



SHELTER

By K.S. Stanley

When you hear the siren, you have to run.
When you hear the siren, you have to hide.

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A NOTE FROM THE WRITER

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Thank you for respecting and supporting the hard work of this writer.

DEDICATION

For the young adults, the hares and rottweilers...

This story is for you.

QUOTE

There is a fine line between love and hate.

-Anonymous

PROLOGUE

A WARNING

From pollution and critical damage, Mother Nature has been sending out storms accompanied with high winds and a poisonous purple toxin which is fatal to anyone or anything. If caught in the crossfire, the repercussions can be catastrophic.

For your protection, the Government have implemented the Lock Down procedure.

At the slightest toxic reading to the weather, a siren will ring out:

- *It is imperative that you stay indoors at all times.*
- ***Do not*** go outside until you hear the second siren.
- *Measures have been made to homes, schools, public buildings and transport to prevent the loss of life.*
- *When the Lock Down procedure goes into effect, just remember to breathe, relax and wait for the second siren. Once the second siren rings out, you will be released from your Lock Down area.*

Thank you for your patience during this time. Remember, we are all in this together. If you require any additional information, please contact your local government officials.

CHAPTER ONE

The heart of Kinterton College was swarming with life. The receptionist ran around the office, answering the telephone and flying messages through the veins of the communication system. She'd been working on a switchboard for the past ten years and the amount of times she had to relearn the skeletons of transferring the calls. That was the hasty change of technology.

A tap rapped against the window and the receptionist opened the panel, switching on a smile.

"Can I help you?" she asked politely.

"Remind Carl about this," the teacher said, pushing the note into the well.

The receptionist retrieved the message and she glanced at the tiny piece of paper.

It was a prompt for the caretaker to keep the sports hall open until five o'clock. It was all for the sake of three students doing something they shouldn't have done in the first place. They were old enough to know better in her eyes. This place wasn't a primary school.

"No worries. I'll make sure he gets the message," the receptionist said.

The teacher disappeared as soon as a call filtered through to her desk. Her name was shouted frantically from the maze of rooms behind the office and she decided the caller had to wait. It probably wasn't the most professional decision to make but she had other urgent duties to attend to.

As soon as she exited the office, a chain reaction took place.

The second the door closed, a wind swept across her desk, bouncing the critical note off and it met the carpet face down.

When the secretary walked into the office, she noticed the paper lying on the ground. It looked nothing special, probably rubbish or a shopping receipt left by the receptionist which must have fallen out of her bag. On instinct she ripped it up and discarded it into the bin.

If only they'd known there was a storm on the way...

CHAPTER TWO

If Sadie Richardson had known that jumping her consolidation period was going to result in wasting two hours of her life in a freezing cold sports hall, she'd have changed her mind in a heartbeat and vowed that it would never happen to her again.

Usually, in her previous detentions, she'd be stuck in a room by herself writing out the mind numbing *I must not* essays or clipping together pamphlets for a teacher's class. Except, when she entered the sports hall as everyone else was making their way home for the weekend - there were two further souls already there.

Nobody uttered a word when she entered.

The first soul she recognised all too clearly was Jack Keeling. This guy had served more detentions and suspensions than any rerun of *Friends*. Sadie had endured a rough couple of years with him, being in his friendship circle wasn't exactly the cherry on top in social terms. Ever since he fell and broke his leg in secondary school, his temper and taunts had ripened severely.

He lay against the shiny floor, his feet crossed over and he stared up at the ceiling of the sports hall. It was ridiculous how relaxed and comfortable he was.

Jack's hair had changed since she knew him; before it was thick and messy and now he'd shaved it close to the scalp. They used to call him Casper after the American cartoon because of his pale skin and white blonde hair. He still wore his black doc martin boots and languished in his menacing blood red sweater, outlining the build of his arms and broad back.

The second soul, she'd never conversed with but heard several peculiar stories about was the mysterious and voiceless Reese Talley. She walked around Kinterton without a flicker of attention from anyone, but this was college, everybody got talked about.

The rumours were venomous - that she was deaf and dumb, she'd been admitted to a psychiatric facility, that she locked herself in the toilets and left looking ashen and shaking from heroin or cocaine consumption.

Reese had shoved herself right at the top of the tiers where the school would gather for photographs and congregate for the Annual Netball Championships. Reese stared intensely out of the window, her long black hair hung over her eyes and it reached past the valley of her shoulder blades. She reminded Sadie of a cross between a female gothic vampire and Morticia Addams from *The Addams Family*. Though, they were virtually the same.

Now, Sadie wasn't a snob, Reese could have added an accessory to her hair, or applied some warm concealer, maybe even a dab of lip gloss, just to add some peachy life to her skin. Also, what was her obsession with black?

She didn't get it. Reese was constantly married to the shade with her painted nails and jumpers. Her hair wasn't genuine charcoal either; Sadie could see the faint sight of auburn peeking from her roots.

The lights flashed over their heads, flickering on and off. Then suddenly it all went dark. Sadie hated this. She figured it was just a glitch or a drain from the electricity but as minutes trickled past, she began to grow concerned.

"What's going on?" Sadie asked aloud.

No answer came. Jack and Reese didn't respond to her.

"Hello!" she yelled.

"Be quiet," Jack shot back poisonously.

"Well, sorry to bother you but the lights might be down."

Then she felt the penny drop.

Oh, shit, Sadie thought. Not now. Why does it have to hit here? In all places, why now?

"Is that *the* Sadie Richardson I hear?" Jack asked sarcastically.

Sadie rolled her eyes. "Cut it out with the bollocks, Jack."

"You're rude! I'm going to tell teacher on you."

She wasn't prepared to listen to his pointless one liners so she pulled out her mobile phone. The brightness of the screen hurt her eyes. She jabbed at the buttons, trying to call her mother but she couldn't hear the dialling tone. "Bugger," she whispered.

"Watch your mouth, simpletons are present," Jack replied.

"Well I'm not staying here all night," Sadie spat and gathered her things. She looked over her shoulder and glanced over to the other soul. "Come with me, Reese."

Sadie heard the snap of something.

Reese's blue eyes shot to hers. She looked confused and anxious. Sadie didn't hold it against her. Reese clearly didn't trust her and it was then when Sadie heard it.

Instead of having her eyes stung with the beauty of daylight, all she could see was darkness and then the sound of that dreaded siren filling her eardrums. The sound was deafening and Sadie watched Reese grab her head, wincing from the loudness.

"Ah fuck-ing Hell!" Jack yelled angrily over the racket.

Metallic shutters came thundering down along the windows from the roof like a band of snakes. The shadows dripped down the walls making Sadie feel claustrophobic.

After the barriers clicked and locked, a booming robot but powerful voice jetted out. It explained the Lock Down procedure, why the government had implemented it, and that they couldn't leave their new burrow until the next siren was heard.

The rain and purple mist rushed over the sports hall like a plane in descent. The shards from the storm hit and bounced off the windows.

Sadie wanted to scream. "Oh-kay this isn't funny anymore. Why aren't the lights coming on?"

Jack laughed at her. "What is it? Scared of the dark?"

Sadie ignored him and marched up the steps of the tiers where Reese stood watching. She wanted to swear at the Lock Down procedure. She knew the message off by heart. It was almost mocking her saying that she had to stay calm and relaxed.

I can't stay sitting relaxed being stuck in a room with Jack fucking Keeling!

Sadie stared outside at the storm between the metal shutters; she was worried about her green mini cooper, her beloved car which meant the world to her. It had been fitted for withstanding the storms, cars, buses and trains looked like metal cocoons or snakes when Lock Down was in full throttle. Sadie pressed her hand against the cold window pane, knowing they wouldn't be budging.

This has got to be the worst day of my life.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Jack barked.

"Nothing." Sadie turned from the window and stared across the sports hall. "We can't be the only ones in detention, there's got to be other people locked in."

"Do it the easy way," Jack said.

"And what's that?"

Jack grinned primitively. "HELLOOOO!"

Reese covered her ears and Sadie closed her eyes. Everything was a joke to him.

"Great," Sadie huffed. "So, what are we going to do?"

"We could call the Reception," Reese said quietly, her voice swirling out from the tension.

"Oh my God," Jack said astonishingly, looking at Reese. "*It speaks.*"

Sadie crossed her arms and tapped her foot against the tier step. "That's not a bad idea, actually."

Jack stared at her grudgingly, she'd broken one rule already from the bully handbook. Never agree with the non-entities.

"I mean, they might have better phone reception up there," Sadie continued and made her way down the steps to the wall where the phone was. It was attached to the wall by the main door. "Good thinking, Reese." She managed to get a line and rang the Main Reception. "Shit."

Jack slowly got to his feet. "What's happening?"

"It's gone to answer phone," Sadie replied and she left a message that they were stuck in the sports hall. Sadie hung up the phone and leant up against the wall. "Just think, my car is out there!"

"Which one is it?" Reese asked.

"The green mini."

Reese peered out of the window. "Does it have a name?"

Jack laughed. "Why the hell would you name a car?"

"Actually, yes I do. She's called Esmeralda."

"That's pretty," Reese said. "

Sadie grinned at her.

"Where did you get the name from?" Reese asked.

"My Mum originally, it was the name of her first car. She had a vintage green mini. When she used to go shopping, she'd put me in the back seat and pack the shopping around me. She said I used to hug the toilet rolls like a teddy bear."

Reese smiled quietly.

"*Hey!*" Jack said angrily. "What are we doing then?"

Sadie looked at him. "There's nothing we can do, we just have to wait." She glanced up towards Reese, who looked really pale, her skin glittered and her faint blue eyes shined. "Are you okay?"

Reese smiled nervously. "I'm fine. You don't need to worry about me."

Sadie sat down by the sports hall door listening to the sound of the rain. It was like heavy metal falling. Her phone buzzed in her pocket and she replied to her boyfriend.

Joe was luckily at home with the television, food, access to Facebook, Instagram and everything else. When she mentioned she was stuck in a freezing sweaty smelly sports hall with the Jack the Albino, he sent her a laughing emoji with a droplet of sweat looming on its head.

It's not funny! She sent back.

Sorry, babe. I feel sorry for Reese. Keep an eye on her especially around that dickhead, Joe replied.

I will, she seems a nice girl, Sadie typed. Gotta go hun, better keep my battery low. Putting it on airplane mode. Don't know how long this is gonna go on for. See you later, love you. Xxx

She stared out of the window until she realised that an hour had past and she hadn't heard the siren.

Reese was sketching in a black and purple A4 pad and Jack was busy texting on his phone. Sadie got up, feeling the stiffness in her legs and she went up the steps of the tier and sat next to Reese. "Got anything interesting planned for the weekend?"

"No, not really..." the girl murmured.

Jack snickered, Sadie scowled at him and she turned back to Reese. "Ignore him."

"What about you?" Reese whispered, she sounded scared.

"Meant to be going to a wedding with my boyfriend."

"Who's your boyfriend?"

"Joe Curtis."

Reese smiled quietly. "I know him. He's in my Art class."

"Yeah, he's mentioned that your paintings are really good."

Reese looked genuinely surprised. "Really?"

"You're one of the best artists in the class apparently."

Reese was sketching a spikey tree on a hill with a full moon in the distance, mist was curling around the hills. It looked eerie.

"I never knew he liked my work." Reese glanced out of the window and fiddled nervously with her sleeve. "Are your family at home?"

Sadie shrugged. "Yeah, they'll be fine. They would've heard the siren so they know I'm locked in here. I always go out on Friday evenings and I sleep over at my mate's house on the weekend usually. Are you worried about your parents?"

Reese didn't respond. Sadie frowned and she peered over to Jack, his eyes glowed with an obvious annoyance - Reese had only directed her questions towards her.

Something buzzed from Reese's bag and the shy girl fished her phone out. She looked like a timid wilder beast going out into the open fields when she answered the call.

"Hi Mum," Reese said into the speaker. "I'm okay. Yes, I haven't forgotten. I will. I promise. Don't worry. I'm locked in the sports hall. Mum, don't panic. I'm fine. We're just gonna stay put till the second siren goes off. We've rang the school but nobody was answering so we've left a message. Mum, please don't worry about me." She yanked her head away from the speaker and blanched.

"What happened?" Sadie asked.

"The signal's gone."

"Well at least she knows where you are..." She glanced up to the clock on the wall, feeling like she could scream.

Fuck, this is gonna be a long night. Come on, Mother Nature. Give me a break.

CHAPTER THREE

She noticed the classroom seemed more distant than normal; they were all in the class before the teacher. That wasn't normal. Then everyone stood to attention like army sergeants when the Head Teacher suddenly walked in. This only happened if a student was in trouble and inside, she wanted to roll her eyes. What was the point in misbehaving?

It just messed everything up for everyone else.

She wasn't expecting the announcement, at all. She wanted to collapse when she heard it.

One of them wasn't coming back to school, ever again. The classroom fell into silence, the students all stared at each other helplessly, they didn't know how to react. She knew how.

She stared at the group of people in the corner, she felt like lifting up the table and hurling it at them. They were responsible for it; they were the reason Sam wasn't coming back.

Reese Talley looked over at the clock and her heart plummeted. It was six o'clock in the evening, she'd been in the sports hall for over two hours.

She stared out of the window, feeling sick to her stomach. It was always the same; it was happening all over again. She must've been born on an unlucky day or something. It was too much of a coincidence that the black dog always interfered in her life, showing its ugly face, growling and sinking its teeth to the bone. Did a gloomy rain cloud constantly follow her? Maybe she'd been a homicidal murderer in a previous life?

Reese didn't know.

There was a pain in her wrist, tightening around her ribcage. Her breathing was becoming shallower by the second and she knew why. Reese tugged at the rubber band, she breathed in through her nose, then she let it go and exhaled through her mouth. The snapping sound soon bounced off the walls.

Solution one: Get out of your head. Find a distraction, someone had told her.

Her eyes raced to her sketch pad as she shaded in the texture on the trees. Sometimes art couldn't keep all of the little pesky demons away. Bad thoughts managed to slither through like insects.

Back when Physical Education was mandatory for everyone, the girls would pick and cross out members for their teams. In netball, she was always the goalie. A position nobody ever wanted. So she was constantly retained the bad luck of getting her back jumped on or a mindless hand smacking her right in the mouth. Maybe if she'd dressed and acted more like Sadie Richardson, her experience would have been different. She wouldn't hate her life so much.

Sadie had golden hair pristinely kept, she always remembered to keep her makeup stored like a life ring and she had a car that matched the same colour of her eyes. Maybe if Reese had copied her, she wouldn't be so much of a burden to annoy people. She wouldn't piss people off with her existence.

Reese wanted to die when she saw Jack Keeling walk into the sports hall and it was the same when she'd heard he was staying on for college. He was never any good at school; he always acted like it was a personal burden to him. If he hated school so much, why stay on?

She heard Sadie's stomach rumble and in turn, so did hers. "Are you hungry?"

Sadie nodded. "Starving."

Reese rummaged in her bag and pulled out her stabilisers. "Want one?"

"Thanks," she said, taking one of the mints from the pack. Sadie's eyes twitched over her shoulder and Reese found Jack's pissed off expression.

"Would you like one?" Reese asked worryingly.

"What are they?" Jack said.

"Mints."

"Fuck off."

Reese put them back in her bag and turned to the window.

"I know this isn't really the right time, but how on earth did you get into detention in the first place?" Sadie whispered. "I mean, you're never in trouble."

Reese shook her head.

"I won't tell anyone," Sadie replied.

Reese believed her, but she was worried about the repercussions.

"I won't tell anybody. Honestly."

Reese was scared but she noticed an honesty in Sadie's voice that she was warming. "Okay, I was meant to be going into my Media class when Miss Blair didn't arrive. So the rest of us decided to go to the field. Miss Blair arrived eventually, saw the classroom empty and they were hunting around looking for us. Eventually, she saw us and that was it."

"Why didn't you go to the common room?"

"Because we'd get caught. The teachers would have seen us."

Sadie frowned. "You all got caught in the end anyway, right?"

"I... got caught."

Sadie laughed, not getting it. "I'm sorry Reese, how did that even happen?"

"They all collaborated on a story behind my back, because I was supposedly the eldest of the class. I had the most responsibility apparently and like a magic charm, Miss Blair believed them."

"That's nasty. Was it even your idea to go for a walk around the field?"

"No, it was Tina Gibbs."

Sadie scowled. "The one with the really deep man voice and badly dyed roots?"

"Yeah, her."

Sadie frowned. "Did you have a go at her? Or tell the teacher it wasn't your idea?"

"No."

Sadie frowned. "How come? If it had been me, I would have given that cow a right slap and told Miss Blair the truth and ratted the whole lot of them out. "

"I didn't want to..."

"Reese, you can't let anyone treat you like that."

Reese sighed, shaking her head. She didn't want to talk about it anymore. It would be going onto a subject that she couldn't handle and she didn't want to give Jack Keeling fuel to burn her with.

Her stomach growled and her heart raced. If she didn't eat soon, she'd be sick and much worse. The mints weren't going to tide and sustain her appetite. Reese pulled and snapped the band on her wrist again in agitation.

Solution two: Calm your mind. Breathe easy.

With that instruction, Reese got up and walked to the Physical Education office. It was set high above on the next floor and it looked out into the sports hall. The huge office window was mirrored so you couldn't look inside. The office appearance was slightly disturbing.

Reese jangled the door handle but it didn't budge. It was locked from the inside.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Jack said.

"Trying to open the door, there might be food in there," Reese replied.

Sadie appeared by her side watching. "Why? I mean, we'll get in trouble if we break in."

Reese knew that and she didn't care for the time being. If she didn't eat something, she'd receive attention she didn't want. If they got in, Reese was perfectly fine with being blamed for it. It was her idea in the first place. The teachers would understand her situation.

Jack pushed Reese out of the way, something inside her glowed like a flame and she watched him rattled the handle.

"Nah," he murmured. "It's fucked."

Sadie prised a grip from her hair and handed it over to him. "Try this."

Jack played with it, stabbing and swirled it into the key hole. He shoved the door with his weight, there was a distinct click and it gave way.

They all entered the dark office and began searching. The cabinets were locked but Reese opened up one of the drawers in the desk. Her heart calmed as she stared at the glorious sight of the party bags of crisps, biscuits and bottles of water. It was like she'd won the lottery.

"Oh my God Mr Douglas and Mrs Grey must have had this stored in case they were locked in!" Sadie squealed. "Good thinking, Reese." She patted her on the shoulder and picked up a packet of crisps.

Reese felt good about telling her story to Sadie, a few years back she wouldn't have. The old Sadie Richardson wouldn't have been trusted, but she possessed those eyes which seemed read her like an open book. Sadie didn't need to ask why Reese didn't defend herself to Tina Gibbs, she already knew and respected her privacy not to pry.

Reese heard a muffled titter escape from the room, and she could feel *him* behind her.

"Boo," Jack whispered. Reese jumped a little and she stared at him. "*Move, freak.*" Reese looked up at him and sucked in a heated breath. "Get out of my fucking way!" He nudged Reese quite forcefully and she staggered to the side. He glared at her the whole time as he helped himself to the drawer of goodies like a rich spoilt kid.

Reese noticed he was still walking with that limp to his stride. Then she saw something glitter across his neck.

Solution three: Find a project. Keep out of your own way.

Her heart beat slowed and she felt something pull at her lips. Her fists momentarily balled up at her side.

Mother Nature, Reese prayed, staring at the pale faced demon from Hell. *Get me out of here before he gets me...*

CHAPTER FOUR

Trampolining was always something he could do. He was the best in the class and he made sure he was at the front of the line.

He climbed up on the trampoline, he noticed a slight shake but he didn't think anything of it. He was a heavy muscle set guy.

He started off with some tuck jumps to get some distance in the air. After a while, he did some tuck front somersaults and was able to slide into tuck back somersaults. He didn't hear their shouts of alarm until it was too late. The trampoline buckled underneath him and he careened towards the hardened floor. His knee hit the floor. He heard a snap and a sheering blinding burning pain.

The notifications were coming through thick and fast. He couldn't keep up with every single message that was blinking on his phone screen. That was the crazy hectic life of Jack Keeling. Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, his name plugged to each one. He wasn't going anywhere in real life but he could still live in another.

His phone screen popped every couple of seconds and his heart raced as he noticed the alarming red line in the top right-hand corner. His battery wasn't going to last long.

You still on 4 later? one of his friends said.

Yeh. Deffo. I'm not bailing, Jack replied. Not even with this fucking lock down. The 2nd siren better ring soon.

Rough. Where are you?

College. Detention.

Again! XD Sux m8. You doing a loner?

Jack smiled. ***Nah, got Sadie R wiv me. And that goth bitch, Talley.***

That's new. What's that freak doing there?

Ain't got a clue mate. Probs detention 4 havin no friends.

XD

If you're not there 2 nite with the gear. Dennis will lose his shit.

He wasn't stupid, he knew the risks. But being stuck in detention wasn't his fault. ***I've got it wiv me. Keep fucking cool mate. I don't control the weather, so Den will just have to put it up wiv it.***

😞 What if ur not there?

Jack was getting annoyed and the dull ache in his started, he had to give it a rub whenever he could feel it flaring up. ***We're not meeting till 10pm! I doubt this storm will last that long! I'll break a fucking window if I have 2. Nothing is stopping me.***

CHAPTER FIVE

Pros and cons had arisen from the Lock Down procedure. It kept people safe from the toxins, risk of human life had been substantially lowered and properties were safe too. However, Lock Down had also become a symbol for modern martyrdom and a keen tool to manipulate.

For example, Mrs Lorna Callisto of Albany in Massachusetts had threatened the American government that she'd walk out into a storm if they did not release her husband from prison. He had been arrested for murder, whether he was guilty or not was still being debated. Her story was constantly broadcasted in the news. The British press picked it up immediately.

The guilty and the evil also used the storms to their advantage. Back in the day, prisoners used to go on hunger strikes to voice their opinion or fight their cause. Once Lock Down was in effect, a bunch of inmates began pulling at the bars and smashing the windows. This was due to their resentment of their cell size. They wanted a comfortable quarantine, regardless of the crimes they had committed.

Even pop culture was banking in on it. Ed Sheeran wrote a hit song called Toxic Love and a drama series called Confinement on Channel Four had just started about four office workers who are locked in during the storms. Reese and Sadie were fans of the show.

The storms and Lock Down were popular device to accompany or strengthen arguments. But if people walked out into the chaos on their own accord, wouldn't it be their responsibility of their fate?

There was only one case of martyrdom that caught the eye of the governments from all countries.

His name was Kenneth Kravitz.

He was known for being an eccentric veteran who'd devised a suit to withstand the storms. It happened many years ago when Lock Down was being globally piloted. At the sound of the siren, Kenny suited up and walked out into his garden. Unfortunately, he did not survive. His death was not seen as a suicide or action of intolerance, but an idea for the future.

His determination and passion inspired an Australian engineer to recreate his idea and work on a suit people could use once Lock Down had begun. The Kenneth Kravitz Foundation was set up after his death and there were frequent donations made to the cause, Kinterton College was one of them.

It had inspired a worldwide debate on safety and the governments were getting involved. People did not want to be cooped up like chickens; a durable suit masking them from the storms was a principle solution.

These were the topics Sadie and Reese discussed as they ate while Jack stuffed his face with crisps texting like crazy on his phone.

"If his suit had worked, I bet we wouldn't be stuck in here you know," Sadie said.

Reese agreed. If the idea had gone right, the three of them could have headed home. But how would that have come into fruition? Hauling a suit around all day? What would it be like to walk out into a frenzied storm?

"I think the Reception staff must have gone home," Reese said.

"Do you think?" Sadie asked.

"Well, if I was working in there I'd return the message to put the person's mind at rest. Especially if it was under Lock Down."

"Should we ring again?"

"There's no harm in it," Reese said.

Sadie wiped herself clean and stepped down from the tier. She trudged past Jack who glared at her from his phone and she rang the extension. Reese followed and Sadie sighed as she heard the replay of the answer phone message. "Well, that's it. This has got to be the longest Lock Down ever."

"Just think about the people who are on the train...or the ones who are stuck in traffic," Reese said.

"It does suck for them." Sadie looked out of the window, the purple mist was still thick and harrowing and the heavy rain had not ceased. "Well, if we have to stay here all night. I want to get some sleep."

Reese pointed to the cupboard. "There's mats in there. The keys are in the office." She went back up to the tier and fished out her keys whilst Sadie retrieved the keys from the office. Sadie unlocked the cupboard door but she could not see anything. The torch blinked on and she let the beam of light scan the floor. It fell on the heap of apparatus.

"Fuck, fuck!" Jack shouted.

Sadie looked over at him. "What's the matter?"

"My phone, the battery! It's died! *Shit!* I'm meant to be going clubbing tonight!"

"Well you should have thought about that before," Sadie said curtly.

Jack glared. "What are you two doing?"

"We want to get the mats out in case we have to pull an all nighter. Can you get them out for us?" Sadie asked.

"Fucking weaklings." Jack rolled his eyes and marched over, navigating himself inside.

Reese kept her tread quiet and she edged towards the Jack's backpack. He'd left it unprotected. Her heart was thumping through her chest as she plunged her hand delicately inside. There were not any books or folders. Instead, she found a box of cigarettes, a lighter, his house keys and something else. She heaped it into her palm and examined it.

It was a necklace, it looked old from the scratches on the metal work. It had been broken somehow and the heart had been crushed. She knew that because she had spied on him, taking it off and putting it away. Also, whenever he had gotten close to her, she had seen something shimmer in the crevice of his shirt. It was always there and it intrigued her.

Her hand dived into the bag a second time and something sharp hit her finger. Carefully, as she could, she fished it out.

It was a flick knife.

She'd heard about people who carried these things and she'd read about what would happen if they were caught. It was an immediate expulsion from college and a heavy prison sentence to go with it.

Why would he need to carry a knife around with him? He's scary enough all on his own.

Reese put the knife back and felt her fingers brush against something soft. She pinched it between her fingers and uncovered it. It was a bag of white powder and she was not naive enough to not know what the content was. *What on earth is he doing with this on him? Is he a criminal?*

Jack's booming voice echoed from the cupboard and her heart was sent into overdrive. She shoved everything back into the bag, except the necklace. She slid it into the pocket of her jeans, a camouflaged place where nobody would find it. She scurried back to wall and watched as Jack and Sadie heaved the mats out from the cupboard. Her hands were shaking.

"Reese?" Sadie asked, projecting her voice. "Where are you?"

"Here," Reese replied and aimed the torch light against the wall, flickering it on and off.

"Where did you get that?" Jack asked forcefully.

"I've always had it," Reese said. "It's a key torch."

"Give it here," Sadie said. "I can find more stuff with it."

Reese rolled it across the floor and the torch tapped against Sadie's shoe.

"Great!" she chirped merrily and tested out the mechanism.

It made Reese laugh, but soon enough she was silenced by the sight of Jack's cold hard gaze. "What's so fucking funny?"

His stare frightened her. "N-Nothing."

"W-Weirdo," he muttered back.

CHAPTER SIX

Sadie rummaged through the cupboards, shining the torch and pressed her hand against a black box. She pulled it out from the corner and stared at a dusty radio. "Look at what I found," she piped up. "Why is this in here?"

"Does it work?" Reese asked, her eyes flowed over to Jack who limped to his corner with no interest in the discovery.

Sadie pushed at the buttons. "I don't think so."

"Are there any batteries in it?"

Sadie flipped over the radio. "Yeah, it looks it."

"I'll see if I can make it work," Reese said.

Sadie passed it over to her and continued with her quest. Reese studied the radio and noticed the flap to keep the batteries from falling out was missing. She pried the batteries out and rubbed them between her palms.

Bring me life.

After a few moments, she fitted them back into the slot. She rolled the belly of the batteries and heard a pitch scratching sound shoot out from the speaker.

Sadie twitched sharply towards the noise and a smile broke out across her face. "You got it working!"

Reese turned the nozzle and the noise screeched out from the speakers. The charming voice of radio host, Damon Archer and his producer, Lozzy Stuart burst from the speakers:

"Right, thanks Fred. I hope you get yourself sorted out. Take care, buddy," Damon said. *"If you're just tuning in to Asylum FM ladies and gents, you will all know that it is Lock Down time. Lozzy and myself were about to leave the studio when we heard the siren go off so we got locked in! Isn't it highly ironic?"*

Sadie laughed. "Poor buggers."

"So instead of turning everything off and waiting for the next siren, Lozzy and I decided to keep on with the show. Of course, if we do go off mid sentence it will because of the storm."

"And we're doing our show the old school way," Lozzy chimed in.

"Exactly!" Damon chuckled. *"We wanted to do the type of show I remembered when I was younger, people rang up with their problems. Sometimes I'd wake up in the middle of the night feeling pretty lonely, I'd turn on the radio and they'd be someone out there listening. Those shows don't exist anymore. So if you're going through something, if you're stuck in a bad place and you want someone to chat to. Just ring the station."*

"You don't have to use your real name. Make something up," Lozzy added.

"Have we got any calls?"

"We have Pat on the next line," Lozzy replied.

"Hello Pat, what can I do for you on this special show? Don't be shy, we're here to help."

"Hi Damon, hi Lozzy," her tiny voice twitched out of the speakers. *"I'm pregnant and I haven't told my boyfriend yet, and I'm worried how he'll react. I haven't told my parents either as I'm scared they'll throw me out of the house. They want me to be financially ready and married before I start a family."*

"You should've worn a condom," Sadie said to the radio.

"What if it happened to you?" Reese asked.

"I'd tell Joe straight away. I wouldn't be shit scared to tell him."

"*Why haven't you told your boyfriend, Pat?*" Lozzy asked.

"*I'm frightened he'll leave me. I don't think he wants kids.*"

"Well it sounds like you're dating a pig!" Sadie said to the radio. "If Joe reacted like that, I'd chop his bollocks off before he could walk. It takes *two* to tango."

Reese laughed and the sound from the radio went dead.

"Bugger!" Sadie said. "I wanted to hear what she was going to say."

"Has someone been mooching in my bag?" Jack asked alarmingly and Reese felt her heart drop. "My grandfather's necklace has gone."

No wonder he always wore it.

"I haven't taken it," Sadie shrugged.

Jack locked eyes with Reese. "Well it's got to be you, cough it up."

Reese crossed her arms over her chest, hiding her trembling heart. "I didn't take it, either."

"One of you must have."

"Jack, have you ever considered it may have just fallen out of your bag?" Sadie asked casually.

"It was here and now it isn't." He turned to Reese. "You're the culprit."

"I told you," Reese said pressingly. "I didn't take your grandfather's necklace."

Jack sighed and he looked at Sadie for guidance.

She glared at him. "What are you looking at? If you've lost it, that's your issue. It's got nothing to do with me."

Jack didn't answer but a smirk tickled at the corner of his mouth and then his lips curved into a smile. "Get up," he said to Reese.

The shy girl sparingly heaved herself to her feet. Reese stood before him; she couldn't help but stare up at his towering stature.

"Gimme the torch," Jack grunted.

Sadie frowned. "Why?"

"Just fucking throw it over here!"

Sadie did and he snatched it from the air. He clicked it on and shone it in Reese's eyes.

She squinted as it burned. Then she put her hand up, covering herself from the stinging light. Jack watched her with an animalistic curiosity and lowered the torch. Her hand fell back to her side and resumed focus on his face, especially his dark brown eyes.

"Arms up," he ordered.

Reese did as commanded and she slowly raised them.

Sadie stopped moving the mats and gaped at what was happening before her eyes. "Are you being serious? Jack, stop it."

"Quiet, traitor."

Sadie shook off his insult and grabbed the second mat. "Do whatever the fuck you want then."

Jack smoothed his finger along the bridge of Reese's arm, trying to feel out any bumps or crevices. Using the torch to help him see better, he slowly stroked the light across her chest, almost as if he was ingeniously undressing her, trying to rip out any secrets she kept concealed.

Reese made an awkward cough, but she could tell that he didn't care. Jack splayed his hand over her jean pocket, his eyes never leaving her face, until she blushed, a deep blooming shade of rose.

Her mouth twitched uncomfortably and for some reason, she knew a part of him enjoyed it. His gaze wafted over her body. Reese's heart twisted as his palm moved over the crease where his fractured piece of jewellery lay hidden, almost burning into her leg.

"Okay, seriously Jack. I was joking before. Stop it now!" Sadie said.

Jack clicked the torch off and rounded on her. "You ruined the fun."

"You're just teasing her. She hasn't got your flimsy necklace so go and get your kicks elsewhere."

"Ouch," he said playfully and his sardonic expression disappeared. He gave Reese the once over, examining her from head to toe, then back up to stare at her blue grey eyes. "Whatever. I'm having a cig."

A breath escaped Reese's mouth as Jack trudged to the corner of the sports hall. She noticed how he picked up his right leg more than the left when he walked. He had a limp from a trampolining accident that went wrong.

Reese sat down slowly in a tremor and she pressed her back against the wall, smoothing her hand over her jeans. The necklace had not moved an inch and if Jack had found it, there would have been Hell to pay.

He would have killed me...

Her attention was drawn back to Jack as he sparked up one of his cigarettes, his eyes closed in a soft tentative manner. A few seconds past and he leaned forward, blowing the smoke out of his mouth into one of the vents. Reese watched him with a quiet fascination.

Jack clocked his head, feeling her prying eyes stare off in his direction. Reese stared quickly towards the ground and abruptly started to mess with her jumper. Jack breathed in another drag, scowling at her.

"You'll set the alarms off if you keep that up," Sadie said.

Jack shrugged, puffing out the smoke. "Who fucking cares? I don't. Nobody's going to stop me."

Sadie marched over to him and plucked the flaring cigarette from his fingers, she took a quick drag and retched on it. "That's not a cigarette, that's a fucking spliff! You're not smoking that shit in here!" She threw it to the ground and stamped on it.

"Hey, you can't do that!"

"Smoke that crap on your own time, preferably when you're not locked in a fucking sports hall. I'm not getting high because of you."

You'll go mad if he shares the other high he's hiding, Reese thought.

Jack smirked. "I see you've still got some *fight* in you, Sade."

"Oh, bite me."

He looked over towards Reese. "She used to be a right bitch."

I already know. I've seen it up close.

"Well I've changed now," Sadie said and she stared up into his face. "The reason I stopped being friends with you is because you were making me into a vile person that I despised."

"That's not strictly true though, is it? You wouldn't have been in detention in the first place if you hadn't done *something* rebellious." He watched her expression and he grinned. "What was it, Sade?"

"It's none of your business."

"Neither is you flushing my cig out."

Sadie walked away from him.

"Want to hear about how I got into detention?" he asked.

"No," she said and glanced over her shoulder. "Plus you're *always* in detention so who cares. I don't know why they don't just expel your sorry arse."

"I had a free so I went down to the field with Pepper for a cig. Warner caught us, he noticed something I had and smashed it. So I started to push him around."

Sadie stopped. "You attacked a teacher? Is there something wrong with you? Have you finally lost your touch on reality?"

Jack crossed his arms over his chest. "I nearly did, but he started it. If he hadn't broken my necklace, I wouldn't have lost my temper with him."

Reese's heart froze. *No wonder it's so precious to him.*

"Jack you can get suspended for that," Sadie said critically.

He shrugged. "I probably have."

"And how is your Mom going to react when she finds out? She's not going to be happy."

"She won't be home, she never is," he shot back.

"Good, she's the lucky one!"

Jack snatched the bottle of pop from the floor and hurled it across the room. Sadie managed to dodge in time but it smacked and bounced off just from Reese's head. She flinched and crawled on her hands and knees, distancing herself from the imminent danger.

Sadie sighed tiredly. "You didn't need to do that. That was really reckless."

"Ignore him Sadie," Reese said, her voice rising out from the silence. "He's only doing it to rile you up."

Jack stared at her. "Who the hell asked for *your* opinion? And why would someone like *you* be in detention anyway?"

Reese mimicked Sadie. "It's none of your business."

Jack scoffed. "Probably something on the lines like '*Oh miss, I forgot my silver encrusted pencil case.*' Or you probably begged to come here so you'd be like the rest of us or nobody would notice who the fuck you are."

"Jack!" Sadie yelled. "Stop it."

"At least I'm not an attention seeker," Reese muttered.

"At least I'm not a weak fucking coward like you. Yeah, I overheard why you're here. You should have smashed Tina Gibbs's fucking head in for shitting on you. I don't let *anyone* fucking walk over me, push over."

Reese felt a surge cloud her eyes, she couldn't control it and the barrier holding her tears back disintegrated. They flowed like a river down her face. Jack started to laugh, at first it was just a titter and then it exploded into hysterics.

Reese was used to this, the embarrassment, the humiliation, it wasn't new to her.

"If I had no morals just like you Jack," Sadie said. "I'd do us all a favour, and push you out into that fucking storm!"

He walked towards her. "Go on then. I dare you."

Sadie's eyes narrowed. "Don't tempt me. Apologise to Reese."

"Why are you sticking up for her anyway?" His voice was full of venom. "I bet you've hardly spoken to her the whole time you've been going to this fucking college."

"I'm the one trying keep the morale up in here, say you're sorry. And if it wasn't for Reese, we'd all be fucking starving!"

Jack smirked, leering forward. "No," he said carelessly. "I won't."

"Apologise. Now."

"Look at the expression on my face!" he exclaimed. "I...don't...care...about...her."

There was a chilled beat of silence.

"*You cunt,*" Reese hissed, smearing her tears with the cuff of her jumper.

Sadie's eyes widened in shock and a suppressed giggle escaped her throat. Jack's jaw could have hit the floor. It was like being at a comedy show when the heckler thought they had the final say and then the comedian crushes them with just a couple of funny phrases.

"What did you just call me?" Jack stepped forward, his smile disappeared and his white wolfish teeth shone, ready to bite out. Sadie saw him advancing and she moved between the space separating him from Reese. "*What the fuck did you just call me?*"

Sadie pushed an urgent hand against his chest. "Jack, don't. Please. Not here."

Jack shoved Sadie to the side and Reese felt her palms go sweaty. Her head was going dizzy as his fists curled up. She imagined how much horse power was behind one blow.

He's going to kill me...

Fear bubbled up in her belly and she scrambled to her feet, darting for the tier, but a pair of thundering feet in black leather Doc Marten boots were quick on her tail.

The air around her grew suddenly cold and Jack's fingers latched onto her jumper. He grabbed her around the shoulders and slammed her up against the wall.

"*Don't you ever call me that!*" Jack pushed his arm up to her chin so her jaw locked. "*Do you fucking hear me?*"

Pain erupted in her back and the tears flooded her eyes. Reese stared at him, his pale arm slicing into her skin and the air in her lungs shrunk as the ache in her ribcage expanded. She tried to fight it but she knew what was looming over her. The hissing in her ears had begun, the white dots clouding her senses were growing and the floor disappeared from under her feet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Jack Keeling had been in plenty of fights and confrontations. But for the first time ever, weakling and resident nobody Reese Talley had called him a word he utterly despised. At the sound it, his temper had risen like a tidal wave.

He had pinned up tons of people before, in fact he'd lost count how many times it happened, even with an injured leg. His opponents or his 'victims' always gave a good fight or reacted in some bizarre way or another. One kid had spat in his face when he'd mentioned his 'slag' mother, one girl who owed him money for spliff threw up and it went all over his boots, one even pissed their trousers and he couldn't remember why he attacked the kid in the first place. But he'd never experienced someone faint on him before.

Reese had fallen into his arms like a rag doll.

Her head hung back like a gymnast striking a pose. She was completely out of it. It was weird and uncomfortable to him. Jack stared at the unconscious girl hanging in his arms. "Reese?"

She wasn't responding and he noticed beads of perspiration had begun to loom on her pale skin. Her black hair was so long it was touching the floor.

"What the hell have you done?" Sadie yelled, running up the steps.

He looked round to find Sadie staring at him with her begrudging x-ray eyes. "I didn't hit her."

"Well, you've done something! Lie her down. Now!"

"She fainted, that's all."

"Put her down, Jack!"

"Fucking hell, calm it," Jack said and he lay her down on the floor.

Sadie knelt by the unconscious Reese. "You must've scared her."

"No, I didn't. I was just pissed off at what she called me."

"Bollocks Jack! I heard everything you were saying. Why do you have to be like that?" Sadie pulled up Reese's sleeve and Jack noticed something twinkle around her wrist.

Jack frowned. "What?"

"Reese forgot to tell us she's a diabetic."

"So? What am I supposed to do? Give her the kiss of life?" he exclaimed. "I had no fucking idea she had that!"

"Shut up, Jack." Sadie listened to Reese's chest. "Thank fuck, she's breathing. I knew she didn't look right." She felt the back of her neck. "She's burning up. There's a sofa in the office, you'll have to carry her in."

Jack sighed.

Sadie glared at him. "For once in your life, will you put somebody else's problem before yourself?"

Jack wanted to scream at her. She was treating him like a kid and it was really pissing him off. To make Sadie shut up, he slotted his hands under Reese. He'd been lifting weights for years so picking up the girl was no dilemma for him.

Had he really scared this girl so much that it triggered her to have a diabetic fit?

The way Sadie was reacting to it bothered him slightly. Could this Reese girl really be in serious trouble?

He just wanted her to back off and not call him by that word again. Jack laid Reese on the sofa in the office and Sadie bunched one of the cushions under her head. "Reese, I want you to flutter your eyes if you can hear me."

Reese did as she was asked.

"Look she can hear you, she's fine," Jack said.

"Are you okay, Reese? Do you need anything?" Sadie asked.

"Water," Reese whispered.

Sadie grabbed a bottle of water from the drawer. "Right I want you to drink this," she said, pushing the bottle against her dry lips.

Reese drank as Sadie navigated the contents into her mouth. The pale girl choked, she sat up spluttering water everywhere and then fell back against the cushions. "I'll be...fine," she uttered.

"See she's gonna be okay," Jack said.

Sadie glanced up. "Do you know what happens when diabetics don't get enough sugar?"

Jack honestly didn't have an answer.

"They'll go into a coma and they can die!" Sadie proceeded and went back to aid Reese. She touched a finger to her temple but her body seemed to be shivering. "Fuck, she's burning up. Just go away Jack, you're no use here."

Her words hurt and it made the fracture in his leg ache. He turned at the door, catching sight of Sadie yanking off Reese's black jumper.

The diabetic weird girl was wearing an incredibly pretty blue laced bra which emphasised her shapely waist and breasts. The moonlight illuminated her pale skin, making her long dark hair shimmer. There was something about the sight of her like that scared him because Jack hadn't felt fear for a very long time.

Pepper choked on the spliff and they all laughed at him. He was the quiet one of the gang, the clown they picked on sometimes when boredom rose but he took it like a soldier.

"You fucking weed," Craig cackled.

Jack took the cig from his mouth. "Do it like this, Pep." The kid watched him as he breathed the smoke in through his mouth and slowly out through his nose. "You'll get more of a hit that way."

He liked it when the drug was taking him. It was better than shagging sometimes.

Jack noticed Craig and Pepper's eyes were staring to the end of the bridge. No wonder they looked annoyed.

It was Reese Talley.

She was standing at the end of the bridge which was situated over a railway track. The college campus was on the other side and you had to cross it to get there. Jack and the lads always hung out at the bridge. They could smoke there as it wasn't permitted on the grounds.

"Are you just gonna stand there?" Craig asked.

Reese looked like she was about to walk through fire.

"Yeah, we don't bite," Pepper replied.

Reese turned her gaze to Jack and he revelled in the fear on her face. She reminded him of a deer in headlights.

"You'll miss your class," Jack said sarcastically.

He loved her petrified expressions, it was the right aphrodisiac before a fight.

Reese had a black folder covered in band stickers pressed across her chest and her arms hugged it like a shield. She staggered forward and kept her head down as she walked.

The lads laughed. Craig flicked his stubbed cigarette at her, it narrowly missed her hair. Pepper snatched the cig from Jack and blew the smoke into her face.

Jack hocked phlegm at the back of his throat. It collected in his mouth and he shot it out between his lips. The yellow spit ball was a critical hit and it dripped down the side the face.

Jack smiled as she turned to him, warm tears were clouding her eyes. The laughs grew louder as she wiped the spit away from her face. Jack saw her wiping tears away from her face as she left but he didn't know that was the moment his downfall was going to begin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The tears were becoming unbearable. The pain in her chest was crushing. Bad luck just seemed to follow her everywhere. The girl sat in toilet, tears falling constantly. It was becoming a common occurrence. Well, she had enough. This had to stop.

The first plan had worked

She pulled out a razor from her bag. She'd taken it from her mother's make up table. She slid one of her fingernails under the cap at the bottom, separating it from plastic. The razor fell into her palm as she gazed at it. This would be the end of her problems.

Her Mom wouldn't notice that one of her razors had gone missing. She had so many anyway, she wouldn't know.

An hour passed when Reese's uncontrollable sweating sessions had ceased to be. After Jack had pinned her up against the wall, everything had gone black and then she heard Sadie's soft voice drifting.

She lay on the sofa in the office; Sadie was sitting across from her. It was surprisingly pleasant listening to the natural sounds of the world outside, instead of their own voices.

"I can't believe it's eight o'clock already," Reese said, her voice lowered to a quiet intimate whisper. "Is he asleep?"

Sadie glanced towards Jack, she watched the subtle actions of his shoulders rise and fall. He lay along the length of the window, his bag had become a likely pillow and he faced away from them. She looked back at Reese, nodding softly. "I'm sorry that he scared you. It's not fair and you were cool when he was laying into you."

"Do you think so?"

A smile lit up Sadie's face. "Hell's yeah! He didn't like the fact that you could stand up for yourself."

"But I was bawling my eyes out and he was enjoying it. I probably looked like a right idiot."

"You looked great actually," Sadie said.

"I didn't plan to call him a, you know. It just fell out."

"It was amazing. He hasn't said a word since. I think you floored him. You definitely surprised me."

There was something triumphant about it, especially hearing it from Sadie Richardson. Reese did feel proud of herself and was proud of Sadie. She'd taken control of her restless situation and thought logically. Her hands were still trembling but she didn't feel sick which was a heavenly positive.

"You did great too," Reese uttered.

"Thanks."

"I'll know who to call when I'm in another predicament."

The remark made Sadie laugh. "How long have you had it?"

"I was born with it," Reese replied. "It's a crappy medical condition, but there are worse ones out there."

"Did you have an attack when Jack...?"

"No, I faint in stressful situations. I have anxiety. My head goes and I collapse when things get really bad." She showed her a special watch on her wrist. "It's not a watch, it tracks the sugar in my blood. It beeps when my sugar level goes down."

Sadie noticed the little silver scar across Reese's neck. "What's that?"

"I...don't want to talk about it." Reese turned on her side, facing the cushioned side of the sofa and wrapped herself in Sadie's shawl like a blanket.

She glanced over to Jack, lying under the moon and rain where the light streaked a blue tint.

Beep, beep. Reese's watch sounded off in the distance.

"I need to do something," Reese replied. "Don't worry about me. Go back to sleep, Sadie."

Jack opened his eyes softly, breathing through the slow burn in his injured leg. He hadn't been asleep at all. He'd heard every word they'd said and tightened his fist through every giggle they dished out. It had taken all of his strength to not go in there and rip their fucking heads off.

He heard Reese rummaging through her bag and she stepped out of the office, her footsteps going towards him. She tiptoed around him similarly to how a deer scurried around a sleeping lion. He could feel the fear rising from her.

Does that drip realise how much noise she's making? Jack thought. He mimed the act of sleeping. The silent loner moved to the same window ledge. *What the fuck is she doing?*

The weirdo pulled out a red hand sized case. From inside, she pulled out a long rubber band and wrapped it around her arm. She tightened it with her mouth. Jack saw a flicker of something sharp in her other hand.

It was a needle.

Fuck me, Jack thought.

Reese flicked the needle, holding it up to the window. She stretched her arm, tapping her pale skin and he saw the veins rise to the surface. The way a drug addict injected heroin. There was something about it, he was entranced. Her long dark hair against her ivory skin made her look like some of the goth freaks he'd see prancing through town. *Fucking freaks. The whole lot of them.*

He saw her wince from the pain as the needle slid into her skin. Something in his stomach jumped which was weird because he'd seen plenty of sickening things. His heart was beating in his chest and he hated himself as his body reacted the way he didn't want to. He couldn't control it.

Oh my God. I'm getting hard...

Thankfully, his growing and aching piece of anatomy was facing the window so she couldn't see. *Fuck off, hard on. Why is this happening? I mean, she's just sitting there in her bra and I can see her tits!*

Reese bit down on her lip. She hissed as she finished the injection. The needle was out of her arm and her eyes shot to his. It hit him like a bullet and he clamped his eyes shut.

CHAPTER NINE

You know when you witness a scene you weren't meant to see, that was how Sadie felt when Mrs Keeling came stumbling in from her night out. Sadie winced when she heard her slurred ranting about how much of a burden he was, how much money he was losing. Sadie looked at her friends, the mutual tension in the room was crushing. They all wanted to flee, as the house descended into silence.

Sadie saw a glimmer of shame in Jack's eyes. He got to his feet and marched outside. They heard their muffled argument; Jack was telling her that she'd had enough alcohol and she should sleep. That his friends were over playing games and she was embarrassing him.

They all flinched when they heard his body being smacked against the wall after he snatched the cider from her trembling hand. Sadie's cheek throbbed after she heard the swipe of Mrs Keeling's palm against Jack's face.

They all stared at each other helplessly, their friend had just been assaulted by his parent in the next room. What should they have done? What do you do in a situation like this?

The office had descended into silence and Sadie watched Reese sleep soundlessly. She heaved herself to her feet and glanced out of the window. The storm was still brewing. This must have been the longest time Lock Down had ever rang out.

Sadie felt a deep sense of guilt when she looked over at Jack. She shouldn't though. With how he messed with people's heads and harmed others - she never heard him once apologise for his behaviour. Only when the teacher made him, then he'd throw it back in his victim's face when the teacher turned their shoulder.

She moved out into the sports hall, Jack looked over at her, glaring and angry. "What the fuck do you want?"

"To see if you're okay," she replied.

"Yeah, I am."

"Jack, I didn't mean to say that about your Mom."

He faced the window. "It doesn't bother me, Sade. I hear it all the time. People always say shit about her."

She sat across from him. "Can you get her any help?"

"She doesn't want it."

"You could take her to AA meetings."

Jack shook his head, shrugging his shoulders. "My aunt pulled that one on her, said she'd rather die."

She'd only met his mother once and it was a very unpleasant experience. She'd never be able to erase it from her memory. Sadie knew there was a reason for the way Jack acted. It wasn't an excuse for his behaviour but his mother played a vital part in why he pushed himself over the edge sometimes.

Sadie could never understand what it was like to live in a house with a drunk mother and a non-existent father. Jack used to joke that she was a prostitute and his immaculate conception was done in the car park behind his local pub. He used to joke

that his father was a millionaire on a business trip who owned a lavish villa in Spain. Maybe it was his father that gave him his white complexion and yellow hair. He always joked, he never got serious about it. Maybe, being serious was a sign of weakness.

"I'm sorry Jack," Sadie said. "I'm tired of fighting with you."

He shrugged again. "I don't care..."

"You know, it's not a bad thing to ask for help once in a while. Or to open up? Or just saying sorry."

He laughed. "Fuck am I saying those words, they mean nothing."

"Why?"

"Mum always says it when she's sober then the second she drinks, she turns into something else." Jack stared at her hard in the face. "Why should I say sorry when I'm not?"

Sadie frowned. "So you don't feel bad about Reese fainting?"

The next action shocked her; she was expecting Jack to spit his words back at her. Instead, he pursed his lips pensively.

"She's diabetic and she faints under stressful situations," Sadie said.

"Whoever broke my leg never apologised to me!" Jack snapped. "Plus she's okay, she's not gonna die."

It was like conversing with a brick wall. *God, he's so stubborn. Why can't he just admit when he's wrong? What's the matter with him?*

Sadie stared out towards the sports field; the rain had started to soften. The purple mist was still out there and it made her think about Esmeralda.

"You know the circle isn't the same without you," Jack said.

She turned to him. "I'm not coming back. I'm in a better place now."

"Yeah, fucking Joe Curtis - like that's better."

"Joe makes me better," Sadie said. "It's what you learn about when you're in a relationship with another human being. You'd learn alot about yourself if you stop thinking about number one and letting someone in once in a while."

"Not gonna happen," he murmured.

She was beginning lose it but that's what he did. Jack Keeling got under your skin to rile you up. Sadie decided to think strategically and she brought out the big guns.

"Does the name Sam Bridges mean anything to you?"

Jack shrugged sluggishly.

"It does to me. We made his life a living Hell."

Jack waved off her actions. "I don't care, Sade."

"He killed himself, Jack."

He opened his eyes and focused on her.

"Yeah, he did," she said. "Claire told me. It happened after you made that Facebook page about him. He came into school and then you knocked him out. You filmed it, put it online and he downed a load of sleeping pills. They rushed him to hospital but he'd gone before they could do anything." She felt a surge behind her eyes. "We drove him to do that, Jack. That's why I left, okay? I felt sick. We were evil. After I found out about his suicide, I couldn't sleep for months." She covered her mouth momentarily. "I saw his father in town once and you should've seen the way he looked at me..."

She remembered that day. She'd never ran out of a shop so fast before.

Jack stared at her, his jaw clenched and his hand balled up.

In no time, the tears fell and Sadie couldn't stop them. "Why did we do it, Jack? Why did we pick on him so much?"

"He was fat. But we were just joking around," Jack said lazily. "It wasn't serious."

"That's not true..." Reese stood in the doorway of the office. "If Sam had been ripped, six foot tall and had a ton of friends, you would have left him alone because he'd have a chance of beating you."

Jack scoffed derogatorily. "Well he wasn't, so fuck off about it."

"Stop it," Sadie said. "The pair of you."

Jack glared at her with irritation.

"I lost my best friend because of your shitty friendship circle. Not a single one of you noticed what you were doing to him. And to me and the others too." Reese looked furious. Sadie had never seen her angry before. "I have nobody to go to lunch with anymore. I've got nobody to speak to. You took him away from me!" She looked at Jack. "You only pick on us because we're outnumbered or we're not as strong as you!"

Jack turned to her, leering forward. His actions reminded Sadie of a wolf on the prowl. "If you don't shut your mouth, I'm gonna shut it for you."

"Do it. I'm not scared of you," Reese replied. "Not anymore. You're nothing but a crippled... *cunt!*"

His pale face flushed scarlet and steam could have poured from his ears. "Remember, what I said before? What did I fucking tell you, huh?" Jack heaved himself to his feet. "What did I say? If you called me that again, I'd kill you!"

Sadie saw him staggering towards Reese and she rushed between them.

The war had started again.

"Don't do this, Jack. Please."

She didn't like the look on his face. His smile was full of pleasure. Reese was a hare and Jack was the dog on the catch. She'd seen him in plenty of fights and he always came up strong. Sadie remembered the fight between him and Sam Bridges, the second his fist collided with Sam's head, he was out cold. Reese had already had one fit already and Sadie didn't want to deal with another casualty.

You don't let a Rottweiler into a fight when you know who's going to win!

"Reese go back to sleep," Sadie pleaded. She stood in front of Jack, pressing her hand against his chest. "Don't do it, Jack."

"You always said you'd kill the person who was responsible for your limp," Reese said.

Sadie stared at her and she felt the air change. Then a huge smile illuminated the quiet's girl face. Sadie didn't like her expression at all.

"After Sam died, I was put on the list to put the trampoline up for PE. I knew how much you loved going first, so I made sure one of the hooks wasn't fastened." She started to laugh and it sounded full of thrill and pleasure.

Jack's smile disappeared and Sadie saw how crushed he was. She stared at Reese's cruel fiery eyes. That was how she looked when she was a tormentor. She remembered the sadness in Sam's eyes and the sheer heartbreak on his face when they tortured him.

"And you didn't know that Sam was in love with you, did you Sadie?"

The room was becoming too small and she couldn't breathe. *I don't believe you. I'm not gonna help you, Reese. Not this time. You're stronger than me now.* Her body clicked into automatic pilot and she flew away from Jack and found the darkness. Sadie heaved the door of the sports cupboard shut and she let the river of tears fall. *I'm so sorry, Sam.*

CHAPTER TEN

It was a mixture of relief and euphoria. Reese had felt it rise from his shoulders as she'd let those secrets and aggressions free. She couldn't bare Jack speak about her best friend like that when he was responsible for his pain. Not when he unable to defend himself. If only he and the rest of the people he'd taunted could've seen her taking out Jack Keeling - the cunt fucking bastard that had ruined their lives, she knew they would've been cheering her on.

Jack stared at her, the pound of his boots on the tier steps made her ears shake. She really didn't mean to upset Sadie but it was like a water fall, she felt she had to let it all out. If she hadn't taken advantage of this situation, it would have eaten her from the inside out. But she did intend to wound Jack, fatally. After everything he'd put her through, he deserved the truth.

Yes, she was the culprit. She was the one who had broken his leg and it was all worth it.

Reese had lavished those heavenly moments when he'd been in hospital. His followers hadn't paid her or anybody else any attention since their alpha was wounded. But the second he returned, their haven was broken and the followers resumed their worship of him... and torment of them.

They'd showered him with concern and love, that type of humanity nobody in school had ever shown to Reese.

Her painkiller had come in the form of Sam Bridges and since he was gone, she felt like she'd been shoved into a stampede naked and alone. Only her parents showed that type of affection. From this resentment, the hate and loathing she'd felt for Jack and his sheep he flocked around school swelled within her until one day it drove her over the edge. The act had caused her mother to become over protective - and if Reese could have taken it back, she would have.

But Jack was too near now, his fists were clenched and his jaw was locked. *He's coming for blood. Here he is, that bastard is back. Do it. I dare you.*

"So you're responsible for this?" Jack hissed, indicating to the limp in his stride.

"You're the reason why I had to stop playing football?"

"Yes," she whispered and she smiled right in his face. "It was me and I don't regret doing what I did." She pulled her hair to one side, revealing the scar on her neck. "And you made me do this..." She pressed her finger against the scar. "You came back, taunting me, calling me a frigid ugly cow. So I got a razor from home, came to school the next day, went to the bathroom... One of the teachers found me, got my neck stitched up, nobody noticed I was gone. Then when I came back, you made a jibe - then you spat in my hair. I had a bandage on my neck, I don't think you even saw it. I got loads of questions, they were never with concern, it was always 'what happened to your neck? Have you got a spot on there or something? Are you covering up a love bite? Are you frigid or something?' I said yes to all of them because I know they would rather believe their own ideas than listen to me." Her gaze never left his. "I never told anyone that I tried to die..."

He was staring back at her, but something wasn't quite right about him. Why hadn't he attacked her by yet?

"Hit me if you're going to do it," she said. "You-you nearly did once, so get on with it. End all of this for me."

Why wasn't he shouting and swearing at her?

Her hand whipped out in frustration and she slapped him clean across the face. Jack took it, after a couple of beats; he turned his eyes back to her. He always acted on impulse but not this time, he was thinking, calculating what to do next..

A laugh escaped from Reese's throat, she used it as camouflage because now she was scared. He wasn't acting like Jack Keeling. The bully she knew would have thrashed her to a pulp, just like he did to Sam. She should be out cold on the floor of the sports hall with a broken nose.

Jack seized her shoulders. His large pale hands clamped down and his face hovered before hers. Jack stared at her for a couple of moments, then she couldn't see anything. He was so close she could taste him. His lips stroked across her mouth briefly and she gasped in shock. The feel of his lips on hers was surprisingly soft.

Jack pushed her away; the force was so violent Reese hit the wall. Jack turned quietly and marched back up to the office, the walls shook as he slammed the door. Pain erupted into Reese's chest and she stared up at the ceiling. What on earth had just happened?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

He'd never felt emotion like it.

Jack remembered when he used to take pleasure in planning his revenge for the culprit who had broken his leg. His ideas consisted of torturing them, breaking each of their limbs very very slowly so they could feel the pain and the ability they would rely on.

He'd always predicted it would have been one of his rivals - maybe Charlie Callow from around where he lived. They'd been in plenty of rough discrepancies, he had friends at the same school, he could've easily asked one of them to injure him.

But it had been the voiceless Reese Talley.

The one girl that he used to spit on, jeer at and rob. She never fought back. He didn't know what to do when she was telling him all of these things he'd done and how he'd done them. Jack knew he couldn't get out of it. He hated the tone of her voice, speaking down to him like he was a piece of shit.

Pain pulsed down his injured leg and he felt the anger rise within him. So he deserved this, did he?

Reese Talley had broken his dream of wanting to become a professional footballer. He'd fucked all of his classes and now he'd have to pay and suffer for it. Thanks to her.

I should've killed her.

Fighting his body's impulses to smash Reese's head against the wall was a challenge in itself. But he had to fight another urge, after seeing her in that blue lace bra, injecting herself by the window, the pleasurable pain when the needle slid into her skin, he couldn't stop thinking about it. When he grabbed her shoulders, one part wanted to hurt her - the other wanted her up against the wall, biting his lips into her flesh, making her scream.

I wanted to hurt her.

That was why he'd barely kissed her.

I wanted to fuck her.

That was why he pushed her away.

You sick bastard.

He had to rack his brain when she mentioned Sam Bridges, but there had been so many of these people he'd 'taunted'. It was impossible to keep a tab on all of them. Maybe he should have been ashamed that he had to back track through all the people he'd bullied...

Then eventually he remembered Sam - the podgy pig eyed boy.

Why go to school looking the way he did? It was his fault because he made himself a target. He should've hit the gym, pulled some weights and stopped eating McDonalds. Maybe if he'd done that, people would've treated him differently. Jack wouldn't have knocked him out. Maybe Sam would've fought back.

I was doing him a favour! He would've spent his money on chips and chocolate, the fat fuck.

Jack never understood the sympathy for victims. They were that way because they chose to be. Why didn't they stand up? Why didn't Sam block his punch?

His thoughts raced back to Reese and the knife story. *But that wasn't my fault, neither was Sam's death. She said, 'You made me do this.' I wasn't the one who slashed her*

neck, she did that. I'm not the one who shoved pills down Sam's throat, he did that all on his own.

He broke her words apart, was this going to happen anyway? Had she planned to come to school with another idea?

She could have attacked me that day if she'd wanted to...

She could have killed me...

Feeling cornered by it all, Jack grabbed the leg of the chair before him and hurled it against the office window. And then he screamed, letting the air disappear so much it made the ledges of his ribs burn.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Looking back at her life, Sadie knew she had turned over a new leaf. But just like the way Reese had done with Jack - Sam Bridges was reciprocating his vengeful hatred of her ten times worse.

The tears were falling down her face as she pleaded for him to stop. Sam bowed his head, lashing the rope around her wrists and ankles. Ironically it was to the netball post where she used to taunt him and snatch the ball from Reese's hands.

Sadie pulled on the restraints but there was no way she could break free. Then she looked up into the sky and she could see it coming for her. The thick purple clouds and the swirls of black mist...

"Sam, please!" she shouted.

He stood to his feet and she didn't realise how tall he actually was.

"Please. Don't do this. You're not a bad person, Sam."

He stared at her, his eyes void and pale.

"Why are you doing this?" Sadie sobbed softly.

Sam stroked her cheek, the back of his knuckles were surprisingly silky. "Why were you so mean to me?"

"Because...you were an easy target for us. And you never fought or spoke back." She watched him, her lips trembling and aching. "You never told on us. We could walk over you..."

Sam nodded with an understanding that frightened her. He turned to the imminent chaos, surveying the calm before the storm. "Don't cry, Sadie. It'll soon be over now."

It was two o'clock on the Saturday morning and the Lock Down siren had not rang out. Sadie lay across one of the mats fast asleep, she kept twitching now and then. Reese shivered as she watched her and she wondered what she was dreaming about. She didn't mean to upset her before but her anger and spite spilled out of her like a waterfall. She missed Sam Bridges terribly, the bullying towards him was ten times worse than she endured. If she'd known what he was going to do, she would have tried with her might to stop him.

But, that was the thing when you're drowning, you're doing it in the dark. Nobody can see you and the overwhelming shame you feel is worth it to drown it.

The weather had lightened over the silent hours and after that bizarre encounter with Jack, she'd begun to sweat like crazy. She lay back against the mat. She ran her fingers over the veins of the necklace.

One of the joints had been crunched down from probably a football or running shoe that had a spiked sole. Reese's hand danced across the necklace, moulding it, trying to piece it together, just like Jack. She twirled the last loop, renewing it.

He'll kill you once he knows you took it. She looked up at the office. *True, but he's got to have it back.*

She reached the office with her heartbeat pulsing through her body. She pressed her hand to the door and pushed it open.

A trail of falling tears was a bizarre experience especially when coming in contact with the improbable beholder. Reese stared at the miraculous sight of the office; he'd ripped it right through. Sheets and sheets of paper were dispersed across the floor, chairs were upturned and the mini sofa was discarded from its original place.

His fingers tightened painfully into his white hair and his cheeks were stained with tears. Was she the first person to ever see Jack Keeling weep?

Jack clocked Reese straight away. "Oh look. It's the leg breaker. I know it was you who went through my bag. I bet you're loving seeing me like this. You can quit fucking staring at me."

With his command, Reese stepped forward and edged towards him as if she was walking on broken glass. "I-I f-fixed your necklace," she said softly and held it out for him to take. It was like heading towards a lion with a treat.

Jack stared at her like she had some sort of revolting disease. "How did you...?" "If-if you'd taken the time to know me, my parents own a jewellery shop in town. They mend this stuff. Your necklace was an easy job for me to do. I've-I've saved you some money."

"Why would you do that after I've been so mean to you?" Jack squinted at her. "Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not. Well, I'm not sure."

Jack frowned at her. "You are weird. Is it true you went to a mental hospital?"

"Yes, after the suicide attempt. The only rumour about me that's true."

Jack blinked uncomfortably.

"Mom sent me there." She held up her wrist. "It's how I learned the rubber hand theory back in therapy. Anyway, I just wanted to help you." Reese dropped it into his open palm and she watched him stare at it. "Just appreciate it."

Jack didn't listen to her. "And I know it was you who was messing around with my knife."

Her heart froze. "Why would you need to carry one around with you?"

He shrugged. "Protection."

"From who?"

"Everyone."

Reese didn't know how to respond to that. "And the drugs?"

Jack wiped his nose with the back of his hand, the red of his eyes ached. "It's my income. I don't live off Mommy and Daddy."

She hadn't known a thing about his upbringing, she'd been far too concerned about getting away from his taunts. She'd learnt so much about him when she eavesdropped on his conversation with Sadie. But for the first time, she realised Jack was just as emotionally vulnerable as her, as Sadie, as anyone. He'd built a wall high up in his psyche for people, so nobody could see or know what Reese had seen.

"I'm sorry about your leg," Reese finally said.

"So what else could you have done? Poison me? Break my arm instead?"

Reese thought about his questions. *Maybe...maybe I would've done all of those things...but at that time, you deserved it.*

"I just...wanted to give the necklace back to you." Reese swept her black hair away from her pale face. "I'm going back to sleep."

Jack's hand grabbed her wrist and her heart rose rapidly. "What are you doing?" she asked, fear bubbling up from her core.

*Solution four: If you see danger...
Run.*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

At ten past two on the Saturday morning, many things had happened during Lock Down. Ivan Arnold had been locked in with his new born daughter whilst his wife had gone out to the shops. Being a father was one of the most frightening things he'd ever encountered yet one of the most rewarding. He'd sat nursing his little girl whilst he watched Poppy sleep wonders as the rain hammered down outside. He'd finally got her to rest, the sounds outside frightened her and she'd been yearning for her mother.

Damon Archer and Lozzy Stuart saw this lock down event as one of their best shows of their career. They'd made their radio show into a make shift bedroom feeling like they were kids at a camping site. It was nice for a change to get up and close with their listeners, rather than just interviewing people desperate for PR. They had some laughs with their callers and it was sad sweetness to hear that people wanted their advice on their problems, even though they weren't qualified therapists.

It was at this time that another turn cut the rising tension, at ten past two on the Saturday morning, Jack Keeling and Reese Talley succumbed to the fine line between love and hate.

There wasn't much thought, well there was from Jack's mind. Reese on the other hand did not think, her mind was completely blown the second his mouth touched hers. She thought Jack was going to hit her but instead he yanked her to his chest, one of strong arms slinked around her waist, his mouth clamping down on hers.

This was her first sexual experience, and it was with her enemy, the pale faced demon. There was no need for words, or arguments. Maybe this was the right way to make things right.

Reese shivered as Jack shifted her out of her clothes, she felt pleasantly numb when her clothes fell away from her skin.

She looked up at Jack as he removed his clothes and she felt breathless when she saw him in all his nakedness. And what he had below. It really was... something. He should have modelled for life classes. She felt dizzy when she saw it.

Jack planted kisses on her body, trailing them down her chest and her legs. The glow in her body bloomed in her belly, and there was persistent ache between her legs. His lips gave her little jolts. He laid her down on the floor and he moved over to his jeans where she saw a condom packet between his fingers. Her breathing changed, it was happening, it was becoming real.

Jack turned back to her, ripping the packet out. He noticed her eyes scouring over his body. "Is the first time you've seen a man naked?"

She looked at him, her mind turning into automatic pilot expecting some sort of insult. She gave a timid nod, her eyes falling to the carpet, she wanted to hide.

"Hey," Jack whispered, her eyes snapping back to his. "Do you want to do this?"

There was no thought for her answer, it was a simple nod.

"I just... want to do something first," she said.

Jack frowned as she leaned down and kissed the scar on his leg. She looked up at Jack, his eyes had changed, there was anguish in his eyes. Filling with painful tears.

"I'm sorry about your leg," she whispered back. "I...shouldn't've done it."

He stared back at her, his eyes racing trying to make sense of what was going on. A smile twitched at the corner of her mouth as she leaned forward and touched his face. He stared back at her, her hand caressing his face.

She was engulfed by his kiss, his lips clamping down on hers, as his hands supported her head. He pushed her down on the floor and they made out passionately. Jack's hands fondled her body sending jolts zipping across her mind.

Jack moved away from her and he rolled on the condom. He moved between her legs and Reese braced herself. It hurt when he slid into her, gasps escaped from her throat. Jack nuzzled his head in the crook of her neck, as he began to shift back and forth.

His breath shuddered against her skin and the way he was panting in her ear, it excited her so much. She breathed through the pain and stared up at the ceiling, letting her body open to the new sensations and pleasure, it was better than fighting with Jack.

This particular lock down gave everyone time to think, to replay their lives and focus on what was crucial. If their domains were ruptured, the barriers were broken through and the toxins slithered in, had they lived their lives properly? Had they been good? Did they deserve it?

In that instant unison of thought, Sadie Richardson awoke, as did Poppy Arnold, and Damon and Lozzy, and Jack and Reese broke from their...bonding.

The second siren of Lock Down rang out powerfully.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Even though she hated the sound, Sadie could have danced around the sports hall. She looked around, there was no Reese or Jack and it puzzled her. Then she felt a pang of worry for her friend.

She rushed to the office in a fit of delight and then she stopped when she heard something. It was bizarre and it didn't make sense. *No no no*, Sadie thought. *Now that is ridiculous.*

She pushed the office door open and scowled at what she saw. "What are you two doing...? Didn't you hear the siren?"

Reese looked slightly flustered. The paleness of her cheeks was as red as Sadie's scarf. "We did, we're just tidying - that's all," the shy girl stammered, picking up a jumble of papers from the office floor.

Reese moved past Sadie and grabbed the food they'd eaten and placed it back in the drawers. Sadie noticed the way Jack was watching Reese, he was staring at her with intention, never taking his eyes off the girl.

Sadie moved into his eye view, breaking his gaze from Reese. "What did you two get up to after I fell asleep?" she asked sceptically.

Jack shrugged at her answer. "Nothing. We just talked. Why? What the fuck do you think we got up to, Sade?"

Sadie watched him. "*Something* happened..."

"We talked, end of." He frowned. "What? Do you think we were shagging or something? You've got one dirty mind Richardson!"

Sadie's heart leaped, then she felt embarrassed, slightly freaked out and a bit little sick. The idea of Jack naked to her was repulsive. "Okay, maybe I jumped too high with that question. I mean, how do you feel about her breaking your leg?"

"Not happy really..." his voice trailed off and he shrugged his shoulders. "Any more fucking questions?"

"No, I'm done. *Wow*. Honestly, there's no more. Promise." She turned around and moved back out into the sports hall unaware of the smile he was concealing.

"Fuck me Richardson," Jack muttered. "You always fall for the truth."

Within half an hour, the caretaker rushed over to the sports hall. As soon as he unlocked the doors, Jack ran out into the open air. The air was clear after all of that chaos and even though it was the middle of the night, everything looked sublimely calm.

It had been a strange turn of events.

"I'm really sorry this ever happened Mrs Hanley," the caretaker said, speaking through steady streams on the phone to the head teacher. "The students? Yes, they seem fine. They didn't leave a mess from what I can see."

Sadie laughed and stared out outside towards the outer car park, staring at Esmerelda.

"Yes Mrs Hanley, believe me they are okay. They've all sorted out how they are getting home and they are just about to leave now. There's no problem at all. Alright, sleep

well." The caretaker placed the phone back on the cradle and turned back to the three students. "I haven't told her about the food raiding in the office. Your secret's safe with me."

"Thanks," Sadie said.

"Yep, don't mention it. Well there's no point in you lot hanging around this place any longer."

"How come you didn't know we had detention? Sadie asked.

"Nobody informed me that there were any students staying behind, usually I get a notification. I did my usual routine and locked up at five."

Reese giggled and covered her mouth with her palm.

Carl frowned. "What's so funny?"

"It's nothing," Reese said.

"Well clear off you lot," Carl said. "This story will be good to tell to at any future parties."

The three students made their way to the front of the school, Jack glanced at Reese's solemn expression and a smile washed across his face. Reese enjoyed feeling the sweep of the wind caress her skin and Sadie stumbled deliriously towards her car.

"Bye Sadie," Reese whispered.

Sadie turned and pulled her new shy friend into a hug. "I really enjoyed your company. We'll have to go to Starbucks or the pub on Monday or something."

Reese smiled. "I'd like that. Look, I'm sorry about before. I lost my temper, I didn't mean to upset you about Sam. I should have been more aware."

"Don't worry about it, Reese. I think we all needed to address some things back there. Is it true about Sam? Was he in love with me?"

Reese's eyes grew sad. "Yes, he was."

"I wouldn't've been good enough for him anyway." She smiled uncomfortably, she had to or she would've cried. "Sam was out of my league. He deserved better."

"Sam would have been proud of you, we always said that out of the group you were the one that was the most hesitant. He would have been happy that you walked away from it." They stared at each other. "I'm so sorry, Sadie."

She waved off her words. "No, it's okay. I need to hear it. I have to. And you," Sadie looked over at Jack. "If you clean your act up, I might invite you along on Monday too."

He smirked at her words, an honest plan.

She held her hand out. "Water under the bridge?"

Jack grinned and shook it.

Sadie smiled and ran to her car. If people weren't watching, she would have hugged and kissed the bonnet if she could.

Reese watched Sadie and Esmeralda zoom up the road and disperse into the horizon. She felt something pull at her stomach, like a flicker of warmth. She peered up into his deep brown eyes, remembering the anger shooting from them only a few hours ago and now they shined with something she'd never seen before. She felt embarrassed. "You-you don't have to wait with me."

Jack didn't respond.

Is he going to be mean again after what we did?

"W-Why do you keep looking at me?" Reese asked.

Jack laughed under his breath and touched his fingers to her chin. His thumb slowly caressed the porcelain surface of her neck and his lips danced across her skin. Maybe words weren't a good idea in this situation. His mouth found the scar and she closed her eyes. He leaned forward and gently kissed her lips. "That's why I keep looking

at you, Reese. Sorry, about all of that shit you know, that I did. I'm more fucked up than you." He pressed his finger to his temple. "Keep that in mind when you feel like shit. It'll make you feel better. Okay?" He looked into her eyes pensively. "Anyway, I'll see you later."

"Wait, Jack. What does this mean? I mean...back in the office?" She stared at his pale skin and white blonde hair. "What happens now?"

He thought about it then he shrugged. "Haven't got a fucking clue."

"Oh okay, just thought I'd...ask."

"Talley, I know you don't like me but take some advice from me." He breathed in and out. "Don't over think things. Just enjoy the moments for what they are. But if you ever want to do something one night perhaps." He coughed and cleared his throat. "If you ever want to talk things out, you know where to find me."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't over think it, remember. Just come and see me at some point and we'll see."

Reese nodded and watched him leave. Jack never had a ride, he never got the bus, Jack always walked. She did think about offering him a lift but she knew her mother would have never let him in the car. A couple of hours ago, Reese would have been perfectly fine ordering her mother to drive over him, crunching every healthy limb he had left. *It's funny how things can change like a light switch.*

After a ten-minute wait, her mother picked her up, hugging her like crazy when she got out of the car. Reese told her that she was fine and gave an edited version of her evening. She never mentioned Sadie or Jack in her story or she'd never have made it upstairs.

Reese went to sleep with a sense of accomplishment, relief and overwhelming discovery. Her mind was whirling with thoughts and exhaustion. For the first time in her existence, she was actually excited for class on Monday.

A NOTE FROM THE WRITER

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading *Shelter*. I hope you enjoyed it.

Out of all the short stories/flash fiction I've written, this is the one I found hard to settle on an ending I liked.

I would love to hear your thoughts on this. A beta reader thought this story had the potential to be a full-length novel. What do you think? :)

-Kateri x (written in January 2021)

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