snort of laughter I heard nearby.

“What are you doing?” an amused Jin questioned.

“Finding a soft, comfortable, warm spot for me,” I murmured, scooting my body further down the couch. “My head feels too heavy. And light.”

A blanket was suddenly thrown over my body, hands grabbing at my feet. I tried to kick my legs, but I didn’t know if it was working. And I couldn’t see what was going on.

Another chuckle came from somewhere, closer this time. “Open your eyes. I’m not attacking you, just trying to get your shoes off. You’re being more of a worm and doing a horrible job trying to kick me. You’re muttering your thoughts out loud. And honestly, this is amazing.”

My shoes made a small thumping noise as they hit the floor, and then my head was being lifted. “I’m not sleepy. And I don’t like medicine.” It came out sounding slurred, even to my fuzzy ears.

“Of course you’re not,” Jin whispered, kissing the top of my head and running a hand through my hair. “I’m not attacking you, just going to massage your temples to help ease any remaining pain.”

My head was in his lap, that was why my body felt smaller than my head. Did heads feel bigger if they were laying flat with the body? This medicine was crazy. Or maybe my body was crazy.

“I don’t like medicine,” I mumbled again, closing my eyes. Jin’s fingers were soothing the aches along my head, helping my body to relax.

Relax too much.

“I’m sorry, we’re trying to help. We’ll work on the medicine,” Jin’s voice floated through the darkness. “Although this was really amusing.”



I tilted my head up, trying to see who I was leaning into. Their arms loosened as they pulled slightly away and honey-brown eyes stared down at me. I knew these eyes.

Jin.

“You made it through the ceremony, sweetheart, so why do you look worried? No tripping, stumbling, stuttering, mumbling, running, vomiting and whatever else you were afraid would happen. Oh, fainting. You didn’t faint.”

He pulled my hand above my head, slowly spinning me beneath our hands. There were people dancing around me, and others further out sitting at tables. The white hem of my dress flaring out made me glance down at myself.

A white wedding gown.

“We got married?”

Jin laughed, kissed my temple, and pulled me back against him. "Don't tell Oliver that you're already wishing it were me. Maybe you've had too many congratulatory champagne drinks."

I didn't think I liked champagne. But, I couldn't remember. Having too many didn't constitute actually having to like it. The voice behind me made me realize I had spoken aloud.

"No," was the chuckle. "Champagne isn't your go-to."

"And I will leave you in the hands of your husband. Oliver and Eleanor. Husband and wife. I need to go find something stronger to drink now."

Jin stepped away from me, holding one hand to his lips before winking and heading away from us. Arms wrapped around my waist from behind, and I felt my body relax against Oliver. It just happened, like it was supposed to.

"Wife. I don't know if it makes me happier to know that you're my wife, or that I'm your husband. However, would you like to know the conclusion I've come to? It's very important."

His hands lightly skimmed up my side and then slowly down my arms. Goosebumps were popping up, and I felt my cheeks heat before his breath tickled my ear.

A small shiver worked across my skin when his lips pressed against my neck. My head tilted to the side, and I felt his smile on my neck.

"What conclusion? What's so important right this second?"

Oliver twined one hand with mine and brought it against my stomach, resting his other hand on my hip.

"It is very important that I get this dress off you this very second." His thumbs kept circling, and there might as well not have been a dress there from the heat I could feel from his hands.

I spun around, draping my arms around his neck, and stared into his hazel eyes. The green in his eyes seemed to twinkle brighter as I moved closer, our lips inches apart.

“So, husband, how do you think that will work out being in the middle of a dance floor at the reception of our wedding?”

Oliver pulled me tighter against his body, raising an eyebrow as he skated a hand further down my back.

“My conclusion is that you are a genius and I agree we should leave this party early.”

Before I could say anything, Oliver pulled away slightly, keeping a hand entwined with mine. “Attention, please!”

I spotted Jin near the bar area, shaking his head and then throwing back a shot of something. He gave us a thumbs-up and then grabbed a microphone from behind the counter.

“I think the newlyweds are trying to run off,” Jin spoke into the microphone, walking back towards us. He handed it off to Oliver.

“Yes. Thank you to everyone that came out today. Eleanor and I both offer our gratitude and love.” Oliver smiled at me. “However, my wife and I have decided to leave now for our honeymoon. Eleanor?”

“Thank you? Have fun. Bye?” I added, with a small wave.

Oliver tossed the microphone to Jin and then scooped me into his arms. I laughed as he nearly jogged off with me.

He placed me back to the ground when we reached the limousine in front of the wedding venue. Tucking my skirts around me, I shuffled into the back and breathed out a sigh of relief to finally be sitting down.

“To the airport, and put some earbuds in,” Oliver called to the driver and quickly shut the partition.

Oliver dropped to the floor in front of me and dug my feet out from under the dress. Unclasping my heels, he slid them off my feet and gave them each a quick rub, having me closing my eyes in bliss.

“Those weren’t the moans I was after,” he said, pressing his lips against the inside ankle. “But it’s a start.”

He slowly rolled my dress to my thighs, sliding his hands against my skin until he had his hands along my panties.

Chapter Twelve

There was no way that I was pregnant. Well, no, there was definitely a way that I could be pregnant. But, I was not pregnant.

That was the point - not being pregnant. So, buying a pregnancy test should not have caused this much anxiety, knowing that I wasn't pregnant.

I was buying it to prove that I wasn't pregnant. It was flu season. It was just another symptom of being sick, by getting nauseous whenever I smelled food. And that even water was making me queasy.

It was all a weird symptom of having the flu. That was it. But I had to make sure. Either way, I would know eventually.

But I knew I wasn't pregnant.

Just needed to pee on the stick that was lying on the bathroom counter. I couldn't see it anymore, since I was sitting on the bathroom floor because it made it easier to breathe without getting lightheaded.

Taking another deep breath, I slowly stood and grabbed the test. Tackle everything one step at a time. Step one was to pee on the stick.

Deciding against closing my eyes, I took the test and then laid the test on top of the empty box it came in. The box said to wait five minutes. Five minutes was going to be agony.

Did I really need to know? No. I already knew. I was not pregnant. I could jump in the shower and let the heat relax the stress this caused. This was all crazy anyway.

The shower turned on with a quick twist of the dial. Quickly stripping, I hopped inside before I could decide to glance at the test. The test didn't matter. It was just to prove that I was correct - that I was not pregnant.

I didn't even have to look at the test to know the answer. There was no point in it being on the counter, really. I either

was or wasn't, and it would be rather obvious. Except, I wasn't.

It would be even simpler if I could remember my last period. Which also did not prove pregnancy. It proved that I had been stressed, and it was screwing with my cycle.

"Is that - ?" a garbled voice choked out.

"It doesn't mean that I'm pregnant." My voice sounded unemotional to my own ears.

When no other noises came, I pulled the curtain back to discover I was alone again.

Deciding this would be as good a time as any to look at the test, I tried to prepare myself by silently counting to five. I had to check eventually. If I waited too long, I could get a false positive.

Or a false negative.

Then I would be right back to where I was.

Taking another deep breath, I stepped out of the shower, grabbed the clean end of the test, and closed my eyes. This was easy. I just had to look at the tiny window thing.

Step two, just needed to look at the pregnancy test. Step two was simple. So, why was I feeling nervous?

"Pregnant." I whispered, my body going numb with shock. The double line was there. It wasn't even a faded line.

I didn't realize I had stepped back into the shower until the water hit my chest.



"And there - did you want to know the sex?" The technician moved the ultrasound wand across my stomach.

"Yes, I'm impatient." Chewing my lip, I tried to understand the screen I was staring at. There was a fifty-fifty chance, but I just knew.

“Okay then, do you want a copy of your daughter’s first picture?”

“Daughter. Yes, please.” I had to blink back the tears forming in the corner of my eyes. If I cried, I wouldn’t be able to have a clear view of my daughter.

“Now you can think of names,” she said as she clicked buttons on the machine. “If you haven’t already been doing that.”

But, I knew. I had known since the pregnancy test. It was a feeling, but I had just known. My little girl.

“Ros-”

My mouth slammed shut before I could finish what I was saying. The room darkened and everything started disappearing.

I jolted upright. The technician didn’t seem to notice the world was - collapsing? The door wavered slightly and then glowed around the edges. Jumping off the exam table, I pulled my shirt down and grimaced at the feel of the ultrasound gel as I headed straight to the door.

Dreaming, I had to be dreaming. Most of the room was completely empty. The entire back half was just - gone.

I grabbed the door, and everything wavered around me. The vanishing seemed to pause as voices sounded around me. It sounded like someone had left an intercom on and stepped away from it as they spoke. It was like a loud whisper. Which made little sense.

The voice. That voice, though.

“You couldn’t even be here the day she leaves the hospital?”

Jin. That was Jin.

“I told you I was running late. I did bring the sandwiches you asked for. You could have left at any time. Is she in bed, then?”

And that was Oliver.

I was in the hospital.

No, Jin brought me home from the hospital. Something happened, and I fell asleep on the couch.

It was a weird sensation knowing you were asleep while in your dream and hearing the wake-side around you.

I twisted the knob, but the door wouldn't open. The room was still wavering around me, though it wasn't disappearing anymore.

“Six hours late? Man, just bring me my sandwich.” A grunt followed, and then, “She’s sleeping. You’re always punctual about everything.”

“Sleeping on your lap. I see it took you no time to get cozy with our Eleanor.” There was a paper noise and then Oliver added, “I thought I was onto something. This whole thing is a mess.”

“Your attitude isn’t helping any. So stop staring at me like that, with whatever that constipated emotion is on your face. Eleanor had a memory try to reemerge, only it caused her some issues. I gave her a dose of that medicine, and she went a little drunk-sleepy. Where’s Elle’s sandwich?”

“You didn’t say she wanted anything.”

“If you are going to be an ass to her, Oliver, I will take her back to my place. You cannot be angry at her, or take your frustration out on her, when she cannot remember shit. She does not deserve that.”

Oliver was annoyed with me? There wasn’t much I could have done in the short time I was awake to have caused his annoyance already. Maybe it was because of the accident, or just before.

My eyes strayed to the frozen technician and the ultrasound machine. Maybe he was upset about the miscarriage. But that wasn't my doing.

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath and leaned my head against the door.

“We don’t deserve any of this, and yet I’m still working toward a solution.”

“Can you, or can you not, at least treat her as your wife? Because I am serious about leaving with her.”

“Of course you would. We both know that wouldn’t be a problem for you. That woman is a stranger to me, Jin. But I will try to work through my issues.”

“Oliver-”

“Goodnight, Jin.”

“Are you sleeping in the guest room? Wait, are you leaving her on the couch?”

“Allow me to repeat myself on two things. This whole thing is a mess, and that woman is a stranger to me right now. I let her keep the bedroom. She’s already sleeping peacefully on the couch. Why would I disturb her?”

“You really can be one heartless bastard. And I thought my family was the cold one. Get into your happy pajamas and get back out here so we can talk. I don’t want to move Eleanor and wake her yet.”

“And you think we should talk over her? That she won’t wake up?”

“Isn’t that what we’ve been doing?” There was a sensation of fingers along my scalp, followed by a relaxing tingle. “As long as I keep some contact, she doesn’t really stir. The memory shocked her system, and the medicine rushed her into exhaustion.”

There was a distant sigh.

“Fine, I’ll be back in a moment and you can tell me what you know of the memory. We can go from there and see if we can figure out what happened. Are you seriously just going to drop crumbs on her head?”

“I’m hungry. She’s sleeping. I’m brushing the crumbs off her. It isn’t like she’s going to know or keep the crumbs.”

Murmurs sounded, followed by Jin’s chuckle, and then a hand swept through my hair.

This man was really getting sandwich crumbs on me. Which was both annoying and amusing. He could have just gotten up to eat, but he didn't want to wake me. And I wasn't sure how to feel about that.

“Oliver means well, Elle. He does. The three of us are just in a new situation, and navigating it isn't the easiest thing to do. It was getting tense before you showed up at the hospital. Now, it's more complicated. Which is not your fault. Oliver isn't the only one that places most of the blame on me. I'll try to make sure his anger stays in my direction. You have enough going on than to also have to deal with his moods. We will all come out of this stronger, this I know.”

Before I could try to pick apart Jin's words, the room started rumbling around me. I looked around to find that it had changed into a hospital room. A dimly lit hospital room, and I was in a hospital gown.

There was a knock on the door I had been leaning against. As I reached for the handle, the door pushed open and a nurse walked into the room, pushing a cart. The cart had a plastic bed thing on the top, with a blanket-wrapped baby inside.

“Just bringing the baby back from a quick check. You can buzz us if you decide you want us to take her back to the nursery if you want some sleep. And there is nothing to feel guilty about if you decide to call us. Sleep is important.”

“No. No, it's okay. I want her to sleep in here with me. Thank you.”

I reached into the hospital bassinet and gently scooped the baby out.

My baby.

This was my baby.

Every mother thinks their baby is the most beautiful baby.

And she was.

The most perfect chubby cheeked, pouty, baby. My heart swelled with love that felt like it was a tangible thing.

I could feel the connection to this baby.

My baby.

Holding her against my chest, I gently kissed the top of her head, not sure if this was a dream or a nightmare.

She felt so real.

She smelled so real.

Her little chest was rising and falling against me. Everything in these dreams had felt so real. And this one I wanted more than anything.

“I’ll leave you to it, Mom.” With that, the nurse left, closing the door behind her.

The baby whimpered in my arms, so I started slowly pacing between the door and the bed while gently rocking her. I didn’t want my baby to cry. I wanted her to be comfortable and happy.

“Don’t be sad, love,” I whispered, peering down into her small face.

She scrunched her nose and tried to snuggle closer to my chest. Then tried to suck in the gown.

“Oh. Oh, okay, hold on. We’ll figure this out,” I breathed, popping the buttons along one shoulder and brought her back to my partially bare chest.

The baby must have been hungry because she zeroed in and started suckling. It was a strange and familiar sensation of tingles as I felt her breastfeed. Maybe I had read pregnancy books while I was pregnant, or watched television shows to understand.

“There aren’t any books that should have caused an emotional response to trigger a memory break. Are you sure she was saying ‘books’ when you found her?”

That was Oliver on the other side of the door again.

I hugged the baby closer to me, looking around the room as I went back to the door. The last time I could hear outside the dream, the room mostly vanished. If the room wanted to vanish

again, it could - but the baby could stay in my arms until I was forced away.

Kissing the top of her head again, I ran a finger along the side of her face as she began slowing down. "I absolutely love you," I whispered, blinking against the gathering tears. "Forgive me for not remembering."

"Yes. I did check the books. Then I got her purse out, once she was in a deep sleep, and checked her Kindle and phone for any other books. Can I add, these digital books she has are so much naughtier than the physical ones? There were entire Kindle folders for 'reverse harem' and 'adult.' I mean, there were others, but those two I'll be revisiting later."

"Focus, Jin. So there weren't any books that she had that should have caused this reaction?"

"Honestly, I got sidetracked at the 'reverse harem' folder. Which was one of the last ones. But the folders were similar in how she set them. There were folders for the genre and then another folder for the books of the genre that she finished. Nothing that would have caused this. Same for the audio books."

Great, so I read naughty books and I wasn't even sure what made a book a naughty one. What level of naughty were my books? How many books were in this 'reverse harem' folder?

"So absolutely anything can cause this? I think - Yes, if we cut the pill in fourths and she takes one every morning, that should work. It should help regulate any issues she may have with emotional triggers and help with the memories."

"Plus, at a fraction of the dosage, it won't knock her out. When you bring her by on Friday, I'll check how she feels while taking it at the smaller dose. I can also check if there are any more episodes of memories trying to overwhelm her. Or, if she starts to remember anything, we can work through it."

"Yes, I'm sure you are quite happy to be able to play a role in filling in her memories."

"Come on, man," Jin sighed. "We're not going through this again."

Leaning away from the door, I checked to make sure the room hadn't vanished around me. Everything was still there.

Including the baby in my arms.

"I think they were happier when I was in the hospital," I whispered, shifting the baby to the other side. She quickly snuggled up against me while latching on to my breast.

The baby was still in my arms. She was still mine. Nothing had taken her from me yet. My baby was real here.

"What do I call you? Did I name you? I did, I just-" I looked back at the baby hospital bed.

The bed that had a miniature certificate along the top inside.

That had the baby information.

My pulse quickened as I shortened the space between that paper and myself.

"I think she's waking up." I could hear Jin from a distance.

No, not yet. I would not wake up. Even though the room was starting to disappear along the edges, I didn't want to wake up yet.

The baby released my breast and gave a small cry.

"It's ok," I whispered, cradling her against me as I leaned down to look at the paper.

'Roselyn' was printed along one line. Everything else that was written was blurry.

"Roselyn," I breathed, feeling the truth of her name.

Everything started vanishing faster. I stumbled back into the door, trying to clutch Roselyn closer without harming her.

"No." There were tears falling now. I couldn't stop them. The dream would end and take my baby with it. "I love you, Roselyn. Forgive me. Please."

"...mom..."

My head snapped up. That voice wasn't Jin, and it wasn't Oliver. The voice sounded so familiar, and that didn't make

any sense.

It sounded like a child.

There was nothing but emptiness slowly surrounding me except for the door at my back. But, I heard that voice. It seemed much farther than the men on the other side of the door, on the wakeful side.

Did I know that voice? I had to have known that voice for it to sound familiar.

“I’m taking her to bed. You may not care if she stays out here, but I do. She deserves to be comfortable.”

“My couch is comfortable.”

“Who’s there?” I called out.

There was no answer, only the shaking of the door behind me.

Rosalyn squirmed in my arms and I glanced down at her.

She was slowly vanishing.

“Please.” I begged. Nothing about this was fair. This was a bittersweet torture dreamed nightmare.

My eyes closed as my body shook with sobs. The weight in my arms disappeared. There was nothing there anymore. I turned toward the door, falling against it.

I could feel my body moving, even though I was leaning against a door. There was a stretch of silence, and then the door shivered. I grabbed the doorknob and twisted it. I couldn’t stay in the darkness with that ache anymore.

“...la...you.” That voice drifted along my hearing before I woke up.

“Sh, it’s just me. Jin.” He shushed as he pulled the blanket up to my chin. “It’s a little after ten, so I thought you’d like to be in bed to sleep instead of on the couch. You started tearing up on the way to your bed.”

“Thank you for moving me.” I yawned. There was an ache in my chest. But he didn’t need to know that. I didn’t want to

think about why I felt crushed. “It was just a nightmare. I think. I’m okay. I won’t have to take that medicine again, will I?”

Dimming the lamp beside the bed, Jin let out a short chuckle. “As amusing as it was, no. Well, yes, but not the same dosage. I’ll check on how you feel about the new dosage, and everything else, in four days. Oliver’s going to bring you to your appointment on Friday. If you need anything before then, your phone is here.” He gestured to the nightstand.

“I got your purse out for you, it’s in the bookcase in there. I unlocked your phone and removed the lock, so no passes needed. Oh, your Kindle is in the nightstand drawer. And, that we will discuss at a later time. Also, I’m not skipping over this nightmare you had, especially with you being teary over it. Any dreams and nightmares you remember we’ll talk about on Friday, too.”

He smirked before leaning down and kissing the top of my head.

“Oliver?”

Jin rose, turning to leave my room.

“Oh, he just got back. Oliver thought it best to sleep in the guest room, given your memory. Well, the lack of memory, really. And he didn’t want to wake you. Like the responsible friend I am, I am sending you both to bed.”

“Goodnight, Jin.”

My eyelids were already closed when he responded in kind. There was some part of me that wanted to question what he had said about Oliver, but I was already falling back into the sleeping world and I couldn’t quite remember what I had heard from my dream. I was desperately praying that I didn’t have any more nightmares.

Chapter Thirteen

Bacon. That was what I was smelling. That was all the incentive I needed to open my eyes. There didn't seem to be any lingering nightmares in my mind. The last thing I could remember was Jin leaving.

Rolling over, I stretched my arms and stared into the canopy above me. Getting out of bed felt daunting. Not only was the bed extremely comfortable, but there wasn't anything to worry about if I stayed in bed. The real world, and things missing, were waiting for me once I left the room.

A knock from the library area sounded as I threw the covers off me. It didn't really make any sense for anyone to be knocking at the door. The only other person who lived here was Oliver, and this was his room also - even though he hadn't slept in here. And I wasn't sure if Jin was the type to knock or just barge into a room.

"Come in?" I called, getting halfway across the room before adding, "Who is it?"

"I wasn't sure if you were awake, or what you were doing, so I knocked." Oliver stopped at the archway between the bedroom and the library area.

"What would I be doing?" I wasn't sure what he thought I would get up to in the morning, or if I normally had morning activities. "This is your room, too, so I didn't think you would have to knock before entering."

He regarded me for a moment before glancing around the room.

"Right, yes, well we don't currently know each other and I didn't think it would be comfortable for either of us to share a room." He cleared his throat before quickly looking away from me again. "Or bed. So, the room is yours and I'll stay in the guest room."

“Oh. Okay. That sounds...” I wasn’t sure how to finish that. It made me feel both crappy and relaxed. Chewing on the inside of my lip, I tried again, “Thank you. That was nice of you. I’m sorry if I’m making things difficult.”

Difficult might not have been the only way to put it. This was awkward.

“The situation is what it is, and we’ll handle it one day at a time. This isn’t why I stopped in to check on you. I was seeing if you were up, and where I should leave your medicine for you to find.”

Pushing the left sleeve slightly up his wrist, Oliver checked his watch, and then turned to leave. He kept talking as he walked away.

“I have to meet with a few of my lab assistants, so I’ll leave your medicine on the counter. That’s where it currently is, anyway. Take it with food. It will help if there is any nausea.”

“Wait.” I nearly tripped over myself to catch him at the door to the living room. “It isn’t going to make me loopy or knock me out again, is it?”

“What? Oh, last night? No, it is a much smaller dosage. You’ll be fine.”

“Okay.”

Following him to the kitchen, I found the pill on a saucer beside a bottle of water. Oliver grabbed a briefcase from a chair at the counter and waited until I swallowed it down.

“I’ll be home at six. Same time as always.”

Then he turned and headed to the front door. With nothing else said, or any instructions, Oliver was leaving.

I knew my way around the home. But it was open and impossible to get lost. The building was new, the whole street was new. I didn’t even know the address.

What if I got lost? Where would I be going to get lost? What did I normally do with my days?

“Wait!” I darted into the foyer, the thoughts causing a sudden panic.

“Hm?” Oliver turned, carefully looking me over. “Are you okay?”

“I just - well, what do I do?”

“What do you mean, ‘what do you do’?”

“During the day. While you’re gone.” I motioned to the open door behind him. “If I leave. Is there a map? Should I be doing something while you’re gone? Do I make dinner?”

Oliver slowly closed the door and fully turned to me. “You just came back from quite the long stay at a hospital, and you’re worried about making dinner?”

“No?” I didn’t know how to voice the panic of being alone and not knowing what I should be doing. What I could do, or knew how to do, or would normally do. “I just...what did our days normally consist of? You go to work, and I do what?”

“Ah. Okay. Don’t worry about anything right now, Eleanor. Ms. Kes will be by shortly with groceries and she’ll be making sure the meals are done. You rest, and I’ll see you for dinner when I get back.”

“Okay.”

I found myself fiddling with the hem of my shirt. There was no reason to be nervous about being left alone. If it was nervousness that was causing my panic.

“Hey, look at me for a moment.” Oliver leaned towards me, tapping my chin upwards. “This is new territory for both of us. We’ll find a rhythm soon. You’ll be fine. I’ll be back at six.”

Then he was gone.

The door was closed before I fully processed what had happened. Nothing happened, really. But, here I was, left completely alone, again, and with no instructions.

Ambling back into the kitchen in a daze, I gripped onto an island chair to steady myself. Oliver hadn’t even said ‘goodbye’ before he left. Just there to point at a pill and gone.

Wiping a hand down my face, I glanced at the clock on the microwave. It wasn't even eight in the morning. Not that I had any idea of how the day could go for me. Being left alone before it truly began was not how I thought it would have started.

"I'm an adult. I can do this. It's fine. Take the day to relax and get used to my home again." As I grabbed the bottle of water for a drink, another urge hit.

The last time I used the bathroom was yesterday. At the hospital. Instead of running back into my bedroom, I darted back towards the front door and the bathroom I remembered seeing near it.



Ms. Kes, or the woman I guessed was Ms. Kes, lightly knocked on the wall between my large bathroom and massive closet, snapping me out of the exploring.

The closet was two rooms, with something similar to a kitchen island separating them. The farther space had men's clothing, shoes, and all kinds of accessories. Though much of the area was empty - probably having been moved to the guest room Oliver was using.

I had been busy roaming around the larger first space, all women's things, when the knock sounded. Everything seemed to be more business or dress attire. I had spent most of the last hour trying to find another pair of leggings or pants that didn't look uncomfortable. The clothing was nice, but nothing suitable to just do nothing.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," the woman chuckled, holding her hands up when I yelped and nearly fell over. She had the same accent as Oliver and Jin had. "I was just letting you know I was in, and asking if you had any requests for a meal."

My stomach grumbled in response before I could fully think through the question. Ms. Kes smiled at me, brushing some

loose gray strands behind an ear, and walked further into the closet.

“I just didn’t hear you, and I was lost in my head trying to decide on an outfit,” I manage, glancing around. “Honestly, I don’t think I have any requests. I don’t know - it’s just, I can’t really...”

“Oliver’s explained everything, dear. I just wasn’t sure if maybe you had any cravings for anything specific. How about we go to the kitchen and I’ll make you an omelet and the rest of the bacon?”

Nodding, I followed her through the room back to the kitchen island. She grabbed the saucer, placing it into the sink, before gathering things out of the refrigerator.

Sitting at the island, I watched Ms. Kes move about the kitchen like she was dancing. Her dark hair, streaked throughout with gray, was pulled back into a bun, making her seem like those schoolhouse mistresses. Though, her eyes and smile were too kind to truly fit the image of those women.

“Ask your questions.” She hadn’t even looked at me when she spoke.

“Questions?”

With a small laugh, she glanced over her shoulder at me. “You’ll have questions for a bit of time, no? I’m a stranger to you, and you haven’t even asked my name.”

“Oh.” She was right. “You are Ms. Kes...right?”

“Not much you could do now, other than run for the door, if I wasn’t. I’m not old, but I’m not young enough to be chasing after anyone.” Winking at me, she turned back to the stove.

“I’m Ms. Kes, yes. Minnie, if you’d like. Oliver and Jin refuse to call me by my name, but I think I like you more than I do them. And you may need a friend - so, call me, Minnie.”

“Okay.” Nodding to myself, I continued, “I can call you Minnie. I’m Eleanor...and you probably already know me, so that was pointless.”

“You introduce yourself to whoever you’d like, Eleanor. You don’t know if they know you. You don’t know anyone right now. Though follow your instincts, yes.”

There were no instincts to follow currently, so that wasn’t the problem. The problem was exactly that I didn’t know if I had any instincts to follow anymore. Everything was confusing.

“Have you worked for Oliver, us, for a while? Since you know Jin, too.”

“Ah. Those boys.” Shaking her head, she mumbled things that either I didn’t entirely hear or it wasn’t English. “Friend of the family. Families? That sounds right. I was a, ah, babysitter for Oliver when he was a child. Of course, that meant both were usually in my care. I looked out for them, and they tell me they’re doing that for me now.”

“So, we’ve known each other for years?”

Minnie paused, bringing a plate closer to her, before responding.

“Everyone is a stranger to you right now, and I am disheartened to know the trauma that’s been done. Especially since you don’t know the people closest to you and the love you should feel.”

She turned, bringing the plate of bacon and omelet toward me. “You eat, get yourself a shower, some comfy clothes, and I’ll let you sample the meals I’ve planned for the next few days.”

Lifting the fork over my head, I sniffed under my arm. It didn’t stink, but I could have just gotten used to my smell. Minnie laughed and placed a cup of orange juice near the plate.

“I didn’t say you smelled badly. You just look like you rolled out of bed. And, for your first full day home, I thought you would like a non-hospital shower to relax some. Before you try to learn or remember anything and get stressed out.”

Trying to remember anything did stress me out, so I just nodded and cut into the omelet.

Chapter Fourteen

Choosing an outfit should have been done before the shower, because there were too many clothes to choose from. I spent too much time standing in the closet in my underwear trying to find regular pants and a shirt to lounge about in. Everything was formal, fancier formal, or business with a few office casuals - which was a very slight difference.

If me before the accident enjoyed these outfits, we would have different views now. They were fine for specific occasions, or places, but there was nothing I wanted to wear just to wear and be comfortable. Which made me feel slightly sad for the before-me if I didn't have any opportunities to just relax in leggings or sweats.

Jin had brought me leggings and a regular shirt yesterday. But there was no sign in the closet of where he had found them. Asking him where he found any of my simple clothing moved up my priority list. Right after I made a priority list.

"Phone is supposedly on the nightstand," I mumble to myself as I finally grab the closest pair of black pants that look even slightly comfortable. No reason to suffocate my hips and thighs with clingy clothing.

I pulled a teal blouse, with wispy three-quarter sleeves, from the hanger and headed back to the bedroom. My phone was right where Jin claimed, on the nightstand.

"Everything is on a phone, right? So you should help me remember?" I questioned my phone. "Or you can at least give me new-old information about myself. My life."

Staring at the phone in my hand, I sighed and placed it on the edge of the bed while I quickly dressed. Deciding to open the phone should be easy. It should be. Except, that I might not like what I found. Or, I may remember something.

Tapping the screen, I stared at the icons as they suddenly appeared. All normal application things - weather, email, maps, photos, contacts, messages and whole folders for

financial, streaming television or movies, shopping, social media, games, and books.

Clicking on my contacts, I quickly scrolled through, not really sure what I was looking for. Or who. Oliver and Jin were the only people I knew, besides Minnie, and both of them were at work.

“Mom.” It sounded choked, with the lump forming in my throat.

How could I not think to ask about my parents? No one had mentioned any family, other than Oliver being my husband. Had they been calling about me? Were they kept up-to-date on everything that happened? Did they see me in the hospital?

“Eleanor? Is something wrong?”

Jerking my head up, I watched Ms. Kes stop at the foot of the bed before fully registering that she asked me a question.

“I called for you at the door, but you didn’t answer. Thought it would be best to check on you.”

“Oh. I’m fine. I just -” Taking a moment to collect myself, I motioned to the phone in my hand. “I was going to see if this held any answers. Instead, now I’m wondering about my parents.”

“I see. Have you tried calling? I’m sure Oliver wouldn’t mind if you gave them a quick ring. He’s been keeping them up to date about you. Might ease some anxiety to finally hear from you.”

Nodding, I closed my fingers around the cell phone and exhaled slowly. They may have been worried about me, but what could I even say to them? Redundant, but they were strangers to me, along with the rest of the world.

“I think I’ll wait for Oliver? If they have any questions, I wouldn’t know what to tell them.”

“Sounds good, dear. Was going to ask how pizza for dinner tonight appealed to you. Something simple and easy, home-y. I’ll go back to the regular meals for the rest of the week.”

Following her out of the bedroom, I grabbed my purse from a bookshelf on the way.

“Pizza would be good, I’m sure.”

Minnie kept to herself in the kitchen, though she would look over at me on the couch. I had given up on going through the contacts on my phone. There weren’t that many people listed, and none of them seemed to register as familiar.

Oliver and Jin were the only two that I could picture, and that was because I recently met them. Well, I recently spoke with them. The parent contacts made me uneasy - who forgets who their parents are or what they even look like?

The app for books took up some of my time, keeping my mind occupied thankfully. Since my Kindle was currently in the drawer of my nightstand, it helped that the app was also on my phone.

There were so many folders. I didn’t even look through all the folders, just quickly scrolling to see if it was a lot. Which it was. The first folder, labeled ‘Adult’, had over one hundred books in it.

Some books looked intriguing, some looked cringe-y, and some looked like I did not care what it was about because the cover made me curious. Not that I was completely judging a book by its cover. Just a tad judging by the covers.

The next two folders seemed for specific authors. One fantasy type, from the looks of it, and the other a thriller mystery. My eyes got tired after about the tenth book in the third folder - and I hadn’t even checked all the books in the three folders, just skimmed through.

Tossing my phone onto the coffee table in front of me, I grabbed the remote control and clicked the power button. Then stared at the television.

The screen had so many streaming apps. Who needed live television, or regular channels, when there were over ten different things that probably covered everything you could

possibly want to watch. I'm sure if I had kept scrolling, I would have found more apps.

Red, I remembered. Of everything, Netflix lived on in my memories. Like not being able to remember why you walked into another room, but completely remembering the lyrics to a late-90s Hanson song.

"Oh wow," I laughed. "Don't know who I am, but do remember Hanson."

"What was that?"

"Sorry," I called back. "I just amused myself. I know Netflix. And Hanson."

"I'm sure even the fae and witches know what Netflix is. I know I'd end up needing to watch something to entertain myself now and then, even with magic. Not sure about the Hanson bit."

Not knowing how to respond to that, I went back to the television. There was just one profile, 'O', and lots of documentaries in the playlist. Something about ancient Egypt became my background noise as I decided to browse through my purse.

Strawberry lip balm, sanitizer, and hand cream in a small front top zipper. Movie theater stub, six one-dollar bills, and two dimes in the zipper beneath the first. Cash wasn't something I was expecting to find, mostly because it seemed odd to have - everything was basically electronic now.

There were two keychain-sized library cards in the back zipper. Along with an unopened dosage of allergy medicine and four black hair ties.

Unzipping the main purse, it disappointed me to discover that it didn't unzip any memories. There weren't that many things inside my purse, either. Flipping my purse over, I dumped out the contents beside me on the couch.

A black velvet type bag that seemed to have quite a few cards inside, based on the size, was part of the contents. There was a pack of hand wipes and a random assortment of folded napkins. Apparently, I liked to keep some snacks in my purse

because there were snack-sized bags of peanut butter crackers and another of almonds.

There was a floral, zippered wallet. Opening the wallet offered me a view of a rather embarrassing driver's license picture. There were a few cards, but no reason for me to browse through them. Hopefully, they could all be run as credit because there was no way I would get anywhere without the PINs.

Placing the wallet back on the couch, my eyes scanned the items again. There were tweezers and a pair of clippers that were twisted together by a green, glitter ribbon that landed against the velvet bag. My eyes were suddenly glued to the simple object.

Unease washed over me as I hovered my hand over the ribbon. It didn't feel random, and yet, it felt out of place. Which made no sense. It was just a ribbon. It was just a ribbon used to make sure I didn't lose two smaller items.

To make sure I didn't lose something.

To keep it safe.

"Keep this safe for me." The words felt like they were pulled out of me, making me gasp for air.

My head started to feel slightly fuzzy, not as intense as the last time, though. But it was happening again.

"Ah!" I groaned, slumping over with the dizziness. "I don't want to lose it somehow."

The last words rushed out of me as I clutched at my chest. It didn't hurt, it just felt...strange. My whole body felt strange. It happened again. Twice.

First the books. Now a ribbon.

It made no sense. They felt like memories. Maybe. Or dreams. Something I knew. Something important. It felt important.

But concentrating on it made it feel like I shouldn't try. It wasn't important. It was just a side effect.

Side effects. No, that didn't make sense. Did it make sense?

"I really don't want to call Oliver, but you aren't responding. You've got to answer me or I'll be calling him. Or Jin, but Oliver would prefer it be him."

Minnie was crouched in front of me, her hands on the sides of my face. Her eyes squinted some in concentration as she massaged my temples.

"I - what?"

"Side effects, from what I've been told. I'm not a proper doctor like those boys, but I think you should trust me here. I can help with this, and as much as I don't really go against them, I know it's for the best."

Now she wasn't making any sense. Though we could babble nonsense together if she wanted as long as she kept massaging my temples. That felt amazing, and I could feel the calming energy washing over me, relaxing my whole body.

"Trust you with what?"

Sitting back on her haunches, Minnie looked at the random items beside me. Taking my hand in hers, she moved them over the items and closed her eyes. Our hands hung between the velvet bag and the items wrapped in the ribbon for a moment.

With her forehead scrunching in some kind of concentration, Minnie slowly released my hand before grabbing the ribbon. She tapped a finger against the velvet bag and whispered something about the energy being interesting.

"Minnie?"

"Interesting energy," is all she whispered again, before placing the ribbon back on the couch.

I watched as she slowly got to her feet and then plopped down on the chair beside me. There were words, possibly, she kept whispering to herself - but I had no idea what she was actually saying.

Finally, pulling loose strands behind her ear, she looked back at me with a small smile. "Sorry, dear. I was just saying

that when I was young, I was raised in a more...natural way. I had a parent that was in tune with the energies around us, and 'seeing-beyond' type things. And, I think. No, I know. I know that if you do not take that memory pill any more, you will actually get better faster. You'll remember sooner. Just don't tell the boys. They mean well, they do, but this time I really do know better."

Not caring that I looked like a fish, my mouth kept opening and closing, not sure where to start. They were the doctors. They were my doctors. They were also my husband and friend. She was...a family friend? Our chef?

Yet, I knew all three of them nearly the same. Not really at all. Trusting the doctors over this woman seemed the obvious choice. Unless she was right. Why would she be right? They were the doctors.

"Are you saying that they know it isn't going to help me? Because they seemed, or at least Jin, concerned when I went wonky yesterday. They lowered the dosage to stave off the nasty part and still help me. But, you don't have any medical degrees?"

"It's okay. I know you'll decide on your own soon enough. They do want to help you. I want to help you, and my instincts are never wrong."

Lightly patting my hand as she stood, I watched her walk back into the kitchen. She didn't seem fazed by anything that had just happened.

"You're not worried that I'll let Oliver know what you said?"

Tilting her head slightly, she gave me a sad smile. "My instincts are never wrong, dear. I wouldn't have brought it up if I couldn't already predict the outcome. We all want you to remember. And as I said, you'll end up taking my suggestion to heart soon enough. You do have tarot cards to consult."

"Tarot? What are you talking about?"

"You have a bag of tarot cards. Obviously, you use them. Or did, I should say. With your energy already on them, it should

be even easier to use.”

Turning back to the purse, I started shoving everything back inside, since I didn't know how to continue this very weird discussion.

If a doctor gave me medicine to help me get my memory back, what would make me stop taking the medicine? Not tarot cards, and not Ms. Kes. There was no reason to change or question anything.

Other than when I started to remember anything it felt like there was an attack on my body and mind. Two days wasn't enough to make an informed opinion. Unless I had been on medication while in a coma, also.

Did I remember being asleep for two months? I had to have had dreams. The dreams could have been random fantasy type dreams. I was sure there were some nightmares thrown in there, and maybe there were memory dreams.

Not that I could remember any of the dreams. And it wasn't even the amnesia's fault for not remembering. It was just the basic principle that most dreams fly away once you wake up.

I didn't need Minnie telling me that, I would decide on my own. If the medicine didn't help and I had the same issues, then I could try not taking the medicine for a bit to see what happens. Or, I could just talk to my doctors about it.

Either way, I would get my memories back.

Chapter Fifteen

Six o'clock came quickly enough once I had decided to just go back to bed. I had set an alarm for five thirty, and Oliver was home right at six. Like he had said he would be.

Ms. Kes was still there when he arrived. As much as I wanted to let Oliver know what she had said about the medicine, something held me back. I wasn't sure if I just felt awkward bringing it up, or I felt like maybe it hadn't actually happened.

"Everything okay today?" Oliver set his briefcase at the table, gave me a quick scan where I stood by the couch, and turned to Ms. Kes.

Moving to the closest island chair, I waited to see how she would respond. Oliver could have asked me, since I was the object he was asking about.

"Eleanor mentioned her parents. Told her that she should give them a call, and she chose to wait for you." Nodding towards me, she grabbed her keys from the counter.

"Pizza is in the oven, just take it out. Oh, and there was the mishap of a memory trying to resurface. Nothing happened like you spoke about. I did tell her that she may want to look into cutting back on the medicine. There's food in the fridge for tomorrow, and three days in the freezer - just have to thaw it. See you all Saturday, then?"

Oliver stalked in front of Ms. Kes as she tried to make her way to the front door. It was easy to see the tension radiating off of him.

"Let's go back some, Ms. Kes." His voice sounded low, like he was trying to calm down.

"Explain to me what you mean by you telling Eleanor to cut back on the medicine we've given her? Then I'll ask what happened with the memory."

"Ah yes. No reason to be upset, Oliver. I just thought -"

“That you would overstep.”

“Oliver, I told the poor girl what she needed to hear. My instincts are never wrong. You know this to be true. It would benefit her greatly if she did not take that drug.”

“You overstepped, Minerva. Honestly.” He sounded close to growling. Roughly raking a hand through his hair, he continued, “You were asked to do one thing. Just to watch her and make sure nothing happened. That was it.”

“And nothing happened, Oliver.” Ms. Kes didn’t seem the least bit concerned.

“Wait, you were here to babysit me? You didn’t always come by to make meals?”

The thought kind of annoyed me. I wasn’t a child. Not entirely sure of my age, I should have looked at the driver’s license closer, but I knew I was an adult. I could keep myself relatively alive.

“Not right now, Eleanor.”

“Do not get grumpy with her, Oliver. If you’re mad at me, then that stays between us. Quite simple to answer the question without an attitude.” She swatted at Oliver’s arm before turning to face me.

“You did have a problem with memories last night, and there was a concern for you being left alone if it were to happen again. Though I do come by once or twice a week to do meals.”

“I felt safer if there was someone to watch you,” Oliver added when she stopped speaking, moving around Ms. Kes and into the kitchen.

Nodding my understanding, I watched as Oliver turned his attention back to Ms. Kes.

He leaned his elbows against the counter and stared intently at her. The tension seemed to rise around them, and Ms. Kes stiffened.

“Minerva, I want your word that you will not interfere with Eleanor taking her medication whenever you are here. That

she will be taking her medicine.”

“Oliver -”

“Your word. Now.”

She ground her jaw for a moment before saying, “Fine. You have my word.”

“Not going to cut it. I just got home. I just want to eat and sit.” He circled his hand in front of him. “Come on, your word or you’re gone. I would love to trust you, but not even twenty-four hours, and I’m questioning you.”

Ms. Kes placed her hands on her hips before looking at me. She chewed her lip and turned back towards Oliver, as her eyes seemed to darken in anger.

“You both have my word that I will not interfere with the taking of the medicine.”

“Was that really so hard?”

“You can be such an ass, Oliver.” Ms. Kes stormed towards the front door, the tension in the room melting away. “Eleanor, rest easy.”

Then the front door banged closed.

“I think Ms. Kes is mad at you,” I whispered, sliding into a chair at the island counter. “She said you guys only called her Ms. Kes, and won’t call her Minnie. And then you call her Minerva.”

“Ms. Kes isn’t a doctor. She overstepped, and she knows she did. You cannot stop the medication until Jin and I have told you it’s time to stop it. You understand that, yes?”

I watched him pull the pizza out of the oven and placed it on the stovetop. He moved like he was still annoyed and needed something to do. There was still tension in the way he moved.

Rolling his sleeves to his elbows, he glanced over at me. “You understand, Eleanor?”

“Oh, sorry,” I mumbled. “Yes. Right. Understood.”

Oliver gave a quick nod before grabbing two plates and cutting up the pizza. He placed a plate of pizza in front of me and took out two cups.

“No alcohol, sorry. Water would be preferred, but I have tea also. So, water or tea?”

“Wait, no alcohol? Besides the bookcases, I was actually kind of excited about the liquor cabinet.”

“You’re on medication that’s messing with your head.” He stuck a cup against the waterspout on the fridge. “And it’s an experimental drug. We really shouldn’t mix the two together.”

Sighing, I stared down at the slice of pizza in front of me. Alcohol had seemed like it would help me ease back into my life. Not to get drunk really, just to make me not so anxious.

“Didn’t think you were the alcoholic type,” Oliver muttered before placing a cup of water in front of me.

“I may not have been before, but the whole ‘liquid courage’ thing seemed appealing. I mean, we do have a liquor cabinet. So, obviously, we drink at some points.”

“Dinner parties. Not that I have those too often. Or after a rather stressful day.” He stared toward the liquor cabinet and then took a bite of his slice of the pizza.

“Oh, mhm.” He raised an eyebrow at me, while he chewed, and motioned toward the cabinet. “We’ll both be banned from it.”

“Sounds horrible,” I joked, finally deciding to eat the pizza and not just stare at it.

“Yes, well.” Oliver shrugged and continued to eat.

A silence fell on us. It wasn’t blaringly uncomfortable, but it was slightly awkward. I felt like I should talk to him, or something, but I didn’t really know what to say.

Oliver stood on the other side of the island eating, but he would glance over at me. Sometimes he looked like he was thinking, and then other times he would look away if I caught his eyes.

“How was -”

“What happened -”

We both started at the same time. Apparently, neither one of us could take the silence any longer.

“What were you asking?” Oliver asked, after he grabbed another slice, and watched me chew my lip for a second.

“Oh. Um. It was stupid. Well, not stupid. I was going to ask how your work day went,” I started mumbling, rubbing my fingers on a napkin. “But it’s as generic as asking about the weather. I thought that I should probably ask about your day, right? That’s a thing a wife would do. Or something a friend would do. Or just that someone would ask -”

“Eleanor.” Oliver interrupted my rambling. “You can ask about my day if you want to. But don’t ask if you feel you’re supposed to and not because you actually want to. You would find my work boring anyway.”

“I would? Do I know what you do?” I barely recalled what they had said at the hospital. Other than Oliver working in a lab type environment and Jin being a shrink.

Maybe I didn’t show much interest before the accident. Even if that were the case, Oliver shouldn’t have felt he couldn’t have spoken to me if he wanted to talk about his work.

“Only what I’ve told you. I’ve been using your blood samples against different chemicals to see what results we get.”

Dropping another slice of pizza on my plate, he shrugged. “And, experimenting with medicine that works in certain parts of the brain to see what we can do about controlling memories. Well, forcing memories? Retrieving memories. Anyway, what happened today? Ms. Kes mentioned an episode?”

“Not an episode, I don’t think. At least, not like yesterday. There wasn’t any pain. I just felt...off. And I think I spaced out for a little bit.”

“What do you mean by ‘off’?” Moving around the island, Oliver turned my chair towards him and began searching my face. “Did you fall asleep, or like a stare-off into space?”

“Spaced out? That’s where you just stare off, right? I don’t think I fell asleep. I don’t remember falling asleep or waking up, right then anyway.”

“Can I check you out right quick? Your heart and eyes, I mean. Can I check - I’m just wanting to make sure everything’s normal.” Oliver scrubbed a hand along his jaw as he exhaled and muttered under his breath. “You said you felt off.”

“Okay. Um, yeah. Sure.” Nodding, I watched him pull a stethoscope from his pants’ pocket. Confused, I looked down at his pants and back at the stethoscope in his hands. “How big are your pockets? Women never get enough pocket space, if given a pocket.”

“Big enough,” he mumbled, putting the earpieces in his ears and leaning over me, his hand and round part going to my chest.

He listened for a moment, his eyes running over my face, before placing the stethoscope on the counter. Then his hands were tilting my head back as he stared into my eyes, one at a time. The intensity was unsettling; it felt like he was trying to read my soul.

“Everything seems normal. Did it last long? What were you remembering? What triggered it this time?”

Releasing my head, he took a step back into the kitchen, creating a space between us.

“My purse? I was going through my purse, and I had a feeling that I needed to keep something safe. Or I didn’t want to lose something. Sounds like the same thing, now that I’m saying it out loud.”

I turned back towards my plate and took another bite. Oliver waited for me to finish before raising an eyebrow at me.

“I don’t think I really remembered anything. It was just that feeling. It was only for a minute or two. Maybe five? It wasn’t

long. And I just felt weird whenever I tried to figure out what I was trying to recall. Like if I tried to focus on it, then my body felt...sick, maybe, and I couldn't focus."

"Okay. Well, let's not do that then."

Pausing with the pizza halfway to my mouth, I watch Oliver wrap up the remaining slices and place his plate in the sink.

"Don't do what? If you mean, don't remember. I already don't remember anything. And I thought that we wanted to get my memories back."

I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck start to rise as goosebumps slowly broke out. What Ms. Kes had been saying started to replay in my mind.

There wasn't a reason as to why my husband would want to keep me without a memory. Or why a friend would go along with it. That made no sense.

"We want your memories to come back, eventually. Of course we do. But there's no reason to force something if it's causing problems. Your memories will be restored to you, I promise."

"Right." I pushed the chair back and handed the plate to Oliver when he reached out.

"I'm going to be in my office if you need anything."

Washing my hands in the kitchen, I watched him walk towards the hallway by the front door. Slowly exhaling, I stared down at the pair of plates and cups in the sink.

It was only the first full day from the hospital, and I shouldn't have felt defeated. Yet I did. I wasn't sure why I thought that something would have happened. A spark somewhere to let me know everything was normal. But that hadn't happened.

Or a connection with Oliver in some way. But that felt awkward and strained. And I couldn't pretend not to know why. He was having to be the doctor to a wife who didn't know him, let alone herself.

Maybe I had been hoping for even a small amount of time getting to re-know him, only for that not to happen. Yesterday, he never showed, and today felt professional in a way.

Walking to the living room, I plopped onto the couch and grabbed the remote control after throwing the blanket across my legs. It was almost seven o'clock, I could wait until he finished in his office and then ask if he wanted to watch a movie with me or something.

Chapter Sixteen

She was standing in her toy kitchen in the living room, her little hand on the handle of her pot on her stove. She'd been mimicking my movements since I had begun making dinner.

I was making pasta for dinner. Well, it had been a frozen meal that was mostly fully prepared already. I wasn't entirely sure what she was pretending to cook. Sometimes it was 'tea' and sometimes it was 'chitten' - chicken.

Placing the spoon on the edge of the pan, I glanced back towards the living room while I walked across the room for the china cabinet. She had a toy wand in her pot, stirring it around and giggling.

Turning back to the cabinet, I pulled on the top drawer to get out the spoons. It was jammed again. The drawer had to be shut at an angle for it to slide out easily, and I must have closed it in a hurry when I had put away the dishes because it was stuck again.

I wiggled the drawer back and forth until it pulled out and grabbed the spoons. Opening the door at the side, I grabbed two bowls and turned back toward the kitchen.

I nearly dropped what I was holding, my heart jumping to my throat. I knew better than to turn my back on a toddler for more than a moment.

I knew this.

But she had just been playing in the living room.

And now?

Now she was standing at the real stove in the real kitchen, with one little arm stretched out towards the real pan on the stove.

The pan with the boiling pasta inside.

Her hand was already around the handle.

Taking a deep breath, I slowly took a step forward trying not to spook her. The last thing I needed was her to be surprised, or jolted, and jerking the whole thing onto her head.

I could see the situation playing in my head and I wanted to scream in warning, the angry tears burning. I knew better than to leave her unattended and leave the kitchen with food cooking on the stove.

“Hey,” I choked out in a whisper. Clearing my throat, I tried again. “Hey, baby, what are you doing over there?”

“I cook, Momma.” She turned her little head my way, her arm moving slightly. I could see the pan shift with her.

Swallowing hard, I blinked furiously to clear my vision, crouching down to be closer to her height. “Why don’t you help me put the bowls on the table instead? And you can make me some tea over here?”

Her little hand slowly released the handle, and I released a heavy exhale. I had been holding my breath because the life of my world had begun flashing before my eyes and I couldn’t breathe.

“With salt!”

“You can add all the salt to my tea, if you come here and give me a big hug, baby.”

Squealing, she ran her waddling self into my arms and I fell back on my butt while the tears streamed down my face. I closed my eyes, inhaling her scent as I rested my forehead against her head.

The darkness didn’t leave. Neither did the ache in my chest.

Chapter Seventeen

“Alright, class, we’re going to be heading to the cows once we get off the hayride.” The teacher had stood up near the cab of the hayride we were currently on. It was like a bus and tractor had combined into a vehicle to make an enclosed hayride.

Even with the open windows, the smell wasn’t helping my allergies at all. I was very thankful that I kept tissues in my purse. A runny-nose never attacked at an ideal time, like in the bathroom or something.

“What are we going to do at the cows’ place?” a little girl asked the other little girl that was sitting between us.

Shrugging her shoulders, the second child looked up at me. “Claire wants to know why we’re going to look at cows.”

“I think you guys get to milk a cow, if you want to.” I laughed at the look of disgust they gave each other.

“Ew! Are you going to milk a cow, Claire? I don’t think I want to!” The girl beside me shuddered as she giggled with the Claire girl.

“Why not, Rosalyn? It could be fun. I’ve never milked a cow. And I never got to hold a baby chicken before and that was fun.”

“Did you see one pooped on Devon’s hand!”

The girls leaned into each other as they started laughing harder, just as the hayride slowed to a stop. We waited for the side closest to the door to exit before our side was finally out of the vehicle, and my nose was able to smell somewhat fresher air.

We were at a petting zoo, so the air was full of all types of lovely scents for my sinuses to complain about.

“Class, remember, stay with your groups. Let’s not lose our grown-ups on our first field-trip! Now, to see some cows.” With a wave of her hand, the teacher led the way down a path

towards the poor cows that were about to be milked by a group of five-year-olds.

I sat near the other adults on the field-trip as the kids formed two lines beside two cows. The cows were eating from a hanging container near their heads, a loose rope around their necks leading to the wooden fence separating the cows, and a small stool with a bucket beside them.

There were a few of the children sitting with their teachers or chaperones because they didn't want to participate in milking a cow. I couldn't really blame them. Something about milking a cow made me feel uncomfortable.

As I watched the lines get shorter, Rosalyn ran out of line with Claire behind her.

"What happened? Are you guys not going to milk the cow?" I asked as they got closer and Rosalyn sat down beside me.

"She's too scared to do it!" Claire joked. "I'll milk the cow and then you'll know it was okay."

I wrapped my arm around Rosalyn as Claire ran back to the end of the shorter line. The staff were giving each kid about thirty seconds each, so it wouldn't take too long to get through all the kids.

"I wouldn't want to milk the cow either," I chuckled and then kissed the top of her head.

"Mom! You can't do that here," Rosalyn whispered, pulling away from me and looking around.

"Right. Sorry. Can I go back to hugging you?"

Her little arms wrapped around my waist right as a heavy wind blew through the open barn. All the voices and animal sounds washed away, leaving only the sound of the wind.

"Where did everyone go?" Rosalyn seemed to be yelling to be heard over the noise of the wind.

I was clinging to her as much as she was clinging to me. We were still sitting on a bench, but that was the only thing that was visible. There was nothing else around. Nothing except for

the wind that was whipping our hair and clothing against our bodies.

“I don’t...know,” I mumbled, pulling her into my lap when darkness started to creep around the edges.

“Don’t forget me. You can’t, Mom.” Rosalyn screamed as she was roughly yanked from my grasp.

“ROSALYN!” I screamed.

Then there was nothing. Again.

Chapter Eighteen

“Ow! Hey!” The voice sounded near me. It was a familiar voice.

Gasping for air, my hand landed on my chest as I jolted upright. I could feel my heartbeat racing under my hand. Oliver was sitting on the coffee table in front of me, rubbing at his cheek.

“What? I don’t know - what happened?” I tried to get my breathing under control.

It felt like I had been running, or screaming, or terrified, and I couldn’t wrap my head around what happened.

We had dinner.

Oliver went to his office, and I had come into the living room to find something to watch while I waited for him.

I must have fallen asleep.

“You don’t know what happened? I don’t know what happened.” He narrowed his eyes at me, before rubbing his cheek again. “I woke up to you screaming and came to check on you. Then you slapped me pretty hard.”

Moving my legs over the edge of the couch, I allowed my eyes to adjust to the scenery. It was dim in the room. But I could make out that Oliver’s hair was tousled and was only in a pair of plaid sleeping pants.

“I didn’t mean to -” I started before registering that he had said he was asleep. “Wait, what time is it?”

“Two in the morning.” Oliver slowly stood, and I watched him go into the kitchen and fill a cup with water.

Hurt lanced through me, and I cocked my head to the side to watch him. He had gone to bed at some point after I fell asleep in the living room. The last I remembered checking for the time, it had only been nine.

Which was five hours ago.

Oliver threw open a cabinet, grabbed a medicine bottle, shook a pill into his palm before tossing it into his mouth and taking a long drink. His movements, and the light of the microwave, glanced off a tattoo that looked to be circling an upper arm. Either it was the light, or the tattoo, but it looked like a ring of fire encircling his left bicep.

“Are you just going to stare at me, or are you going to bed now?” There was no emotion in his voice as Oliver cut his eyes to me.

“I had been waiting for you. I didn’t mean to fall asleep out here.” I tossed the blanket back over the couch and slowly stretched out my arms. “I didn’t mean to hit you, I don’t know why I did.”

“Why were you waiting for me? You can go to bed whenever you want. Unless. Wait, you weren’t thinking we were going to the same room?” He slowly walked to the edge of the island, his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

My cheeks were getting pink, I could feel the embarrassment coursing through me. That wasn’t what I had meant, but with his clear annoyance with me, I wasn’t sure I wanted to tell him I had just wanted to spend time with him.

“No!” It came out a little higher than I had intended.

Jumping from the couch, I walked towards my bedroom door. Once I reached the door, I turned towards him, and found myself staring into a random corner before speaking again.

“I had thought that maybe we could have watched a movie together? If that was something we did. Before? Or talk. But, I see that you’re busy when you get home.”

“Oh.” Was all he said, to the cup in his hand since he was staring daggers into it.

“Goodnight. I’m sorry for waking you.”

I didn’t wait for a response, if there would have been one, before I rushed into the bedroom and quickly shut the door behind me. Leaning back against the door, I realized my hands were shaking slightly.

Dinner hadn't been so bad, it was more impersonal. But Oliver hadn't been annoyed with me. I hadn't realized that I had hoped we would have spent a couple of hours together, to get to know him again, until it didn't happen.

It was only the first day back, though. One day. There were plenty more days to try again. It was just that the thought of being rejected made me anxious with confusion and hurt.

While getting my shaking under control, I walked through the library room and straight to my closet. There were a few drawers that had nightgowns, from what I remembered. There wasn't a reason to stay awake. It was two in the morning, so I would get changed and go back to sleep.

Deciding not to spend the time searching for a long shirt to sleep in, I landed on a silky tank and short set. Most of the other options were of the lingerie type, and I wasn't exactly feeling attractive. Or comfortable.

I brushed my teeth and ran a comb through my hair before heading to the bed. Grabbing my phone from the nightstand, I went to the clock feature to set an alarm for the morning. Or to wake up in a few hours since it was already early morning at two-thirty.

Oliver had left right before eight, so if I woke up around seven, it was possible that I could have breakfast with him. Though, he was annoyed with me accidentally waking him up just now and might still be annoyed in the morning. I wasn't even sure what I had screamed about.

Setting the alarm for seven in the morning, I climbed under the covers, hoping I would fall asleep fast since it was less than five hours until my alarm would be going off. I silently prayed there wouldn't be any nightmares.

There wasn't a nightmare that night, but I also missed the alarm by twenty minutes. I had woken up to Oliver turning the alarm off for me.

He had already eaten and was about to leave for work. So my plan to spend a few minutes with him before he left was

flung out the window. After using the restroom, I found that he had already left.

There was a note on the island counter beside the saucer with my pill and a small cup of water. Nothing was on the note, other than the instruction to take the pill.

Picking the pill up, I rolled it around my palm, remembering what all had happened yesterday. The whole situation with Minnie and Oliver about this little pill seemed so exaggerated.

I popped the pill into my mouth and raised the cup of water for a drink. The pill lodged in my throat and I choked the pill back up with a gasp. Fanning my face while I tried to calm down the coughs, I stared at the pill that was now on the counter.

Maybe I would try not taking the pill. Since it tried to kill me. It was the higher dosage that had caused the problem when I was hit with even a tiny memory. The smaller dosage made me feel weird when it happened. So, it made sense if not having any dosage would not cause any problem.

If all else, I would go back to taking the pills in a few days. I just wasn't sure where to hide the pill. There wasn't anything in the trash can, so a purple pill would have been noticeable.

I grabbed a napkin to pick the pill up and looked around for a place to put it. It felt like I was a child hiding something from their parents. Only, I was the patient hiding something from their doctor. Or a wife hiding something from the husband?

Noticing the liquor cabinet, I recalled Oliver said he wouldn't have any alcohol either. Which made that cabinet a perfect place to keep a few pills as they came to me.

I folded the napkin around the pill as I walked over to the cabinet. Crouching in front of it, I opened the doors and stared at the bottles. There was a spot in the top row where one of the bottles created a darker shadow in the corner, which was perfect.

I wedged the napkin in the corner, partially behind the bottle of dark liquid, and sank back onto my heels. Unless looking

directly into the corner, you really couldn't see the napkin. Standing up, I took a few steps back and looked into the cabinet.

Still couldn't spot the napkin unless I squinted straight at it. Which was difficult to do unless I leaned down some. Taking a few steps towards the cabinet, I closed the doors and turned back to the kitchen to figure out what I was going to have for breakfast.



The day passed rather boringly. There was the shower, another long search for regular clothing, reheated pizza for lunch, read, watched television, and took a nap. I had decided to just wear pajama pants that I found on Oliver's side of the closet, with a tank top and fuzzy cardigan from my side.

Oddly enough, I hadn't had any more of the weird moments where words just flew from my mouth. So there were also no moments of whatever weird side effect that came afterwards.

There didn't seem to be a common trigger for when it had happened before. The first was in the library area of my room, and the second was on the couch. One seemed aimed more towards the books and the other more about the ribbon.

Maybe.

Even the afternoon nap didn't leave any lingering feelings when I woke. I didn't remember any strange dreams of children, and no other piece of the past with Oliver. It was just a boring, calm day.

Five-thirty rolled around, and I ran into the kitchen to browse the fridge. Minnie had made food for us to last until Saturday, from what I understood, so there had to have been at least one meal in the fridge.

"Oh, I like chicken parmesan." I smiled at the dish as I placed it on the counter and leaned over to heat the oven. "I hope I do, anyway. You look good."

I was hoping that if dinner was already done, or near-done, when Oliver came home, maybe he would be more amiable. I

had felt bad about waking him up early this morning.

But I had also wanted to spend some time with him. It didn't work out last night. It also hadn't worked out this morning when I slept through my alarm, missing breakfast with him. But there wasn't a reason I couldn't try again.

As long as he wasn't busy.

I stuck the dish in the oven when the oven dinged, letting me know it was preheated. I grabbed my Kindle from the counter and went to the couch to wait for the food and for Oliver to get home.

Twenty minutes in the oven, and I was taking the dish out. I made two plates and stuck them back into the oven after turning the temperature down. Oliver had said he got home at six, and that would only be another ten minutes.

It was right at six o'clock when the front door opened. I couldn't see him, as I was taking the plates out of the oven again, but I heard the sigh. Suddenly, I wondered if I should have waited and asked him what he would have wanted to eat.

"Is this okay?" I cringed, trying not to ring my hand on the dish towel nearest me. "I reheated the chicken parmesan that Minnie made yesterday. It just finished reheating...well, no, that was about ten minutes ago...then I put it on plates and put it back to keep warm."

Confusion crossed Oliver's face as he placed his briefcase on the table and walked over to the kitchen. Glancing at the plate and back at me, he just nodded and pulled two cups from a cabinet.

"You could have eaten earlier, you know. You don't have to wait for me to eat. It's not something I'm - nevermind."

Oliver handed me one cup and filled the other with water from the fridge dispenser. He grabbed a plate and slid into a chair at the island.

"It's not, what? Was it not normal for us to eat dinner together?" Taking a seat at the counter near him, I watched him pause before his next bite. "I just thought that you'd like not having to worry about dinner after being gone all day."

Oliver didn't respond for a moment, only taking a couple of slow bites and staring at me whenever I wasn't facing him. The silence surrounded us for some time, and it made me squirm.

After ten minutes or so of silence, I decided to try again. Folding my arms on my lap, I took a breath to focus, and turned towards Oliver. It shouldn't have felt so daunting.

"If you don't mind, I thought we could have dinners together? Maybe breakfast...if I don't miss my alarm again."

Oliver's cup made a rattle as he tried to set it down on the edge of his plate.

"You don't need to set an alarm to get up. It's fine. I'll leave your pill on the counter for you before I leave. But if you want to warm up the dinners, I don't have any complaints. Getting rest, and getting better, is more important, though."

"Okay."

My appetite seemed to be growing smaller. I didn't want to seem desperate to spend any time with him. I wasn't sure if he didn't want to be alone with me or if he did just want me not to do too much.

"I have work to do, again. If you could put the rest of the food back in the fridge. You can have it for lunch tomorrow if you want."

Oliver rolled his sleeves to his elbows and rinsed his plate in the sink. He grabbed his cup, staring at me for a moment, before finally nodding towards me and adding, "Thank you for warming dinner for me. I don't know when I'll be done tonight, so please just go to bed whenever you want."

Then he was walking back to his office.

Again.

Pushing my plate away, I folded my arms on the counter and let my head fall onto them. He had thanked me, at least. But there had been more interaction with yesterday's meal and that involved him being mad with Minnie.

Staring at the dark counter beneath my face, I blinked away the tears. There wasn't a reason to cry about anything that had happened. Oliver was just busy.

He was busy trying to find a way to help me.

It was completely ridiculous to be upset if he was too busy for me. The fact that he was spending so much time working on a way to fix the amnesia should have been enough.

Yet, I couldn't shake the hurt needling into my chest as I got up to put the rest of dinner back into the fridge.

When ten o'clock came around, I went to bed. I couldn't concentrate on the television anymore and there had been no sign of Oliver. I would just have to try again tomorrow.

Chapter Nineteen

There was an odd weight halfway across my stomach. Running my hand down my body, my eyes slowly opened just as the sound of giggling started.

Looking down, I found a jug of apple juice propped against me. The toddler waddled back through my bedroom door and tossed her sippy cup onto my chest.

“What -” I sat up and looked around, confused.

The little girl grabbed onto my leg closest to the edge of the bed and pulled herself up on the bed beside me. She crawled up some of my body, grabbed her sippy cup and sat beside my hip.

“Juice, Momma!” She tapped her sippy cup against the jug of apple juice.

“Roselyn! Did you wake your momma up after I told you to let her sleep?” an older woman called from the other room.

“It’s okay, I’m awake now,” I called back. “She just wanted juice.”

“She could have asked me, instead of waking you up. I swear that girl thinks no one can help her unless it’s her momma,” came the muttered response.

Grabbing the toddler, I fell back onto the pillow, making her giggle and squirm away.

“Juice.”

I watched her scoot back to my hip, reach over for the jug, and drag it closer to herself.

“How did you even get the juice in here? This thing is kind of heavy.”

She just nodded and pushed her sippy cup onto my chest.

Chapter Twenty

There was an annoying blaring noise that kept getting louder. Rolling over, my hand landed on my cell phone and my eyes shot open.

The bed was a different bed. It was a different room. And there wasn't a little girl with me, or even a jug of apple juice.

Rubbing at my eyes, I slowly sat up and looked around. It felt so real. So real that I could feel a longing in my chest.

I grabbed my phone as another noise sounded, going through to turn off the alarm. It was seven-thirty, and as much as I suddenly wanted to sink back to sleep, I wanted to see if I could catch Oliver before he left.

Thankfully, he was still in the kitchen after I used the restroom and quickly brushed my teeth. I was still finger-combing my hair when I came into the living room and saw him sitting at the table.

"Oh good, you haven't left yet." With a small smile I walked to the table and sat across from him.

Oliver slowly looked up from the paperwork in front of him, his head tilting slightly. "Was there something you needed?"

"No? I just wanted to see if it was possible for lunch -" I paused as his eyebrows began to draw together.

Taking a deep breath, I tried to start again. "Do you have lunch at work? Or do you go somewhere? I just thought that maybe we could have lunch today?"

"Lunch?" He asked, brushing the paperwork together. "I don't -"

"It's fine," I interrupted, finding the corner of my lip to chew at. "You're probably busy. I shouldn't have asked."

"Eleanor, I'll just be busy. I haven't left the lab for lunch in about a month now."

Oliver stood, sliding the papers into his briefcase, and drummed his fingers along the top of the chair's back.

"Okay, yeah, that's fine." I rushed out, watching him roll his sleeves down and fastening them. "Hope you have a good day."

"I'll be back at six. Like always. Your pill's just there." He paused, motioning to the island counter, before heading to the front door.

"Wait." I awkwardly stood up, deciding to ask about my dreams since I wasn't sure when I'd catch him again.

Turning from the hallway, he leaned against the wall, one hand sliding into his pocket. "Is everything okay? You seem fine."

"No. Well, yes. I'm not sure." I began, clutching at the top of the chair beside me.

"What's wrong?" Dropping his briefcase in the hall, he moved towards me, his eyes quickly roaming my body for a visible clue.

"Nothing, I think. It's just that I remember having dreams."

Releasing a sigh, he ran a hand through his hair. "Dreams? I'm guessing these aren't just normal dreams if you're asking about them?"

"There's sometimes this little girl and -"

"What little girl?" He moved closer, but his demeanor changed. His hazel eyes were suddenly like daggers piercing me. "What dreams?"

Taking a step backwards, I found myself retreating, and I wasn't entirely sure why he looked menacing. He stalked after me, the green seeming to spark in his eyes.

"Eleanor, what little girl?"

"I just -" My thighs hit the back of the couch and I threw my arms to the side, grabbing the couch, to stop myself from falling over. "It's Rosalyn. Her name was Rosalyn...and I have these dreams -"

“No.” Oliver nearly hissed, barely a foot from me. “There isn’t a little girl, Eleanor. You lost the little girl. And I’m not going to talk about it again.”

Shaking, I watched Oliver basically stomped out of the place. I hadn’t realized I was crying until an audible sob broke free, and I slid down to the floor.

At least I found the reason Oliver made it seem like it was difficult for him to have to speak with me, let alone stay in the same room.

It was the miscarriage.

But the dreams felt so real.

Maybe because I needed them to be real.

Pulling myself together took a moment, but I finally made it to the kitchen and grabbed a napkin to blow my nose. I threw it away and used another. Staring at the pill, I grabbed the cup of water beside it and took a long drink.

Yesterday had been fine without the pill, which was enough confirmation to add it into the liquor cabinet with the first one that had tried to choke me. Then I decided to go back to bed. The day had started horribly, and I felt drained.

I ended up skipping breakfast and lunch, forced myself to take a bath, and curled up in bed, waiting for my alarm to go off at five.

Chapter Twenty-One

We were sitting on a bench under a pavilion as kids ran around the playground. There was another bench nearby with presents and gift bags, another bench had a cake and two other benches were spread out with foods and drinks.

I glanced down at my phone to check the time again. The company would be calling in another few minutes. I was just anxious and excited for them to arrive.

I was trying to make this a birthday party that she would remember. She was turning five years old and would be starting school in a few months.

“Are they here yet, Momma?” The birthday girl in question ran up to me, out of breath.

“Should be here in a few more minutes. They called to say they were on their way, and that they’ll call when they arrive.”

“Real princesses are coming to your party?” Another little girl asked, her eyes going wide.

Rosalyn did a fast twirl in her lavender princess dress. “My mom asked my favorite princess to come. I gave her an invitation when I went to the park.”

“If the princesses are good, I’m going to need to know the company you went through to book them,” whispered one of the other mothers.

My phone started ringing in my hand, and as I swiped to answer it, it kept ringing.

The ringing slowly grew louder while everything else slowly faded away.



Groaning, I flopped my hand around the bed until I felt my phone. Turning the alarm off, I swallowed the lump in my throat from having another dream. Maybe they would stop.

They had to eventually stop because the ache left behind was building. And I didn't know how big it would grow before I completely fell apart. Or went crazy.

I made my way to the kitchen and pulled out the chicken parmesan again. Leaving the oven to preheat, I decided to check the pantry for anything sweet.

Finding an unopened bag of chocolate-covered peanuts, I hopped onto the counter and liberated my snack. Sometimes you just need something sweet to snack on to help you feel even slightly better.

I had about a quarter of the bag by the time the oven sounded to put the dinner in. Though the bag wasn't that big to begin with. I closed the bag of my snacks, leaving it on the counter, and made myself a small cup of water.

The meal was on a plate for Oliver by the time he came home. I had decided it was probably best if I started eating before he arrived, in case I had another loss of appetite.

I tried not to look at him as Oliver dropped his briefcase on the table and slowly made his way into the kitchen. Glancing down at the plate, he turned back towards me and cleared his throat.

“What did you end up having for lunch?”

“Not this,” I muttered, finally staring up at him. I tried to keep any emotion at bay. I just needed to be calm and normal.

“Well, yes, I can see that.” With a roll of his eyes, he took down a cup and fished the pitcher of tea from the fridge.

“If you can't eat the same thing two days in a row, I can heat the oven again and put one of the other meals in for you. I just thought it would be stupid to waste what was left.”

“That's not what I meant.” Placing his plate at the other end of the island, he sank into the chair. “What did you have for lunch?”

“I didn't have lunch. I seemed to have lost my appetite earlier today.” It came out more hushed than I would have

liked. Taking a drink of water, I tried to focus on the coolness rather than my reason for not eating.

Oliver didn't say anything as I stood and started rinsing my plate. I could feel his eyes on me, even though I tried to look at anything else around me. Turning to the counter behind me, I grabbed the chocolate-covered peanuts and went to put them back in the pantry.

"Are those...my peanuts?" He sounded surprised.

"Maybe?" Shrugging, I glanced over at him. "I mean, unless I bought them for me before. I'll just buy you another bag. If you tell me where the closest store is, and how to get to it."

"No, it's fine. You can have them if you want them." Motioning with his hand to encompass the kitchen area, he added. "You can eat whatever you want."

"Will this cause another reason for you to be upset with me? Because if I keep doing things that annoy you - I'd rather not."

Leaning back in the chair, he looked up at the ceiling and exhaled loudly. "I'm sorry about this morning. I meant what I said. I just didn't quite approach it as I should have. It isn't a subject I want to speak about. Not right now. Not for some time yet."

I could understand that. Not everyone handles grief, loss, or accidents the same. And, of the two of us, Oliver was the only one with the memory of everything that had happened. He also had to deal with a stranger masquerading as his wife.

"Okay," I sighed and went to sit on the couch.

After a stretch of silence, I looked back at Oliver, just catching him as he turned his head away from my direction.

"Do you - will you be in your office tonight?" I finally asked after he'd rinsed his plate in the sink.

"Yeah," he mumbled with a nod before heading toward his office, pausing just before turning down the hallway. "Your appointment with Jin is tomorrow."

I already knew from the previous nights that there was no point in me waiting up for him, but I still tried.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Mom, are you listening?” The girl in front of me leaned over the booth, grabbing my hand. “This isn’t how it happened.”

Taking in my surroundings, I found myself sitting in a booth at a diner. Narrowing my eyes, confused, I slowly looked around again. It seemed familiar somehow.

“Mom?” The girl shook my hand, still leaning nearly halfway across the table.

“What? Where am I? I think I know this place, but I can’t remember.”

The girl released my hand and sank back into her side of the booth. “Because this isn’t how it happened.”

“What do you mean? How, what happened?”

Focusing on the girl across from me, the features started to make sense. She was the Rosalyn from my dreams. Only older.

I was dreaming again.

“We have a connection. I mean, obviously, we do. But I left some things I didn’t think anyone would notice. I had to. But this is the first time the connection worked for me. I think it’s because I’m not here anymore.”

“Wait. Wait.” I rubbed my head. This wasn’t making any sense. “You’re Rosalyn. Right?”

The girl’s arms fell slightly as she wrapped them around herself, her eyes going sad. But she only gave a small nod, sinking into herself.

“You don’t remember me. Do you?”

I could see her eyes watering, her blinks coming faster, as she slowly began to chew on her bottom lip. She was trying not to cry. And I desperately wanted to wrap my arms around her.

“You’re my dream daughter. I’m sorry...” My words trailed off when a single tear fell from her eye, and she quickly swiped at it. “I’m sorry I couldn’t keep you.”

“I know this is the path we need to be on. But I really didn’t think it would be this horrible.” Rosalyn reached over to grab my hand again.

“No matter how horrible, I’m positive I love you, Rosalyn.”

Taking a deep breath, Rosalyn wiped at the tears before whispering, “The trip has been fine, really, mom. I know you worry about me, and I’m sorry. You’re always going to worry about me.”

My eyes widened as she disappeared with everything around me. Someone had said those words to me before in another diner. I didn’t know when, or where, but I knew this. I wasn’t even sure how I knew it to be true, but I did.

“Rosalyn?” I called into the void.

Why was she older than the other dreams of her? Why were the dreams starting to feel so real? When would they stop?

Did I want them to stop?

“Rosalyn!” I yelled.

“Rosalyn.” It came out as a whisper that time.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Blinking back the darkness, my eyes adjusted to the sunlight filtering through the bedroom window. I knew it was a dream, so why did I feel disappointed to be waking up.

“Eleanor? Eleanor, are you okay? I heard yelling.” Oliver ran halfway into the room, looking around.

“Just a dre - nightmare, I think.” Throwing the covers off, I rub a hand down my face.

“Okay, well, I’m going to go shower and we’ll leave in about an hour for your appointment.”

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I looked over at Oliver as he turned to leave the room. He was in shorts, some kind of swimming looking shirt, and running shoes. There were sweat spots lining his back, and his skin looked wet.

“Wait, what time is it? And what were you doing?”

Turning back towards me, he scratched at his chin before folding his arms across his chest. “It’s eight. I took the day off for your appointment. I decided I could sleep in some before I went down to the gym. I’d barely got back when I heard you screaming.”

I wasn’t entirely sure where to start with the questions. If it was eight in the morning and he had already been to the gym, how did he sleep in?

“Do you go to the gym every morning?”

Cocking his head to the side, he looked confused. “Yes. Why?”

“But, you leave by eight.”

“Every morning I wake up at five.”

“Oh.” Well, I would not be catching him that early. Or in the gym.

“Okay, well, if that was it?” He quirked an eyebrow at me.

“Yup.” I slowly nodded and waved him off.

“We’ll leave in an hour,” I heard him call from the doorway.

“Who gets up at five in the morning to exercise every day?” I grumbled, dragging myself to the bathroom.

I really hoped the early hours and gym were more of an Oliver thing and not a couple’s thing we did together. It would be another thing to add to why he would be annoyed with me. The now-me found the thought of getting sweaty in the gym to be very cringe-y.

“Here, a light breakfast because I have a phone call I need to make when we get to Jin’s office.”

Catching the banana that was tossed at me, I watched Oliver grab his suitcase off the table. He was back to wearing a suit. And other than the doctor scrubs and the workout outfit this morning, I was beginning to think that all he owned were business suits.

“Will Minnie be stopping by while we’re gone?” I asked, peeling the banana and getting an odd cringe in my stomach.

“Hmm? Oh, yes. Ms. Kes should be stopping by tomorrow. Is there a reason why you are calling her ‘Minnie?’” Grabbing keys from the counter and running a hand down his face, Oliver was looking slightly distracted.

“Because she asked me to?” I rolled my eyes at his back before taking a bite of the banana as I followed behind him to the front door. “Ugh. Oh. Eck.”

Coming to an abrupt stop, I dashed into the restroom to spit the banana into the trash. Oliver hovered over me, his hand reaching out before he roughly shoved it into his pocket. With a frown, he leaned against the doorframe and watched me rinse my mouth out.

“What was that about?”

“I’m fine. Thanks.” I grabbed the hand towel and wiped at my face.

Not that the banana touched my entire face, but it felt needed. Well, actually, it felt like I needed to take another shower - but I had just taken one before coming to the kitchen. So scrubbing the banana residue from my face was just going to have to work.

“I see you’re okay. What’s wrong with the banana?” Looking back into the hallway, he snorted. “You threw the rest of it on the ground with your purse when you ran in here.”

“Dropped it. I didn’t just throw it. I dropped it.”

Focusing on putting the hand towel back on the dangling thing, I tried to figure out why I had spit it out. Oliver had given me a banana. I tried to eat the banana.

The banana had a weird texture and taste. My mouth, and the common sense of my tastebuds, rejected the banana. So, the conclusion would be that I did not like bananas.

But Oliver would have known. Husbands knew what foods their wife didn’t like. Maybe? Then again, there was always that running joke that men never paid attention to what women liked. Which seemed sexist and depressing.

“Okay, well, you dropped the banana. Spit out the bite you did take. And now you’re harassing the towel.”

Oliver stepped further into the restroom and pried my fingers from the hand towel. He slowly ushered me around towards him and lifted my head to meet his questioning gaze.

“What happened?”

“Did you forget I don’t like bananas? Did you never know? Or did I like bananas before and now I don’t like bananas?”

Oliver’s eyes widened as he moved slightly away from me, his arms no longer touching me. Clearing his throat, a look of determination flashed across his features before his eyes narrowed.

“Are you angry with me right now? Because I don’t have a way to know what you woke up to not having a taste for. I gave you a banana for a quick breakfast, so you had something to eat.”

Swallowing back my retort, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. There seemed to be a lot of those. I knew there wasn't a reason to be annoyed with Oliver over this.

A banana.

Who had arguments over bananas?

"You're right." Moving out of the restroom, I stopped in front of Oliver and reached my hand out.

Not entirely sure if I was trying to hold his hand, pat his arm, or what - but I pulled my hand back when Oliver stepped towards the front door and out of reach.

Getting my purse and banana off the floor, I mumbled an apology that Oliver acknowledged with a slight nod of his head before he left our suite.

I was left wondering if I had apologized for the banana or for trying to touch him.

Chapter Twenty-Four

After tossing the rest of the banana into a trash bin in the garage, I joined Oliver in the car. Unlike the ride with Jin, there was only an uncomfortable silence.

Twenty minutes of subtle shifting and awkward throat noises or quick glances, Oliver parked in front of a small office building.

“I have to make a quick call, but I’ll meet you inside. Jin is the second door on the left. Just sign-in at the desk, we already did your paperwork. I’ll be in the waiting room when you come out.”

“Right. Okay.” Nodding, I climbed out of the car and left my purse in the seat. Oliver already had his phone to his ear, with an annoyed look, before the door had completely shut.

The parking lot in front of the building had few empty spaces, but thankfully, we were parked near the entrance. And with a quick glance back, besides seeing Oliver slamming a hand against the steering wheel, there was a ‘Reserved’ painted across the parking block.

It made sense that it would be easy to get a parking spot if Jin gave one to Oliver. Especially since there were a few more vehicles that turned into the parking lot as I walked into the building.

Before I could start wondering if it was all for Jin’s office or others in the building, and then wondering how many people had offices in the building, I repeated the brief instructions from Oliver and headed to the second door on the left.

The waiting area didn’t look too clinical, thankfully. There were three televisions on the three surrounding walls, and quite a lot of sitting space. More than half of the waiting room already seemed filled, mostly with women of varying ages and older men.

Trying not to stare at anyone, and telling myself no one was staring at me, I quickly made my way to the reception desk. The woman behind the counter twisted her blonde locks onto the top of her head and went back to typing.

I didn't see a sign-in sheet along the counter, only information on billing, not taking phone calls because of privacy, and a vase of pens.

"Hi," I started. When the woman only moved her eyes in my direction, I tried again. "Good morning. I just need to sign-in for my appointment."

The woman smirked, turning her chair towards me as she leaned back.

"We aren't accepting walk-ins right now."

"I'm not a walk-in? I mean, I did walk in...but, I have an appointment with Jin at nine thirty."

The woman, whose name tag claimed her as Tiffany, tapped at a clipboard in front of her.

"Dr. Sato, you mean. I have the list of his appointments and all files already pulled for him. Do you have your ID on you?"

"Um, no. I left it in the car..." glancing back behind me to see if maybe Oliver had made it inside yet, I sighed. "My husband is just -"

"Ah. Of course." There was a very non-humorous laugh as she interrupted me. "You thought you would be able to get in to see Dr. Sato before your husband found you? You aren't the first woman to try this. Look around you. Most of these women are here because they just have to see Dr. Sato. Although, they have appointments."

Leaning against the chest-high counter, I tried again while feeling the eyes of the rest of the room start to pay attention to us. Tiffany wasn't trying to keep her voice lowered.

"I have an appointment. With Jin - Dr. Sato. At nine thirty." Closing my eyes, I breathed out, "Can you just check? I haven't checked in, so you should be missing me."

“He has a personal meeting cleared in his schedule, which isn’t under your name.” She sounded snobby.

“You don’t even know my name, though.”

“What’s the name?”

“Eleanor -”

“Oh, would you look at that? Nope.” She tapped a nail against the clipboard with a fake smile plastered across her face.

“Can you ask Jin? Maybe there’s been some sort of confusion.” There had to be some kind of confusion. Both Oliver and Jin had told me about my appointment. But the attention this was drawing was causing anxiety.

“His name is Dr. Sato. I’m not in the business to interrupt him when he’s going to be in a meeting. You know what, here, you fill out these papers and you can wait in this other room since you’re causing a commotion.”

Tiffany grabbed another clipboard from near her computer and motioned to the pens beside me when she handed me the clipboard of papers.

“I don’t know - I can’t fill these out.” I whispered, reading through the questions. I hadn’t even known my name that long. “I was told I didn’t need to fill anything out.”

“This is absolutely ridiculous.” Tiffany seethed, standing from her chair and walking around the desk. “Okay, come on. You can figure out how to fill out simple forms while I call security to escort you from the building.”

“Wait...what?” I gasped as she ushered me into a room near the front desk.

“You aren’t the first woman to not take ‘no’ as an answer. So, you can wait while I get security here.”

Then she was shutting the door in my face while I stood looking like a fish out of water. I twisted the door handle to go find Oliver, only to find the door was locked.

“How did that go wrong?” I muttered to myself as I sank into a chair under the small window that looked into the waiting room.

I twisted the blinds to stop the people from staring at me, but just enough that I could see out. Looking back down at the papers, I wrote my name in the designated spot and then hoped I wouldn't be locked up for that much longer.

It didn't end up being more than five minutes before I watched Oliver walk into the room and sit near the exit.

“Dr. O'Shea?” Tiffany smiled over at him. “I'm sure you can go back now.”

“What? Has Jin come out for me?” Oliver asked, looking up from his phone while I tried to get the blinds to open more, but the stupid things were stuck.

“No, he hasn't. But I'm sure he won't mind if you go back on your own.”

“I don't think that's necessary. I'll wait here until he calls for me.”

Tiffany sat down with a nod and went back to the computer. I tried to knock on the window, but no one looked my way, and the same happened when I tried knocking on the door. I was stuck and Oliver didn't know.

“Tiffany, have you seen - oh, Oliver, there you are,” Jin called as he came around the corner, stopping just past the desk to look around the waiting room.

“It's only been ten minutes, if that, Jin. What happened in ten minutes?” Oliver asked as he stood and walked closer to Jin.

“What are you talking about?” Jin asked, scrunching his face in confusion.

“I told Dr. O'Shea he could go back, but he said he would wait for you.” Tiffany offered, glancing between them.

Waving his hand in dismissal, Oliver stopped close to Jin. “There's no reason for me to come back unless Jin needs me

for something. Did she remember something? What happened?"

"Hold on." Jin lifted a hand to halt Oliver from speaking more. "She isn't back there. I came out here to figure out how she was late, since you are never late."

"What do you mean? She wasn't with you?" Oliver's eyes went wide as both he and Jin started to talk over each.

They both turned as the front door opened and a security guard entered. Jin rubbed a hand down his face as the other rested on his waist. Oliver had his phone up to his ear as he began pacing in front of the desk.

"You needed someone escorted again?" the older man asked, moving around Jin and Oliver as he stopped in front of Tiffany.

"Right!" Tiffany jumped up and came around to the door. I moved back as I waited for her to open the door. "Come on."

"Hey," I tried to yank my arm from her grasp as she pulled me from the room. She hadn't given me time to walk myself out. Which I would have done.

"She's loitering," Tiffany smiled at the guard before narrowing her eyes at me.

"Eleanor!" Both Oliver and Jin let out some combination of a sigh and a shout as they turned towards me, Tiffany and the security guard, who decided to grab my arm when Tiffany released me.

"What the hell is going on here?"

"You need to let her go. Right now."

Those were the only two sentences that came across the room loudly, from Oliver and Jin, when everyone started talking at once. Tiffany was staring between the guys and me at a loss for words and clear confusion written across her face.

The security guard suddenly released my arm as he was jerked away from me, tripping over a nearby chair. Pulling himself together, the security stood up and stepped back.

“I was called to remove a woman from Dr. Sato’s office. I don’t know what’s going on, but you guys figure it out.” He smoothed down his shirt with an angry tug before he continued. “I’ll let the altercation slide because we’ve never had problems here, Dr. Sato.”

“Let it slide? You just tried to drag her -”

Cutting Oliver off, Jin placed a hand on Oliver’s shoulder and stepped around him.

“Thank you, Pog. There seems to have been a misunderstanding here,” Jin cut his eyes to Tiffany that spoke of trouble. “I’ve got it handled.”

I hadn’t realized I had landed in a chair until I was looking up at Oliver and Jin, with an annoyed Tiffany further back. Once the door closed, a thick tension filled the room. The other people in the room weren’t even trying to hide that we were openly being gawked at.

“You ok?” Jin asked, pulling me to my feet and rubbing at the arm both Tiffany and the security guard had grabbed at.

“I’d like to go back to, what the hell is going on?” Oliver turned to Jin, jabbing a finger at Tiffany. “Why is your receptionist sending security guards to remove Eleanor from the building? She had maybe ten minutes alone.”

“That’s a good question.” Jin snapped, crossing his arms and turning to Tiffany.

With a growing red face, she only sputtered before waving a hand at me. “She couldn’t tell me who she was. Or if she had an appointment. Only that she needed to see you at nine thirty. She had no ID, and refused to fill out the paperwork. She began making a scene, so I called security.”

“Wait, I told you I had an appointment.” I interjected, moving between Oliver and Jin. “You told me that there were no walk-ins. I said that I had an appointment at nine thirty. You said he was in a meeting. I tried to telling you that my husband was going to be here sooner and maybe he could figure out what was going on - “

“You did not mention a husband.” Tiffany seethed.

“Uh, yes. Yes, I did. You interrupted me, like now, and somehow thought I was hiding from him or something. See - husband,” I gestured towards Oliver.

“Dr. Sato,” a woman behind us slowly stood. “This isn’t the first time Tiffany has called security to escort someone out of the building. And if anyone mentions anything, we seem to have canceled appointments or find ourselves with a new doctor. This is just the first time she was caught.”

“That’s a bit extreme,” I whispered, completely confused.

“Tiffany, call Monica. Tell her you are being transferred to Dr. Wicker and see if she’ll come in for the rest of the day. I’ll send her an email to verify.”

“But - This is - Dr. Wicker?” Tiffany glared at me.

There wasn’t anything that I had done wrong. Other than attempting to go to my appointment. Everything that happened was solely on her. And completely crazy.

“I believe you’ve been excused.” Oliver snapped.

Grumbling to herself, Tiffany went around the desk, snatched her purse from somewhere, and rushed out of the office.

“That was...excessive.” I breathed out when the tension in the room vanished.

“Really wish I could just fire her,” complained Jin with a sigh. Turning back to me, Jin took the clipboard from my hands. I hadn’t realized that I was still holding it.

“Come on, you still have an appointment. And now I’m running behind.”

Ushering me back towards the desk and the hallway past it, Jin turned back towards the waiting room quickly.

“I’ll be offering refunds for the day. Feel free to wait, or head to Dr. Grayson, or reschedule. I’ll let her know what happened.”

Nearly half the people left the room, while others just went back to staring at the television or whatever magazine they had

in their hands. Oliver sank back into a chair close to the desk and scowled.

“I’ll be here and I’ll call about Tiffany.” Taking his phone from his pocket, Oliver glanced back at us. “I’m not answering your phone, though.”

“Didn’t ask you to,” Jin called over his shoulder as he ushered me down the hallway and to one of the doors on the side.

Chapter Twenty-Five

“You can go ahead and take a seat on the couch if you want. I’m just going to send out an email real quick. What a shitshow.” Jin grabbed a tablet from the coffee table and sat back in the chair beside the couch.

Sitting on the couch, I looked around the room. It looked like an office of sorts, just with the addition of some living room furniture on this side of the room.

I folded my arms on my lap and waited for Jin to continue tapping on the screen. It didn’t take long before he placed the tablet back on the coffee table in front of us and ran a hand along his jaw with an exhale.

“You’re okay?”

Lifting my shoulders in a shrug, I rubbed at the arm that probably had fingerprints on it by now.

“I honestly don’t know what happened. Oliver told me to just sign-in. That’s what I tried to do...that was just over-the-top.”

“Okay, well, it’ll get taken care of.” Snatching a pad of paper and pen from beside the tablet, Jin started roughly writing.

“You said that you couldn’t fire her?”

“I said that I wish I could fire her.” With a wink, Jin scribbled some more.

“That’s not different...”

“Let’s move on to you, my lovely Eleanor. We are here for you, right? Right.” Leaning back in the chair, Jin threw one ankle across the opposite knee. “Ms. Kes gave me a short recount of what happened when she was over. Tell me what happened?”

“Wait, so she’s a babysitter for Oliver and a spy for you?” I asked, kind of taken aback.

“I called her to see how your first day went. I would have called you, but I thought it best not since you don’t know me...and I could ask you now. Which I’m doing. So?”

Jin raised an eyebrow when I didn’t respond. Maybe it made sense that he would want to know how I managed, since I had had the problem the day before - which he witnessed. Wetting my lips, I swallowed down whatever weird feeling I had and nodded.

“Well, first I probably was close to falling into a panic because I couldn’t decide if I should call my parents. But I don’t know my parents. And decided it was pointless for me to call people I didn’t know and not be able to answer questions they may have.” Smoothing my hands over my legs to try to stop the sweat feeling, I sighed. “I should probably ask Oliver to help me with the call. But he’s just - I didn’t want to bother him.”

“Oliver’s, what?” Jin started to tap the pen against his lip.

“Nothing, I’m sure it’s just his way of dealing with everything...” The coffee table in front of me seemed so interesting all of a sudden. Not really interesting, just something to focus my eyes on.

“What do you mean, sweetheart? What’s Oliver said? Or has he done anything?”

Taking a deep breath, I spoke at the table rather than look at Jin to face the embarrassment of telling him that my husband - his friend - didn’t seem to want to deal with me outside of a medical aspect.

“Oliver just seems really busy. And that sounds incredibly childish saying it aloud. Though he seems to be angry at me, or annoyed with me. I’m pretty sure I figured out the reason behind that. I made the mistake of mentioning Rosalyn, and he cornered me into the back of the sofa before storming out the door.”

“Rosalyn? You mentioned Rosalyn?” Jin dropped his foot to the floor and leaned forward. “Sweetheart, why did you mention Rosalyn? Walk me through this.”

“I’ve had some dreams. Or nightmares sometimes.”

“Is that what happened with Ms. Kes? You remembered something?” Turning a page on his pad of paper, Jin started to write again.

“No? I was going through my purse, and something about it just gave me this strange feeling. Like I was trying to remember something? Or like I forgot something, maybe. And I think I zoned out while I was processing.”

Glancing at me between his scribbles, Jin tapped the pen against his lips again. “There’s nothing in your purse that would cause that. Oliver went through your purse, and then I went through the purse - You know what? Nevermind. What dreams?”

Shifting to get comfortable again, I cleared my throat. It felt weird that I would be talking about my dreams. Especially since they only seemed to anger Oliver. But I was here because Jin was supposed to be able to help in this area.

“Sometimes she’s this small child, like two or three years of age. There were a couple of times when she was five, and then when she’s a baby. Like a newborn.”

“What happens in the dreams, sweetheart? Does she talk to you?”

“Um, no? It feels like I’m reliving something. Maybe? It always feels so real though. But Rosalyn...she just always,” swallowing past the lump in my throat, I tried again. “It’s like there’s this darkness that swallows everything around me. Including her. Or she just disappears. And there’s this ache. Here.”

Resting a hand on my chest, I finally turned back to Jin to see him sitting at the edge of the chair. There seemed to be a sadness in his eyes and then it vanished with a blink, to be replaced with determination.

“Sweetheart,” he started, reaching for the hand closest to him. “They’re just manifestations of something you lost. You were only ten weeks along, and we didn’t know the gender yet. There was an appointment for twelve weeks. Though you

were very adamant that you were having a girl, you said that you'd let everyone know her name then."

I felt my brows crease in confusion. The dreams felt real. How could I have not known I was having a little girl? I had a little girl. But, it was all dreams that I had to hold on to.

Jin gently squeezed my hand as I closed my eyes, trying to understand. There was a lightheaded feeling starting to form. I could almost see another memory.

I was in a store, buying a pregnancy test. The anticipation was making me nervous, and I jumped when Jin came around the corner. He glanced down at the box in my hand and nearly knocked me over with his hug.

"Are you sure?" he whispered into my hair. I could feel his smile against my head.

"Obviously not," wheezing, I pushed out of his embrace and stared at the box. "If I was sure, I wouldn't need the test. And I was hoping to get this paid for before you found me."

"Oops," Jin laughed, taking my hand and pulling me towards the check-out area. "I'll pretend it's a surprise. What about Oliver?"

"Was also hoping he wouldn't find out anything until after I took this."

Chapter Twenty-Six

“Eleanor? Sweetheart, where’d you go?” Jin was sitting on the coffee table in front of me when I blinked out of the trance.

“What?” I rubbed at my temples, still feeling a slight dizziness.

“You zoned out and weren’t responding. What happened?” Giving my free hand a squeeze, he stared at me with an oddly hopeful look.

“You were with me when I bought a pregnancy test?” I asked. But it didn’t feel right. It felt odd for some reason.

“Yes,” with a smile, Jin rubbed his thumb along my hand. “And at the first ultrasound.”

The dizzy feeling rushed back in with a static noise. It didn’t make any sense.

“Oliver couldn’t make it? Or have you still not told him?” Jin questioned as he opened the door to the building.

“I’m working on it.” I moved past Jin and nearly jogged to the receptionist to avoid answering. Oliver had been cranky the last few months. The moments of amiable silences were few and far between.

After signing in, I sat beside Jin and filled out the paperwork. There weren’t that many people in the waiting room.

Two other couples and a handful of single women were spaced about the place. One of the couples, and a few others, were clearly on a pregnancy visit, if their rounded stomachs were any indication. Some of the other women seemed unable to keep their eyes off Jin.

Snorting, I rolled my eyes and continued to fill out the information.

“I really cannot take you anywhere,” I murmured when I caught Jin’s finger wave from the corner of my eyes.

“Be thankful that I’m not wearing the jeans that hug my ass,” laughing, he nudged my shoulder.

“So thankful,” I deadpanned, standing to take the paperwork back to the receptionist.

“The doctor will be with you shortly,” the older woman smiled.

“Talk to me?” Jin was on his knees between the coffee table and me. I could feel his hands on my arms as I slowly blinked.

It was so strange. I was there, in that memory, seeing it... while not being there. It was like when I was in the dreams. Only I wasn't sleeping this time. And this felt wrong.

I didn't know why, but it did.

“I was buying a pregnancy test. With you. And then I was filling out paperwork at a doctor's office, and you were there for that, also.” I breathed out.

Nodding, Jin rubbed his hands along my arms before moving back to the chair. He grabbed his pad of paper and pen and started writing again.

“Well, this is good. You're remembering some things.”

I watched Jin as he focused on his writing, his foot slowly tapping on the floor. It just didn't make any sense. Not that any of the other times, or dreams, made any sense either.

“How long did I know I was pregnant before the accident happened?” I asked.

Jin's pen paused abruptly as he darted his eyes towards me. “Oh. The accident was ten weeks along. The pregnancy test was at four weeks and the doctor's visit that you just saw - remembered. That you just remembered, was a week later.” Clearing his throat, he closed his notepad and stared at his hands. “So that would be six weeks from the test to the accident, or five weeks from the ultrasound to the accident.”

If I had been excited about this pregnancy, which I fully believe I would have been, I should have had some evidence. Like the ultrasound. Thinking about it, I realized I hadn't seen any pictures in our home, let alone a stray ultrasound.

“Where would I, or Oliver, have kept the ultrasound? I took home an ultrasound picture, right?” I nervously asked.

“One moment.” Jin stood quickly and headed to a small desk in the other half of the room.

Dropping his notepad on top, he opened one of the drawers and pulled out an envelope. Gently patting the envelope against his palm, he walked back over and handed the envelope to me.

“I didn’t look around to see what pictures were there when I brought you back from the hospital, so I don’t know where any pictures would be. But here’s a copy of the ultrasound.”

Jin caused hair to fall across an eye as he raked a hand through his hair after I took the envelope from him.

“Oliver isn’t going to want to talk about the pregnancy. You don’t remember it, well, not really. These dreams aren’t going to do you any good. The pills are supposed to help, so I’m going to suggest we double the dosage.”

Holding a hand up before I could voice my concerns, he added, “It’s still a smaller dose than what caused the pain episode. Eleanor, sweetheart, I just need you to work on focusing on reality and not in these dreams. There’s no way for me to not sound harsh, and trust me, I do not want to, but there is no Rosalyn right now.”

I knew this. Of course, I knew this. Dreams and nightmares were just that - dreams and nightmares. That wasn’t a way to live a life. Or a way to recover.

“Okay,” I agreed, and Jin sat back in his chair.

“Have you been anywhere? I see you either haven’t bought new clothes, or decided that you do like the clothes that were in the closet for you.”

Tracing the crease of the pant’s leg near my knee, I grimaced. “I haven’t been outside since I left the hospital. And I haven’t found any clothes like the ones you brought me.”

“I’ve got to speak to Oliver after this anyway, so I’ll let him know to get you something you find more comfortable. We

have to get you out, too. The sun and fresh air are all things that can help.”

“Okay. But I don’t know where we are, or where we live.”

“We’ll set up some play dates,” Jin laughed. “I’m going to suggest you come by on Monday, so I can check if you’re still having any more of these types of dreams after we up the dosage.”

Something about that made me sad. I didn’t want to lose these dreams. But I also didn’t like the hurt they left behind once I woke up. And I would always wake up.

Though, I wasn’t exactly taking the medicine anymore, either. Maybe they would stop on their own.

“Alright, well, I think I’m good with today. Do you have anything you want to add?”

Staring down at the envelope in my hand, I shook my head. Then, thinking better of it, I asked for the restroom. I didn’t want to have an audience when I looked at the ultrasound.

“That door beside the desk is a restroom. You can use it, and I’ll go speak to Oliver in my office. Just wait here for us when you get done. It won’t take that long. I just want to let him know about the medicine, the need not to keep you in a tower, and the clothes.”

As Jin grabbed his notepad and headed out the door, I went to the restroom with the envelope containing the ultrasound.

Gently closing the door and locking it, I slid down the wall beside the door and brought my knees up. Taking a deep breath, I opened the envelope and pulled the little black and white pictures out.

The photos looked like a blizzard at night, with a round dot thing in the eye of the storm. I wasn’t sure why I was expecting to see something that resembled a baby, but I had. There was a mixture of disappointment and shame as I stared at the pictures, trying to see if they felt familiar.

There was a little bean in the dark middle, surrounded by the grainy black and white storm. As much as I wanted to feel

a connection to the image, nothing was registering.

Swiping at an escaped tear, I put the photos back into the envelope and stood. Just as I was about to unlock the door, I heard muffled voices from the opposite side of the room.

Slowly moving over to the other side, I glanced around to see if I could find where the noise was coming from.

“I’ll bring some of her clothes over tomorrow. I don’t know why you can’t see she would prefer normal clothes,” I heard a hushed Jin from the air vent in the corner.

“Why do you still have her clothing?” Oliver asked with an edge to his voice.

“I just do, which is good, since she needs clothing that she feels comfortable in.” It sounded like a taunt somehow. “You also cannot just keep her locked away. She needs to get out. You, of all people, should know that. She’ll have more time to sink into her head if she’s stuck there with nothing to do.”

“I work, Jin. What do you want me to do? I swear my team has no idea what they’re doing. I’m not even going to get the day off like I planned, just dropping her off and going back. If I don’t work on her problem, then the longer this shit goes on.”

“Okay, but can you at least work on being civil with her? This is ridiculous, Oliver. You’re her husband?” Jin seemed to snort with that. “You can barely look at her half the time. And what happened to the pictures in your place? I made sure there were pictures there for Eleanor to get familiar with.”

“Do not start in on me about playing a doting husband. We are both fully aware you wish the roles were switched.” There was the sound of something crashing. “I moved all the pictures into my new room. I couldn’t look at them and pretend everything was normal.”

“She has no memory, Oliver. Of course, this isn’t normal! But, damnit, get it together. I managed to get her to remember finding out she was pregnant and reiterated a miscarriage. So...we’ll get through this. How close are you on your end?”

Sitting back on the counter, I cocked my head, listening. They seemed to be at odds with each other and yet working together. The whole thing made me have questions, like why Jin had some of my clothes. Unless Oliver and I were having problems before and I had crashed at Jin's place.

“Her blood work is showing signs of working with the newest serum. If her blood doesn't break down on a test run today, I may make it into another pill. But I need to visit the facility for more blood samples. I think I'm onto something with another serum for us.”

“I heard the facility is being emptied sometime this week. You better have this down. And, when you go, see if there's anything personal that's kept. Might be the pushback I keep feeling.”

Not understanding anything about their medical work, I left the restroom since their discussion had nothing to do with me. Sitting back on the couch, I waited for Jin to return to the room with Oliver.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

“I’m going to start leaving two pills in the morning. We had the larger dose, and this smaller one, but I hadn’t made a middle ground pill. I almost didn’t make the smaller dose, actually. Thankfully, I did.”

Watching the scenery go by, I gave a bob of my head in acknowledgement. Jin had already told me that he wanted me to take more. I just hadn’t told either of them that I wasn’t even taking the current one.

“There’s a driver I employ, Jett, so he’ll be stopping by daily to check and see about taking you out while I’m at work.”

Scrunching my nose, I turned to Oliver. “That seems like a waste of time for that poor man. Every day? Just to pop in and ask if I want to go anywhere, and then what? Back home?”

“Jett is paid for it. If he minded, he wouldn’t take the job. He lives in the same building we do, so it isn’t like he’s wasting too much of his time. He’ll probably call in the mornings to see if you need to go anywhere.”

“Okay, fine, I guess.” Shrugging, I turned back to the window.

Clearing his throat, I watched Oliver glance at me from the window. “I’m going to have to leave after I take you back. There’s something that my team doesn’t feel comfortable working on without me.”

“Okay.” It wasn’t as if I wasn’t already used to him being gone. This had been the longest we’d spent time together.

“And,” Oliver started, before letting out a long exhale. “Jin reminded me that you may be starting your menstrual cycle soon.”

“Excuse me?” My attention, and head, snapped back towards him. “How would...how would that - What?” I

couldn't seem to work my head around how to ask where that came from.

Glaring at Oliver, "What the hell were you discussing?"

"It was actually based on the banana." Oliver gave a small smirk and shrugged.

The man just shrugged. Like it made sense and didn't matter.

"Why was it necessary to bring up the stupid banana? And then whether or not I'd be starting my period soon?"

"Obviously you're getting moody-" he waved a hand in my direction.

"Yes. Obviously." I bit out.

Not that I hadn't been depressed, and annoyed. But there were good reasons for them.

"He was asking how you were doing. Like he should, as a professional. I let him know about things which included this morning. Besides the fact that he reiterated that couples don't always get along, he also informed me that your cycle is due."

"And that's normal? Just two men discussing when a woman will be having a period...while they're not in the room."

"Well, if they're the subject matter - yes."

There was another nonchalant shrug, completely nothing strange on his side of the conversation.

"Great." Crossing my arms, I went back to watching the scenery. At least there wouldn't be a surprise period start, because I honestly hadn't thought of one.

"Do you and Jin work for the same company?" I questioned, running through all that had happened since this morning.

"We have the same parent company. Same board members. Why?"

"You said you were going to call about Tiffany. But, she works or did work for Jin. So, that didn't make sense. And you

two work together, I guess...so..."

"Oh. Right. Tiffany has a grandparent on the board. Can't completely get rid of her, but her interfering can get her moved out of Jin's space."

I watched our building come into view and looked around. It was a quiet area. There was a picnic place behind the building, nearing the edge of some woods.

Nothing except another housing building was across the street. The street had some lampposts, but there wasn't really anything other than a few other smaller apartment buildings.

"I think there should be products for you in both bathrooms. Whenever you do...start." Oliver stated, turning into the parking garage.

"There were some pads beside the razors in my bathroom. I shaved my legs the other day and didn't really pay attention to them at the time." Pausing after I unbuckled, I turned back. "What happened to my legs?"

"What? What happened to your legs?" Oliver nearly leaned over with a hand going to the leg closest to him.

"What? Stop it." Slapping his hand away, he only scowled at me. "Nothing's wrong with my leg. I forgot to ask why I suddenly had to shave."

"Mammals have hair."

"Yes, thank you for that, Oliver." I exhaled sharply. "Why were my legs hairless before?"

"Oh. You could have just asked that." Oliver rolled his eyes when I threw my hands in the air. "Jin was shaving your legs while you were in the hospital. As...fascinating...as this all has been, I do need to go."

"Sorry for holding you up," muttering under my breath, I got out of the vehicle and headed for our suite.

I still had questions. Which would probably be easier getting them from Jin, since he was the one that seemed to have paid an absurd amount of attention to things. And I was getting nowhere with Oliver.

There was a man sitting in one of the chairs outside our front door. Slowly stepping out of the elevator, I sidestepped closer to the exit stairwell. The building was supposed to be secure, and yet I suddenly had the irrational fear of being kidnapped.

Or maybe it wasn't irrational. Grown woman being kidnapped was a thing. And, other than the normal responses of yelling for help and trying to kick or hit, I had no idea how to defend myself.

Being closer to the stairs made it easier for me to run down them if I needed to. Hopefully not falling and ending up in a hospital again.

"Ms. Eleanor, I'm Jett." Standing from his seat, his head tilted to the side. "Did I scare you? I told Oliver that I would stop by."

"No, not really." I awkwardly laughed, edging back towards the front door. "Oliver mentioned you. He said you would be calling...but I thought, like, you know...with a phone."

I mimed answering a phone with one hand as I unlocked the front door.

"Well, sorry about that. If this is a bad time? I just wanted to introduce myself and see if you needed me today? Or had anything in mind for tomorrow?"

"Honestly?" Sighing, I ran a hand through my hair. "My morning started off horribly and I think I'll just mope about. I don't think I have anything I even need to do...so, do I just call if I need you?"

Pulling a card from a pocket, Jett held it out for me. "Oliver keeps me on retainer. Call whenever you need me, or if you want to pre-schedule anything."

"Thanks." I tapped the card against the door, watching Jett walk to the elevator, before slowly closing it.

Tossing my purse onto the island counter, I continued to the couch and fell onto it. It was barely noon, and as much as I probably should have gotten something to eat, I just wasn't hungry.

I was tired. I just felt drained. Emotionally and mentally. Like my energy had been working overtime. Since it was noon and I hadn't really done much, I decided that a combination of the session with Jin and trying to find a way to interact with Oliver must have been too much in a short timeframe.

Rolling over to face the back of the couch, I put a small decorative pillow under my head and closed my eyes. Sleeping was a bittersweet place.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

“What do you mean, ‘she wasn’t at the bus stop’?” Rolling over in bed to face the door, I still couldn’t make out the people on the other side.

“I don’t know how else to say it. She wasn’t on the bus.” The man responded to the woman. “I was there before the bus arrived, and I waited until the bus left. She wasn’t on the bus.”

I wasn’t sure why I felt anxious. A slow panic started to build as I tried to piece together what I was hearing, and why it felt familiar.

The door to my bedroom started to open further right as my cell phone buzzed beside my head. Squinting at the brightness, I quickly answered the call from the elementary school.

“Hello, is this Eleanor...Rosalyn’s parent?” The lady on the other end sounded resigned to be the one having to make the call.

“Hi, hello. Yes...she wasn’t on...the bus?” It was difficult to speak.

My throat felt like it had razors whenever I tried to talk, and it all came out in near a whisper. I was sick. I was supposed to be in bed, resting, so my voice would come back and so I wasn’t sick anymore.

“Yes, well, we have her here at the office...now. Rosalyn said you were sick in bed, and I’m sorry to have to be calling, but is there someone that could pick her up?”

“Yes. Thank you.” I wheezed and nodded to the shadowed woman in my doorway as she jangled a set of keys while motioning to the front door.

I watched the woman leave as I hung up with the school. So Rosalyn had missed the bus. And yet the school lady sounded anxious about it. I was sure this wasn’t the first time a student had missed the bus home and needed to be picked up.

Twenty minutes later, the front door opened and a very upset Rosalyn walked into the apartment, followed by the older woman.

“Eleanor, I’m sure you’ll agree with me - but I grounded Rosalyn for a month for you. For making a very stupid and dangerous decision, but I’ll let her tell you what happened.”

The woman seemed to be blurry, even as I came out of the bedroom and slowly headed towards the couch.

Ringling her hands in the bottom of her shirt, Rosalyn whispered, “I missed the bus, so I tried to walk home.”

“What?” It came out more as a squeak. “Rosalyn! We live five miles away...along a busy highway. You’re eight!”

“I know...I’m sorry.” Her bottom lip started to quiver as she held back tears.

“OH, that’s not all. She basically got from the school and near the highway. It was a teacher that saw her walking and asked what she was doing out there, then brought her back to the school.”

“You could have been...killed...kidnapped...lost....it’s hot outside, you...don’t have the water. What were you...thinking?” I felt the heat in my throat when the coughing took over from the force of almost speaking at a normal volume, while trying to yell.

The fear of what could have happened was all too real. My eyes were burning with tears from the fear and anger.

“I didn’t want you to be mad that I missed the bus. So I thought I would walk home so you wouldn’t have to get out of bed to get me.” Rosalyn whispered, wiping away the tears that finally broke free.

Grabbing at her free hand, I pulled her onto my lap and blinked back my own tears.

“I’ve always told you to go to the office if you miss the bus. I am not mad that you missed the bus. It happens, you wouldn’t be the first kid. I’m so very upset that you thought it was okay to walk home. Rosalyn.”

I placed my hands on either side of her face to make sure she was looking at me. “You could have been hurt. Or worse. And that is what makes me upset. That terrifies me. Never, ever do this again.”

Nodding, Rosalyn rested her head against my chest and hiccupped. “Am I still grounded?”

“Yes. No tablets, phones, computers, or television. It probably won’t last a month, though.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I know. I love you.”

She whispered it back as I placed a kiss on her head. Her voice seemed to echo around me.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The sharp poking in my arm brought me away from the echoing. It happened again. Another dream about Rosalyn. The child I didn't have, never truly had...and yet, was completely alive and growing in my dreams.

"I thought I should wake you and see if you had eaten anything today."

Uncurling from the pillow, I blinked away the sleep haze to see Oliver squatting in front of me with one hand in his pocket. The room was darker than it was when I first closed my eyes.

"What time is it?"

"Six. Just got back, and noticed that nothing had been cooked. Not that you need to do that, just that you have been doing it. Then I noticed that there weren't any dishes leftover if you had eaten anything."

Scrambling upright, I looked around the room, somehow thinking it would change the time. I had taken a six-hour nap. I did feel somewhat better, but it was a long nap to take in the middle of the day. Not that I had anything better to be doing.

"I didn't even think about food. I'm sorry." Groaning, I rubbed my hands down my face. "I thought that I would have woken up way before now, and I would have had something ready for you."

"It's fine. I do know how to warm up my own food. I lived before you came here, right?" Patting my hand, he stood and headed into the kitchen. "I'm going to make myself a sandwich, and then I have some calls to make about some materials."

I hadn't been expecting Oliver to stay anywhere near me after he ate, if he had decided to eat, so his statement wasn't a surprise. Oliver waking me up to check on me, if that was the

case, was different. He would normally leave me to sleep on the couch.

“Since I’m already here...do you want a sandwich?”

Slowly turning towards him, I leaned over the arm of the couch. Moving closer, even inches, helps one to hear and understand better. Obviously.

“Are you asking to make me a sandwich?” I hesitated.

“Why do you seem shocked? Are you frowning?” Oliver shook his head in confusion, causing some of his dark reddish brown hair to fall into an eye. “I’m capable of making a sandwich. I know Ms. Kes does my cooking, because I’m busy and she says it’s her way of making sure I have something to eat, but I can make a simple sandwich.”

“Okay, okay,” I muttered, walking towards the island. “It just seemed...odd that you asked me that.”

“Do you want a sandwich or not?” He grumbled, tossing sandwich meat bags onto the counter.

“And there’s the grump I’m used to,” I smirked at his back. “But, sure. Ham, cheese, and mayonnaise. Oh, chicken and bologna. I think that sounds right. Hopefully.”

“I don’t have bologna. There’s ham, chicken,” Oliver separated the bags as he read the labels. “Roast beef and turkey.”

I both wanted turkey on a sandwich, but I didn’t want to eat a turkey sandwich. Wrinkling my nose in that confusion, I just shook my head when Oliver lifted the turkey bag.

Humming to himself, I watched Oliver throw two sandwiches together. At least there wasn’t the tense or awkwardness that usually surrounded us.

“I think I’m going to take my sandwich to my office,” he stated, glancing at his watch while dropping a sandwich in front of me. “I need to make these calls, and we’re in different time zones. Some should be returning my first call soon.”

“Yep.” I shooed him. “I’m used to it now, Oliver.”

“Eleanor...it’s just, this is important.” Oliver started with a resigned sigh. “I don’t know how -”

“It’s fine.” Cutting him off, I stared down at the sandwich when Oliver’s stare became too intense. “I’ll just start trying again tomorrow.”

“What’s that -” Before he could finish, his cell phone started ringing. It sounded like he growled as he angrily grabbed his phone from his pocket.

“This is Oliver.” He snapped to whoever was on the other line, keeping his eyes on me.

Walking around the island and Oliver, as he followed me with his eyes, I grabbed a bag to put my sandwich inside and then put it in the fridge. I just wasn’t hungry anymore.

“Taril, give me just one moment - yes, I know you’re...no, it’s just. Taril, hold on...” Oliver waved a hand at me, making a face. “Eleanor, just one second...what? No, Taril, not next week...”

Moving the phone further from his mouth, Oliver swore under his breath and motioned at me again. Shaking my head, I started to walk towards my bedroom. Mind as well go back to sleep.

“Damn it, Taril, this needs to be done yesterday...just... Eleanor, could you just...You could not do a better job... UGH, fine. Just talk, Taril. What have you got for me?” Oliver was barking into the phone.

“Goodnight, Oliver.” I whispered from the doorway, slowly closing the door when he finally headed towards his office.

I would just start again tomorrow with trying to spend time with Oliver, since today had gone horribly.

Chapter Thirty

Looking around, I tried to make out the shapes further away. But everything started to get hazy after a certain point. Squinting in an attempt to focus did not make anything any clearer.

It was just the restaurant's booth with the cracking vinyl seat cushions that were realistic. Even the chatter in the distance sounded like a low radio static. Drumming my fingers on the tabletop, I sat in confusion.

I felt like I needed to be there. I should be there. It looked like it should be familiar, but wasn't quite right. Like buying Jiff and getting Peter Pan. The same, but definitely not the same.

"It's really hard to go to sleep at a specific time and actually go to sleep. You know that? This works better when we're both sleeping. Did you know that?"

The girl was suddenly stepping into the clear part of my vision, and sliding into the seat opposite me.

"I'm dreaming again."

"Well. Yes, obviously. It smells like cupcakes in here...and I think it's supposed to be a pizza place."

I watched the girl pull hair to the front of her face, scrunching her nose in concentration. "I was really hoping I could control my dreams. Then I could show you that I look amazing with lavender in my hair."

"No. This doesn't make sense."

"I can't even get a 'yes' in a dream? Mom!"

Shaking my head, I tried to slide out of the booth. The dreams were supposed to slowly go away on their own. But instead of that, they were only getting so much more vivid.

I wanted to stay. I wanted the baby back. The toddler. The child. They were easy to hold until they were yanked away

from me. But I didn't know how much more I could handle dreaming those, either.

But, these. The ones where she was an older child. The small teen. Not yet a teenager, but very much her own person. Where she spoke like a regular person. I couldn't keep living in these dreams.

"No, I really can't keep doing this." It hurt to say those words and I could feel my sinuses do that choking thing. Wrapping a hand along the outer edge of the table, I tried to drag myself out of the booth. Only I couldn't leave it.

"I can't keep doing this." I choked out. "Please."

"I'm sorry," came the soft whisper across from me. "I thought that maybe you would have gotten a little better. I didn't mean to make you upset."

Taking a deep breath, I slowly turned to face the girl. She was quickly wiping at her cheeks with her sleeves and staring at the table.

"It's not easy on me either. I have to keep telling myself that it doesn't mean that you don't love me just because you don't remember me. And that's adding to not being with you anymore." Grabbing a napkin from the table, she wiped at her eyes some more while sniffing.

Did ghosts make dream visits? And if they did, did they just age in the dream world? Or, it could very well have just been my want manifesting into my dreams - in a twisted way.

"Please, don't cry." I reached across the table and grabbed one of her hands. Her being visibly upset, and sounding heartbroken, was doing something to my own heart.

"But you're crying too." She rolled her eyes before laying her head on top of the table. "I'll just have to figure this out again. And try again. But I think we're moving to Wonderland soon. Or maybe Oz. Saying, 'I'm going to faerie land' sounds funny."

"This is why I know I'm dreaming. You don't make any sense." Taking a napkin for myself, I wiped at my nose.

She raised her head enough to give me a very 'over it' look. Which was impressive, given she still had teary eyes and sounded upset.

"You used to understand me. Even when you didn't, you did." And then she had her head back on the table, mumbling into it. "I don't know if I can keep doing this. This is too much for me. The books make it look fun, with danger, and excitement, with some scary parts."

"Maybe it wasn't so much an understanding as it was an instinct?" Resting a hand over her head, I lightly ran my fingers through her hair until she seemed to have calmed down.

"I just miss you," came a muffled whisper.

"I know my baby, and I miss you, too." Sniffing, I didn't realize how true those words were until they were said.

Which was interesting because I didn't know how to miss something I didn't have or remember. Yet somehow, I did. And it was this anguish of missing something, or someone, that felt like a living pain in my chest - it beat with my pulse.

She startled upright, her eyes going round, as she tilted her head and started looking around.

"It's starting to get dark at the edges. And I can hear the outside, the wake world." Her hands found mine, and she stared at me with a desperation I wanted to fix. "I think the dream is ending."

"They always end." I squeezed her hands, giving her a small smile, not wanting to start crying again.

Dreams always ended. She would always go away from me. I would wake up in a world without her. I didn't know how to fix that.

"Just...oh...did you find the world?" her voice sounded strained, her body going bleary. It was the eyes lighting with determination and hopefulness that gave me pause.

"The world? What are you talking about?" I could feel the pressure of her hand in mine starting to fade.

“Look for the world.”

Then there was nothing. My hands were on the table, and there was no girl in front of me. Only more confusion and a refreshed feeling of anxiety and sadness coursing through my body.

With the relentless darkness now closing in around the edges of my vision, also.

Chapter Thirty-One

Throwing my hand under the other pillow, I pressed all the buttons on the side of my phone until the noise stopped. I wasn't ready to start the day. It didn't help matters that it felt like my body was one sore muscle.

Though I had made the promise, more to myself, that I would start trying again with Oliver the next day. Since it was yesterday that I re-promised myself, that made today the day to start again.

Easing my eyes open, I pulled my phone out from under the pillow. After checking to make sure I had turned the alarm off and not just sent it to scream in another five minutes, I checked the text notifications.

One was from Jin.

One was from Oliver.

Wondering why Oliver sent a text message from the same building, since he hadn't ever sent me a message before, I opened it.

Only to read that I needed to make sure to take both pills that were left out for me. And that he scheduled Jett to pick me up at eleven for a spa day. Ending with him adding that he had needed to go to work today, anyway.

Pushing a hand through my tangled hair, I let out a sigh. I already knew how it was going to go tonight once he got home. That was assuming he would stay at his lab all day and return at six. Then he would eat, maybe in the same room with me, and then go straight to his office.

Jin's message was just a reminder to get out of the building, and that he had left some clothes for me. At least he had added a smiling face behind his words. Oliver's had all been short sentences.

Not responding to either of them, I decided to find the clothing and take care of the pills. I felt better without them.

Though I wished the dreams would stop.

There were three small boxes of clothing on the coffee table, with a torn piece of paper on top of the middle box. The writing looked rushed, but it was still readable.

‘Didn’t want to wake you. Enjoy your day. - Jin’

Not needing to keep the note, I began folding it on my way to the kitchen island. Sure enough, a saucer was there with two pills. I threw the note away and grabbed the pills.

I debated taking them while I shuffled them in my hand. It was a medicine to help me. That’s why you would take medication. Because it was needed, not necessarily something you wanted to take.

Side effects weren’t always the best, that’s why there were always warning labels included on the medication bottles. You shouldn’t take some medications with alcohol. Or, only take some with food. Then there were those that you took on an empty stomach.

Some were taken only at night because it would make you sleepy. There were those that didn’t put you to sleep, but advised against operating machinery. Of course, you had the nastier things to watch for, as well.

But I didn’t even have the bottle for my medication to check for a warning. I wasn’t even sure what the name of the medicine was. Oliver made it sound as if he had just created the medication for me and the situation.

I was the guinea pig. The experiment to test how the medication would work. Which would have been better if I had signed up to be tested on. But I couldn’t really complain if I was comatose, and he had to decide for me.

Still. The side effects were painful and strange. It still didn’t feel right, and I didn’t want to deal with them. Side effects could kill or make things worse later.

“This might help, we don’t know for sure. Oh, but it could also cause death. It’ll be fine.”

My heart skipped a beat as the words slipped free. Stumbling into the island, the pills fell from my hand as I slowly slid to the floor.

I wanted to laugh, with no idea why. There was also the overwhelming urge to sob, my eyes already starting to blur at the corners. Bringing my knees to my chest, I wrapped my arms around them and took a deep breath.

I was emotional because of everything that happened. That was my problem. I didn't know how to just...be me. And possibly hormones, according to Oliver and Jin.

It didn't explain these types of moments, though.

Closing my eyes, I tried to think about what I said. It had to have been the train of thought about my medication. There wasn't anything abnormal about what I had said.

Only that I wasn't sure why the words flew out of my mouth without consciously meaning to do so. Or why they felt familiar. Like the other times.

The books, the ribbon, and now the pills.

They had nothing in common with each other, and all completely random things to trigger whatever had happened.

"Jin was right. I just need to get out of here. Being alone isn't helping me at all." Sighing, I unfolded from myself and picked up the pills from the floor.

After adding them to the others in the cabinet, I took the boxes of clothing to the bedroom. Relief washed over me as I dumped each box onto my bed and found more leggings, jeans, sweats, and just regular shirts.

Grabbing a set of clothing, I decided to shower and get ready for my scheduled spa day.

Jett was an interesting man. Well, maybe he was. There hadn't actually been too much talking since he was silent for most of the drive. His radio was set to a 50s channel, though.

Other than asking if I wanted him to change to a channel with more recent music, there wasn't much to say. He stopped at a sandwich place when my stomach decided to make a noise. Possibly because I hadn't eaten anything before leaving.

It wasn't like I was hurting for food. I had the curves and some extra squishy places that were missing on the smaller women. It wasn't that I was trying to not eat, either.

I just lost my appetite whenever it got awkward or tense with Oliver, or whenever a weird thing happened. There would be an uneasiness that would flood my system and override any hunger.

Eating in silence with Jett, another new stranger to my life, was less awkward than all the times with Oliver. He was just so relaxed, it made the whole atmosphere feel calm.

It also made the forty-minute trip go by in a blur.

We were parked in front of the last building in the shopping plaza before I knew it. Twisting the knob to turn the volume down, Jett turned back to me.

"Do you need me to walk you inside? You have a massage and facial in this one, and then a hair appointment in the salon next door."

"No, I think I can manage." There couldn't have been a way for me to mess up another appointment. Then again. "I guess as long as the receptionist isn't crazy or something."

"What?" Jett's bushy eyebrows nearly touched each other as his face creased in confusion. "Does that happen...often?"

"Good Lord, I hope not." I cringed, opening the door. "Once was enough. Are you going to be here? I don't know how long any of this is, so you probably shouldn't have to sit here waiting for me."

"Nah, don't worry. I have to call Oliver to let him know that you're here for your appointments. Then I'll go down to the other end and see whatever's playing at the theater. But you have my number if you somehow get done before I get back."

“Yep.” I patted my purse and got out of the vehicle. “Okay, well. Enjoy your movie.”

“And you enjoy your...all that.” He waved at the building in front of us.

Jett didn't leave the parking spot until I entered through the massage place's doors. I watched the vehicle drive towards the other end of the shopping plaza as I added my name to the sign-in sheet.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Both the technician for the facial and the masseuse doing my massage stopped trying to make small talk after they realized I really did not know much about my own life.

Telling them I was in a coma and had no memories of my life before a week ago went awkwardly. It did leave me with silence to relax, though.

First with the facial, where she chuckled, thinking it was a joke answer. Then the only talking was when she was telling me what she was doing, what the benefit was, or asking if I was comfortable.

Then, with the masseuse, who went quiet and yet I could almost hear her thoughts, wondering if I was joking or being serious. After I told her that my husband had scheduled the appointment to help me, she focused solely on the massage.

Which really was a blissful experience. I fell asleep for some of it. Even the short nap was relaxing. Nothing happened. Even when I couldn't remember what happened in my dreams, I would still wake up with a feeling that I needed to remember something or just knowing that I had a weird dream.

This time, it was really nothing. I felt like I had a power nap. There was no current stress eating at me and no haunting dreams. Or dreams that tried to be memories.

By the time I was walking next door, my body felt completely relaxed. I felt re-energized and, yet, did want to go back to sleep. This time it wasn't out of depression or to escape - my body was just floating on a cloud.

"Do you have an appointment, or walk-in?" The woman behind the counter smiled at me, holding the phone away from her head.

"Appointment. Sorry, but I don't actually know the time it's for. I was just told to come here after the massage."

“No worries. What’s the name?” She asked, waving a hand in dismissal. “I’ll check for you. Just give me a moment if this guy ever comes back from putting me on hold.”

“Sure. Eleanor O’Shea? My husband made the appointment and probably already paid. Or that’s what the spa place told me just now after I tried to pay them, anyway.”

Using her shoulder to hold the phone to her ear, she started typing. “Yes. Still here. I’ve got a customer, so I’m not going to stay on the phone. This is the first I’ve heard of Tyler skipping classes. I will definitely be having a word with him when we get home tonight. Thank you for calling, but I have got to go now. Yes...okay. Bye, now.”

Hanging the phone up with a shake of her head, she turned to me. “Teenagers. I swear my son is going to drive me crazy. You could give them the world and somehow it won’t be enough.”

I could hear an echo of another voice, about the world, in my head. There was something about finding the world. Which made no sense.

“They don’t make any sense.” I said, clutching my purse tighter. “They tell you what they want from you, and it doesn’t always make any sense.”

“Exactly!” she laughed, standing from the chair. “Well, you’re only about ten minutes early for your appointment. Which is with me, Claire, anyway. So, if you want, we can go ahead and get started?”

“Sure.”

I followed her behind the partial wall that separated the desk and chairs at the front from the larger second half of the room, still trying to understand whatever I was feeling. Like trying to remember something that you should know, but it’s just out of reach.

Spinning one of the seats towards me, she motioned for me to sit.

“I was only told that it had been a bit since you’ve had a haircut. Do you have any ideas about what you want done?”

I watched Claire pull my hair from the back of the wrap thing she had thrown around me, and stared at my hair resting near just above the bend of my elbow.

“Unless someone did something while I was napping for a couple of months, I honestly cannot remember the last time I had anything done to my hair.”

Chuckling, Claire ran her fingers through my hair. “Mighty long nap.”

“Coma,” I answered with a shrug.

“Oh. Wow. Glad to see you’re better now, hun.” She paused on her way to the small stand beside the full-length mirror I was sitting in front of. “You are better? I see you’re not still comatose.”

Chewing the inside of my cheek, I stared down into my lap. “Memory problems. But, I think I’m better.”

“Aw, I’m sorry.” Claire turned back around with a spray bottle in one hand and a comb in the other. “I probably should have asked if you wanted a shampoo. Sorry. A little frazzled finding out my son is now skipping classes, and other silly worries floating in my head.”

“Understandable. Shampooing sounds good.” I placed my purse in the chair in my stead and walked with Claire to the wash basin in the corner. “Honestly, can you do my hair to end right below my shoulders? And maybe thin it some?”

“You do have thick hair. There are people out there that would love thicker hair. But then it adds weight and can cause headaches in people.”

“Yep, headaches.”

I scooted further down in the chair and Claire maneuvered my hair into the sink as I leaned back. I closed my eyes when she started to hose my hair down. It was like another massage, only for the scalp.

It didn’t help that my body was still relaxed from the massage, so the tingles started up again fast. Those tingles

from massages or people playing in your hair. I could feel my body trying to go to sleep, like floating.

“Tyler, the son that’s trying to be a delinquent, will be fifteen next month. Don’t think he was too happy when his father and I told him that he won’t be an only child anymore. Boy or girl for you?”

“Girl.” I mumbled, trying not to fall completely asleep. I wasn’t able to pay attention to what she was saying. Only that she was talking.

“Oh, girls are the best.” There was a soft banging above my head, and mumbling about getting a bottle open. “Well. Tyler wasn’t so bad. He’s not even bad now. I think he’s been working, under the table type, somewhere and didn’t think we would find out. But, how old?”

“Rosalyn’s twelve.” It sounded like I was hearing myself from a distance, like my body was on auto-pilot.

“I heard that the cravings are crazy if it’s a girl. Now I don’t know how true that is, ya know how pregnancies differ from woman to woman. Because when I was carrying Tyler, my husband had a field day laughing at me at a wedding we went to.” Massaging my scalp, she gave a small giggle.

She just needed to keep massaging. There was a fog that was slowly clearing in my head. I could almost taste the air. It smelled so strongly of a holiday dinner.

There was a shadowy figure, smaller than me, sitting at a table. She carefully picked up a knife from the table and started cutting at whatever was in front of her. I tried to get to her side as quickly as possible to ask if she needed help. She’d managed to toss some steak on the floor once...I was sure.

“Well, it was the reception. But there I was, like seven months along and looking like a whale, snacking on this tuna sandwich. And I suddenly spot this chocolate fountain. Next thing I know, I’ve got a bowl of chocolate and I’m dipping that sandwich right in it.”

There was the vague notion that my head was being rinsed of the shampoo. *But it was the girl I was sitting beside that*

had my attention. The girl with half her hair pulled back into a braid and a green ribbon at the end.

Rosalyn canted her head at me, with a rueful smile, before wagging the knife between us. "I cut it myself. And none ended up on the floor."

My eyes roamed over her, afraid of when I'd be snapped back to my body. I missed her. It was that ache of missing her that made little sense. But I knew I missed her.

"Nice and relaxed, Eleanor?" I heard a whisper in my ear. "Don't mind my aromas. They make people sleepy. But we got your head soaked up in my concoction, it'll help. Let's get you standing."

I felt the brief tug of my arm, and the movement of standing. My hair was being wrapped in a small towel, from the minuscule amount I could see from trying to open my eyes.

"Why do I keep dreaming of her?" I slurred, while shuffling along beside Claire.

Claire. Rosalyn had a friend named Claire. Or she did in my dreams. Just like the green ribbon was in my purse.

"It's in...purse?" I slumped into the chair when Claire released me.

"If that's what you saw, then I guess it's in your purse. We're going to get this hair fixed up for you, and you're just going to work on that memory. See if you can tell me where they are before you leave, hmm?"

Shifting in the chair to sit and not be hanging over the side, I rolled my eyes open and watched Claire shove a phone back into a pocket. She removed a tiny bundle of herbs and waved them under my nose.

It smelled like a seasoned turkey roasting in an oven. Maybe if I cooked more, I would know what I was smelling. But, I didn't. Only that it strongly reminded me of Thanksgiving.

"What happened before you woke up?" Claire's voice was fading once more.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Then my eyes were falling shut again, and I was standing at the bottom of a staircase, staring down a large hallway.

I knew this place. I had been there before. But I wasn't sure why it looked familiar. It looked professional, but there were only numbers on the doors and no other signs of what may be behind them.

Cautiously making my way down the hallway, I stopped at each door trying to open any of them. Only that it seemed all the doors were locked.

There was no point in me being in the hallway. As far as dreams went, it was really boring.

Thankfully.

I moved closer to the middle of the hallway when I heard voices behind the closest door. Holding the handle, I placed my ear against the door to see if I could make out anything that was being said.

There were only muffled noises, but nothing was distinguishing. I tried the handle and startled myself when the door opened.

Slipping inside, I spotted a man on a corded landline phone in the corner. He had his back to me and didn't seem to notice I had entered the room. Or maybe the dream didn't need him to notice me.

In an opposite corner, there was a small greenhouse looking thing.

Small butterfly silhouettes flitted about the enclosure. And as much as I wanted to see what it looked like inside the greenhouse, the windows were tinted.

There was also the need to investigate why, and how, there was an igloo roughly the same size as the greenhouse sitting catty-corner to it.

The room wasn't overly warm, but it also wasn't cold enough to support an igloo. Especially in the same room as a greenhouse.

Both of which were sized to fit at least five of me inside them. At least with the greenhouse, I could imagine the purpose. What was the purpose of an igloo?

Taking slow steps toward the igloo, I raised my hand as if to touch it. It made more sense if it were plastic. But I had to touch it to see if it was actually cold.

Before I placed my hand on it, a door swung open near the man on the phone. I heard more voices inside that caught my attention away from the igloo. There were a few of them.

All sounded young.

All sounded upset in some way.

Dropping my hand, I headed towards the new door. It had a glass pane at the top half with some sort of Venn diagram, only the circles were upright and not sideways, with an outlined tiger face at the center.

The bottom was a circle of swirling oranges and reds, like flickering flames. Bright white with blues and purples swirling with intermittent points made up the top circle. Then there were the two different colored eyes that rested at the center, of the center, of the circles.

The tiger was done in black in white and seemed to have been drawn mid-snarl. But, the eyes were what made me think that it was a messing of two different tigers and not one with two different eyes.

The tiger's left eye was a deep amber, while the right eye was a very bright and pale blue. The eyes almost appeared lifelike in the intense stare that they were drawn with.

Approaching the door, I was hesitant before pushing it open. The tiger didn't move, but I almost expected it to. Even though it was only the head of a tiger. And drawn on a window, and not a real

tiger.

“Mom?” came a shriek, jerking me towards a row of hospital beds. “You can’t be here...this wasn’t how it happens.”

“Roselyn?” startled, I rushed toward the girl as she threw her legs over her small bed.

“Hush, before you make someone come back!” another kid murmured from another bed.

“Mom!” Rosalyn’s face suddenly fell as she sank back onto her bed and stared into her lap.

“I thought you only dreamed of your mom. Now you’re seeing things no one else can, Rose? You’ll make someone come back,” spat a kid further down the row.

“She’s not really here,” Rosalyn whispered, glancing up at me from under her lashes as I came to a stop beside a plant a few feet from her.

I couldn’t seem to move any further.

“Rosalyn. I don’t understand...” I croaked out, trying to move closer.

“You need to wake up. Mom, find the world.” She wiped a hand under her eyes. “Just find the world. And wake up.”

Jerking upright, a squeal of alarm fell from my lips as my eyes opened to see a face right in front of me.

“No worries, Eleanor. Just getting you out of here,” Jett explained gently, moving to my side.

“So glad to have helped you, Eleanor. Do visit again.” Claire smiled smugly as Jett narrowed his eyes at her.

“I fell asleep. I’m so sorry.” I called over my shoulder, trying to stay upright at the fast pace Jett was moving at.

“You just need to wake up.” She laughed.

Stumbling beside Jett, I almost didn’t hear him acidly spitting out ‘witch’ over what sounded like Claire cackling behind us.

Chapter Thirty-Four

I was barely buckled into the backseat before Jett was pulling out of the parking lot. Staying upright, or even keeping my eyes opened, seemed to be an issue. It felt like I was trying to fight for consciousness, similar to waking from anesthesia.

“Lean out the window, it’ll help. Fresh air blasting in your face should make the effects wear out sooner.”

“I’m not a dog.” I grumbled, even though I rested my head against the open window, my hair whipping around me. “I don’t understand what happened.”

“I’m sure you were just tired after the massage, and you were kind of out of it when I went to see if you were ready. Probably a lot of energy spent today, since you haven’t been out in a while.”

“That doesn’t even sound like a real thing.” I rolled my head to the side to get a better view of Jett in the mirror. “You said, ‘witch.’”

“Did I?” His eyes quickly shifted to the rearview mirror, staring at me, before returning to the road. “Maybe you need to just sleep it off?”

Before I could ask what I was sleeping off, since I had a massage and a haircut, an overwhelming need to close my eyes took over. Just as my eyes were closing, I thought I had seen Jett’s eyes give off a glow.

I didn’t have time to fully process what I thought I saw, or ask, because I was suddenly asleep.

“I’ve got her. Tell Jin that I’ll let him know if I need him, and to stop calling me.” It sounded like an aggravated Oliver, which really wasn’t anything new.

“He hasn’t called -” The sound of a phone ringing stopped Jett from finishing his sentence. “Nevermind.”

The weight at my side disappeared, my body only staying in the vehicle because of the seat belt, when the door opened. Leaning my head back, I blinked a few times for my eyes to adjust.

“But you’re at work and sent me away,” I pointed out, more to me than to Oliver. Jett was already away from the vehicle with his phone to his ear.

Seeming to ignore my statement, Oliver leaned over me and tried to release the seat belt. It didn’t do anything, other than make Oliver curse.

With the interior being darker than outside the vehicle, his hair looked closer to purple than the deep red. There was also the scent from him being so close. He was always further away.

I wasn’t sure if it was the smell, the proximity, his absolutely gorgeous concentration to not give me attention, or still feeling dazed that had me acting on impulse. Not even moving that far, I quickly kissed his cheek.

“You’re like a cinnamon roll.” I explained when he quickly turned to look at me and froze.

We were so close, nearly touching. Not to mention the tension that felt as if it had multiplied around me. His eyes weren’t exactly hostile, boring into mine, but they were searching.

Remembering that he kept me further than arm’s length, I felt my face go hot and I quickly turned to look out the open door. The seat belt slowly released, and he moved it across my body, moving further out of the vehicle so he wasn’t leaning fully across me.

My breathing picked up as he leaned his face closer to mine, slipping an arm around my back. His lips tickled my ear, his scruff rubbing along my jaw, as he pulled my arm over his shoulders, and whispered, “Well, I’m not.”

Oliver pulled me out of the vehicle, and I left my brain behind. I couldn’t explain why I was wobbly, barely better

than a drunk, but I was fully aware of where his body was touching mine.

I just knew I wanted more. There was no way that we had been married for so long and didn't touch in even small ways. I clearly had that memory of leaving the wedding reception early - because Oliver wanted to leave.

Because he wanted to be alone. And not alone, by himself, but alone with me. He had told the driver to basically occupy himself, while Oliver started to undress me in the back of the limousine. That was the touching that I was suddenly craving from him.

It was fantastic to know that he did find me attractive at some point, because he was gorgeous. And not helping my thought process at all. I could feel his hand tighten at my waist when the doors closed on the elevator, leaving us alone.

I tried to focus on anything except touching Oliver. Or that his jawline had tickled because of the short beard. Or that his hair looked soft, and I really wanted to run my fingers through it while kissing him.

"You're biting your lip." Oliver's voice sounded husky. He moved in front of me, the one arm still around my waist, and tilted my head up with his other hand.

It did not help the fluttering that I didn't know had started up in my stomach. Like I was being confronted with a crush. I didn't know how to respond; it was a statement, and I was fully chewing my lip harder to keep my breathing to myself.

It was hard to focus when Oliver was standing so close. He was more than in my space. He was against me. The green was becoming more prominent in his eyes as he kept glancing from my eyes to my lips.

I suddenly had the desire to wrap myself around him, or completely become a koala on a tree. Out of all the days I tried to spend time with Oliver, he was rarely there. And now, I just wanted him to kiss me. To let me know that we were okay, and because the oxygen was burning from the escalator and he would be the only way I could breathe again.

I sucked in a gasp as he pressed further into me, his face beside mine, both arms grasping my hips, and I finally let my fingers travel into his hair.

It was soft.

“Stop looking at me like that.” Oliver’s lips tickled my ear as he pressed me against the wall. “I’m a stranger to you.”

Swallowing hard, I found my voice, even though it sounded hoarse. “I’m not looking at you differently.”

My head fell to the side on its own accord when Oliver’s lips started to hover over my neck. “So you don’t want me to kiss you right now?”

“I didn’t...” I started in a whisper and had to clear my throat. And my thoughts. “I haven’t said anything. But, we are here. And you’re my -”

“Husband?” Oliver mumbled against my collarbone, trailing one hand further down until he was gripping my ass. “You still don’t know me, Eleanor.”

There was just something about the way it sounded like he groaned my name. My other hand was suddenly gripping his arm and possibly leaving fingernail marks.

Oliver pulled me even tighter against him, and I felt the harder parts of him pressing into me. He moved his head back to look down at me, his eyes a darker shade of green overtaking any other color.

My eyes began to close automatically when Oliver leaned closer. Catching my breath, I pressed up on my toes to get closer when the elevator jolted to a stop.

“Apple juice,” Oliver blurted, stepping away from me, his eyes going wide.

“What?” The confusion surged through me at the wall he was throwing up between us again.

“You need apple juice. You’re still under the influence, and that is a quick remedy.”

Rushing out of the elevator, Oliver adjusted his pants with one hand and scrubbed his other through his hair and down his face. He didn't wait for me to follow, just left the front door open as he vanished inside.

I ran a finger across my neck and shivered at the cold that was engulfing me. So close. I was so close to getting somewhere with Oliver, even if that would have been kissing in an elevator.

Taking a few deep breaths, I forced down the humiliation and loneliness before following Oliver.

My steps faltered in the foyer, softly closing the door behind me, as I heard Oliver angrily talking to himself and slamming cabinets.

I really couldn't understand why he would be so angry when nothing actually happened. I wasn't sure if that made the situation better or worse.

"If it were dire, I would have called. Absolutely not. Do you think I don't know how to...well, then why do you keep asking...Damn it, Jin. It's apple juice. Of course, I have apple juice. No...we just got inside...no, I don't know what happened...I was going to ask her...Jin. Jin! I'm here. She's fine. I just need you to go to the facility for me, before they ship everything out tomorrow. Thank you. Now goodbye."

Walking to the edge of the island, I watched Oliver toss a container of leftovers into the microwave and slap the door closed. He backed himself against the counter when he turned around, looking in my direction but not at me.

"You need to drink the apple juice." Oliver nodded toward the cup on the counter nearest me.

I sat in the chair closest and pulled the cup closer. Oliver's jaw was clenched, and it looked like he was trying to burn a hole in the cup, the way he was staring at it.

"It's just apple juice?" I lifted the cup to my nose and sniffed it. Not really sure why, I didn't know what any poison smelled like. But as angry as the elevator ride seemed to have

made Oliver, I wasn't totally sure if he would have minded if I was poisoned or not.

“Yes, it's apple juice. What else would it be?” He rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, and just kept staring there. “Just drink it. All of it.”

“But, why?” They seemed very adamant that I drink a cup of apple juice. And considering the fact that I wasn't a toddler throwing a tantrum, it seemed odd.

Groaning, Oliver crossed his arms and leaned his head against the cabinet behind him. “Is it really so hard to just do as you're told? I am literally your doctor. The apple juice will help flush your system of what you were exposed to.”

Squinting down at the cup again, I slightly swirled it around to watch the liquid spin. “But it's apple juice. I had a massage and a haircut, both that you scheduled. What was I exposed to?”

Scrubbing a hand down his face, he finally looked at me. It was more of an annoyed stare. He waved at the cup before turning to take the container from the microwave.

I tried to remember what exactly had happened. It was just the massage that was amazing and made me want to nap. Then it was the hair salon, where I did fall asleep because of another dose of massaging.

Except that Jett had called her a witch when he dragged me out of the building. Goosebumps rose on my skin as I considered what had happened since.

“Claire, she...Jett called her a witch. You guys think she was a witch?” Pushing away from the island suddenly, the chair fell behind me.

“But no one knows who or where they went. Why would one do something to me? What did she do to me? I was asleep...oh, I was asleep basically the whole time.”

My mind started spinning, trying to remember what happened. She had told me about her son. She asked about Rosalyn...I had answered about Rosalyn, as if I still had her.

There was the smell of roasting meat. I had another dream of Rosalyn while I was with Claire. But Claire had been in the noise in my head, asking me questions. I couldn't remember.

"Shit." Oliver hissed from somewhere. "Couldn't just drink the damn juice."

I didn't remember sinking to the floor, or how I managed to be against the back of the couch. But that was where I was when Oliver pried my hands from my head.

It felt like everything was bombarding me. Pieces of dreams kept flickering across my vision. But there was no sound with the images. Only the pounding of my head.

"Open up, come on, babe." There was an urgency in his voice that I wasn't used to. He was pressing the cup to my lips, one hand pressed against my jaw and forcing my mouth open.

I choked on the first mouthful before I realized I needed to be drinking. After two or three gulps, the pain receded, and I could no longer see anything other than what was truly around me.

"Good girl." Oliver said against my head, brushing my hair back.

There was a part of me that wanted to tell him that I wasn't an animal needing praise. Then again, I wasn't exactly as mad as I thought I would be about it.

Ignoring the confusing mix of emotions his statement caused, I used the bottom of my shirt to wipe at my face. It would have been better to have a washcloth because apple juice left a slightly sticky feeling.

"I'm really tired of ending up on the floor. Or sleeping." I grumbled, scrambling back to my feet. "Can you explain the apple juice? And the witch? She was really a witch?"

"Why do you look so shocked at that?" Oliver grabbed the empty cup off the floor and went into the kitchen with it. "In my line of business, we've run into some outcomes from witches and learned to handle it. Jett said the place smelled strongly of some herbs. She probably potioned some, and some were perfumed around the store."

“Okay...but why? And the apple juice?” I took a seat back at the island, resting my head in my hands.

“I don’t know why apple juice works, just that it seems to flush the system for minor cases. If you had eaten something from her, well.” With a sigh, Oliver started ticking off his fingers. “Well, then we’d need an avocado, acetone, gold thread, a banana pepper, a cow tongue, heavy whipping cream, and two half-chewed sunflower seeds.”

“I’m sorry...what?” That sounded very precise, and very random. I really hoped that they weren’t mixed into a drink.

“Do you remember anything she said?” Oliver placed the lid back on the container and put it back into the microwave. “Or maybe she just happened to mention what she wanted?”

“She was just telling me to remember. But not what I was supposed to remember. And that I needed to wake up, but I was sleeping. Oh, she asked me to tell her where something was. No, it was to tell her where ‘they’ were? I don’t know what she meant, though.”

Oliver pulled two bowls out of the dishwasher and the container from the microwave. He scooped out the leftover stew into each bowl, bringing one to me, before he spoke again.

“Probably the fae. You’re the only known survivor of a dimensional explosion, from the eye. She probably assumed that it left residual magic with you, and you’d be able to locate other spots.”

“But I can’t do that.” I tilted my head, staring at my spoon, thinking. “Right? I’m not able to do that?”

If more witches were going to come after me in hopes that I could become their portal-sniffing human, I would never leave the building. Except that buildings didn’t exactly phase witches, from the little I could remember.

“No, you can’t-”

“Why did they wait for me to be alone, outside? I’ve been alone here. Am I safe? How do you protect yourself against a witch? They can just come get me whenever they want?”

“What? No. Well, yes, they technically could.” Rubbing the back of his neck, Oliver shrugged.

Well, it was easy for him to take it so flippantly. The witches weren't after him.

“Okay, wait. Before you get angrier, they can't come into our city. When the whole thing happened, some areas were lucky enough to get older crones that wanted nothing to do with it and set up barriers in the cities they lived in. We happen to live in one of those cities.”

“So I'm never leaving the city.” I let him know, taking a bite and then pointing the spoon at him.

“Someone will just be by your side if you do.”

If that was supposed to make me feel better, it didn't do much good. The witches fought against the faeries. They had magic. I wasn't sure what anything any human did would be able to stop a witch from doing whatever they wanted.

I mean, unless throwing a tube of red lipstick would slow them down - since it seemed like there were some other random things used to stave off potion effects.

“I'm going to stay here. It's only thirty or so lab results I need to comb through and a few phone calls.” Oliver was already rinsing his bowel out.

“So, back to your office?” There was no reason to ask that question. I already knew the answer. That's what Oliver did.

“I'll be here tomorrow. I'll be in the office. But I'll still be here. If you need me.”

Not knowing what else to say, I just gave him a nod and a thumbs up.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The rest of Saturday went by with me trying to find something to watch on the television. Sunday started with Jin and Oliver arguing in my library room.

“Guys?” I yawned-called and two heads were suddenly looking into the bedroom. “Why are you yelling at each other? In here? What time is it?”

“Too early to bother you. Which is what I was telling Sato.” Oliver had a hand on Jin, pushing him towards the living room.

“I just wanted to check on her myself, O’Shea. Are we really at last names?” Jin snorted, stepping around Oliver. “Tell him you want to see me, sweetheart.”

Sitting up, I looked over at the clock. “It’s nine. Why is that too early? Wait, aren’t I seeing you tomorrow, anyway?”

“Yes. Seeing you tomorrow, Jin. Goodbye.” Oliver tried to usher Jin back out the door, only for Jin to move around him and flick Oliver on the nose. “The hell?”

“Eleanor didn’t ask me to leave, you ass.” Jin hopped onto the other side of the bed, crossing his ankles. “Tomorrow is a professional day. I was dropping off lab samples for Oliver and thought we could hang out until I go check-in with my mom.”

Oliver grunted and left the room. Rolling his eyes, Jin faced me and smirked. The gold in his eyes seemed to dance, the more he tried not to laugh.

“What’s funny?”

“Oliver has been amusing recently. And your hair is a mess.” He reached out and patted the side of my head. Or, at least he had patted the pile of hair at the side of my head.

“Just go to the living room. I’m literally in bed, ya know? You two bickering woke me up. I’ll get changed and stuff.”

Throwing the covers off me, I got out of bed and headed for the bathroom. I heard Jin chuckling as he left the room, the bedroom door slamming closed shortly after.

Not bothering to hurry, I took a shower. They had woken me up, and I had been sleeping peacefully - which wasn't normal for me. So there wasn't a reason to spend the rest of the day in my pajamas if I was already awake, and there was company.

"Took you long enough. I made pancakes and bacon because Oliver didn't want to share his omelet with me." Jin waved a spatula at me from the kitchen.

"You could have eaten at your house. And now you're cooking in my kitchen." Oliver scowled at Jin from the table where he had a plate of omelet in front of him and papers laid out around the plate.

"Definitely told you to stop being an ass. Besides, I made Eleanor breakfast too. Which is more than you did." Jin took a bite of bacon and then mouth, 'ass' towards Oliver.

"Is this...normal?"

Not wanting to mess with Oliver's papers, I went to sit at the kitchen island in front of Jin. He placed a plate of pancakes and bacon in front of me. I could hear Oliver muttering behind me, but it was either too low or not in English.

"Hey, you forgot her pills." Oliver said.

Rolling his eyes, Jin grabbed a bottle out of a cabinet and came back with two pills. The pills I hadn't been taking. And now I was in a room with both Jin and Oliver.

Holding my hand out, Jin placed the pills in my palm. I stared at them for a second, a queasy feeling coming over me. I just didn't want to take the pills, but I also didn't feel like it was a good idea to talk to them about it just yet.

"Um, do we have midol or something? I mean, since I'm taking medicine...it just reminded me that I started and my stomach is feeling queasy...so...do we have something?"

I kept my eyes on my plate and tried not to look nervous. It wasn't a lie, exactly. Jin had predicted my cycle, and told

Oliver. I happened to start sometime this morning. And I was definitely feeling queasy.

I could feel Jin's stare on me. It felt like time slowed. It was probably only seconds that went by, and Oliver started shuffling his papers again. I waited until Jin walked back to the cabinet, my head cocked to the side to see Oliver, and then I quickly slipped them into my pocket.

I had to use both hands to hold the cup to my lips, to try to prevent the cup from shaking, because my hands were shaking with nerves. When Jin turned around and headed back with two more pills, I was still gulping down the water.

Jin placed the pills beside my plate, raising his eyebrows at me. "Thirsty?"

"Yes." I coughed out. Lying had made me extremely thirsty.

"Okay then," with an amused smile, he grabbed his plate and came around the island to sit beside me. "I was thinking of a Penny Dreadful binge. We have so many things to re-watch. Dorian is such a little shit."

"Really? This is what you're going to do while I'm working?" Oliver griped, swiping his papers into a pile. "You could help me go over some of these results."

"Absolutely not. That's your field." Winking at me, Jin tossed a bacon at Oliver. "Besides, this is one way we always kept ourselves busy while you were too busy."

Jin's fingers grazed my arm when he flung his on the back of my chair. It seemed vaguely familiar. Trying to remember, I closed my eyes and could see Jin on a couch.

It wasn't the couch here. It wasn't even the same living room. He tossed the blanket off his lap and grabbed my hand. The smile he had was all kinds of terrible ideas, and yet I still let him pull me down beside him on the couch.

"Oliver's working the weekend again?" His arm came around me, pulling me into his side.

Shrugging, I just burrowed closer, resting my head on his chest. I left the popcorn on the end table beside Jin, but he'd hand it over if I decided I wanted some. At the moment, I didn't really want to eat.

"You pick something to watch this time."

Leaning over, I grabbed the blanket and pulled it back over us. He turned the television over to Netflix and went to the list of shows he had already started watching.

I tilted my head back to look at Jin once he selected a show. His lips twitched at the sides as he gazed down at me, amusement dancing in his eyes.

"You liked it." He shrugged and then leaned down to kiss my nose. "It wasn't as terrible as I thought it would be. The Duke gives me ideas."

"Like to have sex on a ladder?" I laughed, turning back to the television.

Jin laid his head against mine and rubbed his hand down my arm. "Not at the moment."

The hand was still rubbing my arm as my eyes started fluttering. My eyes were opening again. I hadn't realized my eyes had been shut for a moment. Rubbing my fingers along my temples, I blinked back the rest of the haze.

"What was that? You weren't answering." I turned my head to find Oliver standing at my side.

Jin was still sitting beside me, his arm on the back of the chair. No one was touching me. Even though I could have sworn Jin's hand was on my arm. Or maybe it had just been the dream-vision.

"I think she was just remembering something, Oliver." Jin took a sip from his cup, and then cleared his throat, his eyes never leaving Oliver's. "I was talking about how we used to watch tv together. Clearly it must have triggered that."

Looking between the two of us, Oliver opened his mouth to say something, only to snap it closed again.

“Actually. Oddly. That’s what happened.” And it was confusing. “We were watching something...somewhere. It wasn’t here, though.”

“Your house, Jin, really?” Oliver’s jawline was tense, causing a small tick.

“Nothing wrong with friends keeping each other company when the third would rather work than spend any kind of quality time -” Jin began, moving his hands into a shrug.

“Don’t start with me. I’m going to be in the other room. The very next room, Jin.”

Oliver snatched his papers from the table as he stormed towards his office. I was half expecting to hear the door slamming closed, but it never did.

“Did I do something just now? What just happened? I literally can’t control what pops up...”

Jin jumped up and grabbed our plates. Even though I didn’t remember eating at all, my plate was empty. I wasn’t aware that I could do anything while stuck in a dream-vision remembering thing, but I had the aftertaste in my mouth.

“Exactly, you don’t control it. Don’t worry about Oliver, he’s annoyed with me. You go get the show ready while I clean up the mess in here.”

Other than Oliver stopping in to have Jin read over some kind of graph two hours later, we sat and watched Penny Dreadful in a comfortable silence. I wasn’t cuddled beside him like in the memory, but I seemed more relaxed there than I was now.

Pausing to use the restroom not soon after, I came back with the bag from my purse. At Jin’s curious glance, I took the cards from the bag and placed them on the coffee table.

“Giving me a reading, are you?” he asked, sliding off the couch and onto the floor.

“I don’t know how? The show just made me remember that these were in my purse and I felt like taking them out.”

Scooping the cards up, Jin began to shuffle them. I sat beside him on the couch and watched. I had the tarot cards, so maybe I did know how to do a reading.

But it didn't feel like that was entirely true. I probably had them because I liked the design. They were pretty, being mostly black with gold drawings and celestial designs on the outside.

Going through the cards a few times, Jin started slowly flipping all the cards over and counted to himself. I dropped down beside him, curious about what he was doing.

Jin sucked in his bottom lip and tapped the cards against the table. "I think you're short."

"Gee, thanks. Maybe you and Oliver are just tall."

"Okay, yes, we're tall." Jin flicked my nose and then held out the stack of cards to me. "Unless I counted wrong, you're missing a card."

"What?" I took the cards and almost began counting. Then I remembered I didn't know anything about tarot card decks. "How many cards are there? I feel like fifty-two isn't correct."

"Not quite. There should be seventy-eight, with twenty-two major and fifty-six minor. So, divide them up and we'll see what's missing."

Jin motioned for me to put the cards on the coffee table and, for some reason my heartbeat picked up. There wasn't a reason that I could see that would cause any apprehension to bloom, and yet it was.

"Here. I don't know what that is." I handed the deck back to Jin and watched as he separated the cards into two piles.

Picking up the larger pile, he counted through them and then shook his head. "Your minor cards are all accounted for. So it's a major."

One arm wrapped around my stomach as the queasy feeling took over again. My other hand went up to my mouth as Jin put the smaller pile of cards down.

I knew.

And there was no way.

I didn't even know any of the cards. And yet, I knew.

Unexplainably, I knew. Which left me with more questions.

"The World." I said, just as Jin said it.

Chapter Thirty-Six

My mind was spinning, trying to understand how this happened. Not necessarily that a card was missing, just the specific card.

There wasn't a way for me to dream about needing to find 'The World,' before knowing it was missing. And why was that specific card missing?

Maybe I had lost the card before the accident, and my mind was still fractured. It didn't know how to piece together random memories and it bled through into dreams.

Things went missing all the time. There were plenty of people missing single pieces from board games. Or even a sock and food storage lids.

Jin crossed his arms on top of the coffee table, studying me so intently there was a crease forming between his eyebrows.

"You already knew which card." It wasn't a question, even though there was a hint of curiosity behind the words.

"I don't. I didn't. It was. I couldn't have." I didn't have a complete train of thought to explain.

I didn't understand myself. There had to be a logical reason. And the only logical reason would be that it was lost before.

"Or it just fell out of the bag. Right?" I was speaking more to myself than to Jin. "It's probably in my purse. Yes, it's probably in my purse. You know what, I'm just going to get my purse."

Jin's gaze followed me into the bedroom and back out. Sitting on the edge of the couch, I flipped the purse over and shook the contents out.

No card fell out. But there were pockets inside the purse. Some of the pockets were zippered.

In a near frenzy, I shoved my arm into the purse. I was literally up to my elbow in the purse, patting around the

bottom before checking each pocket.

“It’s not here.” Defeated, I stared down at the items on the couch beside me.

The ribbon was still wrapped around the smaller items. Hovering my hand closer, I had the overwhelming feeling that I could feel...something.

There was an energy that I couldn’t explain. It made me remember Rosalyn.

No, not remember her. Just the dreams. But it was also Rosalyn that told me to search for the world and I’d understand.

Shaking my head to dislodge the nonsense, I slumped back against the couch.

“I think there’s something I’m missing?” Jin slowly moved closer and turned toward me.

His legs were either side of one of mine. He rested one hand on my knee and reached for one of my hands with the other. That calming sense rushed over me when he gently squeezed my hand.

Jin had a way of being there for me. In a much less demanding and intimidating way than Oliver. It helped keep some of the panic from becoming too much.

“Why are you freaking out?” He gently bumped his knee against mine.

“You said tomorrow is the professional day,” I mumbled, feeling awkward. “I think I’m going crazy.”

“Because...you’ve dreamed of the card?” He guessed, his head dipping to meet my eyes.

“I haven’t, though.” Sighing, I looked in his direction helplessly.

He rubbed his thumb over the back of my hand in a small circle, causing small chills to chase over my skin. When I finally looked into Jin’s eyes, searching for some kind of reassurance, it felt like I was being sucked in.

“Sato. You forgot Sunday dinner with mom?” Oliver appeared behind the couch and an alarmed squeak escaped my lips.

I hadn't seen him approach. There hadn't been a noise. Even Jin jumped back slightly, dropping my hand, before his gaze shifted to Oliver.

“Mother's have the best of timing,” Jin murmured as he stood.

“They absolutely do. Now you can go eat her food and not mine.”

Instead of replying to Oliver's quip, Jin stood and just raised his middle finger.

“We will definitely need to talk about this tomorrow, okay?” Leaning over, Jin kissed the top of my head. “And if absolutely anything else, anything, happens - you need to let me know.”

Nodding, I averted my eyes when I felt Oliver's stare. Instead of explaining what I didn't know how to explain, I started to put everything back in my purse.

“What needs to be discussed tomorrow?” Oliver questioned, eyes darting between Jin and me.

“Walk me to the door.”

Jin shoed Oliver ahead of him until they were walking beside each other, and heads tilted together. I could hear their hushed whispers, just not what was being said.

Whatever Jin was saying was making Oliver tense, his back and shoulders becoming taut. They glanced back at me before they were out of sight in the foyer, Jin with a small wave and Oliver visibility working his jaw.

I heard the door close behind Jin, but Oliver didn't return to the living room.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

I ended up watching the show that I had seen Jin and I watching together, since I didn't remember it. That may have been one of the few perks of having no memories - I could start fresh with movies, television shows, and books like it was the first time.

It was a second-chance to see everything with fresh eyes. I wasn't sure if it made me appreciate the show anymore than I might have previously, though. But, it was an interesting thought to know that I truly didn't know what would happen in a story, when I otherwise would.

"Why is her hair so big?" Oliver took a seat in the single chair, propping one ankle on top of the other knee.

"She's the queen?" I glanced over at Oliver as he studied the television with a less than impressed expression on his face.

"Why would being the queen require you to have an excessive wig? I can't imagine the headaches she had."

"Um, I don't think she's based on a real queen. Or, I don't know, maybe she is...but like, I don't think the queen character was a real person." Reaching for the remote control beside me, I paused the show.

"I know how fiction works," Oliver huffed and drummed his fingers on his leg. "Anyway, I was just coming to check on you, and to let you know that I was going to go downstairs to the gym."

"I'm fine. But I'm not a gym-going girl." I picked up the throw pillow and hugged it against me. I did feel fine, but not okay enough to want to exercise. Ever.

Snorting, Oliver dropped his foot to the floor and leaned his elbows on his knees.

"I wasn't inviting you to exercise. Though light activity would help you feel better." Rubbing the back of his hand against his jaw, Oliver considered me for a moment.

Not really sure why, I had just said I would not be working out with him. And I meant it.

Crushing the pillow against me, I just shook my head.

“Nope. Not doing that.”

Oliver let out an annoyed sigh and leaned back into the chair.

“Fine. But I still need to keep some watch over you for a couple more hours, so you can sit down there.”

“What? You haven’t been watching me today.”

“I was within a short enough distance that I could get to you in case of an emergency. If I’m downstairs, then I wouldn’t know if I was needed until I got back.”

Scowling at him, I relinquished the pillow. I plucked at my shirt, pointedly staring at him. My pajama shirt, which was matching the sleep capris, would not be worn into a gym.

“Yes, they’re lovely. I’m going to change. You’re going to change, if you don’t want to go about the building in pajamas. So, five or so minutes and we’ll go down.”

I watched him, clearly confused, as he calmly headed to the bedroom, unbuttoning his shirt as he went. Doing a quick rewind of what was said, I remembered telling Oliver that I wasn’t going to the gym with him.

And yet he was under the impression that I would be changing and going with him, anyway. Clearly, he was wrong.

Huffing, I sprawled out on the couch and resumed the show.

Oliver hadn’t been lying when he said he would be ready to leave in five minutes. He was standing at the end of the couch, arms crossed, with a look of annoyance.

“Well, now you’re going with me in pajamas.”

“I’m really not. I stay here while you go do your gym things every morning. You didn’t sit and watch me sleep last night, so clearly there’s no reason for me to tag along. I’m an adult, right? I’m...thirty..” Trailing off, my eyes squinted, trying to remember how old I was.

“Thirty-four. You’re thirty-four. Which has nothing to do with anything.” Oliver sat on the armrest and started putting socks on.

“It does.” Sitting up, I paused the show again, and tried to think of a way to argue about being an adult without sounding like a child. “Thirty-four doesn’t require a babysitter. And I’ve been perfectly fine since yesterday.”

“If there were an issue, the setback would occur within forty-eight hours. Sleeping would have allowed anything to disburse through the body and build, not showing signs outwardly. Jin was here because he didn’t think I was capable of keeping an ear out for you. And now I’m leaving, so you are going with me.”

Oliver stood from the corner and started towards me, one arm outstretched to get me standing. Slapping his hand away, I only scowled at him.

“Okay. Fine.” He threw his hands up and stalked towards the front door.

It really wasn’t that difficult. He made it an argument when he couldn’t agree to let me stay inside when he first brought it up. Which was ridiculous. It could have just been a simple disagreement without both of us now being annoyed.

Before I could get comfortable again, sandals were suddenly landing in front of me. Twisting around, I watched Oliver shove a tiny envelope into his pocket and stare right at me.

“Are you throwing shoes at me?” It was an obvious answer, but I was still taken aback.

“Not at you. Towards you. You can slip on your shoes and walk out with me.” There was a quick jerk of his head in the direction of the shoes in front of me.

“Or...?” I asked, pressing my lips together.

“Or I can start my workout now by carrying you to the gym.” Stepping around the couch, he looked like a tiger on the prowl.

Part of me wanted to be amused. Or turned on? But he was being absolutely insane.

“Stop being ridiculous, Oliver.”

I scrambled off the couch and moved around to the back - away from Oliver.

“No, you stop being ridiculous. Just go with me downstairs, it isn’t that complicated. I can’t keep an eye on you if you’re up here.”

He stopped for a moment to grab my shoes and put my phone in his pocket before he started moving toward me again. I was slowly being backed to the table. I was not young enough to crawl under, or over, a table - but I would.

“Then skip working out?” I quipped, pushing a chair between us. “You said you go in the mornings, anyway. Seems pretty obvious for you to stay here and it solves whatever your issue is.”

Oliver’s face twisted into bewilderment, and then looked at me like I was an idiot. “Why would I not go to the gym? I’m not changing any more of my routines for you than I already have. There isn’t a reason to make any concession for something so trivial.”

I opened my mouth to respond and shut it quickly. There really wasn’t anything I could think to say to him. Apparently, I was the cause of some disruptions to his regular programming.

Feeling my energy deflate with that revelation, I lifted my hand out for my shoes. He was just asking to go to the gym, and was trying to make sure I didn’t end up in a medical emergency.

Maybe I was the one being selfish in the situation.

“Will I be in the way if I just sit on the floor and read?” I asked, staring at the table so I didn’t have to see any more annoyance on his face, while I slipped the sandals on my feet.

“No, it’ll just be about two hours. You can grab your Kindle if you want. I’ll be waiting beside the elevator for you.”

Nodding, I took my phone from Oliver's hand and went to grab my Kindle from my nightstand.

"Please don't make me come back for you." Oliver called out to me from the foyer.

The elevator ride was a lot different from the one we had the day before, but there was still an underlying tension filling the space. Just not of the sexual kind. This felt more of an awkward tension.

I was standing on one side, in my pajamas, no less. And Oliver was standing across from me in shorts and a regular type shirt. This was only the second time that I witnessed Oliver not wearing doctor scrubs or a business suit.

The left sleeve of his shirt had bunched up, making the flame tattoo visible. It was easier to see that it did look like a swirling ring of fire looping around his bicep. The fire seemed to reflect the light in the elevator, with the different hues of a roaring fire on display.

"If I wasn't terrified of needles, I think I would get a tattoo. Yours looks like one of those realistic type tattoos. Those are expensive, aren't they?" I asked, gesturing at my arm where his tattoo would be.

Looking from me to his arm, Oliver tugged his sleeve over his muscle and hid the tattoo from view.

"You probably don't want to know how often we've taken blood samples from you then." The corner of his lip tipped into a half smile. "But yes, I would say the cost of the tattoo is high."

"Wait, you don't still take blood samples. Do you?"

Looking down at my arms, I tried to see if there were any prick marks. Whenever I slipped into a memory, or nightmare dream, it always seemed like I couldn't get out until it released me. So there were plenty of times since I'd gotten home that they could have taken blood from me.

"I have enough of your blood to work with." Oliver motioned for me to exit the elevator ahead of him when the doors opened.

That didn't really answer my question, though. He had already started walking ahead of me, towards the door on the other side of the lobby, not giving me the chance to clarify his response.

Thankfully, the area was empty, with only the one person at a desk near the double doors to the building. It might have had to do with the fact that it was near nine at night.

I followed behind Oliver into the gym, where it was not empty. There were a handful of other people spread through the large space. Oliver led me to the side of the room that had chairs set up.

Oliver pulled earbuds out of his pocket and glanced down at me suspiciously.

“You aren't going to try to leave?”

“Why would I have wasted my time coming down here if I was just going to go back upstairs?”

I flipped back the cover on my Kindle's case and watched Oliver put the earbuds into his ear.

“Just making sure. The bathroom is near the back wall, over there. Just let me know if you get up, so I don't think you've disappeared elsewhere.”

Oliver tapped on his phone as he walked towards whatever torture device caught his attention.

“Let me know if you get up.” I mimicked once he was out of earshot. “I could have just gone to bed.”

I got comfortable in the seat and started scrolling through the opened folder to choose a book. Unfortunately for me, there were a few titles that showed I was already a certain percentage through them, or that they had already been read.

Browsing through some of my folders was really all I had done before choosing to read 'Little Woman.' That was a classic and I was able to enjoy it for the first time, a second time.

Now, I was back in the folder filled with books of women that had more than one partner. It wasn't so much of being

with multiple partners in a sexual way - they were based on a relationship.

These women had more than one boyfriend, or husband. And good for them. If one of the guys were being an ass, a trade-off for one of the nicer boyfriends was doable. And it wasn't like history didn't have records of men having multiple women.

At least these stories didn't seem to collect the men and force them into a harem, like men in the past. Although it was a strange concept for the men only having the one woman as the sole focus, while she had however many.

Maybe it was like having a dog. You could have the one dog, but then you see another lonely stray that gives you puppy eyes and next thing you know you have two dogs. Best friend dogs that can keep each other company, but their human is the only human for them. And soon you have another cute little puppy added to your collection.

Clicking on the first book, I finally stopped contemplating the dynamics involved in a heavily filled testosterone relationship. It took reading three different first chapters to get a book that didn't have me angered by the supposed love interests at the start.

Thirty minutes into reading the chosen book, I realized I was starting to get a chill. It wasn't a weird feeling, thankfully, as I spotted the air vent near the chair I was sitting in.

It hadn't been blasting cold air when I first sat down, but now it was. And the chill made my bladder wake up. With the security the building had, I left the Kindle on the seat and looked around the room for Oliver.

He had his back to me jogging on a treadmill. Once I got closer, I stepped around to his side to get his attention. Oliver muttered a curse, stumbling before slowing the pace and taking his earbuds out.

"You okay?" I tried not to sound too amused at having scared him.

"Yes. Very cute." He grumbled, stepping from the treadmill.

He was sweaty. I didn't know if he had been running the whole time so far, but he was sweaty.

"I'm guessing you weren't coming to tell me anything was wrong? Since you don't seem to be displaying any signs of anything abnormal."

"No. I was just letting you know that I was going to the bathroom. As you weirdly requested."

"It wasn't a weird request. If I looked back and you were missing, then I'd have to go search for you. If you just let me know, then I don't have to worry about where you -"

I held a hand out to stop him. It wasn't like he hadn't already given me the same speech. I just didn't want him to freak out or get angry with me for going to the restroom.

"So, I'm just going to go pee now."

Not stopping to wait for a response, I went to the restroom. Oliver had moved on from the treadmill when I came back into the room. There were also fewer people in the gym than before, not that there had been that many when we arrived.

Just as I was walking around one of the benches with weight things, my foot tripped on something. I managed to not fall, but I stumbled to the side while trying not to fall. Instead of falling straight to the floor, I ended up against a small pile of mats.

Which promptly went from being a mini tower to falling sideways. The grunt from the other side was confirmation that they had landed on someone. There had been another bench on the other side.

Pushing myself upright and off the remaining mats, I moved to the side to see what the damage was. They were only mats, so hopefully not too much damage could have been caused.

"What happened?" Oliver was suddenly at my side and lifting my arms to examine. "Did you hurt yourself?"

"Help under here," came a winded voice.

There were legs bent, with feet on the ground on either side of the bench, with the top half of the body and the bench under

the mats. It looked like he might have been doing the weight push-up bar, or whatever it was officially called.

Oliver started removing the mats from the man. He was faster than I was, but I managed to help once Oliver deemed me to not be damaged. And the poor man's arms were shaking once the last mat was removed.

Moving behind the man, Oliver moved the bar so the man could drop his arms. The man waved Oliver off when he asked if he was injured, and just closed his eyes, breathing hard.

"I'm not going to be able to concentrate. We can go back upstairs. I don't even know how you managed to do that."

I wasn't sure if he sounded confused or impressed, so I didn't respond. It wasn't that I had tried to do anything; I was walking back to sit in the corner. There was just a domino falling situation after that.

Grabbing my Kindle, I followed Oliver out of the gym. Sleep was a good option.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

“Is there anything else to eat?” Rosalyn asked from the couch.

Rolling my eyes to the ceiling, I prayed for patience. The girl could never decide what to eat.

“I told you that I was reheating the chili. You said you were okay with eating chili for lunch. It’s already in a bowl for you.”

I stuck a spoon in each bowl and went to the fridge for drinks. It had already been nearly ten minutes of back and forth of what she felt like eating for lunch.

“I thought about it and I just don’t feel like chili.”

Grabbing my bowl of chili in one hand and the soda in the other, I went to the table to eat.

“Okay, well, the chili is done. So if you want something different, I’m not making anything else. You can make a sandwich for lunch.”

Popping her head over the couch, Rosalyn attempted her best sad-eyes look.

“Will you make me the sandwich?”

“Absolutely not. I made you a bowl of chili. And now I’m eating my own. You’re fully capable of making yourself a sandwich. You’re twelve.”

Rosalyn let out a dramatic sigh and came into the kitchen. She started pulling things out and placed them on the counter. I was tempted to do it for her, since she really never had before, but she really should be able to make a sandwich by now.

“Okay, how do you make my sandwiches?” She asked from behind me.

“I put one slice of cheese on one of the bread slices. Then I add -”

“Woah. Hold on. You’re going too fast,” Rosalyn complained over the sound of plastic being opened. “Cheese on the bread.”

“Well, you need mayonnaise or something.” Laughing at her gagging noise.

“That’s disgusting. Nothing goes on a sandwich except meat and cheese. And the bread.”

Turning to look back at her, she was still trying to open the cheese bag. “Then why do you eat mayonnaise on bread...and nothing else? Here, bring it here and I’ll cut it open.”

“Mayonnaise sandwich is by itself, and only okay alone. You don’t mix it with anything.” The conviction in her voice made it even more amusing. And weird.

I cut the bag open and handed it back to her, directing her to grab a storage bag on her way back to the counter. The cheese bag had to be cut fully open and would not be sealing closed, like it should have.

“Okay. One cheese on one bread. What next?”

“Two slices of turkey on top of the cheese. Then another -”

“Hey, slow down! I told you not to go too fast, Mom. This is my first sandwich.”

“You are literally being dramatic about making a sandwich. Bread, cheese, turkey, cheese, chicken, and the other slice of bread.”

“Oh my god, this is so stressful. Go sloooooow.” She whined at me.

“Where are you...after the single cheese?” Snorting in amusement, I started eating my chili.

“Two turkeys. On top of the cheese. Okay, what next? And not so fast this time.”

“You cannot be serious right now.” I grumbled. “Cheese. Add one more cheese on top of your turkey meat.”

“One cheese. Got it.” I heard her humming behind me for a moment before she got to the complicated next step. “Next?”

“Two slices of chicken on top of that cheese.”

“And then the lonely second slice of bread on top. Right?”

“Yes. Then, you put up everything you took out before you eat the sandwich.”

“Putting everything back. Got it.” Rushing around the kitchen to return the food, I heard her humming again.

“Geez, Mom. You made that so difficult. It really wasn’t that bad.”

I just threw a cracker at her as she sat down beside me, shaking her sandwich in my direction.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

There was no alarm that woke me. Oliver hadn't woken me, either. It was the sun blaring through my eyelids into my soul that woke me.

For the most part, I didn't really remember too much of the dreams. I only knew that I had had them again. Plural, not singular. The second I started fully waking, any memory of the dreams would start to flow away.

Stretching, I curled onto my side and stared at my purse. I forgot that I went to bed with it when we got back from the gym. It wasn't that I was cuddling with my purse, only that I had thought to go through it again.

Except I made it to the bed and realized I was exhausted. Being tired was...tiring. The only good thing about waking up to my purse was that it was a reminder to check my bag again.

Clearly, I was blind, and the missing tarot card would be there. Somewhere.

Trying to hold back the apprehension, I thought it better to just get ready for the day first. A relaxing shower might help calm my nerves and make it easier to research my purse. Sometimes you could miss things just because you were panicked or anxious.

After the hour-long shower, I checked the appointment time on my phone. I had two hours to eat and search my purse. And to add today's pills with the others in the liquor cabinet.

Reaching over the bed, I grabbed my purse and headed for the kitchen. Everything could be done at the counter, really.

I placed the purse on the counter beside the saucer. It had only been six days since I started stashing them, but it already felt like a lot of pills.

I rolled them around in my palm on the way to the cabinet. They were the gel type and were easy to poke. Not that I should have been poking them.

Moving the alcohol, I carefully pulled the napkin out that contained the other pills. I placed the two for today in the bundle and counted. Nine pills were stored away.

There probably needed to be a better way to dispose of them because sooner or later Oliver may end up deciding to get a drink. And there was really no telling what the outcome would be if he found the pills.

For some reason, I pictured being locked in a hospital with an IV. Or lots of yelling. He hadn't really lost his temper. Yet. But that didn't mean that something like this wouldn't finally push him over the edge.

Carefully wrapping the napkin around the pills again, I shoved them back into the cabinet. I could worry about the pills at a later time, it was searching the purse I wanted to do.

After placing a pot of water on to boil, I flipped my purse upside down on the island counter. The bag of cards fell out, along with the other items in the purse.

I unraveled the ribbon from the fingernail clippers and tweezers, putting it on top of the bag of cards before placing the smaller items back into the purse. I slowly checked each pocket of the purse.

I patted the sides of the purse in case it fell into the lining, but there was nothing. I carefully placed each item back into the purse until I was left with the ribbon and bag of cards on the counter, and only needed to check the outer pockets.

The only cards in the outer pockets were the two keychain-sized library cards. I couldn't pick them off the counter because they were so thin. And because the type of plastic just made them scoot across the counter.

Giving up, I finally wiped them off the counter and into my palm. Lifting my hand closer to my face, I squinted at the cards in confusion.

One of the cards had a half-faded heart from a sharpie. What was confusing was that the cards weren't the same number. They started out the same, but the last few were different.

So they weren't both my library cards. One of them had to be someone else's. Something to ask Oliver later - if I had a copy of his library card. Which would make sense if I went to the library for him to pick up anything he may have put on hold. Especially if he was always working.

I put the cards back into the pocket and fixed a bowl of oatmeal, staring at the bag of cards. The missing card hadn't been in the purse. Not that it had been when I checked yesterday, but I had hoped I missed it somehow.

Tying the ribbon around my wrist, I placed the bag of cards back into my purse. There was bound to be a logical explanation. One that I tried to come up with as I ate my oatmeal and passed the time waiting for Jett to show up to take me to my appointment.



"No problems at reception today?" Jin asked, guiding me into the room with a hand on my back.

"It was as normal as I would expect, I guess." Shrugging, I headed towards the couch and plopped down.

"Not like last time?"

"Definitely not like last time," I agreed with a cringe.

"Well, that's good." Clapping his hands, Jin sat beside me in the chair and grabbed the pad of paper and pen from the coffee table in front of us.

"Before we get into the tarot card incident, and any dreams; how do you feel with the double dose? Any pain or blackouts with them? Sleepiness or nervousness?"

"Nope. The pills are fine." I didn't include that they were fine in the liquor cabinet.

"Hm. Well, I'm glad they're working for you. But that leads me to ask about this tarot card situation you had going on yesterday. You seemed like you already knew what was missing. Was it in a dream?"

Jin folded his hands, letting them rest between his knees, his elbows on the pad of paper, as he appraised me. He wasn't entirely wrong, I had felt like I'd known.

"It had been a dream. Before the double dose started," I quickly added. I wasn't positive it was from before, but I didn't need him adding yet another pill to the literal pile. "Roselyn had mentioned that I needed to find the world. But, there weren't any actual instructions."

"Roselyn? Did she happen to say why you needed to find the world?"

Slipping my feet onto the edge of the couch, I wrapped my arms around my knees. "That, if I found it, then I would start to understand? Or that it would help me start to recover?"

"Did she now?" Jin muttered to himself, jotting in the notebook. "Subtle and nonsensical. Clever."

"What?"

"Oh, well, it's clever. Isn't it? How the mind works. Sometimes it does what it can to help one make sense when it otherwise wouldn't be able to." He tapped a finger against his temple and nodded.

"Having lost the card before the accident means it would be a point in time that is locked to you. If you are able to focus on something so small and follow that train, then it would be possible that you could lead yourself to a recovery."

"You think...that would work?" The hopefulness was clear in my voice, and it was a tad depressing.

"Theory. But the card is still missing, so it seems like a strange thing to focus on. Finding a singular card that went missing, who-knows-when? I doubt it would help much, other than making your deck complete if you did find it. You could focus on other things. Like, have you spoken to your parents yet?"

Having my hopes doused, I bit the inside of my lip. I hadn't thought about my parents again.

“Oliver’s always busy. And I really don’t want to make a call on my own.” I stared at my lap as the confession came out.

“Well, there is a good reason why you have me. Let’s get this phone call taken care of. Your phone?”

I pulled my cell from my purse and placed it in his outstretched hand. Instead of letting go of the phone, I ended up squeezing it and his hand in a panic.

“Are you sure? I mean, I can wait...and you’re busy.”

“I’m not busy. Well, technically, I am. However! This is important to you, and for you. Plus, we’ll say it’s part of the session for today. So, are you sure?”

I nodded slowly, taking a steadying breath.

“You’ve got to let go of the phone, sweetheart.” Jin looked at my hand and back at me. “I’ll hold your hand if you want, I’ve no problem with that. But you have to release the phone.”

“Right. Sorry.”

I quickly dropped my hand to my lap and wrapped my hands together. Which only made me aware of the fact that my hands were sweaty. It wasn’t hot in the room, but my nerves were working overtime.

“Okay, step-by-step.” Jin stood, phone in hand, and walked around the coffee table until he was standing on my other side.

“It’s dialing your mom.” He sat beside me and held the phone between us. “And now it’s on speaker.”

It only took three rings and the other line stopped ringing. They didn’t hang up. They answered. And I wasn’t sure if I was relieved or more stressed about that.

“Oliver?” The voice sounded unsure of themselves.

“You’re on speaker, with Eleanor.” Jin rushed out, gently nudging my shoulder.

“Oh, Jin. Okay.” There was a heavy exhale. “We just weren’t sure if Eleanor would actually call.”

“She’s right here.” He moved the phone closer to me, nodding his head towards it.

“Hi.” I whispered, staring at the phone. “I didn’t know, um, how to call you.”

“It’s fine, Elle! Oliver and Jin have kept us up to date with everything. We knew you would eventually call. You’re doing okay? Do you need anything? I could search the garage for something to send to you if it would help.”

“You’d really search your garage?” Jin smirked at the phone and then quickly ran his hand over his mouth and jaw area.

“Well, I mean...” the voice trailed off.

She didn’t sound familiar to me, and it was kind of disappointing. Disappointing that I couldn’t even remember the person who gave birth to me and raised me. I hadn’t realized that I hoped, even a tiny amount, that hearing her voice would have made me remember her.

“No, it’s fine. My memory doesn’t seem to work the way I want it to. I just wanted to call because I didn’t know if I should...well, no, I should have. I just didn’t know how to. And I didn’t want to disappoint you. But I didn’t want to disappoint you by not calling, either.”

“As long as you’re listening to those doctors of yours, you will not disappoint anyone. We just want you to get better. Ok?”

“Okay. I’m sorry if I caused any worry.”

“Parents always worry about their children. I shouldn’t cut this short, but I’m actually in the waiting room of my own appointment. I can call back after?”

“Uh..” I glanced at Jin for the answer.

Which didn’t make any sense. It was my mother. I just didn’t know what to talk about. Or how to keep talking to her.

“We’re still working on the memory. Eleanor seems to get anxious easily, so I think if she feels more comfortable, one of us will get in touch with you.”

I mouthed a ‘thank you’ while my mom said her goodbyes to us.

“That wasn’t too bad. Was it?” Jin dropped my phone on the coffee table and then leaned back into the couch, throwing his arms across the back.

“It was a tad bit terrifying, actually.” I sighed, rubbing my hands along my pants to wipe some of the sweat away. “Almost like trying to get to know Oliver better.”

“Wait, what?” Jin laughed, bumping his knee against mine. “I know Oliver can be a bit intense at times, but he’s not that bad.”

“Well, he seems to stay away from me unless there’s a necessary reason to be around. I can’t even imagine him being happy with me. Well, no, I guess I want to imagine it.”

“I guarantee there are photos hidden away in his closet. He’s very cliché when it comes to moving things. Under the bed or in the closet. I know there were photos of the two of you, the three of us, around the place before I brought you back from the hospital.”

“So I should find pictures that Oliver hid away?” Raising an eyebrow, I shifted until my body was fully facing Jin. “How would that not make him annoyed with me? If he purposely put them away.”

“He’s a big boy. He’ll get the hell over it. I’m not catering to any of his perceived sensibilities. I am, however, going to make sure you are happy and on the road to recovery. Eventually.”

“And if he gets mad at me?”

Jin leaned forward and pressed his thumb against the bottom of my lip, gently tugging it from my teeth. Giving a small smile, he shrugged. “I never said you had to take them out and display them. You don’t even have to tell him if you find them. Only that, if you want to see them, then you have the right to do so.”

“That makes sense, I guess.”

“And if Oliver is an ass to you, call me. Immediately. We’ll go get ice cream and he can stay behind.”

“I like ice cream.” I agreed, letting him pull me to his side for a hug.

“It’s why you love me.” Jin kissed the top of my head. “Before you leave, may I make a personal suggestion? Well, it can go either way. Both ways. It is from a medical standpoint and a personal opinion.”

“Sure? I guess?”

Squeezing my shoulder gently, Jin sighed. “Can we not have any more run-ins with witches? Or, going back further, anything magical that can screw with you?”

Frowning, I tried to recall an incident that involved magic before the witch the salon. The only thing that came to mind was the portal imploding that caused this whole mess.

“I don’t think that I purposely went looking for them. Like, I didn’t wake up bored and think, ‘Hey, today’s a good day to play chicken with a faerie door. Hope I don’t lose.’ And it was you that suggested I leave the building. Oliver made the appointment.”

“Hey, I know you didn’t set out for any of this to happen.” Jin gently said against my head before pulling away. “You just scared me Saturday. Oliver and I aren’t like the fae or the witches. There’s only so much we can do. And I’ve kinda grown fond of you, you know?”

Going purely on instinct, I wrapped my arms around him in a hug. Which, I may have needed the hug more than Jin did. But he did wrap his arms fully around me, and it was nice to feel that comfort.

“Based on the horrible clock, I think you’re good to go. You don’t have to see me until Friday. I, unfortunately, should not cancel on the other appointments of the day. Or I would. I’ll walk you to the front. Jett’s in the waiting room, or car?”

Standing, Jin offered a hand to help me from the couch. I grabbed my phone and shoved it into my purse. Friday seemed

so far away. But at least Jin had given me a plan to work on - investigating my closet.

“I think he said he would be in the car.”

“I’ll have to talk to him. He should have waited in the front for you. Never make a woman walk out alone. That’s rude. Come on, love, I’ll walk you to the car.”

Chapter Forty

I barely remembered to set an alarm to remind me to throw something in the oven once I made it back to our place. There were about four hours until Oliver would get back from work and I wanted to get started on searching the closet for any pictures.

After putting my phone into my pocket and leaving my purse in my library, I began looking in Oliver's area of the closet. He had moved quite a bit out of the space, but the drawers and such were still there.

Going through each drawer took more time than I would have thought. I even checked under shelves and cabinets, behind the clothes that were still hanging. Checked inside shoes.

There wasn't anything in his closet other than the few clothes left behind. Staring at my side, I wondered if anything would have been hidden there. Technically, the closet would have been both of ours.

Oliver could have hidden things on my side. Or I could have hidden things on my side. Though, I wasn't sure what I would have hidden. Which gave me another reason to check on my side.

I was in a pile of socks when my cell phone buzzed in my pocket. Dropping the drawer to the floor, I removed my phone to answer the call.

"Jin?" It was odd that he was calling when I had just seen him.

"Hey, I'm having a late lunch and it made me come up with an idea."

I could hear distant chatter in the background, which didn't sound like his office place. So, he had probably gone out for his lunch, given the other noises.

“What are you eating that gave you an idea?” I perched my phone between my ear and shoulder and tried to shimmy the drawer back into its spot.

“Not what I’m eating, just that I’m eating. I realized we haven’t had lunch together since you woke up. And besides, it gives me an excuse to spend time with you.”

“We used to have lunch together?”

Oliver had made it seem like he was too busy to have lunch. Which could have been the case, or it could have just been a recent thing. And I was alone all day. It would make sense if I went out for lunch.

“Sure.” There was a small clatter in the background. “Thank you, just the lemonade.”

“I’d have to clear my schedule, but I’m sure I can make it work.” I let out an exaggerated sigh.

“Well, I don’t know if I should feel important, or like a burden.” I smiled at his chuckle.

“No offense meant, Jin, but you’re my only friend.” I started tossing the socks back into the drawer and worked on emptying the next.

“I’m going to pretend you said I was important.” There was a muffled voice in the background and he must have covered the phone, because his voice was muffled for a moment, too.

“Tomorrow I’ll actually be in a business meeting. But on Wednesday I have a brunch banquet at a retirement facility. Care to join me there?”

“Would I have to do anything? I could maybe help set things up, I guess. Is there a dress code?”

Maybe I was overthinking the brunch, but not knowing how to do anything social really did cause anxiety. What if it were a fancy brunch for these people and I showed up in leggings, or showed up in one of the cocktail dresses and everyone was in loungewear?

“Elle, it’s brunch. I’m wearing jeans, if that helps. I’m not helping set anything up, I’m just showing up and will talk to

whoever decides to talk to me. You just get to go and get free food. Plus, you won't be the only one with a memory problem.”

He mentioned that last part in a sing-song way. I stared down at the bras I had tossed out of the new drawer with a grimace.

“I'm not sure how to feel about that. But, I do like food.” I wiggled the drawer out of its spot to check behind it. “So, just casual clothing, right?”

“Wear whatever you want. Get dressed up if you feel like it. You can pretend you think you're a Lady. Or come in pajamas, keep it appropriate, we don't want to give these men any heart attacks at their ages.”

“I think I'll go with comfortable and casual, thanks.”

“Sounds fabulous. I'll pick you up at ten-thirty.”

I stashed my phone on top of a shelf after hanging up and went back to searching my closet. There wasn't anything extra that I had found, other than some of the clothing still had the tags on them.

My alarm sounded just as I was putting the final drawer back in place. I unfolded myself from the floor, turned the alarm off and went in search of something to throw in the oven.



I had just taken the chicken casserole from the oven when Oliver walked in. Leaving the dish to cool for a minute on the stovetop, I reached for my Kindle on the counter beside me. There wasn't really a way to know if Oliver would have a conversation with me, so best to have an alternative as I waited for dinner to not be at lava temperature.

“Jin said your appointment went well.” Oliver placed his bag on the table and started loosening his tie. “Anything you want to add to the report?”

Glancing up at him in confusion, my head cocked to one side. “A report? Not really? Nothing’s really changed; I cannot remember anything and I was given medicine to help my mind process. Is this like a professional debriefing thing, or genuine concern?”

“Professional.” He walked over to the fridge and pulled a can of soda from within. “That doesn’t mean there isn’t genuine concern.”

Not wanting to pick that apart, I closed my eyes and inhaled. I couldn’t try to get to know him, or spend time with him, if I was always reacting instead of just trying to see it from his side.

“Jin didn’t say I needed any more medicine, but he didn’t lower it again. He called my mom for me.”

“Oh? How’d that go?”

“Awkward. For me, anyway. I don’t know how to talk to people that know me, or knew me before, when I don’t know myself. So it feels like there’s an expectation and that I’ll fall short.”

I quickly turned to the cabinet behind me and grabbed down two bowls. I didn’t want to look at Oliver with that confession. It was hard enough to admit, especially since he was one of the people that I felt like I was disappointing.

Oliver was suddenly at my back, his arm snaking around me and pulling my hands away from the bowls.

“No one is expecting anything from you, Eleanor. There is no pedestal, so there isn’t a way for you to disappoint anyone. Safe and healthy are the only things that are wanted for you.”

My bottom lip became a resting point for my teeth as I tried to focus on what he was telling me and not flashing back to the elevator ride.

“I’ll work on it.” I sighed, looking over my shoulder to end up with Oliver staring straight into my eyes.

Oliver squeezed my hands gently and stepped back, releasing me from his enclosure. He took his drink from the

counter and moved around the island until he was sitting in a chair.

“I don’t have much time, but I can keep you company for a bit.”

“Were you always busy when you got home?” It was a genuine question, because I was starting to wonder how I would have gotten pregnant.

“Not nearly as much as I am now.” Oliver scrubbed a hand along his jaw and exhaled. “It’s just quite a bit to work on right now. Trying to find something that works to help everything that’s going on here. Calling other specialists for past trials, or what works best and what causes what reactions. Not everyone is in the same time zone, or free when I need them.”

I pushed a bowl in front of him and then hopped up on the counter beside the stove. I felt my nose scrunch in concentration as I picked my own bowl up from beside me.

“So...I’ve caused you more work than normal.” It wasn’t a question, since it was obvious because of how the days were progressing.

“You aren’t the cause, just a domino that needs righting.”

I guess that made sense. I didn’t make the accident happen. I was just there. But, I was a problem that needed to be solved.

Before I could ask what other professionals he was in contact with, just to get him talking, Oliver’s phone vibrated against the counter. Sighing to myself, I already knew what was coming.

“Thank you for dinner,” Oliver whispered, bringing the phone to his ear and taking his bowl towards his office.

Tomorrow. I would always end up trying again the next day. It would help if we were up at the same time, but Oliver went to the gym and I wasn’t going to make him babysit me again while he was working out. And I wasn’t about to start exercising before the sun was even awake.

Chapter Forty-One

Against my better judgment, I attempted to wake up earlier. Oliver was in the kitchen throwing a sandwich in a bag, already ready to leave. Which meant if I wanted to attempt it again, I would have to wake up even earlier...or just keep trying at dinner.

“I could make you lunch every day, if you want?” I shuffled over to the kitchen, deciding to make myself breakfast since I was up.

“What? Why? I just pack a sandwich, or grab leftovers.” He grabbed his bag from the counter and started looking through it.

“Just if it would save you time, I can do it for you. Help out?” I pulled bacon and eggs from the fridge and moved to the stove.

“If you want to, I won’t stop you. But I’m not requesting, or expecting, it be done.” He started scribbling notes across a paper he pulled from his bag.

“No, I know. I was just thinking that maybe I could just make you lunch. Or maybe we could have lunch? I could meet you somewhere?”

“I don’t generally leave the lab once I get there. Leaving would take away the time I could be working.” Oliver shoved the paper back into his bag and grabbed his keys.

“Right.” I swallowed back questions about how to make it work out. “Then I’ll see you at six?”

“Yes, six. Send me a message if you leave, please.”

Oliver was tapping at his phone as he headed for the door.

“Hope you have a good day.” My voice dropped in volume when I heard the door closing before I had finished speaking.

I ate my scrambled eggs and bacon in front of the television. There wasn't anything I had planned for the day, so I stayed in my pajamas for a few hours.

Spending the day lounging made the most sense. I didn't really want to go anywhere, and I didn't know anyone to call to keep me company. Other than Jin, who had a job just like Oliver did.

It would probably be better if I had a job to keep myself occupied. Except I didn't know if I had a history of employment. If I did, it probably didn't count anymore. I could have ten years of experience in customer service, but if I didn't remember anything...did I still have that experience?

I would be starting fresh again. So I would have to find something easy, a stepping point into the workforce. Though I would probably have to discuss it with Oliver and Jin, from both the doctor's side and the personal side.

Instead of delving deeper into whether a job would be a good idea for me, I headed for a shower and to contemplate another way to approach Oliver. Or to figure out how to find the old picture that might help jog my memory.

Sometimes it's the shower, or bath, that just opens your mind to new ideas. Jin had told me to check Oliver's closet. And, I thought that I had. Only that the time in the shower made me remember that Oliver had a new closet he was using. He had a whole different bedroom.

If he had shoved things away, then they may have been in the guest room closet. There could be a whole box of memories locked in that room and I hadn't thought to ask him about it.

With a new hope and determination, I was dressed quickly and in front of his bedroom door. There wasn't a reason to look over my shoulder, but I still felt like I was going to get caught doing something that I wasn't supposed to be doing.

Oliver hadn't ever asked me not to enter the room. The door always being closed didn't really mean anything either, since

my bedroom door was always closed. It just felt like I was crossing a boundary of some kind.

But everything that was behind the door were things that had been in our bedroom before. Oliver just moved into the room to give me space. So I wasn't intruding, really. I would have already known what all was in our suite if my mind wasn't broken.

My hand hovered over the doorknob before I nervously laughed at myself and pushed inside. Flicking the light-switch on, I glanced around the room, stepping further inside.

Oliver didn't have any pictures on display in the bedroom area. It was interesting that the bed wasn't made, though. Not that I thought a bed had to be made, just that Oliver seemed the sort to make the bed once he got out.

I skipped looking through the furniture in the bedroom and headed for the bathroom and closet. The bathroom was tidy, but Minnie did the cleaning for us, so I wasn't sure if it was all on Oliver that it was spotless.

Moving into the closet, I turned the light on and slowly walked around. It was smaller than the master closet, but that was more of two large closets connecting. It was about the size of one side of the master closet.

Meaning, it would still take me a while to browse through. Especially since the closet here was as full as my side of the master closet. So he hadn't purposely left clothing behind in the master closet, he just ran out of space to include them.

I pulled my phone from my pocket to set an alarm for when to set dinner in the oven, and then began slowly pulling apart each piece of clothing that was hanging up. I even made sure to check the pockets.

There weren't too many things hidden away, but I also didn't get through all of the closet by the time the alarm went off. There had been a box under some blankets that had captured my attention.

Moving the blankets aside, I sat on the floor and pulled the box towards me. It wasn't taped closed, so it was easy to lift

the flaps back and open the box. Lining the top of the box were class pictures from different grades in elementary school.

I examined a few of the pictures, but none of them had a younger me, based on the names of the students at the bottom. There were two that had both Jin and Oliver in the pictures.

Putting the pictures aside, I pulled more paperwork from the box. Oliver had kept achievement awards, ribbons, and school report cards. Given the grades and the ribbons, it made sense that he had the smarts to go into the field he was in.

I scanned through the report cards just because it seemed to fill me with nostalgia. Somewhere else there could have been a box that I had similar items, if they had been kept.

There weren't any more school items under them, though. I placed those beside the school pictures and leaned over the box to see what else to take out. Except there were just smaller boxes inside.

I grabbed one of the boxes and placed it in my lap, carefully opening the top. I smiled to myself as I shuffled around the Pokemon cards. A part of me remembered having cards like this, not that I actually could remember them.

Another box had a collection of acorns, pinecones, and seashells. They were all different sizes and appeared to be separated based on their sizes instead of randomly tossed in the box. The pinecones lined the bottom of the box, acorns in the middle of them with the seashells at the top.

At least he hadn't collected rocks as a child. Not that it made any sense for people to collect things like them, but I knew they did. People even pressed flower petals and leaves to keep them. So having a box of acorns, pinecones, and seashells wasn't exactly weird for a child.

After making sure I didn't mess up the order too badly, I lifted the second to last box from the main storage box. I almost wanted to keep the box out and take it to my room. Oliver had stored away an old handheld gaming system and quite a few games.

Considering he seemed to only watch documentaries or educational shows now, I was glad to know the little kid enjoyed the entertainment. Me as an adult wanted to enjoy the entertainment, but then I'd have to explain to Oliver that I had gone kind-of-snooping in his closet.

The last box contained school shirts, band shirts, and tie-dyed shirts with names written all over them. They were all sized for children, and with the school shirts having the word, 'Elementary,' I imagined they were Oliver's from when he was younger.

The alarm on my phone went off as I was putting the smaller boxes into the main box. I quickly placed the achievement papers, followed by the school pictures on top, closed the box, and pushed it back under one of the shelves.

Standing, I slowly stretched. It was ridiculous that it both hurt and made parts of me go numb just to sit on the floor.

I threw the blanket back over the box and grabbed my phone. I would have to continue looking through Oliver's closet after my brunch with Jin tomorrow. It wasn't like I had much to do during the days anyway, so it gave me something to look forward to.



The enchiladas had another ten minutes by the time Oliver walked into the kitchen. I was on the couch, wrapped in a blanket, and trying to decide if I liked 'The Office'.

I was three episodes in, but I was still undecided. It felt like watching a train wreck. I didn't want to turn away. The show had cringe-filled moments so far. And yet, it was so easy to believe it was a normal work environment. Which was sad to realize.

Pausing the television, I twisted on the couch until I rested my arms along the back. Oliver had removed his tie and had it laying on top of his bag on the table.

He glanced towards me as he rolled his sleeves to his elbows. "Did you not feel like going anywhere today?"

“Where would I go?” I was curious about the answer because I didn’t know where I would go if I left the building.

“Wherever you wanted. You don’t have to stay inside. Jett can take you out.”

“Well, yes. I know that. I just meant, like...where would I go? I don’t know where I would normally go.”

I rested my chin on my arms and waited for a suggestion. Or even an understanding from him.

“There’s a library downtown.”

“I have books here, and on my Kindle.”

“Okay, well, there’s a local pool not far from here.”

“Would I drown? Do I know how to swim?” Ignoring the eye-roll he gave, I continued as I thought. “Is swimming one of those things that, if you did know how to swim, it stays with you? Like a swimming muscle memory?”

“So we’ll save the swimming until you can go with company. There’s a museum about an hour from here. It is filled with things from the past, so that could be fun for you.”

“Seriously? You want me to leave the city? You said it was safe here, but if I leave the city, then the witches could come after me again.”

The oven timer sounded as Oliver just stared at me with exhaustion and annoyance.

“I have no idea what to tell you then, Eleanor.” He folded a dish towel and used it to remove the enchiladas from the stove. “I was trying to give suggestions on where you could go if you left the building.”

“I think I’ll start small. I’m going to a brunch thing with Jin tomorrow. So that’ll be out of the building.” Chewing my thumbnail, I tried not to panic. “I didn’t ask him if we were leaving the city, though. I should have asked him that.”

“What? Jin didn’t tell me that he planned to bring you along to the brunch.” He pulled his phone from his pocket and started tapping at the screen.

“Am I not supposed to be going? He made it sound like it would be fine. But if it’s like a doctor-patient thing, then I shouldn’t be going.”

“Hm?” Oliver absently hummed. “Oh. No, it isn’t a formal professional gathering. Jin just hasn’t gone to one of these things in a while. I’m usually the one that ends up going.”

“You’re going to be there, too?” I wasn’t sure which answer I was hoping for.

It wouldn’t make sense that Oliver was going and hadn’t asked me to go with him, when clearly there wasn’t anything against bringing someone along. But if he were going to be there, then maybe I had a better chance of spending time with him. Unless he was going to be socializing, which was the point of the brunch.

“No, I’m almost done with this new trial and can’t take the time away. Which is why Jin agreed to go in my place. Well, not really my place since we’re both invited.”

I moved to the island and leaned against the counter, watching Oliver plate the food.

“Oh, well, it would have been nice if we had gone together. But nevermind.”

Oliver looked back with a puzzled expression before turning to grab two cups from the cabinet.

“But you weren’t invited?”

“Jin did yesterday.”

“No, I meant by the organization. But, yes, you were invited. And I’m sure Jin will keep you company.”

Oliver placed a cup of water in front of me and then glanced down at his watch. He picked his plate from the counter, and took a bite - without blowing on it, which was nuts. And he did the blowing and chewing with your mouth open for a minute.

“Since you’re in a hurry, I guess you’ll be in the office soon?”

“Waiting to hear back about my batch of potassium. And there he is, five minutes early, but finally returning my call.”

He placed his plate back on the counter and retrieved his phone from his pocket. I stood up and took my plate to the couch. There was no reason for me to have to sit in there when he was leaving.

Chapter Forty-Two

I pressed the button to open the truck and watched Rosalyn gather her backpack.

“Go around to the back so you can help me get the groceries, okay?”

She just groaned, closing her door, and slumped her way behind the parked vehicle. It was perfectly acceptable to toss things into the shopping cart, but it was crossing the line to ask the child to cart them into the house.

I grabbed my purse from the backseat, putting my phone and car keys inside, and then met her at the opened trunk. Rosaly left out a dramatic exhale when I handed her a bag for each hand.

They were the lightest bags, one containing chips and the other cereal. Apparently they were too much for Rosalyn, who only moaned more.

“This is why people used to have loads of kids. They got more done with the kids helping. Probably complaining, but still helping.” Mumbling to myself, trying to figure out how many bags I could feasibly carry to make fewer trips back outside.

“What do you mean by that? Am I not enough? Are you saying you need another child now? Are they going to steal your heart? Because let me tell you that I’ll steal it right back!”

I slowly pivoted toward Rosalyn, mouth partly agape, amusingly confused, and just stared at her. She had her hands on her hips and was glaring at me with determination and a pout.

It was the complete over-the-top rant and such betrayal on her face that had me burst out laughing. The child could be dramatic, but it had been a while since it was like this.

“Take your bags inside, Rosalyn.” I breathed out between laughs. “I’ve got to pee now. Oh man. Just going to steal it right back, huh? I can’t.”

“It wasn’t that funny.” She grumbled from the doorway.

I opened the door and followed her into the house, shaking my head. Sometimes there wasn’t a dull moment with her. Rosalyn could say the craziest things, or most dramatic things, and leave me wondering where her personality came from.

Chapter Forty-Three

“Sweet Jesus!” I shrieked, my eyes snapping open to Oliver standing in front of me. “You can’t do that.”

Frowning, Oliver glanced down at my arm and back to my face. Following his gaze, I realized he had a hand on my arm. Probably the reason I woke up.

“Check on you? You don’t think I should check on you?”

“No. I don’t mean no, no. You can check on me, I guess. But, do you need to be so close and scare me when I wake up?”

I elongated my body down the couch, to stretch out the muscles, and took in the room. It was darker outside and the television was now off.

Oliver wasn’t in pajamas like the last time he left me on the couch, but his shirt was unbuttoned more and it looked like he’d been raking his hands through his hair repeatedly.

“You were making pained noises, so I thought I should wake you up. You can go to your bed and get more comfortable. Maybe you’ll sleep better.”

He got off the coffee table and started undoing the rest of his shirt. Not sure where the tiredness went, but I was very much awake. When he was closer to the kitchen, he pulled his shirt off and my eyes got stuck.

I knew people had muscles, you couldn’t do anything without them. But, to see someone’s muscle where you didn’t really think to see evidence of muscles was different. Oliver wasn’t bulky, but he had definition and that included his back muscles flexing as he moved.

My back muscles had taken a vacation sometime ago and had left an aging putty in its place. It made sense as to why he was always in the gym, if he was going to keep looking like that, he would need to.

Catching myself from drooling, I focused on the fact that he was getting undressed in the kitchen. I was mostly sure that that hadn't happened before. Or I was having another vivid dream, of a different kind of strange.

"Do you always strip in the kitchen at night?" I tried to keep my face neutral when he turned around.

I'm not sure why I wasn't expecting to find his front to be as defined as his back. But I had seen him shirtless in the kitchen previously, and didn't remember any of those details. Though, the lights weren't on at that time and I had somehow focused on a tattoo.

When clearly there was a lot more to look at than that one tattoo. Not that there were any other tattoos that I could see. I desperately wanted to trace the muscles I was seeing. For science.

Scientifically, how was he able to have a muscular chest without it looking like a bodybuilder or boobs. And I knew, or remembered, that performers would put make-up on their stomachs to create abdominal muscles.

Clearly, I needed to run my hands over his stomach to make sure he definitely had those six muscles showing. Then I could check his chest. It was the right thing to do.

"...are you daydreaming?"

"What!" Jerking backwards, I cursed myself when I fell on the floor. "Ow. No...wait, yes, definitely one of my zone-out moments."

It didn't make sense to have him believe I had another moment where I was in a daydream instead of just admitting to...ogling. And yet, I found it slightly embarrassing to have been caught nearly drooling over him.

Oliver came around the couch, crouching down beside me, and pulled my hand away from the elbow I had been rubbing.

"I think your elbow's fine. What were you remembering?"

I silently cursed myself while Oliver helped me sit up. The proximity wasn't helping my brain. His hand sat near my

thigh, and that wasn't helping either. It might have helped some if he hadn't taken his shirt off.

"Laundry." I spit out, brushing my hair out of my face. "I haven't done laundry."

Oliver cocked his head, examining me. "Ms. Kes does the laundry when she comes by."

"Right. Of course." I chuckled awkwardly and moved to stand.

My foot landed on the end of the remote control, and I wobbled. I tried to make the wobble not end back on the ground, but only partially succeeded. My elbow hit the floor again, only it was inches from harming Oliver in the crotch.

My head hit his stomach, the momentum making Oliver fall onto his back.

"Sorry. Crap. Sorry. So sorry. I didn't actually elbow you... but crap, sorry...I wasn't trying to attack you..." I trailed off and stopped trying to roll away without further injuring him because he threw an arm around me and sat up.

Instead of laying across him, I was now sitting between his legs with his chest against my back. My mind wrestled with the pros and cons of turning around.

I was stuck on the idea that kissing couldn't possibly be a bad decision. Kissing would make things better, or at least it would make me feel better. And with Oliver's hand still against my stomach, turning around was sounding like an even better idea.

"You're holding your breath." He whispered in my ear, my hair moving with his lips. "You should breathe."

Quickly nodding, I took a small inhale because I truly hadn't noticed my entire body had frozen, trying to process what to do. Oliver's hand was sitting precariously in either direction, and it was causing my brain to short-circuit.

The temptation was there. And it was growing, along with my breathing now that my mind was stuck in a dangerous territory. Oliver's lips against my ear were not helping.

“You’re thinking about kissing again.” Oliver’s voice sounded huskier.

His other hand was cupping the elbow that tried to take out an interesting part of him. I was conflicted in feeling very disappointed for nearly elbowing Oliver and feeling grateful that it caused the moment. If it would be a moment.

“I apologized for almost elbowing you.” It was difficult to keep a train of thought when his hand started sliding up my arm.

“Yes, you did.” His hand glided across my collarbone, making my breathing hitch again. “But that doesn’t mean you aren’t again thinking of kissing me.”

He leaned into my back while pressing me back, so my back was flush against his chest. My breathing automatically was trying to fall into the same rhythm as his. I didn’t know if I was breathing too fast or not enough.

Oliver moved his hand slightly higher towards the base of my neck and lifted his thumb against my jaw until he turned my face towards his. His eyes were more green again and kept flicking between my lips and eyes.

“I...don’t remember what the question was.”

My body was sinking into his hold, and his eyes were burrowing into my soul. There was no complaint about either of those happening. I just really wanted to feel his lips on mine.

It would be a nice change, or so I imagined. And it would be a fresh start. We could go back to how it was before the accident. Like the brief moment I remembered of happiness and lust from our wedding reception.

Oliver drew back abruptly, his hands dropping away like there was a fire after him. Scrambling backwards until he was standing, he wiped a hand over his face. The sudden space at my back was quickly chilling without his heat.

I felt my face growing hot, and I stared towards the ceiling to keep my eyes from watering anymore. Wiping my hands against my thighs to stop the jitters, I quickly stood.

“I just thought you might want to go to bed, since it’s almost midnight.” Oliver cleared his throat and strode towards his bedroom door. “I’ll, um, see you tomorrow.”

“Right.” I quietly choked out as the door shut behind him.

I took my phone from the coffee table, turned the lights out, and went to my bedroom. I held the tears back as well as I could until I was in bed. We were getting closer. I could feel it.

We’d work on it. I’d work on it. I had more to search through tomorrow. I just couldn’t give up.

Chapter Forty-Four

Still feeling disappointed about what didn't transpire with Oliver the night before, I chose not to set an alarm for the next morning. Well, not to set an alarm early enough to try to catch him before he left for work.

I still had enough time to be ready for Jin to pick me at ten-thirty for the brunch. Skipping over breakfast allowed me a few extra moments to sleep, and I was going to be eating soon enough, anyway.

Jin didn't call or text to let me know when he arrived. He just strolled into the suite and hopped onto the island, resting his feet in the chair. Thankfully, I had already squirreled away the pills that had been where he was now sitting.

"I'm not saying you don't look good as you are, just that you may get toasty with the cardigan." Jin motioned his head in my direction, like he was pointing with his face or something.

Staring down at myself, I tugged the thin cardigan closer. Being covered felt like an emotional support, a shield. I didn't know what it was shielding me from, but it was comforting.

"But it's soft?" I bit the corner of my lip, trying to decide if I should keep it on.

"Is it?" Jin waved me over, stretching his arm out to feel the sleeve I offered up. "Oooh, it is soft. But we'll be on the lawn for brunch, so you might get hot. It doesn't matter to me. Although sundresses are always fabulous."

"How often do you wear them?"

I smoothed out the bottom of the dress with a smirk. Jin hopped off the counter with a tsk-ing noise. He flicked my nose and then headed back to the front door.

"I would look amazing in one. Now grab your shoes and whatever you need. I'm starving."

Thankfully, Jin hadn't been lying about the event being a casual gathering. Plenty of other people, that weren't residents, were in jeans. They mostly tended to have either buttoned or a polo style shirt, though, and Jin was in a faded green henley shirt.

Jin placed a hand on my back and walked me further into the decorated section of the front lawn. The building behind was three stories and looked like it was probably once an old manor type of house. Waist high bushes lined the walkway leading from the parking area to the front doors of the building.

The right side was set up with tables that had umbrellas above them. There were three areas around the tables that had chaperoned food stations. And the smells were making my stomach grumble.

"You can get food and sit, or you can sit and I'll get you food. Or you can walk with me while I greet some people."

"I'm hungry, but I don't want to be rude to anyone. I can get food and wait for you."

Jin led me around the tables further back and close to one of the food stations. Before we got to the table he was aiming for, a small older woman slapped his arm as we walked by.

I looked around Jin to see what had caused the reaction to see the woman was giving her best fake frown and shaking a finger at him. Jin moved his hand from my bag and engulfed the woman in a hug.

"Judith! Aside from the assault, it's good to see you out here."

"Don't you try to butter me up. I haven't seen you in months. We were starting to take bets that you finally chose a different career."

"What were you betting with? And you didn't bet against me, right?" Jin winked down at her as she stepped back.

"Never bet against you, Jin. I knew you wouldn't stay away too long, you like our biscuits and gravy too much. And it was more trying to arrange marriages for our single family. Bad

matches for some of these folk, but I had my eyes on Darmin's granddaughter for my Shane."

The woman, Judith, turned towards me and visibly looked me over. She narrowed her eyes, nodded, and then turned back to Jin with a pat on his arm. "I would have preferred you with my Danielle, but this one will do. You're not with Jin for his money, are you?"

"Wait...what?" Confused, I looked at Jin for help. Except that Jin was covering his mouth to hide the smile. "I'm not with him?"

"Then who are you here with?"

"Jin. But I haven't been paid -"

"Yet? Are you charging him for the sex? You should always get some of the money upfront. Unless you leave your garage door half open."

"What?" My eyes widened in bewilderment, among other thoughts quickly changing.

"Woah, there, Judith. She's not a working girl."

"Prostitute. She's not a prostitute? Then why's she charging for the sex? I did hear that it is better to advertise yourself as a landlord, renting a space to be moved in for short periods of time. Or is this compensation? The salmon patties. I knew a man that took salmon patties as payment. He's on the third floor. Once he took that pill, Freddy was the reason I needed that other hip surgery."

Judith seemed to be getting louder the longer she went on, and I was slightly terrified. I could feel the blush creeping up my neck and covering my entire face. Jin just bit his lip to keep from laughing, even though he kept trying to shush her. The surrounding people were definitely starting to pay attention, if the snickering was any hint.

"Judy, this is my friend. A friend that needed some fresh air and because I love her, I thought I would bring her with me. Judy, Eleanor...not a prostitute."

“Of course I’m not a prostitute. I would have some prime real estate, though.” Judith huffed, eyeballing me again. “But all the young ones know what a sundress means. Easy access. Here for the salmon patties and ready to go after.”

“Oh, my god.” I sputtered. “Jin, I think I’m going to go sit down. It was...nice?...to meet you.”

I turned and fled to the farthest table, hearing Judith asking Jin where to get the same sundress as I got away. No one was sitting at the table, but that was fine with me. It gave me time to collect myself and remember that there wasn’t anyone, aside from Jin, that knew me here.

I was groaning into my hands when I felt someone sit near me. It wasn’t Jin because they didn’t speak. Slowly lowering my hands, I folded them on the table in front of me and gave a pathetic smile to the older gentleman.

“Don’t mind Judy. She’s a few peas short of a casserole.” He shrugged and started cutting up the chicken on his plate.

“I don’t know about that.” That was a partial lie. I may not have known for certain, but Judy was a bit crazy, in my opinion. “It was just a miscommunication. I’m Eleanor.”

“Nice to meet you, Eleanor. Ned.” He gave a quick head tilt, and went back to cutting up his food. “Jin used to do sessions about once a week here, so it’s nice to see him again. Nice fellow, seems sincere. You know how you can get those doctors that would rather be anywhere else.”

“That’s probably true with any job, though.”

“True. If you’re hungry, you should go make yourself a plate before the rest of the crowd gets out here.” Ned pointed his plastic knife towards the food area.

“Why didn’t everyone come out at the same time?” It seemed like it would have been smarter, food wise, if everyone had the chance to eat from the same moment.

“Oh, they had to have a group assembly. Third and second floor, the south wings, had an orgy last night. After lights out.”

“Okay...I’m just going to make a plate...if you’ll excuse me.”

“Of course.”

My stomach was still growling at me, but I honestly wasn’t sure if I had an appetite.

Jin found me at the table some time later, when I was working my way through some of the desserts. There were a few other residents that had joined Ned and myself, each insisting I try a certain item.

“Have you had a chance to eat anything?” I asked when he sat down beside me, empty-handed.

“Not yet. Been checking up with some people. Hey, Ned. Haven’t gotten into any more trouble, have you?”

“Boy, I don’t get into trouble,” Ned scoffed, jabbing his fork in our direction.

Jin held his hands up with a chuckle before grabbing a scone from my plate. Pushing the plate in front of him, I motioned for him to continue.

“I’ve had too much. But, don’t only eat the dessert. I can make you a plate? If you tell me what you want, anyway.”

“It’s fine, Elle. I’ll eat in a moment.” Jin threw an arm on the back of my chair and started in on the banana pudding.

“See, this is what I’m constantly telling Kevin. There are normal relationships with nice people in the world.” An older woman said from across from us.

“Oh, no, we -” I started, and stopped when I realized Jin and I were talking at the same time.

“We’re friends.” He dropped the spoon on the plate and reached for my cup of water.

“They say that, but I think we know.”

“I’m sorry?” I frowned, staring at the people across from me and really hoped we weren’t about to go into another prostitute

conversation.

“We’ve been around long enough to see it. I’m not crazy, right?” One of the men questioned the woman beside him. “Not abnormally so, anyway.”

“It’s either indigestion or lust.” The woman nodded.

“I really don’t think those are the same thing.” Jin leaned forward, elbows resting on the table. “Eleanor’s married.”

“You didn’t get her a ring, Jin? Frank! The boy didn’t get her a ring.”

“Don’t got to yell in my ear, Betty, I’m right beside you. Maybe he thought the bow bracelet was a good place holder. I always said you can pay for a higher education, but you can’t buy common sense.”

Glancing down at my hand, I brushed my fingers over the green ribbon I had taken to using as a bracelet. There wasn’t anything wrong with the ribbon, it was just wrapped around my wrist a few times before being tied into a bow.

Ignoring the ribbon, I wiggled the fingers of my left hand under the table. I concentrated on my fingers in confusion. I really didn’t have a ring. And it hadn’t crossed my mind. There wasn’t even a tan line or indentation to indicate I had one before.

“Guys, we are right here.” Groaning, Jin pinched the bridge of his nose. “She’s married to Oliver. Doctor O’Shea.”

“Hm.” The woman, Betty, pressed her lips into a line and mumbled about not being wrong.

“Jin?” I leaned towards him, keeping my voice to a whisper. “Did I lose my ring? Is Oliver going to be upset if I don’t remember where it is?”

“I’m sure Oliver just put it away and didn’t think about returning it, with everything that’s been going on. You were only in the hospital gown. All jewelry was removed.”

Chewing on the inside of my lip, I gave a small nod. I could probably find it while I was looking for pictures. The ring was

just another thing that I could focus on while at the suite. Keep my mind busy.

Jin excused himself for food, and I was left at the table with older people that were giving me strange looks again. They couldn't even whisper to each other because most of them were either hard of hearing, or had a hearing aid that seemed to be on the lowest volume. Or, in Ned's case, was ignoring those around him.

"Ah man. This shit is bananas!" Frank spat, coughing out the spoonful from his mouth.

"It's banana pudding." Betty's side-eye was marvelous.

In all honesty, I was in agreement with Frank. Not in regards to the banana pudding, but the outing had been bananas. I was thinking about taking Judith's suggestion on charging Jin for the brunch.

"So that was fun." Jin chuckled as he started the vehicle. "Now you know why I try not to go to these things. Harmless and entertaining. Mostly good people. But also, insane."

I raised an eyebrow, slowly rolling my head in his direction. "You did tell Judith that I'm not a prostitute?"

"Yes." Jin snorted and patted my hand. "She's one of the residents that has a memory lapse. She doesn't actually have family, but she believes she does. 'Shane' that she mentioned she was trying to marry off - he doesn't exist."

Adjusting so I could stare out the window, I inhaled deeply. She had the same problem I had. Only, she openly spoke of Shane to others as if he were a real person. Like my dreams were slowly making me want to believe about Rosalyn.

It was a deep sadness and heartbreak that I understood. There was no telling how many times she had been told that Shane wasn't real. And now she was at the point where he was real - to her.

"Interestingly enough, she did have to have another hip surgery because she snuck into another resident's room for sex. From what I was told, she fell out of her slipper and tripped over Freddy, and banged her hip against a dresser."

“I think I could have lived without knowing about their sex-capades. Gah, I was told some of them were late to brunch because they had a late night orgy.” Cringing, I pulled my cardigan tighter around myself and tried not to have a visual.

“Well, this is new. You aren’t a prude, I know that much.”

“I’m not going to ask, because then I’ll get super awkward. More awkward. And get red and embarrassed. You shouldn’t know things about me that I don’t know about myself, anyway.”

Jin just gave a small twitch of his mouth while he shrugged. “What about their orgy is bothersome?”

“The fact that they had an orgy.” I began, holding a finger up. “Was this an organized event? How did they start it? Who’s idea was it? Wait. No, I don’t actually want those answers. But, also, there had to have been stripping involved.”

“I don’t think I need to explain to you how one goes about doing some squat thrusts in the cucumber patch.”

“Doing...what?” I snorted.

“Getting the kettle mended? A little horizontal refreshment? Helping the one-eye to see better? Shaking the sheets? Screwing...any of those work for you?”

I’m not sure why my hand was covering my eyes, it didn’t change what I was hearing, but that’s where I slapped my hand when I felt the blush creeping up. It’s how invisibility worked somewhere, I’m sure - if I couldn’t see them, they couldn’t see me.

“I got it, Jin. Thanks.”

“Aw, anytime, sweetheart.” Jin chuckled and nudged my elbow with his. “But, like I was saying, how would you expect them to get to business if at least some of them don’t strip? Unless they come prepared in clothing that doesn’t actually require removal.”

“Stripping terrifies me.” I mumbled.

I wasn’t sure how I knew this, or why I knew this, but it felt true. The thought of strippers stripping made me both terrified

and anxious. I was starting to feel a panic just thinking about it, trying to figure it out.

“Stripping? Like...getting undressed?” Jin’s face was an amused confusion when he looked at me.

“Eh, no. Strippers? Like, the dancers.”

“Well, that is something I will definitely be looking into. There’s a story there and I need it, Elle.”

“I can honestly say that I don’t remember if there’s a story or not.” I cut my eyes and returned to the window.

“Okay, see, that? That isn’t going to work forever, love. For now, yes. But not for long.” Jin’s chuckle was quickly followed by a groan. “Man. I forgot about the school.”

Looking around, I tried to find what had frustrated him. There were only cars parked halfway on the shoulder, and traffic slowing to get around them. The only school that I could see was further up the road.

“What about the school?”

“I forgot that there are two different times of the day that traffic is slowed, and sometimes ridiculously so, near the school. The school doesn’t even let out for another hour, I don’t think. So why are all these cars lining the side of the road all the way back here?”

“You’d be surprised at how time-consuming the car rider line is. There are so many kids in the school, and then so many of them are all getting picked up. That’s hundreds, at least. So, everyone shows up early to pick up their kid because if you show up even ten minutes before school lets out, there is already a line of car riders waiting for their kid - because all those car riders have to have a vehicle picking them up. And that’s a lot. It can take anywhere from ten minutes to an hour from start to finish, depending on when you get in line and where in the line you are.”

Silence filled the vehicle when I finished, absently fiddling with the ribbon turned bracelet. I had realized I was going to go into a lengthy explanation in sympathy for those poor souls waiting to pick up their child.

“Eleanor...that seemed very logical.” Jin sounded confused and weary, glancing over at me. “Care to elaborate? On the thought process, or knowledge - not more of the reasoning.”

“Oh. Hm.” My brows furrowed, watching the school come closer into view. “Just seemed logical. I mean, schools have a lot of kids, right? They can’t all be picked up at the exact same time.”

It sounded right. But it also felt like I should be one of those parents sitting on the side of the road waiting for the school to open the gates, allowing the vehicles entry. We didn’t talk further, but we were also only five or so minutes from dropping me off again.

Chapter Forty-Five

Jin walked me up to the suite and then headed back to his office for the rest of his appointments. A part of me was slightly disappointed that he couldn't say and keep me company, because I did enjoy being with him, but the other part wanted to be alone when I went diving into Oliver's closet again.

I pulled my phone from my purse before dropping the purse on the couch and headed towards Oliver's current bedroom. Closing the door behind me, I quickly set an alarm so I wouldn't forget to get dinner started, and looked around his bedroom.

Before I could think of heading to the closet, the nightstand drew my attention. It was more that the drawer was opened slightly and the sunlight from the window caused a glint from inside the drawer.

The nightstand was a better place to look for my wedding ring, anyway. It wouldn't really make sense to keep a small piece of jewelry in a closet area. Unless there was a jewelry case in the closet, but I hadn't recalled seeing one.

My nightstand didn't have my ring, or I would have seen it from the numerous times I put my Kindle inside it. It also wasn't in my purse. So, it made sense that he took it from the hospital and would keep it safe for me.

Sitting on the edge of the bed beside the nightstand, I gently pulled the drawer further out. There were some papers lining the bottom of the drawer, a silver picture frame that was upside down, some pens, a bottle of heartburn medicine, and a small suede pouch.

The pouch was the size to store a ring, but I didn't want to get my hopes up only to find it held a collectible coin. I slowly lifted the picture frame and turned it around so I could see the picture inside.

It was us. Oliver and me, from the wedding. The background was blurred, the focus on the two of us from the waist up. We weren't looking at the camera. Oliver's arms were loosely wrapped around me, and we were smiling ridiculously at each other.

Closing my eyes, I rested the picture on my lap and took a deep inhale. This had been what I had been hoping to find. Proof that we were happy. Even if it were a while ago, we could get there again.

I wanted to get there again.

My finger lingering at the side of Oliver's face. I just needed to reconnect with him. This was what I wanted. To feel the want and love captured. Just to feel it again, for the first time.

I gently placed the picture frame on the bed beside me and grabbed the pouch. The cord along the top of the pouch moved the paper underneath to the side, but I could straighten it in a moment. I loosened the pouch and shook it into my palm.

It was a ring that landed in the center of my hand. And it was small and delicate, not huge and complicated. I loved it.

The ring had a rose-colored band, a hexagon-cut stone the color of a pink grapefruit at the center, and there were smaller stones catty corner to each other. The top side had three tiny aquamarine stones beside even smaller diamonds, and the bottom opposite had three tiny diamonds.

As much as I wanted to slip it right on my finger and carry on, I couldn't. Then I'd have to explain to Oliver that I went snooping into his bedroom. Although I could tell him about the older people and their antics, which led me to want to find the ring, and casually ask him if he remembered where he stored it.

Going over the idea in my head, I placed the ring back into the pouch and then the pouch in the drawer. Shifting closer to the drawer, I leaned over to straighten the paperwork that was inside.

My hand froze on the paper instead, my breathing freezing alongside it. Quickly removing the top paper, I snatched the paper underneath. Dread and shock flooded my veins. Confusion was warring alongside them. I was slowly drowning in a mixture of emotions and I slid to the floor, the papers falling beside me.

The petition for an annulment. A divorce form. That was signed by me, with a date of May 20th. The date of my accident.

We were filing for a divorce. And then everything crumbled further from there. It was no wonder that Oliver was distant.

I pressed my palms into my eyes as I fought to breathe. It hurt. It was worse. I couldn't breathe. I was choking on the air and drowning. The sobbing wouldn't stop. My chest was being squeezed.

Time crept by, my tears were slowly going to auto-pilot. No one had told me. Oliver obviously knew, but Jin made it seem like nothing changed. And maybe he didn't know. Only Oliver could have known. Until now.

"We can fix this." I choked out, almost crawling to get to the bathroom to blow my nose.

It was pointless to wipe my eyes; I was leaking, and it wasn't stopping. My head was pounding, even my eyeballs felt like they were thumping.

"I can fix this." My nose was red, my face was puffy and wet.

My throat was dry and hoarse. I splashed water on my face, feeling the numbness settle over me. My hands were trembling and my breathing was hiccuped.

I was barely functioning.

One step at a time.

Put everything back in the drawer.

Tears rolled down faster after I placed the paper back inside the drawer. A sob tore free when I tried to put the photo back, and I had to stop to imagine the couple in the frame. I put it

away when my eyesight was seeing things more blurry than solid.

There was no point in going through the closet. Squinting against the pounding in my head, I shuffled out of the room with my phone and went to the liquor cabinet. Flinging it open, I grabbed the closet bottle and managed to take two gulps before my body grew more numb. I just had to wait for the alcohol to numb me even further.

“Shit.” It sounded like a beg.

There was no way I could face Oliver tonight. I just needed a damn second to process. I didn't want it to process.

I couldn't stop the tears from rolling down my face. I couldn't stop the pounding in my head. But I could hide from the world for a moment.

I put the liquor back and pulled out my phone. It took a few attempts to get it typed and sent; it was hard to see underwater. Oliver should have received a text telling him that I felt like shit, my head was killing me, and that I was going to sleep it off.

It wasn't all a lie. I felt like shit. Worse than that. And my head was killing me. My brain was trying to escape from my eyes. But my head wasn't the only thing that was killing me. The stab to the heart was a factor, especially since it seemed to have been serrated and then twisted further.

I was going to go lie in the dark and try to sleep it off. Sleep to forget, sleep to remember - I wasn't sure.

Chapter Forty-Six

“You found the world?” Rosalyn flickered in front of the swing set.

Twisting around, I tried to remember when I went to the park. Or where the park was from the suite. The last thing that I remembered was falling asleep in a sea of tears, snot, a building migraine, and tissue papers.

“I don’t know - where am I?”

Rosalyn sat on the swing and started nudging the ground with her feet. She didn’t try to swing, only shifting her feet in the dirt beneath her. When she finally looked up at me, she only sighed.

“You should have found it. Or, no. You should have not found it, which is the start. I think. Did you not find it?”

“I can’t believe I’m doing this again.” I muttered under my breath and rubbed a hand at my temples.

Taking the swing beside her, I looked up at the sky. It didn’t look like it could decide if it was day or night. There was a swirling mesh of pale blue sky with white clouds, and then sparkling dark blue with pinpricks of stars and planets in the distance. A purely fictional, beautiful view.

“If you mean the tarot cards that were in my purse, then yes - I seem to be missing The World card. But I don’t know how my dreams would know that, unless it was missing before, and this is just a weird way to acknowledge it.”

“You did lose it before. It was taken from you, Mom.” Rosalyn released her hand from around the chain on my side, and cautiously held it out to me. “I know sometimes I said I wanted to get away, or stay with friends, or grandparents....but I miss you. I really, really do.”

I slipped my hand around hers and pulled her from the swing to stand in front of me. With me sitting, I had to look up to see her face. She looked tired, nervous, and sad.

“I’m going insane. I know I am. But for some insane reason, I hurt. Every time I see you here. Or have a weird dream memory. It hurts because I get this overwhelming sense of longing, of loss. So, I think I miss you, too.”

I pulled her into my arms when she started chewing on the corner of her lip to stop it trembling; the tears threatening to fall from her eyes. It was a strange kind of hurting, because I wanted to fix it with no way to do so. And without the knowledge of how.

Rosalyn wrapped her arms around my waist when I stood to hug her tighter.

“Everything will start to make sense now. No, it will not make sense. Everything will start to not make sense now.” She rambled into my chest.

“Nothing has made sense for nearly two weeks.”

“Okay, but you should be adding things up on your own. And then you’ll be able to find The World. Able to find me.”

Pulling back slightly, I looked down at her. From a closer point, I could make out the small amount of pale freckles dotting her cheekbones and nose. Not nearly the amount I had, her’s were barely visible. But she was also more of a light tan to my fair skin. We had the same slightly slanted and hooded eye shape.

It was the desperate hope lining her face, with the sadness right behind it, that made me want to do anything for her.

“What do you mean, ‘able to find you’?” There was a spike of excitement that I couldn’t quite understand.

“I just mean it...oh,” Rosalyn glanced down at her body and then back at me in confusion. “The dream’s changing. I can’t control...unless they can sneak in now?”

She was speaking faster and clutching my arms. I tried to soothe her, except she kept frantically checking around her.

“Who are you talking about? What are you talking about?”

“It’s such a small point to figure out, and it’s luck. And I had to make sure there was a link to even get that far. But, I’m a

kid and really can't do anything...and if they already know an easier way. Or...or, if they have a link? It's not on purpose...it feels...like I'm waking up...not forced?"

"Baby, slow down. I don't understand anything."

"I thought I had more time this time." Rosalyn quietly cried, furiously wiping at her eyes.

"No, don't cry." I tried to wrap her in a hug again, but she pulled away.

"I'm waking up," she choked, glancing down her body as it started to flicker again. "You'll figure it out. Then you can find your world."

Grasping her hand tighter, I tried to keep her from fading. Only it didn't work. Rosalyn was there one minute, and with the next flicker, she was gone. My hands dropped to my sides, and I stared around at the blurring scenery.

I couldn't keep having these dreams. I was starting to think that maybe I should take the pills. A little shock to the system never killed anyone. Well, besides when it did kill people.

A breeze suddenly blew across the playground, lifting my hair and making me shiver. I pulled my sweater closer to me with one hand and brushed the hair from my face with the other.

When my hand fell from my face, I was no longer on a playground. Quickly spinning around, I spotted Jin entering the room. The confusion must have been written across my face, because Jin's eyes widened as he spotted me.

He shut the door behind him and rushed toward me while tossing his notepad on the chair near his desk.

"Why are you waiting in my office?"

"Because you're a dream, apparently." I rambled, taking in the scene. Just another weird memory scene in my dream.

"I do love when you compliment me. Though, oddly." Jin stepped closer and ran his hands along my arms. "I don't think you've ever surprised me at work before. I've got to say, it's nice."

“We’re not usually in your office?” I looked up at him when he stepped closer.

The proximity was doing something to my head. But he was always close to me. And yet I couldn’t explain why I was feeling strange. A fluttering had taken up in my stomach. Similar to moments with Oliver.

Chuckling, Jin slid his arms around me and kissed the top of my head. “I go wherever you are, sweetheart.”

“Oh.” I rested against his shoulder and closed my eyes.

Jin was comfortable. I was always comfortable with him, which was one of the things I had grown to love about him. And his smell.

“Why do you smell like...” I moved closer to his neck and inhaled. “Kinda like peppermint?”

Jin’s breathing hitched, and he slid his hands to my waist. “Cologne? Or it might be the outlet air things. Is this going to be one of those quality times? Not that I don’t like that...just so I’m clear. Just need to know if I should be kissing you, or if I should take a breather.”

This had to be insane. I hadn’t had this dream before, so I didn’t know what I was expecting. Or what I was supposed to do. But a lot of the dreams were a one time-only thing.

“Dreams are preposterous.” I mused.

“They really are.” Jin agreed, moving a hand to my cheek and tilting my face to his. “But sometimes they’re the only place where you’re mine.”

My heart sped up as he drew closer. It was a bittersweet realization that I wasn’t shocked or confused about needing this. It was Jin.

I raised onto my toes to meet his lips. There was the faintest brush, and before our lips were sealed an alarm sounded around me. It was far away, but slowly growing louder.

And I was slowly fading away.

Chapter Forty-Seven

I grabbed the edge of my pillow and folded it over the side of my head. My head was still pounding, and that noise wasn't helping. I was also pretty sure that I hadn't set an alarm.

Pretty sure.

Grunting to myself, I swiped my hand around, looking for my phone. Except I wasn't finding it. Once I finally managed to keep my eyes open, I sat up. And immediately regretted it.

My head felt like it was moving slower than the rest of my body. I dropped my head into my hands and sat there trying to reboot. I felt like shit. My body felt numb, my head was pounding, and I couldn't decide between screaming or breaking down into tears.

Clearly, I had woken to a mess.

And the high-pitched beeping wouldn't stop.

My phone wasn't on the bed.

"Eleanor? I'm just turning - what happened?"

Jerking my head up, and wincing with the effort, my eyes focused on Oliver coming through the archway.

My heart gave a lurch, and my stomach felt queasy. I could feel my eyes watering, but I wasn't sure if it was the pounding behind them or seeing the concern on Oliver. Or from just seeing Oliver after yesterday.

Sniffing, I sucked my lips in to try to pull it together. He didn't know I went looking in his room. He didn't know that I found both my wedding ring and the end of our marriage in his nightstand. There was no reason to tell him when he hadn't made the decision to tell me anything.

"Just a disaster of a headache...it's bordering migraine territory." I winced when I turned my head to follow his path to the side of the bed.

“Maybe we can cut down to one pill and it’ll keep this from happening again. I’m going to get a migraine pill for you, and I’m going to go ahead and take a blood sample to make sure everything’s normal.”

The noise went off again, and my eyes squeezed closed as my body cringed. I just needed to find my phone to turn the alarm off. It was so loud.

“Right. I came in to stop the fire alarm from beeping. I had to reset the breaker and forgot the alarm in here blasted whenever that happens. Let me get that done right quick.”

So it hadn’t been my phone that woke me. Even though I was having weird memory dreams again. Only, this time when it started with Rosalyn, it didn’t end with her, or with me waking up afterwards.

It ended with Jin. I had been in his office, and things were leading in a different direction. And it seemed as if it was a common occurrence. Something else that was kept from me.

But maybe it was only Jin that knew. I didn’t remember. And I really didn’t want to ask Oliver.

My chest felt like it was constricting. I couldn’t stop my lip from trembling as the tears started raining down. Going back to comatose sounded blissful.

“Hey. Woah. I’ll get an injection for the pain, instead of the pill. How painful is this?”

Oliver sat at the end of the bed, moving a small case aside with his foot, and moved one of my arms away from my body, feeling my pulse.

“...soul-crushing...” I whispered.

He cocked his head, an eyebrow arching, and stared at me, his eyes lingering on my face for a moment. It may have seemed dramatic to him, but that’s what I was beginning to think I was feeling. A very real soul-crushing type of feeling.

I tried to keep the image of the sky in my dream. It was chaotic, beautiful, and its own type of peaceful. Recalling it helped to calm me down again.

“There you are. Give me just a moment to get the injection. I’m going to get that blood sample first. Alright?”

I started to nod, and that quickly turned into a wince. Oliver gave my hand a squeeze and then leaned down for his case. After a moment of messing with whatever was in the case, he swiped a small alcohol square along the inside of my elbow.

Not willing to make my head pound any harder by trying to look the other way, I slammed my eyes shut. I guess I really didn’t like needles, like I had mentioned before. It would have been better if I could have remembered something more significant than a fear of needles.

“Still with me, babe?” Oliver spoke softly, pressing a cotton ball against the puncture site.

“So far.”

“Alright, let me know if you start to feel dizzy, or if you think you’re about to faint. I’ll get the pain medicine now, and then we can go back to bed.”

“Bed? You’re not going to work?”

“Not at three in the morning, I’m not.” He chuckled while getting out another set of things.

“Oh. I’m sorry if I woke you.” I squeezed my eyes shut after he ran another wipe higher up my arm.

“Mmhmm.” He hummed, jabbing me with the needle.

It might not have actually been jabbed, but I was already reeling from the blood being drawn...and everything else.

“You didn’t. Power cut out for a moment. My radio turned on when the power came back, and then I heard the alarm beeping in here.”

He wrapped some things in separate smaller cloths and then placed everything back into the case.

“You should be good shortly. If you wake up in pain again, in the next couple of hours anyway, come get me. Or yell for me. Or tell your phone to call me, if you can’t look at the

screen. I'll send Ms. Kes a message and ask her to come by tomorrow."

"No, please." I moved back towards my pillow. "If I promise to call you, can I just stay alone? I just want to be alone."

I didn't want to look at him, but his eyes were searching mine before I could avert my eyes. I didn't have the energy, or mental strength, to deal with another person. I just wanted to be rid of the pain so I could wallow and try to figure things out.

I could figure out how to get back on a path with Oliver once the pain receded. Or at least, once the head pain receded. I didn't know how long until the emotional pain stopped feeling like a physical one.

Oliver moved up the bed with me and pulled the covers up once I laid back again. He took a deep breath and sighed with a small nod.

"If you promise, swear, you'll call me or Jin if absolutely anything happens. Especially if this migraine comes back."

"Okay." I whispered, feeling my eyelids closing as the drowsiness washed through me. "Thank you for taking care of me, Oliver."

"Goodnight, Eleanor."



I was woken by another alarm sounding near my ear. Rubbing my knuckles into my eyes, I tried to fully wake up. Rolling over, I found my phone under the pillow beside me.

Blinking against the light, I opened the phone to disable the alarm.

I had only been asleep for another four and a half hours. Apparently, I hadn't turned the alarm off for this morning. Tossing my arm over my eyes, my back teeth ground together.

I didn't know how to deal with...everything. I wasn't sure how to just...be. Nothing was going right, but I hadn't known

how much harder the battle actually was.

There were about twenty minutes for me to decide if I was going to stay in bed, like I planned, or go straight to denial and keep trying. Only this time it would be so much harder. Since I would be pretending that I didn't actually know why Oliver had been keeping his distance.

Choosing denial seemed for the best. Neither option was the healthiest, but denial seemed like the least likely to end with me suffering from another migraine.

Swinging the covers off, I went to the restroom before taking a full minute to just get my breathing under control beside my bedroom door. The coma had given me a second chance. Had given us a second chance.

Keeping a mantra about not giving up, I opened the door to catch Oliver before he left for work. I thought I had gotten over being nervous, but I was suddenly confused about what to do with my arms as I walked towards the kitchen island.

They just dangle at your sides. Did I hug myself and look pathetic? Should I have crossed them, and risk looking upset? Instead, to save my lip, I ended up with one arm crossed at my chest as I pressed my tooth into the thumbnail of the other hand.

“Were, um...” I tried, my voice barely reaching across the room.

Clearing my throat, Oliver turned around from where he was sitting at the island.

“Eleanor. You don't need to get out of bed if you're still feeling unwell.”

“No, my head's not hurting...I just wanted to, um, thank you for the medicine. And, uh, ask if you were able to get enough sleep?”

Oliver's eyebrows pushed together as he glanced between my face and my hands. I quickly dropped my hands to the back of one of the chairs and held on for dear life.

“I’m fine, it was you that had the rough night. Are you okay?”

I nodded and took a deep breath. I was an adult. I could keep doing this. I had to keep doing it.

“Did you fix yourself a lunch?”

“Uh, yes. It’s on the table beside my bags.” Oliver pointed behind him as he perused the papers on the counter in front of him.

“Oh. Do you have lunch at the same time every day?”

“Not always.” He muttered, a finger tapping one page as he pulled a pen from his pocket with the other hand.

“Do you think that maybe you would go out for lunch?”

“I don’t generally leave the lab, so probably not. I think I’ve mentioned this before.” Oliver finally turned toward me and carefully looked me over again. “Why do I need to take lunch elsewhere?”

Twisting my hands along the back of the chair, I gave a small shrug. “You don’t need to. Just thought that, since you’re there all the time, maybe you’d want something other than a sandwich or leftovers.”

I didn’t add that I was going to invite myself to lunch. He had already made lunch for the day. I could ask him again tonight about having lunch together tomorrow.

“Just going to be busy. I have your blood sample to get working on today, too.”

Rolling his neck from side to side, Oliver gathered up the paperwork and went to the table. I watched him put the papers in one bag before picking up the bag, the case from last night, and his lunch.

“Do you want to choose what’s for dinner?” I rushed out as Oliver headed into the foyer.

“Anything you want to do is fine. Ms. Kes never makes a bad meal. I’ll see you at six.”

“As usual. Have a good day?” Oliver nodded and left.

Tonight. I would have to do it again tonight.

I turned slowly, taking in the empty space. My eyes stuck on Oliver's door, but I wasn't going to go in there again. Not until I could change things.

Swallowing past the lump in my throat, I blinked back the tears. Nothing really changed. Those papers had been there already, and I hadn't known. And I wasn't sure if that made it hurt more, or if it made it hurt less.

I made it to the couch and sank into it. Pulling my knees up, I rested my chin on them, trying to decide if I could watch a show. I may not be able to concentrate on whatever was playing, but the background noise would keep me out of my own head.

Maybe.

My phone chirped from my pocket as I reached over for the remote control. A cry broke free as I looked at the screen that was flashing Jin's name. The other side of my problems.

Two different situations, and I wasn't aware of either of them. I wasn't even sure if they were aware of the two situations, or if this was two separate and secret situations where only one person actually knew it existed.

Though, it would have been two if the accident hadn't happened - and it was two people per situation that knew again. Only neither of them knew that I knew. Which was not confusing at all.

Holding my breath to try to stop the heaving, I quickly answered his call.

"Oliver just sent me a text that I should keep an eye on any messages from you. That something happened last night? You okay, sweetheart?"

Swiping at my eyes, I exhaled audibly. "It wasn't anything serious or anything. I just woke up with a migraine, but Oliver gave me a shot of something. I'm fine."

"You don't sound fine. You sound upset. If Oliver wouldn't stay home with you and you want someone there, I'll cancel

the day and be there in twenty minutes.”

Hiccupping a sob, I wrapped an arm around my legs. “No, really...I’m fine.”

“Eleanor. I can hear you crying. Hold on. NANCY, START CANCELING MY DAY -”

“Wait. No. Jin. Hey, no. I’m fine. Don’t make those people reschedule.”

I adjusted until I could lay down, placing an arm over my eyes. This wasn’t helping my emotional state.

Oliver was too busy and was difficult to get close to. Jin was about to close his doors for the day because I was crying, and I was trying to get him not to spend time with me.

“I’ll give them the rescheduled visit for free.” I could hear someone speaking in the background.

“Jin, that’s not the point, though. I’m sure they have reasons for seeing you.” I rubbed at my temples, trying to make sure I didn’t start another headache.

I could hear his long exhale. “NEVERMIND, NANCY. Elle, I just would prefer if you let me stay the day with you. Or at least until Oliver got back.”

“No.” My voice sounded high pitched all of a sudden.

That was the last thing I needed. After the short episode in my dream, I didn’t want to add my awkwardness to that. One thing at a time. It could have also just been a normal dream.

“I just think it wouldn’t be fair of me to ask you to call off work. You’re already there, apparently. And I’ll see you tomorrow for my appointment anyway, right?”

“Except you aren’t asking me to do anything. Which is the problem. I really should just tell you what’s going to happen.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. Even Oliver understood that I want to be alone.”

“And Oliver’s better at this?” His question had an undercurrent to the words.

“I didn’t - I didn’t say that.” I managed, rolling to my side and blinking around the next flood. “I don’t know what this is.”

“I’m being an ass. Sleep has been rough.” Jin groaned. “Please, don’t cry. I just would rather be there. And Oliver’s an idiot for not staying home with you. You absolutely promise to call if you need anything?”

Wiping at my nose with my sleeve, I just hummed in agreement.

“I need to hear you promising, sweetheart, or I’ll be coming over to babysit you.”

“It was only a migraine. You guys are making it more dramatic than it needs to be.” It came out more mumbled, with the pillow that I shoved against my face.

“You literally have a brain issue, and we’re being over dramatic when you get a migraine? You’ve also been crying on and off this whole time. You’re lucky I’m not tying your ass to the bed.”

“Wait, you wouldn’t actually do that...right?”

It was just the way he laughed that had me checking to make sure I was actually alone, and I wasn’t sure why.

“That would be as good a reason as any of the others. Promise that you will call me, Eleanor. Then I’ll let you go back to pretending you’re not upset.”

“You really are cranky and bossy, with a lack of sleep, Jin.”

“Only because we’re adding in the concern for you. And the inability to follow instructions.”

“Alright, alright. I promise I’ll call if I need to.” It was more or less the same as I had told Oliver.

“Thank you.” Jin sighed, and I heard voices in the background. “Can I call you when I take my lunch?”

“Sure.” I finally managed, biting back the hiccups.

I tossed my phone to the other end of the couch and allowed myself to fall apart again. I wasn’t even sure if I would feel

better if I hadn't found the papers, or had the stupid dream.

It took about ten minutes, but when I was able to breathe somewhat normally, and see without the blur from the tears, I headed straight to the liquor cabinet.

I wasn't taking the pills, so there wasn't any kind of reaction to be afraid of. And, as long as I didn't work myself into another migraine, the liquor could help me to pass out.

Which is what I prayed for as I grabbed a bottle, not even trying to see what it was, and took a few mouthfuls. I just needed to forget everything for a little while.

Chapter Forty-Eight

My stomach felt like it was revolting against me when I jumped at the sound of the front door opening.

“Oh boy. Let’s get you sobered up some, hmm?” I leaned my head further back into the couch to find Ms. Kes, Minnie, sitting on the armrest.

“I’m, no, fine. No, it’s fine. I’m fine.” I grumbled, pulling the blanket over my head.

I could still feel everything, but it was distant. Everything was waving at me through a screened door. I could see it, but it wasn’t touching me yet.

“I didn’t ask how you were. That’s plain to see.” Minnie tugged at the blanket, trying to wrestle it from my grasp. “I did say that we’re going to get you sobered. This right here won’t help you.”

“You don’t understand.”

Huffing, she got the blanket from me and tossed it on the other side of the coffee table. Then she was coaxing me into a sitting position - slowly.

“That you feel defeated? With no idea how to move forward, especially since you don’t know how you got to this point? That your world has been ripped from you?”

Minnie’s eyebrow arched, giving me a pointed stare as I gaped at her. It wasn’t as simple as how she made it seem. But it was a good start to the idea of how it felt. And that last part was hitting too close.

“You know where The World went?” I was pretty sure my speech was still closer to slurred than it was to sounding normal.

“I’m not sure that I do. But you’ll find her.” Minnie spoke softly, brushing hair from my forehead. “I’m going to make you a small smoothie. You’re going to drink it and it’ll fix you right up.”

I tried to watch her go, but I hung my head against the back of the couch instead when the world started spinning around me.

“You said ‘her’.” My mind was slowly catching up to what Minnie had said. “You said my missing tarot card is a girl.”

“Did I? That doesn’t sound like something I would say.” My eyes squinted in her direction when I caught the twitch of her lips. “A card is a card, not a person.”

“Right...ugh.” I moved to get up and fell back onto the couch.

One arm wrapped around my middle as I pressed a hand to my mouth, trying to not to get sick. I was regretting this outcome of having a few drinks. A lot to drink. From the bottle. Bottles.

My eyes squeezed closed as I tried to block out the blender noise from the kitchen. My eyes were too sensitive to the sound. Which didn’t make much sense, but I could just add it to the list of things I was having problems with.

“Oliver promised not to send a babysitter.” I complained when Minnie came back with an emerald looking drink.

“Technically, Oliver didn’t ask me to come by. He asked if I was going to stop by today, and then expressed his disappointment when I said he didn’t need me today. Jin, however, demanded I check on you. Luckily for him, I had already planned to do so because of Oliver.”

She pushed the cup into my hands and raised it to my lips with a stern expression.

“All of it. Just take it like you did the cabinet over there.”

“I didn’t drink the entire cabinet...” I muttered before taking a swallow.

I braced for the disgust, even prepped for the cringing reaction, except that it tasted like sweet potatoes. It was only alarming that the color didn’t match the taste. And that it smelled like garlic.

“Family recipe. It’ll get you fixed up shortly. It’ll help you not dwell on anything sad for a little bit.”

Looking down into the empty cup, I glanced back at Minnie with apprehension. “You’re not one of them? You’re not a... witch?”

“A witch!?” Minnie fell back into the chair with very near a cackle, which didn’t help the fear slowly building. “I am most certainly not one of them. I’ve been with Jin and Oliver since they were young, and I heard about your encounter. Would Oliver still allow me to be near you after that?”

“No, I guess not.”

She snatched the cup from my hand with a chuckle and went back to the kitchen, muttering under her breath about witches.

“Well, I’ve checked on you and fixed you up. I’m going to head out and let the boys know I stopped in.” She dusted her hands on a hand towel and walked to the foyer.

“Wait!” Scrambling upright, and trying not to get sick, I tripped getting around the couch. “Minnie. Can you, uh, not tell them about the alcohol? I won’t get any further with Oliver if he includes being disappointed with me for the liquor when he said no alcohol.”

“I’m going to be telling those two nuggets that I checked in on you. Anything else would just set everything back, and it needs to get rolling.”

“Uh, okay? Thank you, I think.”

Minnie gave me a quick hug and left.

She was correct that I felt better. It was strange, but I was thankful. I could think clearer, even though there was a creeping sense that I didn’t want to feel content.

I looked at the microwave as I walked into the kitchen to see that Oliver would be home in an hour. Not finding any food that absolutely called to me when I opened the fridge, I decided sandwiches for dinner would have to work.

It didn't take long until I found myself on the chaise lounge with my Kindle in the library area. The problem was that I wasn't in the mood for a romance novel, or even whatever some of those books were considered.

So I spent some time slowly going through the folders that I hadn't made it to, and what books were listed inside. The amount of folders made no sense, but I assumed there had been a method if I had set it up. I just didn't understand my thinking process yet.

Skipping ahead and scrolling straight to the bottom, I found a folder specifically for Kindle Unlimited. But the books inside were also filled with shirtless men, or women with multiple men. Which I didn't need. I wasn't sure what I wanted, but I would know when I saw it.

The next row of folders gave me pause, and I had to rub my eyes to be sure. Right there, on the screen, was a folder of seventy-five books. The folder was listed as, 'Rosalyn.'

Sitting upright, I felt my heart-rate pick up. I turned the device off and back on, because I was imagining things that weren't there. Holding my breath, I looked for the folder again.

It was still there. It didn't make any sense why I would have a folder in my e-reader device under her name. She wasn't real, or at least not in the sense that she would have been reading books.

I fought to keep my hand from shaking as I clicked the folder to open it. Hoping that the books were stories one would read to a baby or toddler, and I had stored them away while I was pregnant.

Only they weren't. It looked like a combination of older children's books and middle grade books. Two of the books even showed they were in the process of being read, if the percentage display meant anything.

"I don't understand." I faltered, dropping the Kindle and pressing my palms into my eyes.

I could feel the anxiety start to swell, and then receded again. My mind wouldn't stay latched onto the problem.

“Understand what?”

Oliver stepped into the room, hands shoved into his pockets. He didn't look as annoyed as he'd been looking, but there was still a hesitance.

Flipping the cover on my Kindle, I tried to swallow down any terror that might show on my face. I didn't want more medication, and I didn't want to mention it when Oliver clearly didn't like to mention being pregnant.

“The books. There's so many of them where the guys are shirtless on the covers.”

I pushed the Kindle further up the chaise as I stood and tried to move out of the room, hoping Oliver wouldn't open it.

“I see.” He stepped back into the living room, and his eyes followed me into the kitchen. “Ms. Kes said she came by.”

“After you promised not to send a babysitter.” I bobbed my head, getting sandwich meat from the fridge. “Yes.”

“I didn't send her, Eleanor. But I won't apologize for her coming by to check on you. The last bit of the day helped not having to worry you may have been ill.”

“I know, she said. I'm sorry. I'm just tired, I think, and it's just been...” trailing off, I lifted my shoulder in a shrug.

“I'm trying to fix this for you.”

Oliver came into my line of sight and leaned asked the counter. I just nodded in understanding and went back to making sandwiches. As much as I wanted him to spend time with me, dinner was usually him running off, anyway. So it wouldn't matter if he had a whole plate of food or a sandwich.

“Did you just throw turkey and cheese on the bread?” He asked, confused.

“Um, yes?” I wrapped it in a napkin and held it out to him.

“Not that I don't admire you always trying to make sure there's a dinner for me...Just, why is it bread, meat and

cheese? Nothing else?"

"Mayonnaise is only good with bread alone and not for a sandwich," I spoke automatically, and promptly froze.

I glanced down at my own sandwich, that had mayonnaise, and then back at the sandwich I was still holding out to Oliver. This was something that I was used to doing, though I wasn't sure why. It was probably one of those dream things.

Two sandwiches. One could never have mayonnaise. That was the joke. It felt like a long running joke. As the creeping sense of devastation slowly spread, I cleared my throat and tried to breathe through it.

"Eleanor?" Oliver's probing came from close by.

"Nothing. I just thought I was remembering something, but nothing came." I rushed out. "I'll fix it. I didn't even ask what kind of sandwich you wanted."

It wasn't a lie. Absolutely nothing was coming to my mind as to why this was happening. Again. Which was making my hands start to tremble with nervous energy.

"Eleanor. Take your sandwich and sit down. I can make mine." Oliver gently placed a hand on top of mine and pulled me towards him.

"I can do this. I can." I weakly persisted, and damn it, there were tears burning in my eyes. The sandwich was not that important, and yet I needed to do something.

"You're okay?" He pressed a hand to my jaw and tilted my face to his. "You had a bad night. And it looks like it continued into the day. You don't have to make a sandwich, Eleanor."

Sniffling, I closed my eyes and moved back from the counter. I blinked back the tears as I took my sandwich to the chair and sat down. I was beginning to think I might be emotionally unstable, along with going crazy.

"What did you have for lunch?"

I didn't think he would appreciate it if I told him that I drank liquor for breakfast and lunch; so I answered with

Minnie's smoothie. "Thought I'd give a smoothie a try. It was...a healthy lunch. Made me feel better. Was your lunch any good? Or decent?"

"It was fine. Or, I'm sure it was if I had eaten. I got somewhat sidetracked today and didn't end up eating really. I'm finally seeing some promise in the newest trial."

Oliver walked around the other side of the island and took a seat. He would glance over at me and then continue with his food. I wasn't sure how to get him to talk to me, and I really didn't want to ask why he couldn't talk to me - since I didn't want to hear whatever story he came up with. Especially since I knew the truth.

So I tried again with the topic of having lunch. I usually tried in the mornings before he left for work, but asking about it the night before might help.

"Do you think that you could get even thirty minutes for lunch tomorrow?" The inside of my lip was already being chewed on with anxiety over trying this again.

"When I take lunch, it's generally for thirty minutes. Sometimes it's an hour. Lately it's been thirty, when taken." He cautiously looked over at me.

"Right. Okay. So, I wasn't really meaning how long they are. Well, no, I guess that would be something to know, too. But, more like...do you think that we could meet for lunch tomorrow, even for thirty minutes? If there is a place somewhere close to your lab..." I was rambling and abruptly stopped talking when his face grew hesitant again.

"Eleanor, I don't really have time to leave the building to eat."

"No, right, of course not. You've said this before. You'd have to account for the travel there and back, and then you'd probably only have ten minutes to eat."

Oliver stood, tossing his napkin into the trash, and went to the fridge. "Drink?"

Coughing on my bite, I hit my chest and nodded. "Water." No need to tell him that I had already had plenty to drink

today.

I took a few sips from the cup Oliver handed me before I tried to speak again.

“Instead of taking a bag to work for lunch, I can pick something up and we could have lunch there...at the lab. Jett knows where it is, right? Even if you just wanted to take fifteen minutes for a short break...”

Oliver leaned his head back against a cabinet and scrubbed a hand along his face with a long exhale before he stared at me again.

“You really can’t come to the lab. Security. Liability. And I’m not sure why you would want to eat lunch there.”

I balled the napkin and stood from the chair shakily. I left the trash on the counter and started walking backwards towards the bedroom, hoping I didn’t trip.

“It isn’t the lab that I want to have lunch with. I would take it if you only had five minutes to meet me outside the doors at this point. I just want - I was just asking if it were possible to have lunch with you. To see you during lunch.”

“Oh.” He looked back at me, surprised and hopeless. Two confusing emotions to be having after what I’d said.

“Oh?” I threw my arms up. “Just...nothing else?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say. You can’t come to the lab. And I’m too busy to leave it right now.”

“Yes, I think that’s been made clear. And you’ll be in your office tonight?”

Thinking better of going to bed, since it would only make me wake up early tomorrow, I moved to sit on the couch.

“This is just really important. But yes. I have a call with some board members in about an hour.”

“Well, good night then.” I grabbed the remote control and pressed the power button.

I could feel the tension coming off him in waves, but I refused to look in his direction. If I did, I would only end up

grabbing another liquor bottle. I could try to chip at his walls again tomorrow. I was too bruised at the moment to continue tonight.

“You’re not even going to bed...” He quipped, agitation lacing his words.

“I’m not. It’s too early. But, I know the drill. Since I won’t see you again tonight, I thought I would wish my husband a goodnight now. Forgive me if I shouldn’t have done so.” I couldn’t help the sarcasm.

I watched Oliver through the television as he slammed a cabinet closed, muttering under his breath. As he stormed towards his office, I called over my shoulder again.

“Hope you have a good call.”

Chapter Forty-Nine

The next morning, I stayed in bed until I was sure Oliver had left for work. Which wasn't hard, since he was always gone by eight. So I made sure to hop into the shower at seven forty-five and wash my hair. Twice.

It was childish, possibly. But childish and in denial seemed like it would make for a better start to the day than yesterday. It worked better when I finally broke down before getting out of the shower.

One break down, instead of holding it in and possibly exploding later, was acceptable. Especially since I had to see Jin at eleven. Which wasn't helping me feel better. It only made me more anxious.

They were both causing anxiety for two different reasons. Or possibly related reasons. But I couldn't ask either one without telling one of them that I learned things, and didn't actually remember anything. So, denial and random breakdowns.

I quickly stowed away the pill with the others and cringed at the nearly empty bottle in front of it. I was really hoping Oliver wouldn't notice. He definitely would, but hopefully not for a while.

Jett met me in the garage at ten thirty and even ended up sitting in Jin's waiting room. He only smirked with half a shrug when I asked if it was Jin or Oliver that had him not waiting in the vehicle.

"Are you going to tell me what happened yesterday?" The door hadn't even fully shut behind Jin before he started his question.

"My head was a mess, is all." I vaguely waved at my head, avoiding eye contact.

"Yes, I know about the migraine. But you sounded upset in a way that sounded...more."

“It’s fine. I’m fine. No reason to go over it. Hey, um, did I ever come here before the accident?”

“Okay, first thing. Going to remind you that besides being your closest friend, I am also your doctor. So, I think it’s safe to say that I have every reason to go over something that makes you upset.” Jin held up one finger.

“Secondly. You weren’t a patient before the accident...so, you wouldn’t have had any appointments to come to. Why?”

That wasn’t saying that I hadn’t ever stopped by without an appointment.

“So, I’ve never been in your office?” I tried not to chew on my lip as my fingers fiddled at the hem of my shirt.

“Eleanor?” Jin asked carefully, his eyes narrowed on me.

Taking the coward’s way out of asking about being in his office, because the anxiety was getting to be too much, I quickly tried to think of something to get him to change subjects.

“Actually...it was Oliver. Or not him. But because of me not being able to accept that he doesn’t want to spend time with me. Well, he’s busy, so that’s extremely selfish of me. It just feels like he doesn’t want...me?”

“Hold on. What? Oliver is why you - you were that upset because of Oliver.” Jin was out of his chair and it looked like he was about to begin pacing.

He held a hand out when I opened my mouth to speak. “Give me a moment. I’m going to call his ass.”

“What! No. Isn’t this confidential?!” I gripped the sides of my head.

I was going to make things worse. So much worse.

“Damn it. Yes.” Jin groaned and walked around the coffee table until he was sitting beside me. “Yes. Whatever you tell me, stays between us. Okay, how about you tell me what’s been going on and I’ll see what we can do about it.”

“Well, I’m pretty sure I’m now badgering him about eating lunch with me.” I relented, the heat slowly climbing up my neck in embarrassment.

“Lunch? You’ve only been asking to have lunch with him? And he’s been a dick about that?”

“He’s up too early for me, and usually busy. And then dinner is normally him eating in his office. I don’t think he’s ever come out of the office before I finally decide to go to bed because it’s late. So I thought...maybe lunch.” I explained, staring at my lap.

“Oh. I see.” Jin placed a hand on mine. “And you still want to try to spend time with him? Still want to keep trying?”

There was this sadness to his question, and that was depressing. I didn’t know if he felt sorry for me for being an idiot and not giving up, or sadly embarrassed for me.

He tugged at my hand until I finally stopped picking at a loose thread. “If you want my help, I’ll help you. If you want to try again with Oliver.”

His thumb gently rubbed the back of my hand, and there was a sudden image in my head. It was there for only a moment, but it was clear. *We were sitting on this same couch. Only Jin’s arms were wrapped around me, keeping me close. On his lap. Kissing.*

My eyes widened in surprise as I looked up at him. He was staring at my lips before quickly going back to my eyes and cleared his throat. I didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t tell him that I had another memory-vision thing.

And I didn’t want to tell him while also whining about my husband. The only things I was remembering were making me feel worse and worse about myself. I was an absolutely shitty person who was slowly going crazy.

“Eleanor?” He released my hand to wave his in front of my face as I sat in shock. “Do you want me to help you with Oliver?”

“You’d do that?” I asked tentatively.

It didn't seem like something he would, or should, want to do after what I saw. And dreamed...since that was looking to be more and more like a memory dream and not a weird random dream.

“If it's what you want? Yes. If it'll make you happy? Yes. Anything you need to make you feel better, I will do it.” He glanced down at his watch. “We'll get dinner setup for tonight and it should start to help with Oliver.”

“What do you mean, dinner tonight?” I watched him walk to his desk and grab the phone.

“Hey, Clint. Would you and Sonya be able to take care of the rest of the patients for me?...Yes, it would probably be easier for everyone if you just used my rooms....Need to take the rest of the day for personal growth...Great, I'll owe you both.”

“Did you just cancel the rest of your schedule?” I gaped at him as he walked back towards me.

“Yup, come on. We've got two hours of driving. You're going to get dolled up in something that will short circuit Oliver's brain. And you'll have his favorite restaurant for dinner. I'll place the order for pickup once they open.”

I quickly followed behind Jin as he walked towards the waiting room. He was just calling the rest of the day off and had someone coming to cover for him. Which was really bittersweet, since I couldn't even get five minutes with Oliver beside his front doors during his lunch.

“Jett! You can tell Oliver that I sent you home. I'm taking Eleanor shopping to cheer her up.”

Looking around Jin, the people in the waiting room curiously looked between us. They were probably wondering why Jin was leaving when they had appointments with him.

“Is that...allowed?” Jett carefully asked, glancing at me with a raised brow. I only shrugged in confusion.

“What do you mean? Allowed? Oliver will be fine.” Jin looked around the room and slowly turned to face the majority.

“Doctors Betta and Delneve will be here shortly to continue the appointments. Or I can refund.”

He turned to me and shooed me to the front door. “You have your phone and purse? Not that you need your purse, but it’s something that women tend to keep near them.”

“Yes. But, wait, Jin.” I grabbed his sleeve in the hallway. “You said it’s two hours away.”

“Nope, said it’s two hours of driving.” He placed a hand on my back and led me out of the building. “Round trip. One hour away.”

“But...the witches? Oliver said that I was safe here because -”

“Yes, I know. I don’t believe there will be anything to worry about. You aren’t going to be alone. I’ll be with you.” Jin interrupted while opening the passenger door to his car.

“No offense, but, again. Witches. Are they afraid of shrinks?” I protested.

Jin only winked and shut the door. When he closed his door once he was seated, I just stared impatiently at him. It was a legitimate question.

“After everything that’s happened, we managed a - Actually I’m not really sure what to call it. It’s a powder we made in Oliver’s lab by combining objects found that were left by witches and then leftover faerie...stuff.”

Jin lifted the middle console and pulled a small jar from inside. Unscrewing the lid, he dipped a finger into the powder and turned to me.

“Just need to rub it on something that touches your skin and it’ll slowly be absorbed into your body. It makes you immune to magic for maybe a week. Until it leaves the body.”

“Is it even safe? And if you had this stuff, why didn’t Oliver give it to me when I had those appointments?” My nose scrunched as I leaned into the door and away from the silver powder.

“If it weren’t safe, I would not be giving it to you, Eleanor. And we forgot we had been working on it. It was actually because of what happened that had us getting it finished and out to be able to use. Now, let me see that ribbon bracelet you’ve been wearing.”

I glanced down at my hands to the green ribbon tied around my left wrist. I still wasn’t sure I wanted that stuff on me. Let alone seeping into my skin. Though it would be better than not having it and being attacked.

Reluctantly, I placed my hand in Jin’s and he slid the finger between the ribbon and my wrist. He lined the ribbon with the powder and when he released my hand, there was a slight itch from where the ribbon rubbed against my skin.

Jin lined his finger again and rubbed it along the cuff of his shirt before putting the jar back. Him using the stuff made me feel slightly better about it not being poisoned.

“Alright. Time to get you a dress that Oliver can’t ignore.”

And then we were heading out of the parking lot. Jin had really left work to help me because I was depressed about Oliver. And I didn’t know how to feel about that, given what I was starting to see in the dream-memory.

Chapter Fifty

Jin hadn't lied about taking me an hour away to go shopping. He wouldn't explain why we couldn't go shopping nearby, except to tell me there weren't any stores that had what we needed.

I wasn't sure what he thought I needed. Other than to find it an hour away, apparently.

He parked along the street of a downtown area. There were shops, restaurants, and cafes lining both sides. Some spaces looked like they were tucked between two others, while some spanned three stores in length.

"This place has the best evening wear," Jin explained, helping me out of the vehicle. "They have a wide range, which is perfect for us."

"I'm pretty sure I have a closet with more clothing than I know what to do with. And that includes fancy dresses."

"Yes, I helped stock that closet." Jin groaned as we entered the store. "But those were just grabbed and added to the closet without a specific occasion in mind. This is a specific reason."

Not wanting to ask how one dress differed from another if they were all considered the same type, I just rolled my eyes and followed him further into the store.

It was one of the larger stores that covered three spaces and had a second floor. The second floor seemed to have more of the men's wear, from what I could tell from where we were standing. The bottom area had a lot of dresses, an area for underwear, a section for shoes, and then an area for dressing. There were chairs and tables spread throughout the area.

It was a bit overwhelming. There were a lot of dresses to choose from, and for no reason. I could have grabbed a dress from my closet. I was just unsure of the reason I needed to.

"Jin, the trip was fun and everything. But, are you sure I need another dress? What am I doing here?"

Jin waved a woman over, not that he had to because she had already started towards us once we crossed the threshold, and leaned into my side. “We’re setting you up on a date. I’m helping you with Oliver. Which is now the nicest thing I may have ever done for him.”

The woman smoothed a hand down her side and gave her best, ‘I need you to spend all your money,’ smile towards us.

“I’m Nadia, and I’ll be happy to assist you today. Do we know what we’re looking for?”

She glanced between us when I gave a quick shake of my head. Jin placed a hand on my back and ushered me towards an area that seemed to have dresses that were cut in half.

“She’s going to need something that covers quite a bit, but also shows just enough. Something mid-thigh? Yes, definitely mid-thigh.” He stepped back, his bottom lip in his teeth, and looked down at my lower portions.

“Mid-thigh? What?” I hissed as the woman nodded enthusiastically, heading further down the row of short dresses. “Have you seen my thighs, Jin? They need coverage. And enough coverage that they won’t ride up.”

Jin fell back into the chair behind him with a smirk, and a raised eyebrow. He slowly looked down at my body before moving back to my eyes. The motion had me feeling naked under his gaze. And I should have felt more concerned about that than I did.

“I have seen your thighs. Thank you. You do realize that thick thighs are extremely sexy? Just try a few things on, hm?”

The woman popped her head around the dresses, breaking Jin’s gaze and returning my focus. “I have a room set up for you. If you’d follow me?”

“Sure.” I sighed, following behind Nadia with Jin at my heels.

She led us into the back corner of the store, which took up much more than a typical corner space. Jin sat on the small wavy-type couch that Nadia pointed him towards and ushered me behind one of the thickly curtained sections.

Nadia pulled the curtains together and turned towards me, motioning towards the dresses hanging along one of the walls.

“Let me know what styles you like, or which ones you don’t, so I can get an idea of what other dresses to bring to you. Unless you find something you absolutely love already within these, of course.”

“Okay.” I said, turning to watch her from the mirror.

“Oh. We also ask that there’s no fraternization in the store.”

I watched the confusion cross my face as she left me alone and I mouthed ‘fraternization’ to myself. How many people came into a dressing room and ended up having sex? Apparently enough that they had to ask people not to do so.

I stripped to my underwear and slid the closest dress from the hanger. The peach colored dress was loose fitting and hit right above my knee. However, it made me think of a cross between a hippie and a flapper.

The sleeves were bell styled, but they didn’t slowly get wider. They were huge all the way down, from the shoulder to just past my wrists. Then there were the dangling tassels lining the hem and reaching to mid-calf.

“Are you coming out, or am I coming in?” Jin called. “I can hear you making a noise.”

“Because I don’t like it. It’s weird.” I grumbled, making a space in the curtain to step through. “This is a ‘no,’ right? I either need to make a flower crown, or find a speakeasy.”

Chuckling, Jin shooed me back into the room from his seat. “Yes, that’s a no. Are there any darker colors in there?”

Closing the curtain behind me, I turned to look at the dresses. There were more in darker shades than the lighter ones, like the one I was currently wearing.

“Yes.” I called back, unzipping the dress I was in.

“Good, try one of those. Oh. Hugging more at the bottom than the top.”

“Right.” I muttered to myself, pulling a dark brown dress from the hanger. It wasn’t even on all the way before Jin was stepping into the room.

“What the hell?” Whirling on him, I tried to quickly find the zipper on the back of the dress.

“You were taking too long.” He shrugged and spun me around, so my back was to him and I was facing the mirror again.

Swatting my hands away, he zipped the dress and eyed the mirror, scrutinizing me.

“I look like a pregnant tree.” I huffed, plucking at the fabric around my stomach.

“Okay, you don’t look like a pregnant tree, Elle.” Jin squinted his eyes at me. “Though I don’t think this is the right one either. Let me see what you’ve got.”

Trailing off, Jin started inspecting the dresses beside me. He left three on the wall and held onto the remaining dresses.

“I’m going to return these to Nadia and see if there’s something else. Stay here?”

“Sure, but what about the dresses you left?” I ran my fingers along one of the sleeves.

“They seem like something you’d wear. And would look amazing in it. So, we’ll get them. Stay here, please.”

Then he was pulling the curtain closed behind him as he left the changing room. I stared at myself in the mirror, turning to each side to get a full view. Didn’t matter how I turned, I most definitely looked like a pregnant tree. And the half sleeves made me feel like I was missing my branches.

I heard Nadia and Jin in the background and waited for them to return. I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to take the dress off, or just to wait. With my luck, one or both of them would enter the room while I was in my underwear. So, I sat on the stool in the corner and waited.

“Excellent. Thank you.” Jin was saying from the other side of the current not long after he left to find Nadia.

“It’s not a newer one, it’s just not currently in style. But I think it would look nice on her.”

Nadia stepped into the room with a dark wine colored dress that seemed to shimmer with silver threading. She hung the dress at the side of the mirror and smoothed down the front.

“Okay! Here you are. Let’s see how this one works.”

Once she left the room, I climbed out of the tree dress and stared at the newer dress. Pulling it from the hook, I twisted it back and forth, trying to figure out why it seemed to be missing the whole back.

It took me a moment to figure out how to get into the dress, since the neckline resembled a thick choker and not something I could pull my head through. Thankfully, I spotted the eye hooks inside the back of the neck.

I stepped into the dress and shimmied the dress to my waist. It wasn’t super tight, but it was definitely hugging everything below my waistline. There was no way I could even lean over with how high up on my thighs the dress ended.

Slipping my bra off, since there was absolutely no back to this dress, I stuck my arms through the sleeves and hooked the neck together. I took a deep breath to steady myself as I turned to the mirror.

It was definitely short. My fingers fell below the hemline, and I was really hoping my ass wouldn’t pop out of the bottom. The back was missing from the shoulders to the lower back, and from further along the sides. I was lucky I wasn’t showing some side boob. Not that there was a whole lot of boob to show.

As self-conscious as I was feeling, I also felt giddy in the dress. It was ridiculously short and missing the whole back, showing more skin than I would normally be comfortable with. But I was actually feeling...pretty.

“Come out, so I don’t have to get up.” Jin called from the other side of the curtain.

Pulling the curtain back, I bit my lip and stepped into the open waiting area. Jin just stared at me for a moment, his eyes

going darker without saying a word to me. He cleared his throat and motioned for me to turn, so I did.

I heard something fall and Jin shifting on his seat behind me. My anxiety started to pick up the longer I stood there without him saying anything. Deciding that I probably looked like a fool trying to wear this type of dress, I tried not to let the embarrassment completely overwhelm me until I could get back behind the curtain.

“I look ridiculous. Don’t I? I tried telling you that short dresses wouldn’t work with my body. I’m just going to change and we can go. There’s probably a more appropriate dress in my closet.” I started rambling and rushed towards the changing room.

“Hey. Woah. Wait a minute.” Jin said from right behind me.

I hadn’t heard him get up, or move towards me, but I could see him in the mirror standing at my back. He whipped the curtain closed behind him and then rested his hands on my hips.

“Please tell me you do not actually think you look ridiculous. Because, this dress,” Jin began, running a finger lightly up my spine that made goosebumps pop up. “This dress is great. And you, in the dress, will now be seared in my mind.”

“So, this is what you think I need to wear for Oliver?” I quietly asked, looking at myself in the mirror.

Clearing his throat, Jin stepped back with a quick nod. “Yes. Definitely. He’ll get over his hangups because he won’t be able to think straight. I’ll just step out so you can get changed.”

Jin took the dresses from the wall and quickly strolled from the room. I waited a minute to make sure he left before unhooking the neck and stepped out of the dress. It was a nice dress, though impractical.

Nadia came around the corner and waved me back into the main shop when I left the changing room to find Jin missing.

She led me to the front of the store beside the register, where Jin had added a box of shoes.

Taking the dress from me, Jin placed it on top of the others. I lifted the lid of the shoes to find silver peep toe booties. They were cute, but the heel gave me pause. I'd been wearing sandals and the occasional sneaker. I wasn't even sure I could walk in heels, let alone ones that were about four inches.

"Are these necessary?" I whispered, tilting my head at the shoes. "I'm sure I have shoes -"

"Yes, you have shoes in your closet." Jin interjected, taking his card back from Nadia. "But if you're getting a new dress, you get new shoes."

"Have a wonderful day!" Nadia called behind us as we headed to the door.

"I should have paid for this. How much was all this?" I asked as Jin opened the back door of his vehicle and dropped the bags on the seat.

"No. I brought you out and forced you to get everything, so why would you pay?" He shut the door once I got into the vehicle and walked around. "Let me call Ruthman's to get the food order going."

Chapter Fifty-One

By the time we picked up the food and made it back to the parking garage at my building, it was five-fifteen. There were only forty-five minutes before Oliver arrived home, and I still needed to talk myself into changing into the dress.

“You get the bag with the shoes and the dress for tonight, and head on up. I’ll get the other bags and the food.”

“I can help. There’s a lot of stuff to carry.” I said, opening the back door for the clothing bags. “I’ll just take all the dresses with me now and come back to help with the food.”

“You can take the dresses.” Jin popped the trunk open and eyed me suspiciously. “You’re stalling. Go up and get changed. I’ll set the food up so it’ll be easy to get it tabled.”

Pursing my lips, knowing he wouldn’t budge on letting me help, I grabbed the bags and headed to the elevator. Once I got to the front door, I left it open to give Jin an easier time getting everything inside.

I dropped the bags in the closet and took a deep breath before stripping down. Pulling the dress out, I went to remove the tag, only to remember I hadn’t seen one when I tried it on either.

I quickly stepped into the dress for the second time that day and wiggled it over my hips. There was an influx of confusion about whether I felt like a clown for thinking about wearing the dress, and feeling a little beautiful in it.

Thinking better of sitting on the floor to put the heels on, I took them into the bedroom and sat on the bed to put them on. It was also easier to grab at the bed once I stood to make sure I didn’t fall on my face.

Slowly testing the newborn legs, I took a few small laps around the bedroom to make sure I was able to walk. Ten minutes of the circles getting bigger, I went back into the bathroom to pull back one side of my hair. I wasn’t sure

exactly what to do with the makeup, so I stuck with mascara and some lip gloss.

Taking careful steps, I made it into the living room to find Jin setting tall candles on the table. Apparently, he wasn't only putting the food away; he was setting the table for us.

"I don't think all that is necessary. The lights are on. We don't need multiple candles."

I stopped halfway to the table at Jin's stare. His eyes widened, and he'd left his mouth slightly open, not saying whatever he'd been about to say. Looking down at myself to see if I finally looked ridiculous, I crossed my arms across my middle.

"Uh, yeah. Yes." He cleared his throat and rubbed a hand along the back of his neck. "Yes, it's necessary. The lights are on, but I'm about to dim them. Candles make things serious."

"Are you sure?" Chewing on the inside of my lip, I walked towards the kitchen for water. I was starting to get hot because of the anxiety, and had to wipe my hands along my hips because of the sweaty feeling.

"If for some reason I wasn't before, I'm damn sure now." Jin muttered. "I need to go. Right, yes. Okay. In about twenty minutes, you can get the food to the table."

Holding onto the counter with one hand so I didn't fall to my ass and not be able to stand again, I slowly turned back around. Jin took a bottle from the table and headed for the door.

"Thank you. You really didn't have to do all this," I said before he crossed into the foyer.

Stopping, he peered over his shoulder at me with a small smile. "I know I didn't have to, sweetheart. But I want you happy, and this is just one of the things that's been making you depressed. One thing at a time, but I'll slowly fix everything for you. Enjoy your night."

Without waiting for a response, not sure how I would have responded anyway, Jin nearly bolted out the front door. And I

was suddenly alone with the butterflies that felt like they'd turned into wasps in my stomach. I was too nervous about this.

Trying to take my mind off the dinner surprise, I went in search of my phone and Kindle. I set a timer on my phone so I'd get the food set up in time for Oliver, and my Kindle to give me something to keep my mind occupied.

Choosing a classic, I started reading. Or, possibly, reading again if the ribbon across the corner was current, and I had already read the book. Just one perk about not having much of a memory. Reading books for the first time, no matter how many times I may have read them previously.

It didn't seem like much time had passed before my alarm was going off on my phone. Stowing my phone away on the coffee table, after shutting the alarm off, I quickly headed into the kitchen and began removing the food from the oven.

I set up each plate at the table, so everything would already be served once Oliver walked in. I was pretty pleased with myself when I didn't drop anything, even whenever I wobbled in the shoes.

Jin had placed a bottle of sparkling apple juice in the fridge with a sticky note about using it in place of the alcohol I wasn't able to have. Chuckling at the fact that he had no idea I had already been drinking, I poured two cups of the apple juice and placed them at the table.

It took a minute to find a lighter to get the candles lit, and I felt stupid for doing so. But Jin had placed them out and claimed it made it better, so I kept them. He had left without actually dimming the lights, like he claimed he was going to do.

I finally found the dimmer switch at the edge of the foyer and got the lights to be not too bright, but not so dark we wouldn't be able to see what we were eating. I mostly didn't want to stab myself in the face with a fork, honestly.

Glancing at the clock, I took a breath and sat at the table to wait for Oliver. He would be getting home in the next couple of minutes, and it was the most anxious I'd been to see him.

I closed my eyes and tried to think about eating. Just eating. There wasn't anything scary about eating. It wasn't the first time that Oliver and I ate together. Though this was the first time that I was actively trying to get him to take a longer amount of time since he would either go to the office with the food, or go straight to the office once he finished eating.

My foot started to slowly twitch as I thought about me not knowing if Oliver had another call to make once he got home. He could have important work, or calls, or emails, he needed to get done and I would now be taking time away.

And if that was the case, I would have also wasted Jin's time. He'd spent most the day with me, after ditching work, and buying everything. When he could have stayed at work and took care of his other patients.

I was being selfish. I was being ridiculously selfish because I wanted attention from my husband. There was no reason that I couldn't wait for a moment whenever Oliver wasn't busy, instead of bombarding him with a dinner like this.

Pressing a hand against my chest, I opened my eyes and tried to calm down. My heartbeat had picked up and my breathing was coming in short gasps. I didn't need a meltdown, it would just be another thing for Oliver to deal with once he got home.

I slowly grabbed the cup of water from beside the apple juice and took a long sip. Looking over at the microwave, I blinked at it for a moment before I fully registered the time.

For some reason, the microwave said it was six-fifteen. Which had to be wrong, because Oliver was quite punctual. He was home every day at six o'clock.

To be sure of the time, I went to grab my phone from the coffee table in the living room. Sure enough, it also showed that it was after six.

"He's busy. He probably left a little later because he was busy." I nodded to myself and sat on the couch. It just gave me a few more minutes to read.

Not even thirty minutes had passed before I was checking my phone for the time, or to see if I had missed any contact with Oliver. And I hadn't.

Feeling confused, I headed to the kitchen to get containers to store the food away. I blew out the candles and got the food put in the fridge. With each action, I grew colder. Which may have had to do with the dress I was wearing, but I was beginning to feel dejected.

I didn't want to be a coward and just leave a note, so I decided to wait for Oliver to get home. I could always warm up the food once he got back, and it wouldn't be that long now.

I sat in the side chair, slipped the heels off, and pulled the blanket off the back to wrap around myself. Thinking better of just sitting and staring at a door, I got up and grabbed my Kindle before curling back into the chair with the blanket. There was no way I was going to text or call him, to nag about not being home at a specific time, if he was busy with work.

I jolted up at the sound of something falling, followed by a curse. Dropping my feet to the floor, I tried to wake up and remember why I was in the living room.

When I looked towards the kitchen and dining room, Oliver was nearly falling over picking his bag off the ground. As he stood, he wobbled slightly and leaned against the chair. Which only pushed it further from him and made Oliver stumble to the side with a curse.

"Are you - wait, are you drunk?" I cautiously asked, watching him try to put the chair back under the table while muttering to himself in a thicker than normal Irish accent.

Oliver spun around like someone had shot him and squinted at me. "You're awake? - It's late - why?"

Feeling the disappointment swell in my chest, I just stared at him. "Why am I awake? Or why is it late?"

"That one." He sputtered, snapping a finger before pointing it at me. With a groan, he fell into the chair he couldn't get under the table, and rubbed at his forehead.

“It’s late because...that’s how time works?” I responded, not even sure what the time was since my phone was on the other side of the coffee table and I couldn’t see the microwave from where I was sitting. “I’m awake because I was waiting for you, so we could have dinner. What happened?”

“Dinner. We uh. I got it to work - or it should now - left early with the team - what happened to the lights...right, left early with the team for celebratory drinks and food - why are there candles on the table - I forgot to tell you, might be late.”

“Yes, you forgot to tell me.” It was surprising to my own ears how unemotional I sounded when I could feel the hopelessness coursing through me. “Jin set candles out because he said it would make the dinner better.”

“Jin?” Oliver looked up, confusion written across his face. “Why were you with Jin?”

I pulled the blanket off me and let it fall to the ground as I leaned forward to pick up my shoes. Slowly standing, I nodded my head towards the fridge.

“Jin thought he would try to help me spend more time with you when I told him that I was depressed about our relationship. Ruthman’s is in the fridge. You can warm up...if you’re still hungry. I’m not really hungry anymore, so I’m going to go to bed. Congratulations on your lab thing.”

When I turned to get the blanket from the ground, I heard Oliver’s loud intake of breath. I was too numb to consider that maybe he had noticed the dress. I threw the blanket over the chair and walked towards my phone.

“You look...nice.” I heard him whisper behind me. “Why are you - was this supposed to be...” Oliver trailed off as I cut my eyes at him.

“Yes, Oliver. It was supposed to be a date. Which I see now that I was really, really stupid for being nervous about.”

I felt my eyes start to burn and I blink furiously, not wanting them to fall.

“I knew from trying almost every day just to ask for any amount of time with you. And yet, I didn’t realize how high

Jin got my hopes up that maybe tonight would be different.”

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I grabbed my phone from the coffee table as he stared at me.

“And it’s stupid of me to get my hopes up, right? You’ve told me that you’re busy. So, I know this. But a part of me just hoped that maybe you would want to spend a moment with me. It was selfish of me to expect that, and I wasted nearly all of Jin’s time today. God, I can’t even get you to hug me and I honestly thought that tonight would be different. That you’d look at me and not just see a burden, or a medical problem needing to be solved.”

Wiping my fingers under my eyes, I tried to catch the tears as they overflowed. “I’m happy your thing finally worked out for you, Oliver. I really am. And I’ll stop badgering you for attention. I’m sorry that I had tried to do something special for you tonight without checking to see if you were available or would even want it. And that I look ridiculous. I told Jin that I looked ridiculous. The whole thing must look like a joke, wrapped around inconvenience, to you. So, goodnight.”

I walked to the bedroom door with a deafening silence, even though the tears were falling a lot harder than I wanted them to. I had wanted to leave the room with slightly more dignity. The dignity of just looking stupid for having thought a romantic date was a good idea, and not falling into tears on top of it.

“Eleanor - wait.” I heard the chair slide back as he stood.

I pushed the bedroom door open and quickly closed it behind me, flipping the lock as I walked away. I looked down at my phone to check the time when I heard Oliver and then something shattering in the other room. It was almost midnight.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Sleeping was difficult. I was at a crossroads about it. Drifting to sleep could potentially lead me to dreaming of Rosalyn. Or the recent addition of Jin. I didn't want either of those.

But then staying awake only left me time to replay everything that had happened. My mind kept pushing the rewind button on everything that happened the whole night, with special scenes of every other failed attempt thrown in there.

So it was drifting off for maybe an hour and then I was forcing myself awake once I realized I was falling asleep. Then, I would close my eyes once the humiliation and tears became too much, until I was drifting off to sleep again.

It was an endless, painful cycle. And it left me feeling a strange out-of-body jittery when I finally decided to get up for the day.

I waited until I could smell Oliver cooking himself breakfast before I headed for the shower. If he decided to wake me up, not that he often did, I wouldn't be there, and he would have left for work by the time I was fully ready for the day.

Grabbing my phone, I sent a quick message to Jett to ask if he would be available to take me absolutely anywhere. I dismissed the message from Jin, asking how the night went. I had wasted all his time and however much he spent on last night. I would call him later in the day once I thought I wouldn't break down over the phone. Again.

I made sure to spend as much time standing in the hot stream. The pressure felt nice on my back and neck, especially after the tossing and turning all last night. The temperature, I didn't really feel. I was just numb, and my skin was going from pink to a light red by the time I shut off the shower.

I got dressed in a pair of leggings, an oversized shirt, and slipped on a pair of sandals. Taking a hairband from my purse,

I pulled my hair into a fast bun, made sure the green ribbon was at my wrist, and grabbed my stuff to go.

Pausing at the bedroom door, I slowly unlocked it. It was making me feel nauseous to leave the bedroom and face the world, but I also didn't want to stay in the building.

I let out a long exhale and left the room. My heart skipped a beat when Oliver stood from the table with his phone to his ear. I just stood there frozen, like a deer in headlights.

“Yes, I know. I'll be coming in, just later. I've got to go now. No, just bye.”

Oliver placed his phone beside his bag on the table and ran a hand through his hair.

“Eleanor, about last night...” he started, moving around the table towards me.

“I get it. You took your lab out because of something that happened. I shouldn't have just assumed you would be back at six, even if it was the time you were always home by. I shouldn't have assumed you would have even had time for dinner with me. You're usually back to your office.” Shakily raising my phone to check the time, I glanced back at Oliver.

“Jett's meeting me downstairs, so I'll get out of your way. Why are you still here? You're usually gone by eight. No, wait, it's not my business...I'll just go now.”

“Yes, I'm running late. I thought that maybe you would have left the room by now, and I was waiting for you.”

“Oh. Well, I'm sorry for making you late.” I grumbled, walking in front of the couch to go the long way to the front door, to get further from Oliver as he came closer. “You can go. I'm leaving anyway.”

“Where are you going, Eleanor? Because Jett said you never gave him a destination.”

I snapped around and stared at him. “I don't know where I want to go yet. I just wanted to - how did you already know I was leaving?”

“Jett sent me a message after you contacted him. He keeps me updated. But I told him not to worry about it, that you’d contact him later.”

“What? No, I was leaving now. You didn’t have the right to do that, Oliver.” Fuming, I hurried towards the front door.

“Eleanor, would you wait a damn minute. I’m not trying to argue with you.” Oliver’s hand wrapped around my arm and I was suddenly spun around to face him. “I just - I wanted to make it up to you. I thought that I could start with breakfast?”

My mouth opened and closed, not sure how to respond. My brain was still processing the words. They didn’t make sense, but he was there and not hurrying off.

Oliver tugged at his cuffs and looked to the side, avoiding eye contact. “I need to apologize. I want to apologize...to you. I didn’t realize what was going on, and I may not have been acting the best.”

Snorting at that understatement, I slowly moved to the kitchen island and dropped my purse on it. Either I finally fell asleep and now I was dreaming of Oliver acting strangely, or Oliver was acting strangely and I was fully awake.

Staring at my hands, I fiddled with the strap to my purse. “You don’t have to do this. I know you probably are freaking out that you’re not at the lab, and I don’t want that to add to you resenting me.”

Oliver moved around to stand somewhat in front of me and pulled my hand from my purse. “I’m asking because I want to. I’ve already told them that I’ll be late. There isn’t too much left for me to do, so a couple of hours late is fine. I’m also their boss.”

“If you’re sure...” I cautiously looked up at him.

“Okay. Yes. I’m going to get cinnamon rolls in the oven. You don’t tend to eat whenever you’re upset, not that I think you’re upset - I thought something simple would be easier?” He exhaled in a rush.

Oliver released my hand and went to the fridge, taking a can of cinnamon rolls from the inside and then the milk jug.

Turning to the stove, I watched him set the oven and grab a tray from the cabinet. I just sat there watching him.

Even knowing the can popped open with a noise like a firecracker, I still jumped at the sound when it unspiraled. Once he shoved them in the oven, he went back to standing beside where I was sitting at the island.

“I didn’t eat any of the food you got for dinner last night,” Oliver started after tapping his fingers along the counter.

“Well, I didn’t either.” Shrugging, I tried not to stare at the fridge where the food was stored away.

“If I had been here, on time, I would have appreciated what you did.”

“Jin. It was Jin. All I did was whine at my appointment and he did everything else.” I confessed, chewing the inside of my cheek to keep from mentioning that I had actually been excited about the possibility of a date night.

“Well, regardless, you didn’t object to it.” Oliver took a step closer and leaned into the island. “I thought that maybe, if you haven’t washed your hands of me, you wouldn’t mind still wanting to set time aside for us?”

My heart fluttered, and I hated that it was like a starved puppy. But, like a puppy, I did want that time to spend with Oliver. All the previous times, he never acknowledged that I was trying to spend time with him other than to tell me a resounding, ‘no’.

“If it’s something that you want, and not just because you’re trying to apologize to me.”

“Of course.” Oliver tentatively placed his hand along my jaw and tilted my head in his direction. “Tomorrow we can - shit, tomorrow is the last trial run. Monday, then, we can go somewhere. A museum?”

“I’m not asking you to take me places, Oliver.” His thumb was moving in small circles against my cheek and it was making it hard to concentrate. “I just wanted to get to know you, again. To spend time with you.”

“I know, and I promise we’ll spend time getting to know one another.”

Oliver standing so close was making the butterflies frenzy. I couldn’t think through the reasons why I should be cautious, or even embarrassed. Especially since there were two specific occasions where he bolted from just touching me. Not to mention the mess of last night.

“And you really did look...amazing, last night.” His eyes took on a darker hue while he glanced at my lips. “I’ll find another reason for you to wear that dress. If you want.”

“It was Jin’s idea, and he picked it out. I’m sure there’s something better for me to wear in the closet.” I tried to shrug away the nervousness.

“We’re not talking about Jin right now. Even if he was the one that chose the dress.” Oliver turned the seat so that I was fully facing him. “And you did look stunning.”

“Okay.” I breathed, trying not to get lost in his gaze. “You said we’d start to get to know each other?”

“Yes. I don’t think there would be a problem with that, and I think I like the idea.” Oliver pulled one of my hands from my lap and rubbed his thumb over my knuckles.

Before either of us had a chance to say anything else, the front door was opening. Oliver’s brows creased in confusion and he started to turn to face the archway to the foyer.

“Oliver, babe! I’m back! Miss me?” a woman’s voice called from the doorway.

It probably had more to do with what was said, that had my hackles rising. But there was also the fact that a woman had just entered our suite. On her own.

“Honey?” Oliver nearly choked and froze in front of me, blocking my view. “What are you doing?”

“Oliver, really?” She clicked her tongue. “You sent me away, telling me to give you a few months to get things in order.”

“Oliver, what’s going on?” I asked, trying to push the chair back from the counter.

“Nothing, she’s leaving,” Oliver ground out, stepping in front of my line of sight again.

“Wow. So, I’m not your fiancée anymore? A few months to fix your little problems and we’d get married. Is that not what you said? And here I am...and here she is. She’s not supposed to be here.”

I don’t think a bucket of ice water would have made me any colder than the feeling that was suddenly engulfing me. It was just one hit after another. I struggled to my feet, glimpsing the platinum blonde supermodel standing on the kitchen side of the foyer.

“What?” It came out in a whisper, even though my body was screaming.

“Eleanor, just wait -” Oliver started to turn around, and the woman flung glitter at us.

Just two handfuls of white, sparkly glitter raining down the whole area, making me sneeze. As bizarre as it was, it was low on my list of questions. Who walked around with glitter to make themselves an entrance?

“Now, now, Oliver. I think you get a timeout. We need to talk, and she needs to go.”

“Excuse me?” The numbness was warring with a fiery rage, but I could feel the crushing part not far behind.

“The grownups are talking, dear. You should be silent and still.” She narrowed her eyes at me before stepping close enough to Oliver that she was now stroking his arm. And he wasn’t moving away from her or doing anything to stop her. “Oliver, tell this other woman to leave so we can talk.”

“Screw you. What the hell is this? You need to get out of our home! How did you even get in? Oliver?” Gritting my teeth, I furiously blink back the tears. For once, they were tears of anger.

“How do you think I got in? Oliver gave me access a while ago, when we first got together.” She sneered at me and quickly turned back to Oliver, moving her hand to his jaw. “Tell her to leave, or I’ll get rid of her myself.”

“What -” I started, only to be cut off by Oliver, who had yet to do anything.

“Eleanor, please just listen to me for a second.” Oliver said, not moving.

And I was done.

“No. No, this is insane. I can’t. I’m not staying for this. Have all the time in the world.” I started yelling at them, grabbing my purse from the counter and heading for the front door. “You really are a bastard, aren’t you?”

Oliver said nothing. He didn’t try to stop me. He didn’t make any noise. The only thing I heard were the woman’s giggles as I slammed the door.

I was slowly spiraling and couldn’t get my breathing to calm down. I took my phone out of my purse and quickly dialed Jin. The elevator was taking too long, and I had too much energy building. By the time Jin answered the call, I had already started down the emergency stairwell and could barely see straight.

“I don’t need all the details. Wait, Eleanor - what’s wrong?” The background noise was slowly fading from his end of the line.

“I just - he never came home - then he was drunk - he was making breakfast - and a woman kicked me out - please pick me up.” I somehow managed in between sobs and trying to breathe.

“I’m not going to pretend to understand all, or any, of that. I’ll find out later. Leaving now. I’m guessing you don’t want Oliver tracking you down?” I could hear his keys jangling in the background.

“No...I can’t...again.”

“Okay. Okay, sweetheart, this is what we’re going to do. You go to the back of the building. There’s a pathway that has butterfly fairy lights along it a little bit down the way - take it. The lights glow to keep you on the path, just follow it all the way to the end and I’ll get you from there. Text Jett to pick you up in the garage.”

Stepping out into the bright morning, I wiped at my eyes to try to clear the water and blurriness. There was the sound of a door shutting and a vehicle starting in the background.

“But I’m not...going to the garage.” I rushed, pressing a hand to my side from the ridiculous pace I took down the stairs.

“You’re not. But he is a good false start for Oliver before he turns his gaze on me.”

“But I won’t be...with Jett.” I started racing towards the tree line behind the building and following it further down.

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll get Ms. Kes to take care of that. She lives for these types of things. Are you at the pathway yet?”

“Uh...yes.” Glancing up, I spotted aqua blue iridescent butterflies periodically lining the lower canopy.

“Okay, I’ll be at the end. I’ll take care of everything.”

I almost dropped my phone into my purse before I remembered that I was supposed to call Jett. Except that I did not sound close to normal, so I sent him a message.

Oliver had told him that I would contact him later. Thankfully, Jett didn’t ask any questions in his response, only that he would see me in five minutes at the car. I just had to hope that Ms. Kes and Jin had a plan that made sense.

I stashed my phone back in my purse and hugged it against my chest. I scrubbed a hand against my face and tried to stop hiccupping from the sobbing. I was a mess. This was a huge mess.

Lifting my head towards the canopy of branches, I wanted to scream. I wanted to laugh at the absolute shit show my life

turned out to be. And I wanted to fall to the ground and break apart into tiny pieces - let the butterflies take me away.

The further I moved down the path, the brighter they glowed. Their wings looked like they were fluttering in a breeze that I couldn't feel. Though the ones behind me would slowly fade to a softer blue after I passed by, the ones closest pulsed with their glow.

They shone against the wine colored petals sprinkled about the dark bark of the branches. It all made me feel lonely, and awed by their beauty. The pathway was stunning, and mostly distracting me from my mind, but it felt like it needed to be shared with others.

Chapter Fifty-Three

It took about forty-five minutes for me to reach the end of the pathway, to find that it opened to a small cottage in the middle of a clearing. As I slowly drew closer, the front door swung open and Jin stepped out.

“Is this a witch’s house? In the middle of the woods?” I questioned, taking stock of the cottage.

It looked like a regular home, and nothing to show it was made of candy and sweets.

“No.” Jin softly chuckled, walking towards me. “I got bored one day and had it built as a way to escape and take a breather whenever I needed.”

“Oh.” Sighing, I finally looked at Jin and the look of concern broke the thin wall I placed on my emotions.

Breaking down into rackings sobs, again, I covered my face with my hands. If my legs had still been working, or not working, I would have sunk to the ground.

“Eleanor, sweetheart,” Jin whispered against my head, and it took me a moment to realize that he had wrapped me in his arms. “Let’s get inside so you can sit down.”

With a sniffing agreement, Jin helped me across the porch and nearly carried me into the house. He stopped to close and lock the front door before leading me to the couch on the left side of the open space. Jin took my purse and pulled my phone out, turning it off, and then dropped them inside a small cabinet area on the coffee table.

“Come on. I’m not going to force you to tell me what happened,” Jin spoke softly, pulling me down on the couch beside him and then wrapped his arms around me. “But it would really help if you did tell me.”

Curling into his side, I shook my head as my hiccupping calmed and the sobs turned into silent tears. It was still too raw to rehash, though it would probably be too raw for a long time.

“Okay,” Jin sighed and kissed the top of my head. “Well, I’m not going anywhere.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, closing my eyes.

His heartbeat was a steady thumping under my cheek, and it was kind of soothing. It could have been the rough night, jogging down five flights of stairs, the mini hiking trip, the adrenaline wearing off, or the pathetic amount of crying I’d been doing - but I found myself falling asleep against Jin.

“Sorry, just trying to get my phone from my pocket so I can throw it across the room,” Jin mumbled, shifting around beneath me when I started waking up. “Someone won’t stop calling me. The vibrating is really starting to annoy me.”

“It’s Oliver?” I slowly stretched my legs out and sat up. My face felt stuffy and swollen, and there was a headache building behind my eyes, reaching into my brain.

He slipped his phone from his pocket and rolled his eyes. “He doesn’t seem to take the hint. This has been going on for the last thirty minutes or so. My thigh feels weird, since I just let it carry on. We’re not turning your phone on. I’m sure there are just as many voicemails on your end.”

Standing, I stretched out some more kinks and stared at the ceiling. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do now. Not that I had much of an idea before, but there had been some sort of path to follow.

“I’m going to get dinner going. Eggs and bacon are good with you?” Jin asked as he turned to the kitchen that was separated from the living room by a small table.

“I don’t think I’m hungry.” I confessed, finally taking in the surroundings. “I just feel sick.”

“Did you eat anything before you left this morning?” Jin called from the fridge.

“No...I didn’t get the chance.” I sighed, walking to the window beside the table. Moving the blinds aside, I blinked a few times to catch up to the fact that the sun was setting.

“Well, then you’re going to eat something. You may not feel hungry, but you need to eat.”

“What time is it? How long have I been asleep?” Turning around, I tried to find a clock.

“Eh, it’s nearing eight. So you had a good ten hours?” He glanced over at me from the stove. “You okay?”

I just stared at him, letting it sink in, before I finally decided to pull out a chair and sit at the table. “No. I’m really tired of sleeping. I’m tired of not fully knowing what the hell is going on. I’m tired of feeling like I’m slowly going crazy. I’m tired of crying. I’m just....so exhausted.”

“And we will unpack all that after you eat something. If we start now, you won’t end up eating because you’ll be back in a despairing mood.”

“Fine.” Grumbling, I folded my arms on the table and laid my head on top.

I really was exhausted, and I couldn’t bring myself to untangle the emotions. There was a part of me that could burst into tears at any moment, but the embarrassment and anger were holding it at bay. For now.

Jin returned to the table, after placing our plates in the sink, with a roll of toilet paper and a trash bag. He put the toilet paper in front of me and the bag on the chair opposite from where he had been sitting.

“Softer than paper towels, and I don’t have tissues.” He shrugged, sitting back down beside me. “Alright, I know I said I wouldn’t force you to talk to me. But, Eleanor, I would really like to know what happened. I would like to hear it from you, so I know how to handle Oliver.”

I closed my eyes and worked my jaw, trying to hold it together. It wouldn’t get any easier later, if I waited. I just needed to get it done and over with so I could...move on? Mourn?

“I left you with the food in the oven, right? You were wrapped up like a tempting present. What happened from there?”

“He didn’t come home.” I leaned back and stared at the ceiling. Deciding that if I let the numb washover, I could possibly get through this without breaking down again.

“What do you mean?” Jin’s bewilderment was clear. “He gets home by six.”

“Except last night.” I hugged my arms around my stomach to stop from shaking. “I fell asleep in the living room waiting for him. No, I sat at the table waiting for him at first. Then I finally put the food away when it got closer to seven. Then I fell asleep in the living room, and Oliver woke me up close to midnight - because he was drunk when he got home and ran into the table or something.”

Jin cocked his head and opened his mouth to speak. Only he didn’t speak, he just shut his mouth and then rested his hand against his cheek.

“I don’t - that doesn’t make - are you sure? No, obviously you’re sure - I don’t know what to make -” Jin pressed his lips together and dragged his hand through his hair in agitation. “Did he even try to explain why he was late?”

“He said he finally got his project thing to work? That he took his people out in celebration. And saying it out loud makes me sound like a spoiled brat.” Closing my eyes again, I sighed. “But it got so much better this morning.”

“Oliver said it works? That’s what he said?” He was suddenly leaning against the table, reaching for my hand. Excitement danced over Jin’s face for a moment before he coughed.

“And that isn’t important right this second. He should have let you know not to expect him. Oliver was not thinking straight yesterday, especially if he was drunk and still didn’t make any kind of move towards you in that dress. That’s unreasonable restraint. Even sober he should have caved.”

I felt the tears starting to gather again, and I grabbed some of the toilet paper to blot at them. “Why would a new outfit change anything? You didn’t try anything either, and I don’t know how to feel about that. But at least I understand a lot more about why Oliver didn’t want me and why there was a divorce.”

The crying was only held back through half of my ramblings and then it was a flood. It wasn’t the hiccupping sobbing just yet at least.

“Well, I think there’s a good reason why in my case,” Jin started cautiously. “What divorce are you talking about? I feel like I’m missing some steps.”

“Oliver didn’t go to work this morning. He stayed because he said he wanted to try, with me. And I was stupid enough to actually believe that would be something he wanted, because then this gorgeous woman just comes strolling into the kitchen, throws glitter at us, and says she’s engaged to Oliver. She said that he asked her to leave because he had some problems to fix and it would only take a few months.”

Abruptly standing, I balled the toilet papers in my hands and started to pace. This whole time, he had been getting rid of me. For months.

Stopping, I turned to Jin, who looked confused and concerned. “Months, Jin. I was a problem that needed to be fixed, for months. Before now. And he just stood there, not correcting her, not moving, and not really saying a damn thing. He couldn’t even look at me and tell me what was going on.”

“A woman?” Jin finally questioned, frowning into his hands.

But my mind was still turning. Divorce was simple. There had already been a petition signed. He had it. There wasn’t any more of an issue that I could have caused...unless there was.

“He wouldn’t.” I breathed, fisting my shirt. “Why isn’t he more upset about the miscarriage, Jin?”

“Hold on, Eleanor.” Jin was suddenly standing and walking around the table to where I had stopped pacing. “Oliver

couldn't have done what you're thinking."

Pressing my hands into my eyes, I tried to make sense of it. Jin was in every pregnancy memory. Jin was the one that had the ultrasound, and allowed me to bring it up. Jin was who I dream-remembered having a different relationship with.

"I want the truth, Jin. Please, do not lie to me." I whispered, holding my hand out to stop him from getting closer. "Is Oliver the father of my child?"

Jin gaped at me. "Eleanor-"

"No. I want the truth. Because I remember...I remember things...with you, Jin. With you, while married to Oliver...and I'm a hypocrite that can't remember - Oliver knew. That's why...that's why he's been so - so angry at you. At me...And then the pregnancy - why would he be angry. The only emotion he shows is anger - unless his wife lost another man's child, Jin. Is Oliver the father?"

"You remember - what with me?" Jin took a step towards me, his eyes intense.

"A dream, in your office. We were kissing. Or about to and I woke up. Then extremely close cuddling. On your lap, somewhere...very handsy and mouthy. Jin, answer the question."

"Shit. You weren't supposed to-"

"Is. Oliver. the. father." I grit out, cutting off whatever he was stuck on.

Jin exhaled slowly and slid his hands in his pockets. The side of his jaw ticked and stared up at the ceiling. I didn't think he was going to answer until he finally did.

"No, he's not." He whispered, his gaze finding mine again. "Oliver isn't the father of your child."

Chapter Fifty-Four

I had been expecting Jin to admit that Oliver wasn't the father, but it still felt like a slap in the face. Neither one of us had been faithful to our marriage. It wasn't a wonder that Oliver had seemed like he didn't want anything more than a medical relationship with me.

"And you didn't think any of this was relevant? Oliver clearly had, or has I guess, another woman. He had divorce papers in his nightstand dated the day of my accident. Did I drift to you because you were there when Oliver wasn't? Or, was it Oliver going elsewhere because he knew I was with you? It's kind of a big piece of information you both forgot to mention."

Jin grabbed my arms to stop my pacing and looked down at me. "You're starting to spiral, sweetheart. Just calm down."

"Calm down? Calm down! I can't remember anything about my life except for random flashes. You two told me that Oliver was my husband. I wanted, and tried, to get close to that man. The man that was done with me. Because we were getting divorced. Because I was screwing another man! Was pregnant with your child, Jin! And you even helped to push me into his arms. I don't even know how - am I still pissed about this woman? Do I even have a right to be mad about them? Because clearly I was with you, too."

Jin wrapped his arms around me when I tried to jerk away. "Okay, well, we didn't count on any of this playing out. I did not know that Oliver had divorce paperwork squirreled away. And I'm not sure about this other woman. What'd she look like?"

"Blonde. Leggy. Rude. Oliver called her, 'Honey.' And she threw glitter at us. Who does that? Who carries glitter in their pockets in anticipation of throwing it at people?"

"Honey?" Jin tensed against me. "She happens to be Tiffany's cousin. And worked with him at the lab for a time. I

remember she had a thing for Oliver, but I didn't think - nevermind. Tiffany must have called her after your visit. Was the glitter red, blue, or green?"

I pulled back slightly to stare at him. Jin genuinely stared at me, waiting for the glitter color. "It was white."

"Of course it was." He grit out. "Oliver was working with, eh, pixie dust a while back. She must have stolen a batch and tweaked it. I don't know what white does. Did it touch you?"

Jin quickly pulled away and started running his hands down my sides. When he started to lift my shirt, I slapped his hands away.

"I feel fine. Well, no, I feel like shit that was placed in a blender. But I literally sneezed and nothing happened."

"Sneezed?" Jin's nose scrunched in puzzlement. "Why would you - the ribbon. It worked against fae magic?"

The fact that his voice went from confusion to amazement, was making it hard to follow what he was saying. I had sneezed when she glittered us. Nothing else.

I glanced down at my ribbon. "Oh, that stuff you put on it."

It was Jin that took up the pacing beside the table; talking to himself and being very animated with his hand movements. He'd effectively distracted me from focusing on everything else.

"-if we replicate it in big enough quantities - but then that level of production would be hard to - I need to call Oliver."

"Wait, no. No, no, no. You can't call Oliver. I don't know what to do yet. I don't even know how I feel. I can't see him right now."

Jin stopped his pacing to stare at me, his hand halfway in his pocket. He let out a small curse and lowered himself back into the chair beside him.

"This is - this is a bigger mess than I imagined it would turn out to be." He leaned back in the chair with a sigh and closed his eyes. "Oliver needs to know about the ointment so we can start making more."

“Why is that important right now?” I asked, gripping the top of the closest chair.

“It’s another step in blending magic with science. Especially if Oliver had success with his other experiment. Not to mention, it works to repel both witch and fae magic. That seems important, Eleanor.”

Chewing on my cheek, I tried to think of a way around not involving Oliver. I wasn’t ready to face what happened. I was still trying to unravel myself.

“Can it wait just a couple of days? I can’t see him right now, Jin. I can’t. It’s too raw, too confusing. I don’t know what I’m even going to do with myself.”

The edges of my vision started to waver with tears, but there wasn’t enough to spill over. It was a very sad fact that I may have been drying up.

Jin took a deep exhale and then gave a small nod. “I need a couple of days, too, I think. Please don’t start crying again, sweetheart. We’ll get everything figured out.”

Lifting his arms out, he motioned his hands my way with a jerk of his head. “Come here.”

I slowly walked towards him, trying to breathe through my stuffy nose. My face had a swollen feeling again, and my nose was leaky.

Jin grabbed my hand and pulled me sideways onto his lap. I relaxed against his chest and exhaled slowly. My mind needed to just shut off. There was too much going on and to think through.

“Do you love me?” I blurted out, my brain-to-mouth filter failing.

Holding my breath and inwardly cringing, Jin’s hand froze mid-stroke in my hair. I really hadn’t meant for it to come spilling from my lips. The question had barely fully registered in my mind before it was released into the world.

“I think I’ve loved you for some time now,” he quietly breathed, and softly kissed the side of my head. “Which makes

everything that much more complicated.”

“But Oliver loved me enough to marry me, right? Until he didn’t love me anymore.” I sniffled, bringing the crushed toilet paper to my nose.

I was wrong about being dried up. Tears were tracking down my face, I just ran out of energy to fall into sobbing hysterics again.

“I’m sure it’s just...complicated, with Oliver.” Jin gently squeezed my hand, still combing his other fingers through my hair.

“I remember parts of the wedding, Jin. I remember being happy at that moment with him. But I also remember being happy dancing with you, and how you looked sad. And Oliver seemed happy to be with me then. When do you move on like he did? And why does that even bother me when I wasn’t even faithful to him?”

Jin slowly ran his hand up my wrist, to my elbow, and down again.

“I’m not going anywhere, sweetheart. Not until you tell me to do so.” He sighed against my head and said something in another language. “You’re overwhelmed with your thoughts and emotions right now.”

Frowning, I turned to face him, with the annoyance bleeding into my words. “Is that another way to tell me I need to calm down?”

If I hadn’t been exhausted, I would have moved from his lap. The best I could muster was to lean far enough away without falling onto the floor.

“Yes, Jin, I’m a little upset right now. I don’t know how I’m supposed to analyze everything. Am I relieved? Sad? Pissed? Confused and upset, definitely, at least.”

I rubbed my fingers under my eyes, trying to wipe away the leakage. There really shouldn’t have been a way that there was this much liquid to sustain this much crying.

“That’s not what-” Closing his eyes, he ground his jaw together before starting again. “I’m not trying to tell you how to feel, or not feel. You have every right to feel anything. Or nothing. Or everything. I only meant it’s harder for me to help when it’s so much to work through, and I don’t know where to even start to untangle things.”

“I don’t know if I’m asking you to help. How would you help?”

“Whether you ask or not, I’m going to try to help you.” He wrapped both arms around my waist and pulled me against his chest again. “What would help right now?”

Leaning my head against his shoulder, I closed my eyes and tried to relax. His minty scent helped calm my nerves more. Jin had a way about him that made it easy to be comfortable.

“Tell me something about myself that only you know.”

“Something that only I know?” Jin mused, a hand rubbing at my back. “Oh. So, for some reason, you dissect those chocolate boxed cake things with the cream inside before you eat them.”

Scrunching my face in confusion, I tried to picture cutting a chocolate cake into tiny pieces and why it would be strange. “Do I cut it weird or something? What does the cake look like?”

“It’s not really a cake. It’s rolled? Like a tiny rolled chocolate sponge cake? With cream swirled inside, and then a chocolate coat around the cake. It comes in a box with a few of them.”

“Wait. Are you talking about those prepackaged swiss rolls?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. So I cut up swiss rolls?”

“Not exactly. You unroll the thing and scrape the cream off. Then eat the chocolate cake part.” He chuckled against my head. “It was amusing to watch.”

“You can do that? And it doesn’t fall apart?” I was kind of impressed with myself.

“Well, I don’t know that I could do that, but you do. But, that’s something only I know about you. Unless you’ve done it in public, anyway.”

“Hmm.” I hummed, followed by a yawn.

Jin slid a hand up the back of my neck and tilted my head towards his face. “I think we should get to bed. You’re winding down, and I haven’t gotten a decent sleep in some time.”

“I don’t want to go to sleep. I’ll either dream of Rosalyn, or I’ll dream of Oliver.” I murmured.

“I’ll keep everything at bay.” He ran the back of his other hand against my cheek.

“How? Is that something you can promise?” Jin’s thumb traced the bottom of my lip.

“I promise. I’m a fierce cuddler.”

“Okay,” I whispered, the air feeling thicker around me.

Jin skimmed his lips against my cheek and then nudged me off his lap. Taking my hand, he led me towards the door that had been at his back. He closed the door behind us, released my hand, and walked a few steps to the dresser.

“You have clothes in the other room, or you can wear one of my shirts?” He asked, rummaging through one of the drawers.

“The shirt’s fine.” Chewing on the inside of my lip, I tried to not focus on the bed. Or that Jin had pulled his shirt over his head and his pants were sitting low on his hips. “Are you sure you want to stay here with me? Maybe I should go to the other bedroom.”

Jin turned towards me, brows creased, and a shirt in hand. “What? Why?” He tossed the shirt at me and opened another drawer.

“I mean, even Oliver wanted to stay in another room.” I stared at my hands, watching the shirt twist in my fingers.

“Should I even be jumping in bed with you?”

“Okay, first, look at me.” Jin was suddenly in front of me, fingers grasping my chin and tilting my face up. “Oliver is an idiot. I should have taken you from the hospital and kept you. Third, you aren’t jumping into bed. We are going to sleep. I would feel better knowing that you’re beside me and not across the house. If you want to be in a separate room, I won’t stop you. But I also won’t promise that I won’t end up beside you once you fall asleep.”

Quickly wetting my lips, Jin’s eyes followed the movement, and his fingers flexed against my chin. I gave a small nod of understanding and Jin removed his hand, but didn’t move away.

“Which door is the bathroom?”

“Bathroom on the left, closet on the right.”

I went to step around Jin and when I was standing beside him; he shot his arm around my stomach and leaned towards me. His breathing was tickling against my hair, but his grip on my hip was tight.

“There’s an extra toothbrush in one of the drawers.” His voice had dropped lower, and a toothbrush didn’t need to sound sexy.

Swallowing, I only nodded and made to move away. Jin’s hand tightened further, and he used the other to brush the hair from my shoulder.

“We’re only sleeping, Eleanor.” Jin’s lips brushed against my neck as he spoke.

I wasn’t convinced that Jin’s hand was the reason I was still upright, because it felt like I had melted into the floor. My heartbeat picked up and sleeping was not on my mind.

Nodding vigorously, because I couldn’t trust my voice, I bolted to the bathroom when Jin removed his hands. I leaned against the door once I had shut it and took a minute to breathe.

My head was feeling foggy and confused. Too much had gone on with the day. Too much had come to light. I just needed to do one thing at a time, focus on one thing...and not do anything stupid.

Finding the toothbrush in a drawer, like Jin said, I quickly brushed my teeth and changed into his shirt. I held the shirt against my nose and breathed deeply. The minty smell helped clear a bit of my sinuses, and it smelled nice.

“You’re just going to bed. To sleep.” I muttered to myself, freezing near the door. “Only a complete emotionless bitch would do anything else.”

Closing my eyes, I unlocked the door and bounced on my toes to work out the fear of leaving the bathroom.

“Yet. I found out I cheated on my husband with our friend. Who turned out to be the father of my child. And I just ran away from the husband while his mistress came to visit. And run straight back to Jin. Straight to bed.”

Letting out a shaky breath, I swiped at my face to stop the tears. The cold, numbing ache was slowly coming back and pushing out the warm feeling I had when I was near Jin.

“I’m a horrible person.” I whimpered and slowly sank to the floor.

I brought my legs up and rested my head on my knees. It’s probably different having someone else tell you that you’re horrible, instead of discovering it yourself.

“No, sweetheart. Bed. No tears. Come on.” Jin hushed above me, dragging me off the ground. “Your emotions are a tidal wave. Let’s get you to sleep.”

He tugged me into the bedroom and helped me into the bed. Jin didn’t walk around the bed to get in. He climbed over me and settled beside me. After he pulled the blanket over us, he snaked one arm under my neck and the other across my middle, and pulled me closer to him.

“Close your eyes. I’m not going anywhere.” He kissed the back of my head and laced the fingers at my stomach with my fingers.

He slowly brought his other hand to my temples and started massaging it. Between that and his other thumb doing small circles on the back of my hand, my body began to relax, and I was quickly falling asleep.

Chapter Fifty-Five

Everything was flickering around me. It was like I was surrounded by open doorways, or windows, with scenes playing out. Each one held something different. Some had Rosalyn, others had Jin or Oliver.

The only thing they all had in common was the fact that they were like static. It was as if I were standing in the middle of different television channels and the signals weren't coming through. There were a few images that looked like they were glitching, items and people completely blurring or disappearing.

I tried to walk through a door that showed a toddler version of Rosalyn. She was carrying a pink bucket nearly as big as herself and examining a tie-dyed egg in front of her. I watched her squat down and blow at the egg.

She was trying to get the little specks of dirt off the egg. Rosalyn wasn't going to touch the egg until she thought it was clean because she didn't want to get dirty. Pushing the baby curl from her eyes, she looked back at me and said something.

Only I was too far away to hear her ask for help. I knew she was asking me to brush off the egg for her. She waved her little hand, motioning me to hurry, and I tried to go to her.

I did try.

Over and over again.

Every time I moved closer, I was jerked back before I got to the threshold. Until I finally gave up and turned to another scene. There wasn't a doorway or window I came to that let me get through to Rosalyn.

There were a couple of scenes I tried to step into, and I would have to quickly step back into the in-between space. The ground would start swaying beneath me if I stepped too far inside in some. In others, things would start to vanish and leave gaping voids.

I finally came to a window that was fogged over, but I could make out an image of Rosalyn as the older teen I'd been seeing recently. She was reclining in a chair, reading a book. There wasn't anything else there, only her reading.

I pressed my hand against the window, and it shimmered around my hand. There was a resistance keeping me from entering, like some of the other scenes. Lifting both hands against the space, I pressed harder, and a ripple radiated outward.

I watched Rosalyn lower the book and look around. The harder I pressed, the more alert she became.

"Mom?" There was a strange echo to her voice.

"I'm here!" I called back, slapping my hands against the window space. "I'm here!"

Rosalyn dropped the book and jumped out of the chair, peering into the darkness around her.

"Mom, where are you?" She cautiously placed her hands in front of her as she walked around the room she was in.

"I'm here! I'm trying to get in!" I curled my hands into fists and continued to hit the window, trying to force my way inside.

"Something's interfering." Rosalyn came closer to where I was. "I can barely hear you. But you're close, Mom, I know it."

"I'm right here." I cried out, desperately trying to tear at the window.

It wasn't letting me through, and I wasn't going to give up. Rosalyn was just on the other side. She was right there.

"Mom." Rosalyn's lip wobbled with her small smile. She lifted her hands and held them up to the other side of the window. "You'll be coming for me soon. You're really close to the end."

"No, I'm right here, Rosalyn. I'm right here. I'll get through." I didn't bother trying to clear my vision or wipe at the tears. They were coming too fast. My fists banging against

the window weren't the only things that were hurting. My heart felt like someone was squeezing it in a vise.

"Mom. You're waking up." Rosalyn whispered, pressing her hands harder against the window. "I love you. You're so close now."

"No!" I sobbed, the blackness swirling in around me. I pressed my hands into the window, opposite of Rosalyn's hands. "I love you."

I watched Rosalyn bite her bottom lip when it started to tremble, and she rapidly swiped at her cheeks as she turned away.

As she faded away.

I screamed into the surrounding darkness, banging my fists against the window again.

"Open your eyes, love. Come on." Jin's voice was growing louder, though I heard someone heaving breaths close by.

"You were just dreaming. Open your eyes," he coaxed.

Taking gulping breaths, I forced my eyes open and found the heavy breathing was coming from me. It took a few blinks to adjust to the darkness. My heart was pounding. I was in tears again, and Jin was halfway on top of me, holding my wrists above my head in one of his hands.

"There you are." His face was close enough that I could see his eyes glance over my face. "I'm going to let you go now. Let's not start punching at me again, 'kay?"

"I was punching you?" I asked, confused.

Jin merely nodded and rubbed at his chest. He sat back against the headboard and watched me.

"Why was I punching you?" I slowly flexed my fingers, feeling a sting along some of them.

"You know, you really didn't say why. I was still waking up anyway, but you sped up the process." Shrugging, he grabbed

a bottle of water from the nightstand beside him and took a drink.

“I would like to think that I’m still a decent person, even in someone else’s dreams. So, what were you dreaming about?” He asked, handing the bottle towards me.

“I don’t really know.” I sighed, shaking my head slightly as I sat up. “It was like a weird carousel of television-type memories or something. But I couldn’t really see all of them. Or make sense of most of them.”

“What kind of memory had you swinging fists?”

“It wasn’t a specific memory that was getting that treatment.” I took a quick sip and handed the bottle back. “I couldn’t get through a window to Rosalyn...and she was right there. Right there.”

Jin wrapped an arm around my shoulders and pulled me close. “You’ll be okay. It’ll get better.” He spoke softly against my head, scooting us back down into the blankets.

“I don’t want to go back to sleep.” I moved my arm across his bare stomach, trying to cling closer. “What time is it?”

“Four, when you started punching. I was still half asleep and getting back into bed.” His fingers skimmed over my arm, sending calming tingles throughout my body.

“Where’d you go?”

“I didn’t go anywhere exciting. Just the bladder waking me enough to stumble to the toilet.”

“Oh. Are you going back to sleep?” I leaned my head back and tried to see his face more clearly.

“Not if you don’t want me to.” Jin moved his arm from his head and grabbed the hand that was resting on his hip.

Jin slowly dragged it up his side, up the center of his chest, and then lifted my fingers to his lips. He softly placed a kiss on each fingertip and then placed my hand on his chest.

“Your fingers were getting fidget-y. Let’s just keep them up here.” He pulled at the sheet and blanket until they were up to

my chin.

My fingers were still tingling and frozen on his chest. I hadn't realized that my hand had been roaming. I wanted to feel embarrassed, but I also wanted to scoot closer.

I watched Jin throw his arm back above his head and kick one leg out from under the blanket. He continued to run his fingers through my hair, and my heart refused to slow any more.

“You're going to stay awake just because I asked you to?” This time, I noticed when my fingers started skimming.

“Pretty much.” He chuckled and rolled onto his side to face me. “Are you going to keep staring at me? Or control your fingers?”

I bit at my lip and forced my fingers to still. Nodding, I moved my arm around him and moved closer. “You are great to cuddle with.”

Jin laughed into my hair as he wrapped his arm around me. “Fierce cuddler. We can stay like this and if you want to go to sleep, I won't judge you.”

“Thank you.” I whispered, and pressed my lips against his chest in a gentle kiss.

Wrapped in his arms, surrounded by the mint scent, I quickly fell back to sleep.

Chapter Fifty-Six

Jin wasn't in the bed when I finally woke up. A part of me was waiting to realize that everything that had happened the last couple of days were dreams. And if it was all a bad dream, of course Jin wouldn't be in the bed with me. But, if it was all a dream, why would I wake up hoping Jin would be beside me?

I spent a few minutes staring at the ceiling, trying to comb through my thoughts and emotions. My emotional energy levels felt drained. I had the notion that maybe I should feel something more than the emptiness. Like a car that was sputtering its way to a gas station, hoping it didn't stop working completely before it could be refueled.

Just because there were no more tears, didn't mean they wouldn't replenish later. And I was completely over being a leaky mess. I was done trying to connect with Oliver.

Clearly that ship had sailed. There was no point in embarrassing myself further with him. It was pathetic. It pissed me off. It cut at my heart.

I covered my eyes with my hand, trying not to remember the too few moments where Oliver had looked at me with longing. When he pressed me into the elevator's wall. When his arms wrapped around me in the living room. The heat of his hands grasping my hips. The goosebumps from his lips skimming my neck.

"No. Stop it," I hissed, pressing my fingers against my eyelids. Because as much as I wanted Oliver, and could feel the pain it caused, there was also Jin.

When my brain stopped flashing between moments with either of them, I could finally get out of the bed and to the bathroom. Seeing that Jin had set out clothing for me, I hopped into the shower and stood under the water, even as it moved from hot to cold.

“Do I need to take you out of there? Or can you get out on your own?” Jin asked from the other side of the curtain.

I hadn't heard him come into the bathroom. But I wasn't even sure if I had closed the door. I was just going through the motions.

“No. I'm fine.” I responded automatically.

It wasn't a lie. There wasn't anything truly wrong with me, other than the amnesia. Feeling numb didn't mean I wasn't fine. I was just coping. The numbness was helping me not to spiral too far.

“You're not fine, Elle.” I could hear the aggravation in his voice.

It was going to happen with Jin, too. Like with Oliver. Oliver was done with me. I was an inconvenience, an aggravating burden that had been nagging at him. He had also once promised not to leave me, like Jin had been promising.

“I'm sorry,” I whimpered, the warm water running over my cheeks. Which was strange because the water was cold on the rest of my body.

The curtain jerked back, and Jin's hand reached out to turn the water off. He grabbed a towel from the closet and opened it in front of me. When I didn't move to grab it, - not that I could move, I felt frozen to the spot - Jin stepped closer, motioned my arms up, and wrapped it around my body.

My fingers clutched at the top of the towel as I just stared at him. “I'm not trying to be a problem.”

“Oh, no. No, Eleanor, sweetheart.” Jin's hands came up and cupped my cheeks. His thumbs running under my eyes. “I'm not mad at you. I'm not annoyed with you. At least not for what you think. You're not fine. You're a mess.”

“Thanks.” I forced out, trying to step out of his reach.

“You're going to be a mess. It's kind of expected, and I don't need you to pretend otherwise with me.”

Jin slid a hand down to mine and tugged me out of the shower. He brushed the other hand around my head and pulled

me against his chest. I felt the kiss as he pressed it into my wet hair as his arms circled around me.

“Are you going to need help getting dressed? Because you’re shivering.” He pulled away and looked down at me.

“No. I’m fine.” I replied, taking a step away so he could leave.

“I just told you about that word.” He scowled.

Instead of leaving the bathroom, Jin’s hand reached out and grabbed the edge of the towel, pulling it away from me. When I started to protest, lunging for the towel, he only grabbed my arm and began patting it down.

“Jin, I said I was -” I started, the numbness receding to annoyance.

“Fine? Yes, I heard you mention that.” He interjected and moved behind me, drying my back. “But if you’re going to lie to me, then I’ll just do it myself.”

“Fine,” I huffed, trying not to grind my jaw.

Running the towel down my other arm, Jin slowly stepped in front of me again. His eyes were burning into mine as he stepped closer. He moved the towel down my back with both hands until it was on my ass, and trapped me between his arms.

“I’m naked,” I blurted out. The numb feeling had left, leaving a growing sense of awkward shyness.

Jin’s lips twitched at the corners, and his eyes slowly looked down at my body. “I did happen to notice that.”

I swallowed the lump in my throat and tried to move my arms in front of me in the most casual looking way. Not that there was a casual way. Jin quirked an eyebrow once I had an arm across my chest.

“You do know that it’s a bit too late for that?” He chuckled huskily.

He pulled the towel taut, stepping closer and effectively trapped my other hand before it got lower. Except that there

was a noticeable bulge, from his side, now pressed against that hand.

“Oh.” I breathed out, my body going hot.

Jin’s smolder caused my breathing to hiccup. Breathing was becoming difficult, and it didn’t help that my arm was trapped against my chest.

He gave me a wink, and then slowly dropped his body towards the ground. His body moved against mine until he was kneeling in front of me. I wasn’t sure that I was breathing anymore.

“Wha-” Clearing my throat, I had to try again. “What are you doing?”

Jin looked up at me through his eyelashes, without answering. Dropping the towel from one hand, he moved it between my knees and languidly dragged the towel over each leg, not taking his eyes from my face.

“I thought it was rather obvious that I was drying you off.” He raised from the floor, trailing the towel higher up the inside of thighs as he stood.

I opened my mouth to say something, or just to breathe, when his hand cupped me with the towel. His eyes stayed on mine when my hands grasped at his arms. Jin’s breathing got harder, while mine seemed to stop, and he pressed the towel harder against me, making me go to the balls of my feet with a gasp.

My fingers were digging into his arms as something barged into my mind. I felt my eyelids flutter, trying to keep reality and the memory apart. But it was there -

I was sitting on the counter in the bathroom, my legs wrapped around Jin’s waist.

“Please,” I gasped, my fingernails digging into his hair.

Jin kissed up my neck and bit right below my ear. He pulled away slightly, his hands squeezing my thighs, and gazed at me expectedly. “Please, what, love?”

I tried to press my heels against him to bring him closer. I needed him closer.

Chuckling darkly, he ran a hand up my body until he was gripping my jaw. Jin tilted my head to the other side and started kissing my neck again. He moved his hand from my jaw to cup a breast.

“Jin,” whining, I tugged at his hair, feeling his lips curving into a smile against my neck. “Please, stop teasing me.”

“Am I teasing you?” he asked between kisses.

“Jin,” I was not above begging.

He trailed his hand back down to my thigh and yanked me nearly off the counter. “Of course, love.”

My mouth fell open as he finally pressed inside.

“Eleanor?” My eyes snapped open, my chest heaving. Jin was peering at me with a mixture of guilt and concern. “Did you see something? I shouldn’t mean - I didn’t think - I’m sorry. Are you okay?”

I looked around the bathroom, trying to get my bearings straight. “I’m okay. I think I just need to get dressed. Please.” I cringed at the last word, since I had just been using it with Jin for a different reason.

Not that the thought of being with Jin made me cringe, only that it was awkward in my ears. I couldn’t remember having a relationship with him, and yet I clearly had things popping up to suggest otherwise.

“Of course,” he said gently and left the room, closing the door behind him.

I walked to the sink and turned the cold water on, quickly splashing it on my face. At least I had snapped out of the empty, numb feeling.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

When I finally stepped out of the bathroom, Jin wasn't in the bedroom. Which gave me another moment to get myself together. It felt like I was a hormonal mess, going from crying to lusting. I was starting to think that I might end up with whiplash from the constant back and forth.

I took a deep breath and cautiously stepped out of the bedroom. Jin looked up from the couch and rubbed his hands on his lap. We just stared at each other for a moment before he stood, walked a few steps towards me and stopped within arms distance.

"I am sorry about - that," Jin rushed out, looking more conflicted than I had seen him before.

Reaching out, I slid my hand into his and tugged him closer. "It's not really your fault that I go comatose when a memory decides to pop up, right? So, can we just move on? Eat? What do you have?"

Jin's eyes darted to the floor, his teeth sinking into the corner of his lip, before he gave a quick nod. "Right, food. Food I can do for you."

I gave his hand a squeeze and then went to the couch. My eyes tracked Jin across the short distance into the small kitchen and watched as he pulled out a bag of flour tortillas from a cabinet.

"Do you come out here often?" I questioned, folding my arms across the top of the couch and watched Jin take cheese and butter from the fridge. "How often do you stock your food?"

"I haven't been out here in a few months," he answered, glancing over at me before continuing in the kitchen. "Ms. Kes normally stops by once a week for me to make sure nothing is spoiled, and keep things fresh. Quesadillas, movies, and popcorn okay with you?"

“Sounds fine. What movie?”

“We’re going to have to put a limit on how many times you are allowed to use the word, ‘fine,’ in a day.” Jin turned from the stove, spatula pointed at me and eyes narrowed.

“Fi- okay.” I rolled my eyes when he nearly shut with how squinty his eyes got. “I’ll just pick out a movie then.”

I found the remote control beside the television while Jin was muttering to himself in the kitchen. Going with the classic, I clicked on the Netflix icon and stared at the screen for a moment. It was surprising to see that I had a profile beside his.

“I have my own?” I looked back towards Jin.

“Your own? Oh. Well, yes. I mean, we can share, too. Pick whatever you want.”

“What were we watching in that memory I had, when you came to check on me? There was a duke.”

“We’re watching Bridgerton?” He asked, sounding giddy.

“Why do you sound excited?” I questioned, glancing back at him before searching for the show.

“Because I haven’t seen season two. Don’t judge me. We all have our guilty pleasures.”

I held my hands out in a mock surrender and went back to the television, waiting for Jin to join me at the couch. I pulled my purse out of the coffee table and searched for my chapstick, accidentally pulling out the two keychain library cards.

Thankfully I didn’t have to wait long before he was bringing me a plate and soda, setting it on the smaller end table beside me while he went to grab his food. I paused midway to placing my purse on the coffee table when I noticed the cards had different numbers on them. I noticed that before and forgot to ask about it.

“Jin? Did I go to the library with you or Oliver?” I cautiously asked, finding the faded heart that had been drawn on the back of one of the cards.

He gave me a quizzical look as he sat down beside me on the couch. “That’s a weird question. Why?”

“I have two library cards, and they have different account numbers on them.” I held the cards out to him.

Jin’s hand had paused midway to putting food in his mouth. He quickly dropped the piece of quesadilla and took the cards from me, eyes roving over the cards. “Well, that’s an oversight. I’ll hold on to them for you. I can’t check which account is yours until Monday, when they open. Obviously the other is mine though.”

The cards were quickly shoved into his pant’s pocket and he cleared his throat. Jin kept his eyes on the television as he shifted on the couch and waved a hand at me. “Aren’t we supposed to be watching something?”

I stared at him for a moment more, trying to figure out why it felt like he was trying not to look at me, and then pressed the button to get the show going. “Are you okay?”

“Yup. Just anxious to finally get to the second season.” Jin picked his food up and gave me a tentative smile.

Not wanting to dwell on things that may or may not be strange, I picked up my plate and started to eat.

A few hours, and episodes, later it was easy to forget that things were complicated in my life. Jin had taken the empty plates back to the kitchen, and we still hadn’t gotten to the popcorn yet.

Which wasn’t a complaint since I wasn’t hungry and I was comfortably reclining against Jin. He’d kicked his feet up on the coffee table and had an arm around me, where I was curled into his side.

“I don’t think I’d do well in that time period,” I commented, a little over the fact that the women had to ask the men for permission for nearly anything and everything.

Jin’s chest rumbled under my head with his silent laugh, and he rubbed his hand along my back. “You’d be fine. Just play the part in public, so you don’t cause a riot, but you’d still have your freedom with me.”

I tilted my head back to look up at him. “So if I was stuck in another period of time, you would also be there? How do you figure that?”

“I did tell you that you couldn’t get rid of me now.” He tapped my nose with a finger and then raised both arms above his head in a stretch.

My fingers trailed along the hemline of his shirt when it rose above his pants, showing his stomach right below his belly button. I could see little goosebumps appear while my fingers lightly skimmed across his skin. It was fascinating to watch.

Jin’s hand came down around mine and he lifted it to his mouth, placing a kiss on my palm. “Would you rather I not be with you?”

“Probably would prefer you were there,” I admitted, curling my fingers around his. I sat up straighter, so I didn’t have to crink my neck to see his face.

“Well, that’s good to know since I would prefer to be stuck with you, too.” Jin’s thumb circled the back of my hand causing tingles to race through my system.

“I didn’t say I would be stuck with you. Only that I would prefer you were there.” I was getting trapped in his eyes, and felt like saying anything was a good way not to be sucked completely inside them.

Jin’s eyes darkened as he glanced down at my lips. “Oh, I wouldn’t be stuck with you. You would be stuck with me. There wouldn’t have been balls to find a suitor. Just one and I would have taken the dance card from you. And then you would have found yourself quickly becoming mine.”

As he spoke, he dropped my hand to his chest and trailed his hand up my arm to my neck. My breathing felt shallower when he rested his hand along my jaw, his thumb traced along my bottom lip.

There was a palpable tension, and my brain was having a hard time trying to clear the rising longing. It was like a tidal

wave crashing against a wall, slowly getting higher - until it would be looming over it.

I could feel his heart beating faster beneath my hand. It was the intensity in his gaze, the overwhelming feeling, and a strange desire to know what his lips felt like. There had been the odd memories, but I didn't actually remember kissing him.

And I desperately wanted him to kiss me. My body felt like it was humming with energy. There was a sense of urgency to touch him, to kiss him...to do something.

I needed something.

"I'm going to kiss you now," Jin rasped, his other hand clutching my waist.

Not that I needed the warning, because I needed him to get on with it. He didn't wait for a response, the hand at my jaw pushed further back into my hair, and then his mouth was on mine.

I was drowning and finally able to breathe all at once. The tidal wave was a tension looming over me and pulled me into its depths. I was lost to the desperate need to get closer to Jin. He was the only thing that was keeping me alive.

Jin was the oxygen in my lungs; and everywhere we touched, I could feel the rush of energy under my skin. I needed more. I wouldn't be whole until Jin gave me more.

My hand had curled into his shirt, tugging at it. I couldn't get it off of him. There were too many things in the way. Not in the way of the shirt, just everything was in the way.

"Let me get you to the bedroom," Jin breathed, trailing kissing from my mouth to my neck.

"No. Now. I need something now." Giving up on his shirt, my hand went to the waistband of his sweatpants instead.

I nearly started trembling from the overload of need coursing through me when Jin stood and dragged me up with him. He swatted my hand from his pants and pulled my shirt over my head.

“I’m trying very hard not to have you against the wall right now,” he said, as he grabbed my ass in both hands, pulling me back against his body.

But that sounded like the best idea. He could have thrown me to the floor and it would have been the best idea. That was what I needed. Not later, right that second.

I pushed his shirt up as far as I could, while Jin was taking my soul through my mouth. Nipping at his tongue, he finally leaned away enough to get his shirt off with a groan. His shirt had barely hit the floor before his hands unhooked my bra, slid it off my shoulders, and dropped it on top of his shirt.

I wrapped my arms around his shoulders to bring his lips back to mine. I needed him to stop moving. I needed him to move more. I needed more. I wouldn’t be able to work out the energy if I didn’t have more.

Jin bit at my lip as he ran his hands to the top of my pants. He released me long enough to squeeze my ass from inside my pants and then squatted down until he was pushing them completely to the ground for me to step out of.

My breath caught in my lungs as he deliberately trailed his fingers up my thighs while he slowly stood back up in front of me. He stepped towards me, his eyes a darker swirling honey, and I unconsciously took a step back, bumping into the wall. Jin stalked my steps until he was pressed against me, my arms going around his shoulders, and he leaned down to kiss my collarbone.

Leaning my head against the wall, I closed my eyes and silently begged for more. It wasn’t enough. I was burning alive, and he was the only thing that calmed the flames.

“More,” I forced out, a hand slipping to his waistband to get them off of him. But he only chuckled low in his throat and grabbed my hand. Jin pushed his pants over his hips and quickly kicked them away.

“More,” Jin’s lips brushed against mine as he spoke. His hands grabbed the backs of my thighs and he hoisted me up his body.

“Yes.” I locked my ankles around his waist as he adjusted himself beneath me. “More. I need more.”

“Of course, always,” he spoke against my ear and pressed me harder into the wall. His lips found mine again as he took his time pressing inside of me. Every little push further deeper felt like I was finally getting a drink to fight away the heat.

Jin’s fingers were digging into my thighs, and I didn’t care. Everything was starting to feel better. I just needed a little more. And when Jin stopped moving, settling completely flushed against me, I could feel the muscles constricting - trying to get more.

I tried to move against him, and Jin moved against my neck, keeping me still. Raking my fingers through his hair, I pulled his head back to stare at him and squeezed my thighs.

“More. Please. I need more,” I pleaded, as I felt the muscles along my walls constrict around him again. “I’m not going to survive if you don’t start moving.”

It was probably an exaggeration, but it felt true in the moment; but Jin’s eyes burned darker, and he finally started moving again. I clung to his shoulders as he panted something against my ear.

Either he wasn’t speaking in English, again, - his since his accent seemed thicker, that could have been the case - or I was too lost to listen properly. The buzzing energy was speeding beneath my skin, and the crashing wave was building to drown me out again. But there was also the other building sensation that was both making it harder to breathe and moans free-falling from my lips.

“I’ve got you,” Jin whispered between pants, adjusting his grip on my thighs and shifting a bit until he was moving in a way that caused my breathing to hiccup and I let my head fall back.

“Don’t stop,” I gasped, feeling my walls squeeze him inside again. If he stopped, there was a very real chance I would die right there.

“Never.” He leaned his head towards mine until his lips were trailing kisses along my jaw. “You’re mine.”

I had no more breath to speak. I could only give a jerky nod in agreement as I felt a rush from the energy, the wave swelling, and pleasure colliding together.

“Tell me you’re mine, love,” Jin rasped out, moving harder against me.

“Yes,” I agreed, my eyes closing.

Jin moved faster, and I felt myself unravel. My voice felt frozen inside me, my mouth opened, and I only managed a strangled moan when Jin bit down on my collarbone as he released himself.

We were both breathing heavily. Jin’s head pressed against my shoulder, his fingers still clutching my thighs. I didn’t think I could feel my legs, even my arms were falling down Jin’s arms.

We stayed like that for a few minutes, Jin breathing against me and me trying to catch my breath.

“Can you stand for a minute?” Jin lifted his head from my shoulder and gazed at me. “I’ll grab a towel. Or I can just start the shower for you.”

Squirming, I glanced down at our bodies. How we were still joined. And how that had escalated incredibly fast out of nowhere.

“I’m naked again,” I sighed, trying to figure out if it was easier to ask Jin to vacate my bubble or try to hop off.

“Next time you can keep some clothing on?” Jin gave me a small smile and then shivered as he slowly removed himself from my body.

“Are you okay? Don’t say you’re fine.” He grabbed my elbow once he lowered my legs, and I wobbled.

“Give me a second to get my legs working again.” I rubbed at my thighs and glanced up at Jin. He was biting at his lip and watching me intently. “I’m better than fine, Jin. I really don’t

know what came over me - but that made me feel better. I mean, more than just...”

I trailed off when I watched the smirk forming. “Shower sounds great.”

Chapter Fifty-Eight

The shower gave me too much time to think about the fact that I could no longer be confused about the relationship Jin and I had. As guilty as I felt, my body seemed to have partially calmed down. Some.

I couldn't focus on much aside from the slight soreness from different areas because of the fact that walls are not that soft. The longer I stayed in the shower, the stronger the longing grew. It was the same craving from the living room, and it was slowly trying to engulf me again.

When I stepped into the bedroom, I found Jin was at the edge of the bed, only in boxer briefs. He reached a shaky hand out to me, his eyes never leaving mine. Biting the inside of my cheek, I tried to remind myself that I was not controlled by sex, but I could already feel my body temperature rising.

"We're going to bed, right?" I hedged, slowly stepping closer. "Because you probably should go to work tomorrow or something."

Jin's lips curved upwards into a very devious smile. "Yes, I'm taking you to bed. I don't really give a shit about anything else right now."

My hand slipped into his, and he pulled me down to straddle his lap. Jin's lips pressed into mine, with one hand twisted in my hair, and the other at my hip. His tongue moved into my mouth and that stupid, desperate need crashed through me, again.

I rocked my hips against him and sucked at his tongue when he groaned against me. I needed more. The craving and insanity wouldn't abide until I could have Jin again.

"Just stand for a second, Elle," Jin chuckled when I started whining as he pushed me off his lap. "I need those adorable shorts off that ass. Then I'm going to need you to climb right back on."

Nodding through the haze, I nearly fell over in my rush to get my bottoms off. Jin grabbed my arm and pulled me back onto his lap. And I almost cried in relief that he was naked.

“I need you, love,” Jin whispered, hands at my hips and not letting me sink down onto him.

I needed him to stop talking and start using a very different part of his body. Leaning my head down, I nipped at his collarbone and trailed kisses to his ear. “Stop torturing me, Jin.”

With a low moan, Jin swiftly pulled me down onto him, and it was everything. I wrapped my arms around Jin’s shoulders with a deep sigh. That low buzzing under my skin wasn’t as strong as earlier, and neither was the feeling of being swept away with a tide. But they were still there.

Jin didn’t move under me, allowing me to set the pace I needed. His hands roamed along my body; one had a hand on my ass, keeping me pressed tightly against him, and the other had pushed my shirt up and was fondling my breast. I just needed more.

It was always more.

Except I wasn’t sure how long my knees and thighs would be able to keep this up. Not being able to walk because I pulled a muscle, or joint, felt like a fair trade to being able to finish. Or, it seemed like it did with the swirling emotions and energy coursing through me.

My breathing faltered, and Jin’s mouth wrapped around my breast. He slowly started rocking his hips against mine and I was so close to being done.

“I can’t keep -” I gripped his shoulder, trying not to slow. “More.”

“Do you need me, love?” Jin’s tongue rolled across my chest and up my neck. He grasped my hips in both hands and tugged at my lips with his teeth.

“Yes.” Gasping, I tried to devour his mouth because I was sure I would be able to breathe better if I had his air.

Jin said nothing, but I felt his lips twitch against mine before we were kissing again. I was going to have marks on my hips from his fingers digging into me, but it would be worth it. He started moving in tandem, pulling me down while he lifted up against me.

I could feel everything coming together, quenching the desperation, and my head fell to the side trying to draw in oxygen. Jin kissed down my cheek to the same spot on my collarbone he had bitten earlier.

Right as my thighs began trembling from the exertion, and right on the edge, Jin moved one hand around and between our bodies. He rested his hand on his pelvis, so his thumb became a landing spot that he pressed up against me.

It only took two more movements, and I unraveled. I couldn't move anymore. My fingernails were digging into his arm and neck. Jin wrapped his arms around my waist and flipped us onto the bed.

Locking his lips onto the bite mark, Jin started pushing faster into me. I was very content in my dying and couldn't wrap my legs around him, even if I wanted to. It only took a short moment before Jin sank his teeth into the bite mark and collapsed on top of me.

Getting my breathing closer to normal, I ran my fingers through his hair. Jin only turned his head, so he was staring at me. He brought his arms up and shifted his weight to them.

I ran my fingertips down his face and traced his lips. Jin closed his eyes and nipped his teeth at my fingers until he leaned his face further down and placed a soft kiss against my lips.

"You're not a vampire." I mumbled, running my fingers from his face to his shoulders.

"No." He gave a small, confused laugh. "Pretty sure they aren't real."

"Then why do you keep trying to draw blood from my neck?" I tapped the same spot on his neck and he looked down.

“What?” Jin lifted further and looked down. “Damn, you really have my teeth mark.”

His voice sounded confused and concerned, and when he looked back into my eyes, he looked almost nervous.

“I really didn’t mean to - I don’t know why I -” He groaned and rubbed a hand down his face. “How bad does it hurt?”

“It doesn’t?” My fingers cautiously touched the area. “Only when you do ‘Dracula’. I think the hormones, or adrenaline, are making it numb. You’re the doctor.”

Jin kissed my cheek, and then gently kissed his bite mark. “I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

“I’m naked again. And I just had a shower.” I threw my arms above my head when Jin tugged my shirt down.

“You kept your shirt on at least.”

“Thanks.” Yawning, I looked around for a clock.

“I’m going to get a towel for you and then we’re going to bed.”

Jin carefully raised the top half of his body and then glanced down. Following the motion, my cheeks started burning when I realized he was very much still inside of me.

“Now you blush?” Jin laughed, and then twitched inside me. He had really twitched; causing my eyes to widen and a small squeal to leap out. Jin laughed harder, finally moved away, and went to the bathroom.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

Sleep didn't require me to track it down, at least. After I cleaned myself as well as I could, I fell asleep with Jin curled molded to my back. The last thing I truly remembered was my breathing was slowly matching his rhythm.

I didn't get to sleep for more than a few hours until I rolled over, feeling out of sorts. It only took a moment to realize I had moved my leg across Jin's hip, and one of his hands was skimming along my thigh.

Jin turned towards me and placed his lips against mine. The electrical buzz was lightly moving beneath my skin again. He rocked against me when my hand traveled to the back of his neck.

He moved over me until I was flat on my back and tugged my head back until he was taking the air from my lungs with his mouth. Jin moved the one hand up my thigh and yanked at my underwear until he had them ripped away.

"Why are you making me crazy?" Jin groaned against my ear, nudging against me once he had his pants removed. "I need more."

I didn't have an answer, only that I agreed with him. "Yes. More."

His hand came around my neck and tilted my head to the side as he settled inside me again. A relieved sigh floated from my lips when he started moving, and was staring at me like he could see into my soul. Jin was pushing me into the mattress with the punishing rhythm, holding me hostage as I grasped at his arms to try to get closer to him.

My chest was heaving when he released my neck and captured my mouth again. His tongue swept into my mouth as he brought my knees up. My joints would protest when I remembered to care, but it was worth it at the moment.

“Release to me,” he spoke against my mouth, adding something I didn’t understand.

Except, I understood the feelings that were piling higher and ready to undo me. Undo me and rebond me. My eyes closed as I fought for air, riding out the sensations.

And then Jin was biting down on the same spot, making me jolt. The buzzing energy seemed to rush into the crashing energy, pulsing at the bite mark until they seemed to seep out through the bruise.

“We weren’t sex starved before, right?” I force out between the gasping.

Jin tilted his head until his lips were brushing against my jaw, and he placed a soft kiss. “I’d like to think that wouldn’t be the case.”

He slowly lowered my legs and rolled over onto the bed, breathing heavily. “I’m blaming you. I was sleeping, and you woke me for sex. Like I’m a buffet.”

I slapped my hand against his chest, turning to my side, and winced at the bruising that was probably forming down below. “Not exactly what happened.”

“Give me a second. This is the last towel I’m getting you. At least until tomorrow afternoon.” Jin lifted my hand, kissing along each finger, and then carefully rolled off the bed.

He just rolled straight onto the floor and groaned until he got to his feet and headed to the bathroom. I was already partially asleep when he returned with the towel.

My body felt like it was finally shutting down to reset. Like going to sleep knowing you’ll wake up in a better mood or condition. I didn’t know if it were the three sex sessions to finally knock my body out, but it did the trick.

I was so gone that it barely registered that Jin cleaned me off and tucked me back into bed. There was a vague notion of pants being put on, and the arms circling me again. But my body was blissfully content and exhausted, and I was fast asleep.

Chapter Sixty

I jolted at the sound of banging. It was far away, and I didn't want to wake up. Rolling over, I threw my arm around Jin's waist. He was comfortable.

"Sh. I'm going to be right back, sweetheart. Stay here," Jin's voice whispered in my ear, but it sounded from a distance also.

I felt Jin move off the bed and push a pillow against my side. The sleep was fading away, even though I could feel Jin telling me to sleep.

The sound of the bedroom door gently closing caught my attention and my eyelids fluttered open. I was glancing around the room, waiting for my eyes to adjust, and to figure out why I was awake when I heard a door slamming.

I jumped out of the bed and went to the bedroom door, only something gave me pause before fully opening it. The door wasn't fully shut, the latch hadn't caught, and so I could see out into the other room.

"Why the hell did you think you could hide her away?!" Oliver yelled, stepping into my small line of sight. I took a tentative step back, not wanting them to see me.

"Keep your damn voice down. Eleanor is sleeping, and you are not going to wake her up before the sun's even up. You have caused quite enough damage as it is."

Jin crossed his arms, standing near the table with his back to the bedroom.

"Is it clever, or idiotic, that you decided to hide her away in the same place you're keeping her things? Have you lost your mind?! Where is she sleeping?"

"Have I lost my mind?" Jin scoffed, taking a step closer to Oliver. "Tiffany, Oliver. Explain Tiffany to me. Explain why there's a divorce petition. You couldn't even try. I basically

wrapped her in a bow and set her in your lap, Oliver. I told you that I should have kept her.”

I took another small step back, and to the side, to get a better view and so they wouldn't hear my breathing. As much as I wanted to step into the other room, I didn't. I just knew not to go out there.

“I didn't know Tiffany would show up!” Oliver shoved his hands into his hair. “She was working with me, before the hospital and got called back. We already had another plan going, and then the hospital called. And we had that to deal with. Out of the two of us, I wouldn't have lost my head with Eleanor. Which is exactly what I've been trying to keep from doing! Unlike you. Where's she at, Jin?!”

“Watch your voice, Oliver! And, I'm pretty sure that you mean; show no emotion and push her away. You couldn't even pretend to be her husband! And I was there, picking up the pieces. I actually care about her. And I'm not going to lie to her anymore.”

“What's that supposed to mean, Jin?” Oliver's voice strained with tension.

“Well, for one - good job thoroughly checking everything in her purse.”

“You checked her purse, too.”

“One of us missed the fact that she had two library cards with different numbers.”

“Which is easily explained and not a viable reason to want to completely shit on this already shitty situation. So, what the hell do you mean by not lying to her anymore?”

“She asked me if you were the father, Oliver. She demanded that I tell her the truth. And so I did. I told her the truth, that you are not the father.”

“So, who's the father, Jin? Because I'm pretty positive that I am the husband here. That Eleanor is my wife.” Oliver took a step closer to Jin, and my hand clamped around my mouth to keep the noise down.

“She started connecting dots from your absences, disloyalty, genuine asshole attitude to her, and some slight memories. To the simple conclusion that I would be the father.”

“You motherfu-” I slammed my other hand over my mouth, further suffocating my gasp, as Oliver’s fist collided against Jin’s jaw. “You slept with my wife! Is she in your bed now?! You couldn’t even let me try to salvage this!?”

This wasn’t right. Oliver already knew. It only made sense if Oliver already knew about Jin. Oliver was annoyed with Jin, especially when it came to me. Jin made it seem like Oliver had known. It didn’t make sense.

And I couldn’t move. I wanted to go out there to separate them. There wasn’t a reason for them to fight. My feet felt glued to the ground, though. No amount of trying to move to the door, or wanting, made me actually move.

“That was your free shot, Oliver. One.” Jin held his jaw in one hand and shoved Oliver back with the other. “And you want to talk about her being your wife? Really? We both know that’s shit. And now you want to play husband? You didn’t even want her! Half the recent problems have been because you made her feel like shit! Did you ever get your head out of your ass long enough to touch her? Because she cried to me how you couldn’t even hug her. Have you even looked at her?!”

“Of course I didn’t want her!” Oliver threw his arms up and took a step back, working his jaw. “I would have ended up like you. Risking everything to tell her the truth? This was not supposed to turn out like this. And now, you’re also taking her to bed? She’s my wife!”

“It wasn’t the bed at first.” Jin taunted him, and I wanted to punch him.

Oliver glared at Jin and ignored the jab. “I didn’t even come for this! I came because I brought the final serums. The last blood samples I got from Eleanor worked better than the earlier samples. Then I added the sample from Rosalyn before she was moved, and it worked.”

My whole body froze. There was something wrong with my hearing. Rosalyn wasn't a tangible person to be able to speak about in that sense.

"Seriously?" Jin asked carefully, stepping towards Oliver and the box he was opening at the table. "Do you know where she was moved to?"

"That's not important right now." Oliver dismissed the question with a wave and took out two injector looking things. "It's about an eight-minute timeframe to rework the recessive DNA strands."

I could feel my face heating in rage, the tears building in the corners of my eyes. The anger was rushing through, and I didn't understand what they were saying. It didn't make any sense.

"So, what's the plan? Dose up, and then tell Eleanor - what? We need another plan, because I refuse to lose her." Jin pulled a chair from the table and sat down, resting his elbows on the table.

"I have a shot for Eleanor, too." Oliver quickly lifted another injector from the box and then replaced it. "I'm not sure how you think you're going to keep her, you knew the plan. The best we can do is help her get Rosalyn."

That was the last straw. I stepped towards the door, reaching for the handle, and wavered. I needed to step into the room and find out what was going on, but I couldn't.

I watched Oliver hand Jin one of the shots, and Jin leaned his head against the chair with a long exhale.

"I'm not taking this until you do. So, if it goes wrong, I know not to take it." Jin tapped at the cylinder, making it look like it sparkled.

"Fine." Oliver rolled his eyes, and rolled his shirtsleeve up. "It knocks you out at about five or six minutes and starts working through the system completely at eight minutes. If I'm still breathing in five minutes, just take the damn thing. Downtime was about half an hour. I had a couple of volunteers at the lab test it last night."

Jin gave a quick nod, and Oliver stuck himself with the needle. I watched as he emptied the sparkling purple drug into his arm, and then he had a staring contest with Jin.

I guess Jin decided to trust Oliver because he only waited about two or three minutes before he was injecting himself also. And that was all I needed. Too distracted, and hopefully they would be too drugged soon.

“Someone better explain to me why the hell Rosalyn exists.” I grit out, flinging the door open and stepping into the other room. “Why the hell you lied to me. And where she is.”

Oliver’s and Jin’s chair scraped against the floor as they both jumped to their feet. I was too angry to yell. I was too angry to decipher the emotions I was seeing. I was seething, at a boiling point.

“Shit.” Oliver choked, stepping around the table towards me.

“Eleanor, love, it’s not what you think.” Jin held his hands out like he was approaching a wild animal. “Just let us explain.”

“Do I have a daughter?” My voice was barely above a whisper as I glared at them both. “Do I have a daughter that’s alive?”

“Eleanor, now isn’t the best time for this,” Oliver started, glancing back at the wall clock and stumbling to the side.

“I think it’s the most perfect time. You’re both drugged, right? So I can leave and neither of you will be able to do shit about it.” I took a step back when Jin took a step towards me.

“You knew, this whole time where my daughter was!” I cried out, giving in to the anger. “Why would you lie about that?! You made me believe she didn’t exist!”

“Jin had to make you forget,” Oliver mumbled, leaning against a chair.

My head snapped towards Jin’s as his eyes went wide. “Shut up, Oliver.”

“What does that mean? Why would you do that?” I kept the space between us as Jin tried to move closer, and glanced back towards Oliver. “We’re married.”

Oliver’s laugh was humorless. “Even if we were married, apparently you’d screw Jin.”

“What do you mean, ‘if we were married’?” I breathed, dread flowing through my veins with anger.

“Shut up, Oliver!” Jin snapped, and Oliver only fell to the floor.

“I told you I didn’t like the plan. Too messy...too risky.” Oliver’s eyes found mine, a strange sadness within them. “You didn’t deserve this.”

“What do you mean? What is he talking about?” I looked towards Jin, who was starting to stumble. “Oliver’s my husband. And you’re...Jin.”

Jin fell against the arm of the couch and let out a growl. He ran a hand over his face and yanked at his hair, seeming to give up, before looking at me. “No. I’m sorry Eleanor. We’d never - we didn’t know you until you came to the hospital, and we were called to handle you.”

I took a step back, fear replacing the other emotions. This didn’t make sense. I couldn’t make it make sense.

Swallowing hard, I grasped at my hands to keep them from shaking. “And Rosalyn?”

“Faerie. Definitely somewhere in Faerie, now.” Oliver slurred, his eyelids fluttering. “They’re bastards.”

“Seriously, Oliver! Stop talking!” Jin wouldn’t even look at me.

“No.” I rasped, moving around the couch and heading to the front door. My body was moving on instinct. I would find her. I would. Because not finding her was not an option.

“Where are you going? Eleanor, stop!” Jin called after me as I stepped around Oliver. He only watched me pass, with his eyes half-closed.

“I’m getting away from you. From both of you. And I’m going to find my daughter.” I sounded like a robot. If I thought too hard, I would break. And if I broke, I couldn’t get Rosalyn.

“Jin - stop...her.” I looked back to see Oliver twitching against the floor.

I should have been concerned the drug would kill him. Should have been. But, a part of me was hoping it was causing him pain.

“Damn it!” I heard Jin blurt out before the sound of him falling to the floor reached my ears. My arm reached out and Jin called to me again.

“Eleanor! I told you I wouldn’t let you leave me.” There was a break in his voice that gave me pause, and I looked over my shoulder at him.

I had been falling in love with him. With them both. And what was I left with now?

“Everything was a lie,” I sniffled, the burning falling from my eyes. “I am leaving you. Both.”

Jin clutched at the couch, trying to raise up, his eyes focused on mine. The pain in his eyes only made me angrier - he had no right to be hurt. He was the one that had broken me. Lied to me.

Before I could turn back to the door, Jin’s eyes flashed a bright golden. I jerked back in surprise and stared at Jin.

“You are not leaving me, Eleanor.” Jin demanded, stretching an arm out to me. An arm that had flashing white streaks running down it and pouring from his fingertips.

Screaming, I jumped aside as one shot past me and hit the front door. Jin looked from me to his hand, then to the door. “Oh, hell.” He mumbled right before his head hit the floor and started twitching like Oliver.

I turned to the door to run out. The door that was covered in a wall of ice. I tried to kick at the door, and it only shimmered. I ran to the closest window - iced over. Cursing under my breath, I ran to each window to find them all sealed shut in ice.

“No. No. NO!” I started screaming. “Let me out!”

I was trapped in the house. Jin had trapped me in the house with them. Trapped in the house with men I thought I could trust. Men that I thought cared for me, even in a small amount. And, at least one of them definitely had magic.

There wasn't a way for me to leave. And I desperately needed to leave. There wasn't a way for me to find my daughter if I couldn't leave.

The daughter that turned out to be very much a real person.

Author's Note

Thank you for giving this story a chance. It was an interesting rollercoaster, and it isn't over. I can't apologize for the cliffhanger - they happen. But, hey, that's what the next book is for, right? To find out what the hell has been going on.

To get updates on the second book, join the [Readers Group For Rebekah Margaret Doss](#) on Facebook. Or, to just talk out your theories - not that I'll admit to any of them.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, as strange as it may be, to my daughter. Without her, I may not have had this crazy nightmare dream that I was able to tweak into this story. Even though she isn't reading the story. Actually, without her I wouldn't have had some of the added memories in this story. The book was dedicated to her at the beginning - just covering my bases.

To my mother; for believing in me, always being there, and being my first reader.

To my sister, for allowing me to 'borrow' some entertaining moments. For being my second reader, even though she prefers movies/television. And, because she wanted to be thanked in the book - I probably would have anyway.

Thank you to those readers that found the summary & cover interesting enough to request an Advanced Reader Copy! And to everyone that enjoyed this story - it's crazy to believe people gave it a shot, coming from an unknown author, and actually liked it.

And I've got to thank the Lord for giving me the imagination and creativity - and free time - to get this done. As crazy as that may sound.