



Strange Beginnings

When tragedy strikes Skye and Gerry's life again, their will to survive is tested one more time. Decisions have to be made and none of them are easy.



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Geraldine, Gerry, has been pacing her office all morning. Something is wrong, she knows it's wrong and she is waiting for the knock on the door or the call to give her an answer to her worries. Among the unknown worries she has been going over, the situation between herself and her boyfriend, friend, guy she is close with. She can't seem to put their relationship into words any more. That is a problem by itself. Jett and Gerry have known each other for over ten years. About two years ago, things changed and developed into an intimate relationship, or did they? Gerry has been pondering this for a couple of weeks now.

They have spent many hours together talking, having fun, laughing, doing fun activities and even being intimate a few times. However, lately they have also been talking to each other about other people and how they feel about them. He has someone he has met at the last conference he attended and he has been in touch with her ever since. She listens to all his concerns and has even given him advice about what to do and yet, they remain "together". Nothing feels the same any more. They are best friends, brother and sister almost, so the last time they were intimate, the whole thing felt wrong, at least for Gerry. Jett said nothing.

Jett is a funny kind of person. He always tells Gerry he only has enough emotion to give to one person at a time. Even as his best friend he sometimes will say to Gerry he is not sure how he can stay her friend and date anyone else. At least he has gotten past that part with this new girl in his life, before they started dating or doing whatever they are doing now, he was dating some others and reporting back to Gerry about his success and failures. Now he has begun to talk to her about another girl, one he really likes, and yet, they were intimate before he brought up the subject to Gerry. Something is very wrong with him, she thinks to herself. Or maybe her, maybe she is so lacking for attention that she accepts his, it is more a physical act than an emotional one and that bothers her the most, she never wanted to become that kind of person.

But this morning is not her normal worries about Jett, her worries started last night, however, when Gerry felt she had to call her sister, she did, but no one answered the phone. After two hours of this she wanted to run over there or call the police and Jett said not to worry, that maybe she was caught up in an art design and can't hear her phone. He also told her that she has to worry less about others, that worry consumes her. This isn't some stranger off the street, this is her sister, the only family she has. She knows something is wrong, she is still not answering her phone this morning. Something serious is going on and Gerry is worried sick but after Jett's reaction last night she can't call him back. She is still too angry at him for pushing her sister away as her being too worried over nothing, he should know better, of all the people she is close with, he should've known.

When she thinks of her sister, her heart beats faster, she thinks of Jett's reaction and she gets angry so she paces even faster. She is moving around the room so much she doesn't hear the knock or the hello being said to her. They try again, "Ms. Gerry!!" her secretary calls.

Finally, Gerry turns around, her heart racing, her head pounding and yet she sees two police officers behind her secretary and part of her is relieved, almost. "I'm sorry Willa. What do you need?" she asks walking towards her.

"These two police officers are here to speak to you," she pauses, "about Skye," she says softly and backs out of the room.

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“Is she alive?” Gerry asks first.

Officer Kennedy speaks first, “Yes, she is. But she is in bad shape. She has been beaten pretty badly, in her own apartment. We received the call last night about midnight. She has been rushed to Blessed Heart Emergency and only came out of the operating room about a couple hours ago, she wrote your name down, along with this picture, she is unable to speak. Her jaw has been wired shut. I’m sorry to say this all at once but we do need to ask you some questions, she did not seem to be up to questioning and she wrote you have all the answers.” The officer watches her intently to see how she reacts to the paper he handed her.

Gerry looks at the piece of paper then goes behind her desk and grabs her purse, “Quick, take me to her apartment before that bitch robs her blind. I’ll explain along the way. I’ll text a friend to get to the hospital. She needs supervision or they will finish the job.” Gerry is out the door before the officers get a chance to move. “Come on, you’re wasting time!!” she yells at them.

As soon as they get in the car, Gerry in the back, she immediately sends a voice message to Jett’s phone. “Damn you Jett, Skye is in the hospital, she has been beaten up pretty bad. I’m handling the apartment, you better get your ass to the hospital and bring your body guard friend with you too. I don’t want anyone else going in that room. NOT ANYONE!!” If her phone could grab him, it would.

Gerry starts rambling to the officers. “Ok, listen and listen good, turn on your recorder, I only have breath to say this once. Five years ago, my sister was attacked by an asshole named Peter Belvedere. I’m confident that his sister was part of all this from the beginning, however, we could not get the charges to stick, because all of his other victims refuse to press charges saying they weren’t raped that theirs was consensual because that is what the jackass made them all believe. Are you writing this down?! This is important! Call in the name if you don’t believe me,” she takes a deep breath.

“Put the siren on and drive faster please,” they oblige, “Skye is the one who got away. Our father taught us self-defense moves from the time we were old enough to wrestle with my brothers. The only way possible for them to have gotten to her now is if there was more than one of them involved. She may be on the shorter side but she can bring down a skyscraper if she needed to. Anyway, we moved closer to work for both of us, here in this city, instead of commuting so much from out by the coast. We figured he was only getting local girls, so maybe if we left, eventually he would finally be caught.”

Gerry sits back in the chair and gathers her thoughts, “O.K. this is the really important part. I hope you’re recording all of this, no way you can write as fast as I’m talking. You see, this bastard charms the women or girls into thinking that he is going to teach them how to please a man, and shows them how to conduct oral sex so that their man is immensely pleased. Then he proceeds to rape them, all the while, telling them they were the ones who started everything by pleasing him so much he wants to give pleasure back. Here is the trick though. He will only do this with a virgin. He makes it very clear to them how important his teaching job to their adult well-being.” Gerry’s heart is beating so fast she is pretty sure it will blow through her chest cavity any minute now.

Officer Kennedy looks back at her, “Your sister told you all of this from the time of her attack?”

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“Yes, in great detail. We also discussed which defense move she used as well and which one would have been more useful, should something ever happen again. Pardon me for saying this sir, but I told her if that ever happened again, and she was forced to do oral sex on a man, well, she should bite down like a German Shepard on fresh steak and don’t let go. I have a feeling that is what she did this time. You said there was a lot of blood. I’m going to venture to guess, it wasn’t all hers and that there is one very wounded man in the upstairs apartment right now,” she smirks at the thought.

“How do you know where he lives?” The other officer asks in a condescending tone.

“Oh, that’s easy. I figured out about five or six months ago, that the woman who lives upstairs looked too familiar, I couldn’t place her face for the longest time. Then, all of a sudden, recognition hit me. By then it was too late. Skye, the trusting one in the family, had already befriended her to the point that she would have her over any time the woman came knocking. When I realized who this woman was Skye didn’t want to believe me. Then I reminded her about the birthmark Peter had, that she told me about, and the next time she saw the sister, she saw this mark clearly on her neck as well. Once she figured out who we were, I think she put her plan in motion,” Gerry says.

“You’re so confident this is the same guy?” Officer Kennedy asks.

“Tell you what,” Gerry starts, “when we get there if the apartment is clear, I might be five percent wrong, but if she is there, and she will be, you had better call a second car to investigate her apartment, I can guarantee he is up there licking his wounds, so to speak, because she was an army medic before, and I’m sure she took care of him. Because if they went to a hospital, it would have been on record and that is a wound that would be obvious.”

“Why would she be in your sister’s apartment?” Officer Kennedy asks

“Skye is very trusting of people but not institutions. So, she leaves only enough money in the bank to pay her bills automatically. The rest of her money is used to buy diamonds and other gems, she has them all over the house, hiding in plain sight. Some in pieces of fine art as well, she believes they are good investments. She has a myriad of cute little figurines that are all holding them. My guess is sister bitch knows about them and is coming to collect. I’d bet my house on her being there, no I’ll bet my life on it and yours too.” Gerry’s voice is getting low now. She doesn’t want to be right, but then again, she does.

She gets quiet now and waits till they get to the apartment. One of the officers has called in her predictions. Before they go in though, she hears Officer Kennedy calling for a second squad car and even a back up to be posted in the back of the building in case someone wants to escape. Gerry takes a deep breath, she doesn’t do blood well, and if there is a lot on the floor, she could possibly not do well with this.

“Another car will be here in a minute, they happen to be around the corner, do you want to wait for them?” he asks her softly.

Gerry looks up, her fear starting to show now. “One minute won’t matter I suppose,” but then she gets out of the car and starts walking inside. The officers follow her up to the door, but when she finds the door unlocked, they push her to the side. She immediately puts on her phone’s camera on record video and follows them in. First, she sees the bloody mess on the floor, then they hear

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rattling in the bedroom. The officers get there first and yell, “Freeze, police! Hold your hands up above your head and leave them there. Now turn around slowly,” the officer says.

Gerry could not believe her eyes, there she is, in person, facing the sickest form of sick. “She has bulges in her pockets, I’ll bet they are Skye’s gems, she has one she just dropped down her shirt sleeve too, caught it on camera, make her shake her sleeve out.” Gerry says smugly. Now she has her. If nothing else, they caught her red-handed in a robbery, and one of great value too, doesn’t that make the robbery worse? She thinks to herself. That will put her away at least a few years. Gerry hopes, and she knows she will not survive being on the inside, she is not so smug around actual strong people.

Both officers get to her before she can move, they guide her arms down one at a time and shake them out, five small diamonds fall out. Once cuffed, they frisk her and find bumps all over her. Officer Kennedy tells Gerry, “Keep the camera on me please, I want it known exactly what I am doing, I am only retrieving what is believed as stolen goods from the pockets of this female. My hand going into her pocket and now out of the front pocket to reveal a fistful of gems,” he shows his hand directly to the camera now. “Been here a while then, have you?”

They continue to search her. Two more officers come in, thankfully, one of them is female. They allow her to continue the physical search on the accused, until they feel all items are recovered.

The other two officers head upstairs to check the apartment for any other evidence related to this crime and for any other people. “Do you know how many your sister has?” Officer Kennedy asks. “I would only know by what number might be missing. You see, this woman, and I use that term loosely, thinks she could have stolen them and then sold them, but she can’t because each one has a tiny number on it that can only be seen when using one of those jewel glasses, as soon as even the lowliest of pawn shop owners would see the number, he would know the gem is stolen goods and would not buy them, she would be sitting on all of this. The number gets erased professionally if it’s going to be put in jewelry. Lowly pawn shops don’t have that kind of sophisticated equipment, costs too much. My sister has a special guy who does this for her. Last I knew, she had about fifty diamonds of various sizes, and close to that in other precious stones. I’m sure she hasn’t had the time in here to find them all yet, I can see that many of the figurines have not been moved yet. But she certainly had a good start. Unless some are already upstairs and she has only come back for these,” Gerry stares at this woman.

Over the officer’s walkie talkie Gerry hears, “We had to call for a bus, found one male in the shower, collapsed and bleeding. Looks like he tried to take off his own bandages to shower only to start bleeding again. You don’t want to know where the blood is coming from. We also found video linked to the apartment you’re in. If you go back to the living room, I’m sure we could see you. And one more thing, there are many videos here we found. One is sicker than the next. This is a tag team effort Kennedy, the victim’s sister is right. No more getting off on lack of evidence or witnesses.” Click, the voice ends. “No better witness than their own videos,” he finishes off.

The woman standing before Gerry is looking like a confident woman, Gerry looks at her, “Do you get off on seeing your brother with other woman or on seeing the women? My guess is your brother, you sick, twisted witch,” Gerry says through gritted teeth.

“You can’t prove anything little Gerry. You couldn’t do it last time and you can’t now,” she smirks.

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“Last time? What on earth could you mean?” Gerry plays innocent.

“Don’t be stupid, you knew your stupid sister is the one that got away from completing the task last time, she needed to learn her lesson this time. It was fun to help Peter out. No more self-defense moves if your hands are tied behind your back now are there?” she remarks, still showing confidence and also completely ignorant to the fact that there are police officers standing next to her as well as Gerry’s phone recording every word.

“Allow me,” Officer Kennedy says to Gerry. He begins to read the sister her Miranda rights about everything you say can and will be held against her in the court of law. Since Gerry caught this all on video, what she said is almost as good as a confession. Especially since she offered the information without being asked about last night and the last attack on Skye. Officer Kennedy looks at Gerry as the grin on her face grows watching this woman turn pale at the thought of what she just did; “Everyone thinks they are smarter than the law,” he shakes his head from side to side. The ambulance siren is outside, footsteps are heard running upstairs. The officers are leading their accused robber to the doorway as the emergency workers run past them. One of the officers from upstairs comes down looking rather pale, he turns to his female partner and says, “Man, whatever did that to him, I don’t want to know. He won’t be able to be with his wife for quite some time,” he says.

“No wife, sister.” The female officer says, pointing with her eyes to the one in handcuffs by the victim’s door. “He is a serial rapist. Those videos aren’t consenting adults you found,” she says dryly.

“Holy crap! Then well, maybe he got what he deserved. Byran is going in the bus with the, well I’d say victim, but he’s not. Come to think of it, I’d say man, but he is not much of that any more right now either,” the second officer smirks.

Officer Kennedy, being the senior of the bunch, tries to keep his face straight. “Enough, you two, take this one to the squad car, put her in a solitary cell when you get back, she doesn’t deserve to be with other humans. Her rights have already been read. I’ll bring Ms. Gerry here to see the real victim.” He says in his most authoritative way. The officers snap back to being professional instantly. The stretcher is coming off the elevator. The accused woman begins to cry out as she sees her brother with a blood stained sheet over him, and IV has been started and he is barely moving. She bursts out crying for him and her knees buckle. She turns to Gerry and with fire in her eyes, she screams, “Your sister will pay for what she has done. She maimed him!!” She spits down on Gerry’s shoes.

Gerry steps out of her shoes and simply says, “I wonder how the other women in prison will like it after being told that you were the one who brought women for your brother to rape? And that you enjoyed watching. Somehow word always get in there on what people have done to get themselves put there. Hmmm?” Gerry starts walking past everyone towards the door.

The two officers standing on either side of the sister, pull the woman up. “Let’s get you down to the squad room.” They drag her as she refuses to walk on her own. “Like taking out the trash boys,” one says to the other.

Gerry is outside by the car she came in waiting for Officer Kennedy, he follows the others outside. “Do you need to get shoes at home first?” he asks.

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“No, the hospital is my next stop please.” All of Gerry’s energy, all of her bravado has suddenly disappeared. She practically falls into the squad car’s back seat, as the door opens for her.

No words are spoken all the way to the hospital, all the way up the stairs, all the way to the nurse’s station in front of Skye’s room. Finally, Officer Kennedy says, “This has been a living hell for you this morning, I know, and I hate to ask this but.....”

Before he can finish his sentence, Gerry hands him her phone. “Keep it,” she says quietly and turns around to see the door to the room. She was hoping to see Jett standing there but instead she sees someone even better. His good friend the bodyguard. The one she has been fantasizing about for months now. Which Jett doesn’t know about, she hasn’t been willing to share this bit of information with him, yet.

So much brawn and so much brains, the man has it all. He is the one she has been speaking to Jett about, well, not by name, while he has been going on about the woman from the conference. Jett is her best friend/brother in the whole world. She could not live without him in her life. But this man, this is the man she *needs* in her life.

Officer Kennedy walks over behind Gerry, he puts his hand out to shake the guard’s hand but before the guard’s hand even goes up a very baritone voice as smooth as silken chocolate says, “Before you ask, yes I do have a license to carry, and no, you may not go in. Skye talks through me or through Gerry, no cops.”

Officer Kennedy is still holding out his hand. Owen finally puts out his hand. As they shake, Officer Kennedy says, “I’m Officer Kennedy. Anyone gives you a hard time, you tell them to call me. Take care of this little lady please, she has been through hell this morning and I’d hate to find out you or anyone else is the cause of anything further.” He is staring Owen in the eye and Owen is staring right back. It’s a test of wills and/or testosterone, Gerry is not sure.

The officer stands back first, he looks at Gerry, “I will only call if we need you. I’m hoping with everything we have,” he holds up her phone while also referring to the video tapes they found, “we won’t ever need you or your sister. But I’ll keep you posted, if that’s ok” He watches as her eyes go from fear to relief. She has no words left, she shakes her head.

Officer Kennedy walks back to the nurses’ station, “Anyone gives them a hard time Kerry, you call me. Let it be known I’m on this job. That goes for next shift and the next, until this patient is safely at home. Is this clear?” he says with authority loud enough for everyone to hear.

“Yes sir. We’ve done this before Kennedy we know the drill,” she says.

“Not like this. This time, it’s a hundred percent signatures and everything else, no exceptions, from doctors to cleaning crew, am I clear?” he says even stronger.

Kerry looks over at Owen. “I’ll give him the list now.” She says and Officer Kennedy watches as the list is made and printed, put on a clipboard and brought over to Owen. “These are the nurses and doctors assigned to this patient this shift. This sheet has a place for signature, time in and time out of the room and reason for visit. Any questions, you tell them to find me. Or Officer Kennedy. We have your back, you have my word,” she holds out her hand. Owen shakes it and gives a nod towards the officer, who salutes him, turns and leaves with his head hung low.

“Miss,” Owen calls to the nurse, he points to the officer.



Kerry comes over to him and whispers in his ear, “His sister was a victim of a brutal rape years ago, by someone she knew, she almost didn’t make the first night in the hospital, he has no tolerance for the scum who do this, but all the love in the world for the victims, you’d be surprised how many people know someone who has been raped. It’s a quiet society, a sisterhood no one wants to be a part of. Kennedy will go to any length he legally can to make sure the perpetrators don’t make their way out of jail. His sister still has many physical wounds, believe me, when I say, this sickens him. We call him superman around here. But you heard nothing from me.” She walks away as if the conversation between them was not out of the ordinary.

Owen turns to the door and sees Gerry is still standing there looking in, she hasn’t moved a muscle. His heart is aching right now and he wants to break character, so to speak, and hold her, but he is on duty, and that can’t happen right now. Or ever, as long as she is with Jett, his best friend since forever.

“Ger?” he asks.

Gerry looks over at Owen, “The same guy, Skye was ambushed by the sister and him together, tied her hands behind her back this time so she did what we talked about.... she....she,” her voice barely audible.

Owen feels himself cross his legs, “She held on like a bulldog grabbing for a bone. Good job Skye,” he smiles at Gerry. Owen and Jett are the only ones who know about what the sisters planned. Gerry looks over at him, she tries to smile, “they say her jaw is wired shut. He must have had to use force to get her off,” her hands go to her mouth.

Owen puts a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Gerry, she is a fighter if anyone is. She wants to see you. Jett was here for a few minutes, feeling guilty as hell but he had to leave. He left this letter for you but he said don’t read this until you have some quiet time. Go on, she won’t bite,” he pushes her gently in. Gerry smiles back at him in response to his attempt at a joke.

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For three hours Gerry has watched her sister sleep, no one coming in the room because Owen won’t let them. He tells everyone the sisters need time alone and if no machine is beeping, there is no need for a nurse or doctor right now. They listen to him easily enough. Gerry is not sure why, maybe it has to do with what the nurse whispered to Owen, or the officer. Still she watches her sister. She looks peaceful enough, everything considered.

Gerry walks to the window and opens the letter, “no time like the present” she says to no one.

*This is the worst possible timing in the world, but then again, it’s the best isn’t it? I think we both have come to the same conclusion lately, haven’t we? I can’t stop thinking about Belle and your crush on this mystery guy has only become bigger over the past few months.*

*I know I’ve always said I can only have one woman in my life at a time, but I think I’ve only been too scared to venture away from what is so familiar.....you. This is not goodbye Geraldine, you know I could never do that.*

*You and I are meant to be family, sure we have siblings, but not like each other. If I ever get married you are my best man for sure, well, that is if Owen lets me pick you over him. ☺*

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*Our moments together were always good, all of them. Let’s release each other from the secondary part of our relationship and remain the best of the best to each other. I’m sure I will always need a confidant, you’ve helped me grow so much over the years.*

*I apologize for not recognizing your real fear last night. I sat with Skye this morning and we talked. Well, she wrote, I listened. She told me that I should not feel bad, that she did what she was supposed to do. It took me a moment to realize what that was, then I crossed my legs and almost died. She tried to laugh but it’s too hard, don’t make her do that, that hurts her too much.*

*She also said don’t call your brothers but don’t listen to her on that one. She needs them now, even if she doesn’t want to admit that to you. But you don’t have to call your sister in law – she is a piece of work that one. Love your family, always will. Love you, deep, deep down.*

*I had to run because my boss wants me out on the west coast by dinner time – big client to woo over, and I have to have a contract signed by Tuesday. That gives me only three business days. Belle lives out there and we’re going to make a go of us for those few days together at her place and see what happens.*

*Call me if there is any emergency, I swear I’ll be on the next plane for you and/or Skye or for you, oh I already wrote that. I love you my Ger. Wish me luck, I’ll be pulling your strength to make it through and win this client over.*

*All my love*

*Jett*

Gerry rips up the note and smiles to herself. Part of her is so excited that Jett is taking the initiative with this girl right now that she feels pride and joy for him. She throws away the letter pieces. Leave it up to Jett to put it in writing. Anything serious comes in writing. “I’ll bet he proposes in a note too,” she says out loud again.

“Hmmm?” Skye asks.

“Oh, Skye! You’re up!” Gerry runs to her sister. She leans down and hugs her and receives a very tight hug back. Gerry whispers in her ear, “we got him, both of them, actually.” Skye nods her head into her sister’s neck. They stay this way for a long while. A few tears fall but mostly love is shared.

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Three days of being in the hospital all day is making Gerry pretty crabby, but on the other hand, she has never been more productive. She makes all her calls from the quiet room, never has to bother with interruptions of any kind and Owen has been there night and day like a watchman. The staff here already know not to come in without knocking or without permission. Owen takes a break once or twice a day to sleep in the cot in Skye’s room but as soon as he hears a knock he is up like a soldier on duty.

Gerry has a hard time working when Owen sleeps, she has never spent this much time with him in close proximity and her nerves are getting to her. He hasn’t spoken with her much because he is always outside the room, on duty, or inside sleeping. She is not sure he eats but the food she brings disappears so he must be somehow, although she has never actually seen him put food in his mouth.

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A sudden knock at the door breaks her concentration. If there is a knock it means Owen is away from his chair. Gerry gets up to answer the door, she opens it slowly. Officer Kennedy is standing there out of uniform but she recognizes him. “May I come in?” he asks.

Gerry steps aside and opens the door more for him to pass her. He walks straight over to Skye, who happens to be up. “Good afternoon, I’m Officer Kennedy, a lot of my colleagues call me O.K. for short,” he smiles.

Skye looks over at him and her eyes become quite big. Gerry runs to her other side and holds her hand. Skye uses sign language to speak with Gerry. Something they both learned together one summer they worked with some disabled kids. “Thank you,” O.K. says.

Skye and Gerry look at each other and then back at him. “Learned a little sign myself when I was younger, I keep my skills up, comes in handy sometimes on the job. I get my big green eyes from my mother by the way,” he smiles. The girls laugh, well Skye tries to then grabs her jaw.

“Oh, sorry, that was insensitive of me. I’ll try not to make you laugh again.” O.K. says when he sees the pain in Skye’s eyes.

She waves her hand at him as if to say, ‘no, it’s okay’. Skye points to her pad and Gerry hands it to her. “I’m O.K., only sometimes it hurts, really.”

“If it’s easier to sign, we can do that instead of writing things down,” O.K. mentions to her.

“Why, is my handwriting so bad?” Skye writes

This time Officer Kennedy smiles. “I know it’s not your last name but I only know you as Ms. Gerry, how are things going for you two?” he asks kindly.

“Gerry is fine. Our last name is Traver by the way. We’ve been managing. Owen has been wonderful at his job.” Before she can say anything else he comes in quickly.

“The nurses said we have a visitor, did he sign.” he stops his voice, “Oh, sorry officer I didn’t realize who was here.” Owen puts his hand out to him first this time. Officer Kennedy steps over to shake his hand.

“The nurses said since you’ve been here the whole area has been quiet. Must be nice having the whole department listening to you,” the officer smiles.

“I simply asked the nurses not to be telling jokes outside a patient’s room because they might think you are laughing at them. Now, they only tell jokes at the nurses’ station, most of them quite bad I might add. I haven’t even smirked once. I think they feel I’m an emotionless fool,” he says.

“On the contrary, they admire your ability to be on duty around the clock Owen, you’re a machine,” Gerry interjects.

“Emotionless, like I said,” he closes the door behind him.

Gerry looks around, “I thought it was a compliment. I’ll be right back, you two talk.” Gerry opens the door slowly and pulls over a chair to sit next to Owen. “What was that about? I thought I was paying you a compliment.” She puts her hand over his on his chair, “really, I did.” She tilts her head to face his but his glare is unwavering from the wall in front of him. Sitting stiff as a soldier on duty as a watchman. The military sure trained him well.

“The doctor said Skye is actually really out of danger and may be able to go home as early as tomorrow. They are doing one more brain scan today to make sure nothing funky has shown up since she got here. I’m hoping you will come with us. We’re going to go to my house, my brothers



are coming in tomorrow; they both couldn’t get away until then. Owen, talk to me, the silence is killing me,” she pleads

“Do you need a guard at your house Ger? Why else would you need me? I do have a job you know,” his voice sounding somewhere between about to crack and angry.

“I want *you* there Owen. *You* give *me* strength. Skye has agreed to move in with me also, and my brothers are going to be moving her stuff in by the weekend. Jeremy, the oldest as you know, he is bringing a guy he knows to be a big time lawyer and is going to review Skye’s case while he is here. The new one and the old one. There is going to be a lot of jumbling around, and I’m going to need a sounding board, I choose *you* for that job but if you don’t want to, ..”she lets her voice drag on. She moves the chair back and heads back into the room.

Skye and Officer Kennedy are laughing and having a good time. “Ah, Gerry. Skye tells me she is moving in with you. Great idea if you ask me. She also tells me you have a brother coming in to take on the case. Under so much pain meds, Mr. Peter dumbass spilled the beans and confessed to all of what he had done to Skye from his hospital bed. I think he was trying to claim a victim status. I’m also sure their lawyer will try and say it was a medicinally induced confession, but after seeing the list of his injuries, he has no fight left in him. Besides, the video tapes are pretty damning. That sister of his is quite a piece of work. She not only watched during the events but afterwards she enhanced the videos to make some parts even clearer.” He looks at both women to see if he overstepped with his remarks.

Gerry is looking stunned at the moment. Skye takes her pad of paper, “How much damage did I do?” her face looking nervous.

“He isn’t going to die from the wounds, although he may die of embarrassment if he ever has to explain why he has a scar that looks like he had many, many stitches. I’m no doctor, but I’m not sure he will be reproducing any time soon. Nor do I believe he will have a simple time with any bodily function in that area hereafter. Especially where he is going. Prosecuting attorney is looking for maximum sentence in a maximum-security facility. As for the sister? For being the one who planned them, then assisted in this last one, being caught stealing, I think she will get the book thrown at her as well. I believe she can get up to twenty-five years, but I’m not sure myself. I don’t pay much attention to that side of things,” his voice sounding very professional now.

Skye frantically writes on her pad, “And how much time will I get? For maiming someone?” she asks with a tear running down her cheek.

“0!! Tell her Officer! 0 Right!!” Gerry’s voice is quite agitated now and a bit loud, Owen rushes in “What’s going on in here? Why are you upsetting them?” he lunges forward to grab the pad to see what Skye has asked.

“Why is she serving any time at all?” His voice booming now.

Officer Kennedy holds up both hands to show surrender, “Whoa, slow down everyone. No one said you’re being charged with anything. This is a clear case of self-defense, you knew what was coming and you did all you could to prevent more damage to yourself. The whole precinct is talking about this. In fact, some of the women police officers have decided to start teaching self-defense to high school girls and at the local colleges for girls, well women actually, who want to learn, for free, at the precinct. They decided that it will hopefully prevent date rapes as well. This

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case has everyone buzzing, some even think you deserve a medal. So, no, no time is being served by anyone here. I can promise that much. Skye, I came because I wanted to check on you personally, that’s why I’m not in uniform. This is a personal visit. Is that okay with you?” he asks looking around the room.

Owen sinks back down, Gerry watches as he visibly looks four inches shorter as he walks out of the room. She chases after him again, catching him before he leaves the room and pulls him to the other side of the room, she pulls the curtain behind her so they have a small amount of privacy. “What’s doing? This doesn’t seem to be like you Owen,” she whispers?

Owen looks at Gerry, “Sorry, I overreacted is all. I shouldn’t have been so overbearing over there. Kennedy must think I’m a fool that is over protective and under qualified. I should leave. Maybe you don’t need my protection any more here. Now that the guy will be in jail,” he says and tries to move around Gerry.

She grabs him one hand on each of his arms. “Owen, I said this before and I’ll say this to you again, I need you, even if Skye doesn’t. Sit down here and gather your thoughts. Kennedy is here right now and I think he wants to stay a while. Take a nap,” she pushes him over to the empty bed. Owen watches her leave around the curtain. He hangs his head down and decides to rest on the bed like Gerry said, maybe it’s all this sleeplessness that is getting to him, or maybe the proximity of Gerry and not being able to hold her all these days is killing him. Her words about needing him are floating in his head as he drifts off to sleep.

~ ~ ~

Owen and Officer Kennedy are helping Skye and Gerry’s brothers move all of Skye’s belongings into Gerry’s house. Who knew she had so much in a small apartment? Skye was given the job of checking and identifying all of her gems to make sure nothing was missing. That is the only good part, nothing is.

Gerry bought this house on a foreclosure, it’s much more house than one person needs. She is happy to have Skye home and the two of them are rearranging every room to accommodate all of Skye’s belongings and all of Gerry’s as well as all of the items their brothers decided they needed, and bought, when they got here. Her brothers bought a display case for all of Skye’s figurines, one that has a lock on the door and even an alarm if someone decides to break the glass. In a whirlwind transformation, some rooms are looking rather eclectic. Gerry is in a neighborhood of the city that has homes and not apartments. She is on the outskirts of the city, far enough away yet close enough for a great commute.

All day, doors are slamming, people are yelling to and at each other, but all in all, tempers are being kept down and each person is playing their part. Friend or family, everyone feels that they belong to this crazy mix of people. Even their lawyer is helping, although he is helping the girls differently than the other guys, but no one is caring. He has been holed up in on Gerry’s bedroom because it’s the only one with no transformation activity.

Skye and Gerry have been in the kitchen for the past hour and a half making dinner for all the hungry men in their life right now. They left notes stuck to places in each room as to what belongs

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where. Hoping that the men folk can read and follow directions. If not, they know what they will be doing again tomorrow, the girls are pretty sure they are reading the notes.

Jeremy comes in the kitchen, “My friend finished going over your case Skye with the prosecuting attorney, either on video chat or on the phone, he is a young lawyer but he is a tiger, that is for sure. These two wackos won’t get another day outside of their cell for many years to come, possibly their lifetime. The judge on the case is someone I know from when I used to live around here; his reputation is that of a no-nonsense guy and has little tolerance for any kind of abuse, and if it’s done to an unsuspecting woman? Well, I almost pity your abuser, almost.” He smirks. Jeremy wanted to bring the news to her personally instead of his friend. It’s his job as the oldest to be taking charge now.

Skye smiles and laughs a little. Laughing has become easier, she has figured out a way to laugh because she has to. Everyone around her is always making her laugh, especially her new friend, Officer Kennedy. He spends all of his off-duty hours with her and she is loving the attention. She didn’t think she would, but one of her brothers told her that maybe it’s the right medicine. To be thought of as the queen she deserves to be.

The girls have two brothers older than them and two younger, they are a sandwich, their father used to call them the substance of the sandwich in order to put their brother’s in their place. Skye misses her parents, they were taken from them too soon. First their mom, when Skye was only twenty-one and then their father, a year after her first attack. Better he never saw this, she thinks to herself.

Without realizing, Skye has stopped in her path and she has tears falling from her eyes uncontrollably. Ironically, Jeremy sees her first, he walks over and picks her up like a small child, he whistles to someone she can’t see and he proceeds to carry her upstairs to her room. Once there, he puts her down slowly on her bed, sits with her for a moment and kisses the top of her head. “You are my hero little sweet pea. Small and mighty, Momma always said so. You remember?” she shakes her head into his chest, she can’t stop crying now. “But even the mighty fall occasionally, it’s okay to let go of some of that emotion you’ve held in for so many years. I know I’m not always the one to be the caregiver, in fact I usually run to get Benjamin, don’t I? Not today, today you need your big, big brother, today you need someone to say how special you really are, you need someone to tell you that through all of this, you will shine. I love you sweet pea. I really do. I haven’t said those words to you in years, I know, but I do,” he holds on to her even harder than she is holding to him. The two of them cry together holding on so tight that they almost meld into each other.

The knock at the door helps them to release the hold on each other. “Mind if I cut in?” Kennedy asks. Jeremy releases his sister and stands up, kisses his sister on the forehead again and takes a deep breath before walking out.

Officer Kennedy watches as it registers in Skye’s eyes who is at the door. Once she takes him in, she starts to cry again and he is right by her side. He holds her in both of his arms and she buries her head into his chest and starts all over again. This is the first time she has had a chance to let her emotions take over. He quietly holds her and rubs her head gently. He kisses the top of her

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head and she crawls into his lap and again buries her head into his neck this time and let’s herself run dry. His arms are around her back, he says nothing. He waits.

Jeremy comes down the stairs and everyone watches him, the lawyer friend runs to his side for comfort, they’ve been friends since college, and closer than that for the past year. Gerry watches from the kitchen door. All the brothers are in a huddle now. It’s hard for Jeremy to see Skye hurt, she has always been his favorite toy, that’s what he has always said, even though she is almost twenty-six now. Seeing her brothers give each other support is a great thing. Her youngest brother told Gerry he is missing a college exam right now but called his professor and explained the situation, he said to come back when he is ready and he will give a new exam to him then.

They came through in the end, her brothers. Gerry knew they would, each one more devastated than the next, when they heard the news. Jeremy was the first she called and it was also the longest call. He needed to know all the details from beginning to end. She told him most of them, enough that he knows what happened without the finer details that Kennedy or Owen know.

Gerry clears her throat, “Dinner will be ready in five minutes, any of you nuts know how to set a table anymore?” she tries to joke. They peel off each other one by one, two of them head over to the kitchen and start pulling out dishes, silverware any everything else necessary.

“I’ll go get Skye,” Owen says softly. He takes the steps two at a time because it’s easy for him to do it that way having long legs, he doesn’t like walking up Gerry’s steps they are short in height as well as depth so two at a time makes it more bearable.

He knocks at the doorframe, there is silence in the room; he can see Kennedy holding Skye.

“Dinner in five my love, you promised me a milkshake with your machine if I hook it up properly,” he tries to lighten the mood. “Therefore, you know that was the first thing I did.” Skye looks up, her tear streaked cheeks about do him in. “I only have chocolate ice cream,” she tries to smile. She knows Owen loves vanilla.

“I’ll manage,” he smiles. “Staying for dinner Kennedy? You sure worked hard enough today,” Owen smiles.

“Sure, give us a minute, okay?” he says slowly to Owen. Owen nods and walks away.

“I’ve never become involved with someone in this way. I’ve never wanted to. I’ve seen many women in my line of work, but you, my friend, are special in more ways than I can count. I’m sorry for being blunt, but that’s my nature, any chance we can make a go of there being an us?” Kennedy looks into Skye’s eyes, he only sees how blue they are and not how swollen they are. Sheer beauty to him.

Skye considers Kennedy’s words. She looks into his eyes, he wants her. There is a man in the room with her who wants her for herself, he has certainly seen her at her worst ever and now he asks this question? She is part scared and part excited, “We certainly can try.” She says still talking through her wired jaw.

She starts to slide off of his lap and he stops her as she stands up on the floor. “Thank you.” His eyes looking right at hers, Skye feels her knees go a little weak. She smiles at him the best she can right now. He stands and takes her hand so they can go downstairs together.

With everyone at the table, food is served, there is a knock at the door, “I’ll get that,” Gerry calls to everyone. She pulls open the door and sees Jett, she hasn’t seen him since the day before

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everything happened. Belle is standing next to him, so she assumes. Her emotional mind wants to grab him and say hello but her rational brain says it’s not nice right now. So, she doesn’t move at all for a moment. She simply grips the door tighter.

Then, Jett grabs her and picks her up, he puts her down slowly and holds on a moment. “I’m sorry I haven’t come sooner. I’ve been busy.” He pushes away and looks into her eyes, “hate me?” he asks longingly.

Gerry smiles, “never,” she says softly.

“This is Belle, Belle, Gerry,” he says quickly.

Belle jumps at the chance to push him out of the way and hug Gerry. She whispers in her ear, “Thank you for pushing him.” She pats Gerry’s back and Gerry returns the gesture. She smiles as she parts from Belle. “Boys set the table for two more!!” she calls into the house.

Belle and Jett follow Gerry into the dining room. Jett proceeds to introduce Belle to everyone and Owen twitches a little in his seat, Gerry notices this and she is pretty sure no one else did. She stands behind Owen and puts her hands on his shoulders to hold him steady. “Belle, I hope you like simple food, it’s all I know how to cook,” she smiles.

“Oh my god you cook too?! You’ll have to teach me. My mother used to tell me I could burn boiling water.” The crowd laughs and the tension has officially been broken. Gerry squeezes Owen’s shoulders a bit more and walks into the kitchen to bring out all the food. With only one more dish to serve, Gerry hears a chair fall backwards in the other room. Most likely Jett’s, he does that when he gets up to fast.

“Oh my! I forgot that I have ice cream for shakes in this bag. I heard Skye was serving her signature milk shakes, didn’t want you to run out in the middle. I have chocolate, vanilla and extra creamy vanilla for the man who came through for me. I owe you big time Owen. Thanks for all you did for the girls, it means a lot to me.” He picks up his glass of water as if to toast Owen. Owen nods and everyone around him pats him on the back. Skye gets up to take the bag from Jett and kisses Owen on the cheek as she passes him towards the kitchen.

“Did you hear what Jett said?” She signs to Gerry before she puts away the ice cream.

“Yes, I did. We all owe Owen a lot of gratitude. I, for one, intend on giving it to him privately,” she grins at her sister.

“About damn time,” Skye tries to say with her voice as she puts the ice cream away.

Gerry runs over to hold her. “This is going to be a lot of fun, the two of us here in this big house.”

Gerry grabs the last salad dish and heads for the dining room. Skye follows.

But before she sits down Skye holds up her glass and says in her best voice possible, “To family, to Momma, to Daddy and most of all to our newly acquired extended family members.” She eyes Owen, Kennedy and Belle giving each of them a lift of her cup.

“Here, here!!” everyone says in unison.

~ ~ ~

The first month having her mouth wired had been hard, now going towards the end of the second and she is ready to kill someone. Skye luckily doesn’t have to talk to anyone for work, she can do all her communication through e-mails and texting. Although, when Kennedy comes over, she



likes to try and use her voice, she misses hearing herself and saves her voice up for him each time she sees him. He has been a big help in her making connections with some people about her artwork. As usual, some like the pieces more than others.

Lately, she has been doing a lot more writing than artwork, trying her voice out in prose instead of in paint and putty. She has also been writing in a blog about self-defense methods taught to her by her father. They are a bit untraditional, but thankfully, when the moment hit, Daddy’s advice worked. Twice. This has become a fast-growing success. She never knew she had so much to say, but each time she writes something she gets more and more followers.

One of the female officers that works with Kennedy set her up with this. They scrutinize who is following, each one verified to be female so that they don’t have any predators watching the site. Skye feels good that she might be helping someone out, somewhere out in her own community or beyond. She is not sure how they do the verifications, but that is not her job so she doesn’t ask too many questions.

Kennedy is expected to come over in about an hour, Skye decides to go upstairs and shower. Gerry built an office in her basement, she has a separate door down there for clients to come, if necessary, or she meets them in their place of business. It has been working out great. She and Skye are living separate lives together. She has her space, Skye has her own as well. The basement has essentially been divided into two sides. Only one is directly accessible to the house; that would be Skye’s half. Gerry leaves out her front door some days for the fun of opening the door to her office from the outside.

The house, was originally a ranch, the owners that foreclosed had built a fantastic second floor, and like most ranch houses, this one has a huge basement. Gerry had a two-room office built, with both rooms having windows, one for her and one for her secretary/waiting room. The dividing wall between her and Skye is equipped with an emergency door that can open from either side.

When they both ‘get home’ from work, dinner is made together if Skye is not going out with Kennedy. Sometimes he comes by and does the cooking for both of them. The only thing missing is Owen. Gerry has not been able to communicate with him how she feels. She thinks he feels the same way, but if she broaches the subject of anything relationship wise, the subject is changed, or he finds a reason to leave. So, lately she has waited for him to contact her, and it’s not working. She hasn’t heard from him in four days and its making her completely mad.

Jett and Belle are practically living together since she moved to their area, Owen has to see that she is no longer attached to Jett. Skye is no longer in danger, especially with Kennedy in her life. Her brothers all call now at least once a week, each of them a different day to talk to both of them. It is not that her life is not full, it’s that, it’s not fulfilled.

~ ~ ~

“Skye? It’s Kennedy,” he says.

“I know who it is by your number silly. What’s up?” Skye still is only using her voice with Kennedy, well, and Gerry, it’s easier in the house to simply talk.

“Your twelve weeks end tomorrow, don’t they?” he asks.

“Yes, thank the good Lord, I will be free to yawn and scream as I like. Why?” she asks.

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“Well, first of all, I’m sure you will have instructions and there won’t be any yelling quit yet and maybe no eating hard foods either, but that aside, I was wondering if I could be the one to take you to the doctor for this? Cheesy huh?” he asks in a shy voice.

“I love cheese,” Skye smiles into the phone and gives her sister a thumbs up. Gerry looks over at her and smiles, she knows that thumb only means something to do with Kennedy.

“Great, I’ll pick you up at 9:00 sharp, will that give us enough time to get there?” he asks.

“Sure 9:00 will be fine. See you then.” Skye hangs up and turns to Gerry, “You’re off the hook, Kennedy offered to pick me up, actually, he asked me if it was okay for him to take me tomorrow,” she smiles at her sister.

Gerry looks over at her and tries to smile. She is really happy for her sister that out of the worst tragedy since the death of their parents, Skye has come away with a terrific guy who will most likely take her away from this house to have a house and possibly a family of their own soon. Gerry is thrilled, and at the same time, sad. Jett and Belle are about the cutest couple ever and it surprises her every time she sees them how much more extraverted Belle has made Jett. The two of them are always headed to this activity or that. He tells her about everything, all the time.

She knows he is not trying to rub anything in her face but it digs a little harder each time. The only time she has seen Owen is when it’s a big group. With Skye going out tomorrow morning, this is going to end. She says to herself. Gerry grabs her phone and sends Owen a quick text, “*must have you here at the house by 9:15 tom sharp. Can’t explain now, be here!!!!*” she clicks send and hopes for the best.

Owen is pacing after receiving the text from Gerry a few minutes ago. “What could be wrong now? Did Skye’s appointment not go well? Isn’t it tomorrow? Did they hear from the lawyer? Damn it I can’t bear anything else happening to them!!!” he shouts as he puts his fist through the nearby wall. Taking a step back to see what he has done, he slumps into his office chair. The past couple of months have been a drain on him. Every time he sees Gerry his heart beats a little faster but he is so afraid to move forward, so afraid to offend Jett. He doesn’t want anyone to think he has been standing around waiting for them to break up.

He has been falling for Gerry almost since they met. When he found out Jett beat him to her, he was crushed. Jett is the better looking one, has a more lucrative job and certainly knows her better, what right does he have assuming he knows anything more than her favorite hot chocolate from the café on Mulberry Avenue. He knows the colors she looks best in and makes sure to compliment her when he sees her in them. He can feel when she is agitated and remembers not sleeping the night Skye was hurt. How can he tell her that? Sure, she says she needs him, but we all say that about our friends, don’t we?

The knock at the door startles him back into reality. “Come in,” he says in a low voice.

Jett walks in wearing a grin as wide as the Atlantic Ocean. “Did I hear another pound into the wall before I came in?” he asks.

Owen lifts his eyes to the newest hole in the wall. Good thing he owns this office building. “Owen, you have to get out of this funk. Ever since Skye was hurt you’ve been walking around here like it happened to your own sister.”



Before Jett says another word, Owen blurts out, "It did Damn you!" Realizing what he said, he slumps down even further into his chair, if that was possible and turns his chair to face the wall. Jett closes the door to the office and sits in the chair in front of his old friend. "Daisy was injured in a car accident you said," Jett mentions this remembering her facial scars looking like that of a car accident so he accepted it as truth.

"She was running away to the hospital or the police when the crash happened. I told her I didn't have time to come down pick her up because of a bad date. She was only eighteen when it happened, remember?" he says in a low voice almost inaudible.

"Yeah, I remember we were in graduate school then, I drove you home because you couldn't bear to be behind the wheel. When did you find out the truth?" he asks.

"Daisy told me in the hospital, she had only told the doctor when our parents were not in the room. They found the guy because he was someone she knew and could tell them a name. It was actually someone I served with, who had met her at my own house. My own comrade, can you imagine? She was honored an older guy was interested in her, she told the police. He was released from service immediately without anything, no pension, dishonorable discharge takes it all away from you. Only served two years and got off for good behavior. When he got out of jail, he ran himself into a tree, couldn't take what he did. He sent me an apology the day he got out. Only Daisy and I know, my folks never learned of him or his actions. It's all in the past now, shouldn't be affecting me now, but my pain, is real as it was then so don't tell me it wasn't my sister okay? It was Skye for goodness sake! It should not have happened! I should have known, you don't understand!" He slams his hands down on his desk as he stands to pace.

Jett watches his friend for a moment before standing and doing something he thought he would never do in his life. This is what Gerry has always done for him, time to give back. He walks over to Owen and pulls him into a hug. Owen accepts him and they stand there for a moment or two, Jett absorbing the pain from his friend, until he feels Owen finally release his tension, then they part and go to sit down on the two chairs in front of Owen's desk.

"You're not responsible for what happens to all the women in our town or any other town for that matter. I know you saw all kinds of human destruction in service, involving women and children, and that's why Daisy's accident hit you so hard, but Owen, it's out of our control man." Jett is trying to get through to his friend but he sees by the look on Owen's face that he is talking to a wall. Owen is scratching his head, there is too much going on here. "I've known too many people that have gone through this kind of tragedy. Too many people hurt and it's beginning to weigh me down. I'm always around for the tragedies." He mumbles, hoping Jett doesn't hear him.

"Owen, you know this isn't my expertise. I used to call Gerry for this stuff. Speaking of which, why are you giving her such grief? All she wants is for you to be in her life," Jett finishes his sentence and Owen jumps on him.

"Gerry!! How the hell can you throw her name around like that!! You were dating her, you've been her best friend ever since we met her!! Telling me to call her is just.....well. Ahhh!!!" he stands to pace once again.

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Jett watches his friend pace around the room, his steps are quick and purposeful as if he is trying to stomp out his anxiety one heel press at a time. He tries to think of what to say, what Gerry would say, he looks down at his phone.

“Don’t you dare,” Owen says dragging out the sound of the r. “I have to see her tomorrow, that is enough, I don’t need you contacting her now and telling her what a pathetic mess I am.” Owen barks at his friend.

“What do you mean you *have* to?” Jett asks.

Owen takes his phone out of his pocket and throws it to Jett. Jett looks down at the phone on his lap and picks it up, he checks Owen’s messages and sees the one from Gerry, earlier today.

“What’s the big deal? She wants to see you? So, see her Owen. For the first time in a long time, see her for who she is. A beautiful woman, inside and out,” Jett says very matter-of-factly.

Owen stares at his friend. “What are you saying? You and Gerry were together, she is not a woman I should be looking at.” Owen stands with his hands on his hips glaring at his friend now.

“Owen, Gerry and I are the best of friends, we pushed that friendship too far for a while that’s all. I still consider her my best friend and confidant, next to you, she is the only other one who knows me on the inside. Since Skye’s accident we have remained that way. I’m with Belle now, you know that. In fact, I originally came here to tell you that I think Belle is going to be my last girlfriend. We’re talking permanence Owen. Me! And permanent in the same sentence,” he smiles at his friend.

Owen hears his friend speaking but his mind turned off as soon as he said Gerry was free. But there is no way Gerry is interested in him. “Jett, who would want to be with the man that disasters follow?” he asks. “Jett?”

Jett stares at his friend, he knows he missed the second half of what he said, if the two of them don’t get together soon, this being in the middle thing, is going to kill him. “Owen did you hear what I said? I’m thinking of proposing to Belle! Me!! Mr. ‘I don’t know how to love anyone;. And what kind of bull crap are you talking about? Disasters don’t follow you, you happen to be the only one I know who can come out smelling like roses all the time. There is always a positive that comes from each event. Even Daisy’s accident – afterwards you poured your heart into studying so much that you graduated with honors and that’s not nothing. Even Daisy found a purpose and she has been excelling ever since. Now that she has a real boyfriend she is complete. She tells us that all the time. He is the most understanding guy she could have found on the planet. That incident with an old college friend? She too found a way to dig herself out of her hole because you gave her that strength. Don’t you see that?”

When we were teens and that multi-car crash happened on school grounds, you didn’t let anyone be sad about the loss of equipment, you decided to pull everyone together and get people involved in community service and the grounds became better than it ever was.

In service, you witnessed things no one should have seen, but you know what? You came back and decided to be part of an organization that prevents such things from happening in your neighborhood. You may have seen many tragedies, as you say, but each time you come out stronger, but all you see is the bad. Hell Owen, you’re only thirty years old and you own two office buildings due to your own perseverance. Who does that? Half of this building is filled with

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businesses that pay no rent, you only ask people to pay for their own utilities. When a business fails you don't even evict them, you help them find another place to put their energies. You may only see tragedy, but Owen, everyone else sees that everything you are involved in comes out smelling like roses not growing like weeds." Jett finishes in exasperation, he sits back in his chair and blows out a sigh.

Owen watches his friend sit there being frustrated with him. His mom always told him he sees the negative in every picture not the beauty of the finished photo. "You have a meeting today you shouldn't miss, it's a big client isn't it?" Owen says to Jett remembering something about a big client and a big push again.

Jett stands to go, he walks closer to his friend who is standing at the door, holding it open. He puts his hand on Owen's shoulder and nods before he walks out. "Jett, make sure to see Marco down at the diamond exchange, he is the only one I would trust. No one else, not even his partner.

Remember that, only Marco," Owen calls to him.

Jett turns around and smiles. He knew Owen would know where to go, he smiles at him and waves over his head as he leaves the area and heads for the elevators.

~~~~

Kennedy picks up Skye for her appointment to the oral surgeon today they will undo her jaw, it's an outpatient procedure, they were told, and she will be good to go within an hour or so. His hands are shaking as he approaches their front door. The door swings open before he gets to the first knock.

"Kennedy, you had better be doing right by my sister or I'll kill you. Is that a threat? Yes, actually it is." Kennedy lifts his eyes to see Jeremy standing there in the doorway, filling it out from frame to frame.

"Good morning to you too Jeremy, are you here alone or are your brothers here as well? I never did get a chance to get to know them last time you were all in town." Kennedy tries to play things soft, he knows how much the oldest brother protects the girls in the family. Even more so now.

Jeremy's face softens a moment realizing he came off a bit strong. He takes a deep breath. "We, my partner and I, are both here on business, thank you for asking. He is still sleeping, he was in a meeting until 4:00am last night or this morning depending on how you see that time of day. But that is neither here nor there," he says as he crosses his arms across his chest.

"Jeremy!! Move out of the way!" Gerry yells at her brother.

He slowly steps aside and allows Kennedy to enter the home. "Sorry, apparently being a big brother gives you come whenever you want to, even unannounced at midnight status. And the let us take up two of your bedrooms status and have you make me some midnight dinner urgency. Should I go on?" She glares at her brother.

Today is supposed to be a great day, she is expecting Owen to show up in the next half an hour and she is so far from ready because she was up talking to her brother until the sun came up.

"Kennedy? You're here already? Oh man, I'm late; give me five minutes, I'll be dressed.

Promise." Skye smiles as much as she can to him and he returns the smile, completely ignoring everyone else in the room. Gerry is smiling too. From this mess, came the best man around. Skye

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has won the heart of one of the finest men she has ever met, she couldn’t be happier for her sister. She hopes her brothers see Kennedy for who he is, wonderful.

With their ins and outs, plus their combined group of friends, the house has never been busier and this is the way Gerry likes her life, busy. When she bought the house she never anticipated how big a four-bedroom house is, living here by herself, has felt like living in a huge cavern, the basement used to echo before she finished her office, and now Skye’s studio this past month. Now every room of the house has life.

Kennedy turns to see Gerry smiling and her brother growling. “Did he get his bone this morning or is he always this friendly?” he asks to Gerry. She begins to laugh and so does Kennedy.

Jeremy storms out of the room, “I’m not done with you yet!” he calls over his shoulder as he bounces into the kitchen for some more coffee.

Skye comes running down the stairs signing as fast as she can, “Quick! Let’s get out of here before he comes back, I heard the whole thing. Watch out the next one is moving upstairs Gerry. Good luck. Love you!” she grabs Kennedy’s hand and pulls him out the front door before Jeremy has a chance to stop them.

“Did I hear a door close? Where is Kennedy? I wasn’t done with him. Did he skip out? Scared of me huh?” Jeremy laughs with confidence.

Gerry laughs too, but not for the same reason. “Take yourself and your big ego upstairs and get your partner and yourself ready to leave. I have someone coming over in the next fifteen minutes, and no, I will not tell you who or why, it’s none of your business. My plans did not include having anyone here today, so I advise you to get your collective asses in gear and leave. Don’t come back until after 2:00 pm today. That should be enough time for me to do what I need to do. Now you have fourteen minutes, move!” she barks at him.

Jeremy takes two steps at a time and gets upstairs he quickly walks into his partner’s room. Gerry hears a lot of movement going on so she heads upstairs too, to find the perfect outfit. First, she rummages through her closet, then she starts in the drawers, back to the closet. “Ah, here you are,” she says to her favorite dress. It’s soft, sophisticated and she believes it to be Owen’s favorite color, he always compliments her when she wears this. She begins to smile as she pulls the dress over her head. A simple dress, can be worn for work or casual so her brother won’t realize why she is wearing this, she hopes.

Everyone walks out of their rooms at the same time, Gerry begins to laugh. She checks her watch, “Five minutes boys, get a move on. Take breakfast to go please, it’s already made.” Her voice hopefully sounding more confident than her mind is right now.

Both of the men move quickly, each stops to give her a kiss on her forehead. “Have a good day,” they say in unison.

Before she knows it, they are out the door, with only one minute to spare. She knows Owen will be exactly on time, she waits at the top of the stairs to gather her strength. Before she can assemble her thoughts there is a knock at the door. She tries not to run down the stairs but it is hard.

Standing at the front door, she smooths down her dress with her hands, checks her hair in the mirror and slowly opens the door to see Owen standing there with deep concern on his face. She smiles to break the tension he is obviously feeling.

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Her stomach is jumping, her heart pounding, her mind is racing. There are so many parts of her body that are moving right now she is surprised that she is still standing. Words aren’t coming to her, she leans forward, reaches out and grabs his hand to gently pull him into her house. She guides him past her and closes the door all without letting go.

Owen sees Gerry in his favorite dress, it’s simple and hugs her silhouette ever so gently. His mouth is watering, his hands clammy, his heart is beating every other beat. For a trained soldier who is supposed to be ready for any event at any time, he feels like a new recruit with no anticipatory senses at all.

Gerry reminds herself to stay with the plan. She and Skye were talking about this before their brother showed up last night. ‘Stick to the plan’ she says to her own mind again.

~ ~ ~

Kennedy is so nervous he is happy to have his hands on the wheel to give himself something to cling to right now. He glances over at Skye who is a bundle of nerves, he needs to quickly find a conversation other than their destination.

“Do you always wear polka dots and stripes or is this just for show?” he jokingly asks noticing her outfit for the first time.

Skye glances down at herself in horror, “Oh my! I was in such a hurry I didn’t notice. You must think me a fool Kennedy,” she says nervously.

At the next building, Kennedy pulls in and parks, he gets out of the car and rummages through his trunk. When he comes back into the car he hands Skye one of his spare shirts he always keeps in the trunk, occupational hazard. Over the years of being an officer he has needed to use them many times.

Skye takes the shirt and pulls it on top of the one she is wearing, she inhales as she slides it over her face. It smells like Kennedy, warm, loving and comforting. This is what she feels every time she is with him. Her rational brain says it’s too good to be true, no arresting officer falls for the plain girl with all the scars, but here he is, and here she is. These past couple of months have been filled with joy, not fear, and it’s all because he is in her life.

On the road again, Kennedy says, “Skye, we have to get a couple things out in the open before we get there, you mind?” he says.

Skye stares at him, his voice sounds official and her stomach instantaneously goes into knots feeling as if he is going to break it off now, say he is finished with his duty now that she is better. A large tear rolls down her face before she can stop it.

Kennedy sees the tear and clears his throat, he realizes his voice may have sounded harsh. “You see, here is the deal,” he starts, “I have a whole day planned for you and I, and I hope you don’t mind. We are going to do what needs to be done first, then from there I have a few surprises. You think you will be up to a whole day with me?” his voice coming out nervously.

Relief spreads all over Skye and she nods in agreement because if she tries to talk she knows she will cry. Kennedy continues, “Oh, and one more thing, my name is Marshall. I sure would love to hear it be the first word you speak with an open mouth.” He smiles at her, she returns the smile but turns her head to the window because right now their closeness feels too intense for her.

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Arriving at the doctor’s office, Marshall jumps out and opens the door for Skye, her eyes melt into him. She is nervous and excited at the same time. He has a nervous stomach himself, his nerves are jumping around, and he is hoping he can pull off all of what he has planned for today and get home smiling tonight.

Skye takes his hand to get out of the car, Marshall closes the car door behind her but does not release her hand. They walk in together. He never leaves her side the whole time. First in the waiting room, then he walks her into the operating room itself and holds her hand until she is sleeping, until now, when he is still holding her hand as she wakes up.

Skye blinks her eyes once or twice to confirm that it is Marshall who is sitting there and not Gerry, even though she knows where she is right now, hopefully. Skye swallows twice and then in a whispered voice she says, “Hello Marshall.” The smile on his face is broad, not one tooth is covered up and his eyes are the brightest she has ever seen in him or anyone else for that matter. Marshall stands up and leans over to Skye, he moves very slowly and kisses her right on the lips. Skye responds with puckered lips, it doesn’t even hurt. It feels so good she wants to scream, an unwanted tear falls from her eye again. Marshall leans back and wipes it off with his thumb. “Happy tears?” he asks concerned.

“Yes, very happy.” Skye realizes that this is going to be a very special day indeed. It can only get better.

~ ~ ~

Gerry is still holding Owen’s hand and repeating the plan to herself, he has been silent so far. Which makes sense, she is the one who called him over; he has no idea why he is here. He has no idea she is about to ambush him, hopefully pleasantly.

Gerry walks over to the stairs still holding Owen’s hand and pulls him to the bottom of the steps, she steps on the first step to bring herself a little higher, to at least come up to his nose, she releases her fingers from his hand and slides that hand up his arm and around his neck, she takes her other hand and does the same on the other side. Owen is soldier still, his face giving away nothing.

“Owen,” her voice quivers, “welcome to your destiny.” She pulls him down quickly to kiss her. First it is a very soft kiss, then as his arms find their way around her, the kiss turns heated and passionate, he has pulled her onto her toes. They stay that way for a while, Owen pulls away first, his face confused.

“Why?” he says softly.

“I’ve been trying to talk to you for weeks now, trying to get you to be with me and not with a group of friends. Every time I try you have a reason not to be around me. I was beginning to think these feelings were only from me, so I figured if I gave you a direct request, you would listen and come to me, only me. Mad?” Gerry watches his eyes, his face, and his chest to see his breathing because hers is certainly faster than normal.

Owen’s eyes glance up the stairs, his body would love to grab her and run up there right now, but he knows that is not appropriate. He looks back down at her face, Gerry is staring at him in a way he has been wanting to see for the longest time and now it’s here. Certainly, that kiss was sincere.

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He could feel it in his lips and all the way down, you don’t get that if it’s not mutual; at least he’d like to think so.

“Ok,” he starts, “you certainly have my attention now. Let’s talk. The kitchen?” he asks thinking if he sits on the couch with her he may not be able to control his hands.

Gerry steps down from the step she is on and leads him to the kitchen. “You didn’t sleep last night, did you?” she asks.

“No, how do you know?” he asks.

“Truth?” she asks.

“Nothing but,” he says firmly.

Gerry eyes are down at her lap, she takes a deep breath before she speaks, “I felt you wake up last night at around 3:00am. I was up with my brothers who showed up unexpectedly by the way, I kicked them out this morn. But I simply knew you were up. Pacing fiercely.” Gerry gets up to get two glasses and some juice, she places them on the table and pours a glass for each of them.

“Not weird, surprised. I can say the same thing to you. I knew the night Skye was hurt, I knew you were agitated and not sleeping. You were laying down then sitting up a lot,” Owen says blankly.

Gerry sits back down and eyes her glass, then back up to Owen’s eyes. He is not telling a lie, she knows when he lies. He felt her? Before she even knew things were over with Jett, he felt her inside?

“Quite a pair of insomniacs, tuned into the same channel,” Gerry responds finally. Owen is quiet again. What she wouldn’t do to get another kiss from him, even more. Her body responds to anything about him. It’s high time she listened to her body and not to her rational mind. The oven buzzer goes off and she shakes her head. Mechanically she stands up to get plates and sets them on the table before going over to get the quiche out of the oven and place it between them, “Breakfast time,” she smiles.

Owen leans back in his chair and takes a deep breath. “Cheese, onions, fresh mushrooms, bell peppers and something else, hold on, let me smell it again,” he takes another big sniff. He looks closely at it but it’s covered in cheese so he can’t see through the egg. “Ok, I give up, what’s in it?” he says holding his hands up.

Gerry smiles at him, “sundried tomatoes and black olives,” she slices him a piece and puts it on his plate, then one for herself and sits back down. She watches as Owen takes his first bite, closes his eyes and savors the flavor combination.

“Does my destiny come with this kind of breakfast every day?” he asks smiling.

“You’ll have to take it one day at a time,” Gerry laughs.

The two of them spend the next couple of hours talking and laughing. They cleared the air between them and there are no secrets left to bear, for either of them. “How about we go to the art museum today, there is a special exhibit, you may like,” Owen says.

“I’d like that, thank you.” Gerry, realizing the time, sends a text to her sister. *How did it go?*

Doctor say all is well? We’re headed over to the museum, special exhibit today. Two thumbs up.

☺
~ ~ ~



Hi, its Marshall, Skye is in the dentist’s chair right now, getting the cleaning she needs after having her mouth closed for so long. I knew a guy who said he would do it for free considering what she already had to endure. We’re headed to lunch soon. ☺

Gerry is staring at her phone, “Who the hell is Marshall and what is he doing with Skye?” she yells out loud in the car, she is staring at Owen.

He is laughing, “No worries, Marshall is Kennedy’s first name,” he lays his hand on her knee to calm her down. Gerry exhales and writes back; *did she get any restrictions? Make sure you’re careful with what she eats. Does she have to go to physical therapy or something?*”

Now Marshall is laughing, he loves this family and can’t wait to be a part of it permanently. *We have all the paperwork, will show you tonight at dinner. By the way inviting everyone to meet us at Chillie’s at 6:00pm. I think we should all celebrate today together.*

“Owen, Marshall wants, wow I feel weird saying that, anyway, Marshall says to meet him at Chillie’s at 6:00pm for dinner, you’re part of the everyone you know,” she says.

“Yes boss. Happy to be there.” He laughs, she punches him in the arm. *“Owen and I will be there. Inviting Jett and Belle?”*

“Yes, I will, and all the brothers too,” Marshall writes.

~ ~ ~

Gerry decides to pay attention to the road, “Owen, the museum is to the east side, why are we going west? Where are you taking me?” her voice came out cracking.

“Patience my love, you will see soon. Relax.” Owen admonishes himself in his thoughts, he can’t believe what he called her. Thirty seconds into their being together and he is already blowing this relationship. He has waited years for this and now he will end things before they get to where he wants to be.

Contrary to what Owen believes, Gerry says, “Damn, wish you had bench seats in the front of this car.” She reaches over and puts her hand on Owen’s knee and lets it ride up slowly and when she is almost at his hip, she takes her hand away and stares out the window. ‘Holy cannoli, what did you do right now?’ she asks her own mind. ‘Surely you will either scare him off or he will think you are the biggest whore; Gerry finds herself tearing so she turns to the window even more.

Owen catches Gerry’s facial change as he watches her while at the stop sign. His body reacted as it should to her touch, but his heart aches at her own reaction. She is as attracted to him as he is to her, and both of them think it’s too quick. ‘what a pair we are,’ he smiles to himself.

~ ~ ~

At 6:00pm all of the couples show up one at a time to find Marshall and Skye sitting in the corner table by the fireplace. Their smiles are bigger than any have ever seen. No matter who asks, Jett, Belle, Jeremy, Alan or the other brothers, nothing is being said before Gerry and Owen get there. At about 6:15 the mood shifts down a bit, “Ok, who wants to call them?” Jett asks.

Finding her voice, Skye says, “No, it’s all good, 6:25,” she says with a smile and pulls out a five dollar bill and places it on the table. Belle follows suit, “I’ll take 6:27,” she puts up her five. One by one the dinner guests call out a time and place their money on the table.

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However, unbeknown to anyone at the table, Skye is squeezing Marshal’s leg under the table. Before they know how much time has passed, the final couple shows up. It is Skye who sees them at the front door and waves them over. She checks the clock they all agreed to go by. “6:25, I win!” she says as she takes the money. Everyone laughs as Gerry and Owen take their seats.

The laughter stops, Skye jumps up from her seat to run over to her sister and hug her. She saw the tear streaks on her cheeks as only a sister could see. “All good?” she whispers. Gerry shakes her head into her sister’s shoulder, Skye does not let go yet because she feels her shirt get wet, she holds her sister a little bit longer.

As the oldest, Jeremy stands to join the circle of siblings, he pulls Gerry into him and she starts all over again. When she is calm again, everyone sits down, Owen pulls her into his shoulder and there Gerry stays, leaning on him and calming herself down with his every steady breath.

Owen finally speaks, “This is all my fault. With everything going on, I figured today was forgotten, and for some reason, I felt the need to rectify that. She has been like this ever since. Sorry,” he finishes quietly.

Only Marshall and Belle, being the last ones in the group, don’t understand. He looks around the table as everyone’s face become somber. Skye says, “It’s the anniversary of our father’s death. Usually we all get together, but our lives have been so busy, we almost let this year slide. It’s usually only the three of us, Owen, Gerry and me, sometimes Jett comes to but our brothers think we are silly and don’t come. Thank you, guys, for being here this time and thank you Owen for remembering. You are definitely one of the good ones. Daddy always said he loved you,” she turns to Marshal, “He would have loved you too,” she says softly.

Gerry finally finds her voice, “I don’t know if I’ve been crying because of the day or because Owen remembered and took me to where he knew I would want to be today instead of where he mentioned first. I’m sorry to bring down the evening. I feel better seeing everyone now. Skye, you sound so much better now, how do you feel? And I’m sorry for being so annoying to you guys this morning, I know you’re my brother and Alan you’re as good as one, but once in a while I need a moment to myself and today was one of those moments.”

“Fantastic!!” Skye smiles to show off her teeth. “Marshall took me straight away to get my teeth cleaned professionally, then we went to lunch and I enjoyed my mac and cheese. I still have to have some soft foods for a little while until I get used to chewing again, but they said it will only take about a week or so. Then, well, I’ll let Marshall here say the rest,” she giggles.

“I took her to the park and we drove up the hiking path and walked all the way up to the point where you can see downtown, I got down on one knee and proposed. Same place my father did to my mom,” he says smiling to everyone.

The whole table begins to make a lot of noise, as if their team won the championship. The manager of the restaurant comes over quickly to stop the noise but Owen stops him in his tracks when he announces, “Champaign for everyone, my baby sister just got engaged!” The whole restaurant begins to clap and goes back to eating.

The manager comes by and pulls Marshall into a hug. Everyone watches with eyes asking for an explanation. “Everyone, this is my one and only uncle, we all call him Big D.” After hugs all around, and the glasses are poured Jett stands up to propose a toast.

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“To our newest family member, **Big D**, and to Marshall for bringing our Skye from bottom to top, and since we’re sharing good news at this table,” he lifts his glass to Belle and says, “Congratulations to Belle for being the first one in her family to get married under the age of thirty,” she clinks her glass onto his and the table bursts in to shouts once again. Dinner is filled with plans and lots of laughter. The group stays there for hours, phone calls are made, people show up to join them or stop by for a quick congratulations. It is 10:30 before **Big D** finally tells them to all go home. Reluctantly they all get up at once and head for the door.

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Skye, Marshall, Jeremy and Alan go back to the house. Jett and Belle head back to Jett’s apartment. The rest of the brothers decided to sleep in the basement between Gerry’s waiting room couch and the floor. Everyone agrees to meet tomorrow at the sisters’ house for a big, celebratory, bar b que dinner.

Gerry and Owen head towards the park. Sitting on the swings together, holding hands, Gerry asks, “Why did you only say half the story tonight Owen?” “Skye deserves her night to be all her own, I had a feeling he was going to ask today so I held back. Not sure I saw Jett’s news coming so soon, but it’s pretty cool. I guess the heart knows when it’s right, there is no time frame that is right or wrong for this kind of thing,” he answers, “You angry?” “No, but I do have to say that I think most of my tears today were because you not only remembered the day specifically, but you thought it important to ask my father first. We’ll tell them that part later. It’s not as if I have a ring yet, so this news can wait.” Gerry leans into Owen’s shoulder and he wraps his arm around her a little tighter. “Marshall sure did a sweet thing by getting her smile fixed, didn’t he? He is great, I really do like him,” she says. “It’s funny how all of our endings seem to stem from new and strange beginnings,” Owen says softly into her head.

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