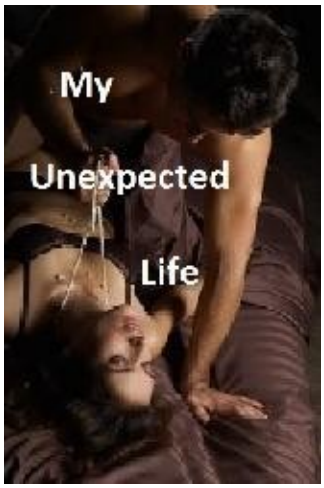
My Unexpected Spiraling Life

By : FyresydeHerbalyst

Sidonie is trying to restart her life after she lost the only man she ever loved. Now she is packing up her seven kids and moving to Vegas where she has a new job at an ad agency. Her life is thrown a new twist after she plays a part in a TV prank show and meets six men that turn her world upside down.



Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/FyresydeHerbalyst

Copyright © FyresydeHerbalyst, 2014
Publish your writing on Booksie.com.

Table of Contents

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 1

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 2

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 3

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 4

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 5

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 6

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 7

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 8

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 9

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 10

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 11

My Unexpected Spiraling Life Chapter 12

My Unexpected Spiraling Life : Chapter 1

"Baby, it's time." My husband looked at me with sad eyes as he put his kit in the back of the van. We loaded up the kids and headed for the base, this is the day I had been dreading. As I drove I glanced in the rear view mirror and saw the tear stained faces of our seven kids. I felt a hand over mine and smiled at my husband as we approached the gate. I handed over my ID to the man on duty, he nodded to me and handed me back my ID as he opened the gate. It seemed like time was moving too fast and before I knew it I was unbuckling the kids and getting them unloaded as Harley grabbed his kit from the back. He came back to the kids and I and hugged each of us in turn, giving the kids the usual "be good for your mother" speech he always did when he went away. They gripped me tightly as he came over to me, tears splashing down my cheek.

"You take care and keep things running while I'm gone. I promise to be home soon." I hugged him tightly and kissed him fiercely as he held my face in his hands.

I broke the kiss and nodded my head. "You better come home to me soldier, we got a lot to do when you come home and I am sure the "honey do" list will have grown."

He nodded, kissed me one more time before he hugged each of the kids again and then headed for the bus that would take my world away from me. The eight of us stood huddled together as the buses left.

My dream changed then, to the worst day in my life. I stood by his grave as the guns sounded, breaking the silence of the air. The flag folded and my husband was taken from me forever. The kids huddled around me and my oldest fell to her knees. Each detail of the day was written into my memory and haunted me each night. I felt a pain in my side and woke up to find the kids in bed with me. I sighed and got up first going to the bathroom to wash my face before I went downstairs for coffee. The cold water washed away the last visions of the dream even though the warm tears splashed down my face.

I walked quietly down the stairs as to not wake the dog pile of children that had made their way into my bed. As I stepped into the kitchen I was shocked to see the light over the stove on and my oldest daughter at the table with a cup of coffee and her head in her hands. I placed my hand on her shoulder, and looked at her tear stained face. I moved to the cupboard and grabbed my cup out and prepared my coffee before I sat down opposite of her. She looked ready to bolt so I put my hand on hers and looked into her eyes.

"I know you are hiding something hun, you might as well tell me before I find out the hard way. I can tell by your lack of sleep I'm not going to like it, but you know you can always talk to me Laura."

Fresh tears started down her face as she looked at me. "Momma do you think we all do dumb things sometimes? I mean to the point that it can ruin your life?"

I nodded. "Sometimes, but it all depends on how long you are going to hold out on me Laura. I can't help you unless you tell me, even though I bet I can hazard a guess at what is going on. How far along are you?"

She looked at me shocked. "I, uh, well about two months. Oh momma I didn't mean for this to happen. I wish that I could go back and change it. I found out the day they put daddy in the ground and I didn't know how to tell you. It looks like sometimes you are just barely hanging together and the wrong thing will make you break. I promise, I am not quitting school and I am going to get a job, but I want to wait until we move. I don't see the point of getting a job when we are leaving in a week."

I nodded. "I am sorry if you thought you couldn't tell me, but Laura, no matter how fragile I am you have to tell me things. I'm not happy about this, but what's done is done and we will just have to get on with it and

figure it out as we go." I hugged her to me. "Thank you for helping with the younger ones, sometimes I think I am not strong enough for them, but then you come out of nowhere and you have kept me strong even when you yourself are falling apart. I am putting too much on you and hopefully when we move things will quiet down a bit. You will have to share a room with your sisters until we can save up enough money, but this job and me going back to school are good things."

She moved around the table and hugged me tightly. "Mom, I'll always help out. We all lost him and now with the government being a pain and not helping, it has left the eight of us to fend for ourselves and do the best we can. Since our other parents don't want anything to do with us and we are all yours now, well we can only do the best we can."

I nodded and remembered how the other mothers decided that they didn't want the strain of having the kids back and I sighed. "Strain," that is how they saw the kids. Reese, Christian, and Charles had one mother while Aleria had a different one, Laura was my ex's oldest daughter while Celeste and Scott were mine (and Laura's younger sibblings). I smiled to myself as I thought of my mismatched family and how much they meant to me. I don't think I would have given them back even if their other parents wanted them, they were my world. I looked at Laura as she eyed me puzzled.

"I was thinking of how odd our family is, of how many different moms and dads you guys have. I guess we are the Brady Bunch minus one huh?"

Laura laughed. "Yea, I guess we are. I didn't think of it like that. As soon as my mom said she didn't want me and dad couldn't handle me you didn't even hesitate to take me in. I get to spend time with my little sister and brother and in the mix I got four more. How you always have time for us is just amazing, you always make sure none of us feel left out."

I smiled. "I don't want any of you to feel left out, now how about we go wake up the circus that made it's way to my bed and get all of you out the door and on your way to school so I can get some packing and school work done."

She nodded and raced me up the stairs. I laughed as she jumped on the only empty spot on the bed and woke the kids up. They started to laugh as they joined us jumping on the bed. I watched the Chaos ensue with rapture at how for just a moment my children were just that, children again.

"Alright heathens of mine. It is time to go downstairs and eat so we can all get ready for school. Celeste, Charles and Scott, we have to get you ready for daycare while the others get ready for school." I watched as they all filed out of the room and down the stairs. Laura looked at me for a moment and nodded.

"You get their things together and I will get them fed. Just like we usually do, I know it is hard sometimes, but that smile was genuine momma and I am glad to see it back."

I smiled and hugged her tight. "We will all get stronger from this so don't worry. We may have bad days, weeks or months, but do it we will. Now go feed the zoo and yourself since that baby is going to need to eat as much as it can. I am going to go get their clothes set out and then take a quick shower. Do you think you can handle the motley crew down there by yourself?"

She nodded and smiled. "I have been for a long time, even when daddy was deployed. We are just picking up the routine like he is gone but coming home. Same routine, same times everyday momma. Go wash up and I will have them ready to get out the door in about fourty five minutes."

I nodded and moved into the rooms getting each child's outfit picked out and on their bed while Laura fed them. I could hear the noise level start to rise and I smiled to myself. "HEY IF I HEAR THAT MUCH NOISE IT MEANS THERE ISN'T FOOD IN YOUR MOUTHS, OR YOUR BEING VERY RUDE. KEEP IT DOWN AND EAT UP KIDDOS!"

I moved to my bedroom and began to stip out of my pyjamas. I turned on the shower then moved over to my vanity and started to take my hair out of the bun it stayed in while I slept. My long blonde hair fell over my shoulder and all the way down my back. I shook it out and then got into the shower and relished the feel of the hot water as it ran over my skin. I slowly thought to myself as I washed up, memories started to come to me of the times that Harley and I would shower together, how we laughed at things and loved more than a lifetimes worth. I rinsed off all the soap and then got out, braided my hair back loosely and then put on a pair of capris with my favorite black tank top.

I moved down stairs to see the kids all putting on their shoes with book bags and lunches in hand. I looked over at Laura and nodded approvingly. "Thank you" I mouthed to her silently. I grabbed my keys from the bowl by the door and got them all in the van. I took Laura, Aleria, Reese and Christian to the bus stop and stayed until the buses came for them. Then it was off to the daycare to drop off Celeste, Charles and Scott.

The daycare owner looked at me surprised as she ushered my three into their classes. I smiled at her and nodded in my kids' direction. "I will be a little late today, I have to pick up some more boxes and then get things ready in between work and school. Do you mind staying just a bit more?"

She shook her head. "I don't mind, you have never done me wrong and I know it has to be stressful now that he's gone."

I raised my eyebrow at her. "Yes, things are tough, but the kids and I aren't letting it get to us. This new job I am up for will really help and the company is helping us with the move and with rent until I can get back up on my feet. I understand that you have known my husband and I for years, but even though the memories still hurt, he wouldn't want me to dwell upon it."

She nodded. "We are going to miss you and the kids. Where is it you guys are going again?"

I looked at her. "Vegas. I am working for an advertising agency there and hopefully finishing up my degree. I have to do what I have to do Deb."

She nodded again. "I know, but you guys were like family and we have seen these kids grow up. What day are you guys leaving."

I thought for a second. "Friday night, that way we can get settled in before school and work on monday. We are going to miss you guys too, but there are too many memories here as it is. We will still visit, when time and money allow. We won't forget you guys."

She hugged me tight and then let me go. I waved bye, got back in my van and started to do my errands before I had to be at work. I picked up the boxes that the store put on hold for me, picked up the packing tape and put them in the back of my van. I went into work and smiled at my boss before I got to my desk and logged on to the virtual customer service server. I also opened up my school site and started to print out my assignments for the next month. I looked up to see my boss staring at me.

"You know I should turn you in for that, but being as you only have two days left here I think I will let it slide." She smiled at me and I smiled back.

"If I was sure when my new place would have internet I wouldn't have printed out so much. It drives me insane that I have to go, but without the military help and the fact that they decided that due to budget cuts we were going to lose the death benefits, I just can't afford it here and you can't afford to pay me as much as I need."

She nodded. "I know and I hate to lose such a good agent. I mean, you are great at resolution and no one has come close to your stats. Maybe you can work part time for me from Vegas. I will give you the disk for the program and maybe that will help boost the money you get."

I stood up and hugged her. "I knew we were friends for a reason. Thank you, I am going to need it. I found out this morning that Laura is pregnant."

She looked at me stunned. "Are you serious. My goodness what was that girl thinking? I mean she's only fifteen and now going to a new school pregnant."

I nodded. "I think I am going to get her on the virtual school so that she can do it from home and help me out more. She is bright and learns fast so maybe if she is able to get through it quicker, it will give her a leg up into college."

She nodded. "Well you get to work and take care of the Brady Bunch there." I smiled at the reference and looked at my screen to see a customer waiting. I started to type and clear my mind from the pain, disappointment and fear. It was going to be another long day."

http://www.polyvore.com/my_unexpected_spiraling_life/set?id=46949285&lid=1478048

http://www.polyvore.com/sidonie_harley/set?id=46949388&lid=1478048

http://www.polyvore.com/motley_crew/set?id=46950749&lid=1478048

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

It was moving day and no one was happy about it. Laura huddled up the crying children and one by one put them into the van. Aleria came over to me and hugged me tightly as she said her own silent goodbye to her childhood home.

"It will be okay hun, we will start over and things will be alright. You will make new memories. I know for a while it will be cramped sharing a room with your two sisters but you can do it can't you?"

She nodded and then moved over to the van. Each kid left something outside the front door in memorial to their father that wasn't able to come with us. Lastly I went up to the door and left a white rose with a note attached to it. "Our love is just as pure." I got in the van and started out of the driveway and down the road, the moving truck not far behind me.

The trip to Vegas took almost a full two days with the kids having to go to the bathroom and always being hungry. When we finally got there I smiled as our apartment was on the second floor of an old theater. I looked at the kids and smiled. "Alright guys we are here, now I know you guys are used to having your own space, but for right now you are going to be sharing. The sleeping arrangements are as follows. Girls get one room and boys the other. The living room is mine and until we save up enough this is how it is going to be."

I heard groans all around and looked at my kids for a minute. They understood necessity, but still it wasn't the home they were used to. I grasped Charles hand as Scott reached for me and I smiled. "Alright guys and gals, let's get everything out of the van and into the house so that I can at least have some sanity when I take you guys to school and such."

It didn't take us long to unpack and move things into the apartment. Each kid had a backpack with all of their important things with them, things that meant the most to them. I grabbed up my own backpack and started to place letters that Harley and I had written into the same decorative box they had been in at home. I placed my bedding on the couch and then moved into the kitchen and put some of the bare essentials away.

It wasn't long before Monday came and I had to get the kids to school and myself to a new job. After I dropped the young-uns off at daycare, I rushed across town and in the door of a large building where I was greeted by a friendly receptionist.

"Welcome Mrs. Ross, Mr. Jenkins will be with you momentarily, and welcome to the firm." Her perky attitude and the fact that she had called me by my married name struck me oddly.

"It's Anderson actually. Ms. Anderson. My husband passed away, it was painful to keep his last name so I reverted to my maiden name, but you can call me Sidonie or just Sid. I feel more comfortable with that."

She nodded her head and I saw an older gentleman start my way with a smile on his face. "Sid, so good to see you, it was really hard to do all those phone interviews, but I am so glad that we snagged you. Come with me and we will get you settled into your new office and if there is anything you need, please don't hesitate to ask. I know it is hard being the new person in the office, kinda like a sideshow thing, but we are pretty laid back here."

I smiled at him. "Thank you Mr. Jenkins, I do have to ask though, are my hours flexible? You see I have seven children and I have to be able to meet their needs as well as my own. I know that you need someone

that works hard, and I promise I will do just that but my kids are still adjusting to losing their father and now the move is just a bit much."

He nodded. "I can understand and we don't like to put a strain on family so as long as your projects are up to par I think we can be a bit flexible. My goodness your husband and you must have been busy to have seven children. The divorce must still be hard on them."

I shook my head. "No sir, we aren't divorced. My husband died in Afghanistan fighting for our freedom, and the children are from our previous relationships. None of them are ours together, and I have another one on the way with my Laura being pregnant so young. It is just a lot of adjustment to get used to I guess."

He nodded in understanding. "I am so sorry for your loss, all of your loss. I think between a cell phone and laptop you should be able to do whatever it is your family demands, I was very impressed with the samples you sent me. If you can throw something like that together in just thirty minutes I wonder what you can do with a couple of days."

I nodded and smiled. "Thank you sir, I promise not to let you down." He handed me my first project and left me to my own devices. By the end of the day I handed my new secretary a jump drive with my ideas on it and walked out to start picking up the kids from school and daycare. When we all got home it was close to 6:30 so I started dinner, got all the lunches ready for the next day and got all the clothes set out and baths ready. By the time I got the kids in bed and myself settled down it was almost midnight and I was exhausted.

My days settled in to the same routine and weeks turned into months, the kids got back into their sports and other things they liked to do and I was stretched about as thin as I could be. Mr. Jenkins loved my work ethic and how quickly my jobs got done, perfect down to the last detail. One day I walked into the office with a surprisingly happy boss grinning at me.

"I have so news for you. Our client at the Television station has asked if they could borrow you for a show they are doing to prank some people. I told them that the final decision is yours, but we will pay you for your time away and you will also be compensated by the TV station themselves. I figured with how thin you have been lately it would be perfect for you to do. I think they said a few grand would be good and you will get the normal $1000 that you make here. What do you say?"

I thought for a moment and nodded. I mean it couldn't be that bad. "Sure when do I start?"

He looked at me, handed me my keys and pushed me towards the door. "You start now, don't worry about the kids, we have hired a certified nanny to take care of them while you are gone. We asked your daughter Laura to write down schedules, allergies and things that she would need so that you could go straight to set. We will call only if there is a problem, but I think everything is under control."

I nodded and smiled as I headed for the elevator. Once I reached the Lobby I called Laura.

The phone rang three times before she answered.

Laura *Ross and Reynolds residence this is Laura

Me* You sound so professional sweetie. Listen I might not be home tonight. I am going to try, but they want me to do this TV show and it pays better than anything I have had in a while so I had to take it.

Laura* I wondered why your boss needed all that information from me. I guess they are sending in a Nanny and I need to step up to wrangle the hoard?

Me* Please, I would owe you if you could do that for me. I am scared they will make her run for the hills, I don't think she understands what she is getting into with seven kids.

Laura* Don't worry Momma, I've got it taken care of. You just do what you need to do and I will handle it from here.

Me* Thanks honey, I will be back when I can. I love you and I will talk to you later.

Laura* Love you to Momma, take care and see you when you get home.

The phone clicked and I turned the van on and headed to the site of the show. As I walked through the door with my ID and the pass that my boss had given me I sighed at how busy it was. I missed the slow life that we had before. A woman smiled to me as she took my pass and ID.

"Welcome, you are going to go down the hall, third door on the left and ask for Ms. Spencer. She is the director and will talk to you about what you are going to do."

I nodded and took my ID back from her. "Thank you Ma'am." I walked down the hall and knocked on the door. I heard a beautiful voice answer curtly.

"Come in." I opened the door to see a woman about my age with beautiful black hair and stunning blue eyes. "Can I help you?"

I looked at her for a second in shock. "Yes, yes I'm sorry. You called my boss about me being in your prank show. He told me I had to come right over."

She smiled and walked around her desk. "Oh thank goodness, I thought I was sent another air head. The other five I have had to deal with aren't the brightest girls on the planet. Now, why don't you take a seat and I will tell you what is going on. First off, would you like something to drink?"

I shook my head and she continued on. "We do a show to prank your spouse or significant other. Our accomplice gives us information on the person and we set it up, make it look real and then play a horrible joke on them. The couple that contacted us wants to throw a fake wedding for their friends and then have their reception turn into a strip show. I know you might not be comfortable with this, but I thought you would be the best choice. We are also pranking their friends who happen to be a group of six marines fresh from deployment. What do you think?"

I thought for a second. "I am not shy, that I promise you, but are you sure I am right for this, I mean I'm not in the best shape."

She looked at me for a moment. "You look beautiful and we know your husband was military, may the Goddess guide his soul, so you would be great bait for a dateless marine. The other five are showing up with what we in the industry call "Escorts" and I think he would appreciate a smart woman."

I nodded. "With the kind of money that you are offering I really can't turn you down. My kids and I are living paycheck to paycheck and we need a chance to get ahead for once. When do we start shooting?"

She eyed me for a moment. "Well the joke starts tomorrow so can you be here bright and early for wardrobe and then go to an address we specify?"

I nodded. "Until tomorrow then." I walked out of her office and smiled to myself. With the money I would get from the show and my check I would be able to afford to get some gifts for the kids.

I got back to the house a little late and the children were already in bed. I looked at the Nanny and smiled. "Not easy is it?"

She shook her head at me. "You have a gem in that daughter of yours. Laura really kept them at bay when I started to feel lost in it all. How do you do it?"

I shrugged. "Sometimes I wonder myself, but it is unconditional love. You learn what each one needs and make sure you remember they all need attention. Do you think you could watch them again tomorrow? I have to start my shoot tomorrow."

She nodded. "I am paid up for however long you need me. How about I get here early, get your van and learn how to get them ready in case I am here for a couple days."

I nodded. "Truly helpful, I hope you are up for a 4am wakeup call, that is just to cook breakfast for them all."

She sighed but nodded. "I'll be here."

I laid down on the couch and smiled to myself. It was about time that we got a break.

Chapter 3

Morning came quicker than I would have liked and I heard a soft knock on the door. I moved over to it, answered it and smiled as the Nanny looked back at me. I rubbed my hands together and laughed. "Alright, it is time for a quick rundown on my children. I really hope you are good at remembering names. I know you can tell that Laura is pregnant, you really need to stay on top of her when it comes to her vitamins and school. She does her schooling online for at least four hours each day. Aleria is a picky eater and will tell you she only wants hotdogs. Please make sure that she eats veggies before you hand over the hotdog or you won't get her to eat anything else. Reese and Christian love sweets, but don't give in unless they do what they are told. I know you have the schedule of each child's activities, but today you are going to have to sit and watch Reese's rehearsal for the school play. He is excited about it so you have to make sure you cheer loud for him once practice is over. Celeste, Charles and Scott go to daycare across town, they have to be picked up no later than 4:45. The daycare closes at five, but to make it to the play rehearsal on time you have to pick them up early."

As she wrote it all down I started to smile. "Favorite foods and the house rules are already on the fridge along with allergies and so is a number to reach me at if you need reinforcements and Laura just isn't cutting it." I smiled for a second. "I think that covers everything, by the way this morning is eggs and bacon, I have to go take a shower so I can go. Remember to call me if you need anything."

She nodded and went to the fridge to grab out what she would need. I giggled to myself as I moved to the bathroom and started the shower and took down my hair. I looked at myself in the mirror and sighed. I hadn't had a chance to work out or anything since we moved and it was starting to show. I had a bit of pudge starting on my stomach and promised myself I would make time to fix it. After I got out of the shower I went to the closet and pulled out my favorite sweat pants and t-shirt. If I was going into wardrobe, I didn't see a point in making an effort.

I walked back to the kitchen and saw the Nanny hard at work making breakfast for the kids. I tapped her on the shoulder and gestured for her keys as I held mine up for her. "Have a good day and call me if they start to act up. I will set them straight for you."

She nodded and handed me her keys. "Have fun today and don't work too hard." I giggled and walked out the door. The drive to the studio was soothing and by the time I walked in the door I had a smile on my face. I greeted the woman behind the desk and moved over to wardrobe where I heard high pitched giggles. I rolled my eyes before I opened the door. Once it opened I saw five very beautiful woman staring back at me and all of a sudden I felt self conscious. I moved over to the empty station and giggled as a gay man clapped.

"Finally a blank canvas to turn into a masterpiece, those barbie dolls over there thought they were perfect so I left them alone, but you my dear have a natural beauty that I am going to play off of." He turned me away from the mirror and looked at me wickedly. "You have to have some kind of trust in me if you didn't complain about me turning you from the mirror hun."

I laughed. "Eh you can't make me look any worse than I already feel. Since the move I haven't had any time to work out and the kids are just running me ragged."

He looked at me for a moment with his eyebrow raised. "My dear you are too young to have children, let alone one child. My goodness how young did you get married, fifteen?"

I laughed. "How old do you think I am hun?"

He sized me up for a moment before he answered. "You can't be older than twenty three. I mean your skin is beautiful, your complexion flawless and I would pay to have your beautiful hair."

I laughed hard then. "Wow, thank you so much for making me feel better about myself. I am not even close to twenty three though. Add ten years and seven kids worth of stress and try again though."

He looked at me shocked, as did the other women in the room. One of them came over to me and put her hand on my shoulder. "I hope I look like you when I am thirty three. Of course I only have my beauty to rely on, no one thought to make me smart."

I looked at her sadly. "No one thought to make me smart either, I did it myself and I am still doing it. I am going to college, working two jobs, raising seven kids with an eighth on the way. Before you ask, no I am not pregnant, my fifteen year old daughter is. She is doing her schooling online so she doesn't miss out on her education."

They all looked at me in awe and I started to blush. The makeup artist continued his work and I sat quietly, lost in my own world until two of the other girls came over to me.

"How do you do it? I mean I work one job and try to go to school and it is killing me. I don't know how I would handle two jobs, seven kids, hormones and school. It must help that your husband is around right?"

I sighed and looked down. "He isn't around. He died a few months ago overseas. It has been me and the kids for about six months now." Both of the beautiful young blondes sat down and started to chat with me as my hair was finished and my outfit brought out to me. I eyed my new gay friend for a minute. "You have got to be kidding me. You go put that dress up right now and come out with something better. I don't do dresses. I just might do a long skirt and a comfortable top, that is if you are lucky."

He smiled at me and nodded his head. He came out with a flowing brown skirt and a white tank, strappy sandals and beautiful wooden jewelry. I nodded and started to put it on. While I was adding the last of my accessories the director came in and handed me a card with an address on it. I nodded and headed for the "Wedding." When I got to the beautiful resort I sat down at a table as I was directed, met the person who staged this whole thing and shared a good laugh with him. He asked me if I was uncomfortable getting undressed just to embarrass his sex staved marine friends, I giggled and shook my head.

After we had finished introductions guests had started to arrive and I saw six men in dress blues. My heart was in my chest and I was scared that I couldn't move. He brought them over to the six of us that sat at the tables and I thought I was going to cry. He introduced each of the women to their date and saved me for last. As he walked over to me he smiled. "Parker this is Sid an old friend of mine from the ad agency. Do you think you could do me the favor of escorting her, her date backed out last minute."

He looked at me and nodded dumbly and it was at that moment that I never did look to see what the makeup artist had done. I started to feel self conscious as he put out his hand to help me out of my chair. I smiled at him and giggled as he tilted his head to the side like a lost puppy.

"Hi, I'm Sidonie, Sid for short. Thank you so much for escorting me, it is torture coming to a wedding alone."

He nodded dumbly again, a silly stupid smile across his face. He escorted me to my seat and sat down beside me. His hand didn't leave mine at all and I wondered if it showed, the conflicting emotions that I felt. Pride for our men in the service, sadness at the loss of my husband, mischievous about the joke, yet I kept a perfect poker face. After the ceremony we moved into the clubhouse down the way a bit, Parker's hand still in mine as we moved leisurely down the lane. He talked to me animatedly about the things he had seen, the places he

had been and stupid things he had done with his friends. I didn't notice that a grin had spread onto my face until the sound of pinging glass broke me out of my euphoria.

"I would like to thank everyone for coming today and before the speeches I would like to say a few things. First off Mike, Sarah I know you guys are excited to be Married, but this wasn't your real wedding." The bride and groom looked confused and I looked down. "Don't get me wrong I hope that tonight you have the best sex, but I want to call six beautiful woman and their dates up here. So girls if you could bring those eyesores up here, I would appreciate it."

I grabbed Parker's hand and pulled him with me, lifting my skirt in my hand to be able to see the uneven ground beneath my feet. I smile at him and felt the fight give way as he followed me like a lovesick puppy. As we reached the stage I let go of his hand and stood in front of him.

"Now see Mike agreed to go along with this so let me get him up here." I heard running footsteps behind me but watched Parker the whole time. He took a step forward, but I put my hand out and stopped him, shook my finger at him and placed my hands on my hips.

"Ladies, I know you have a surprise for our wonderful Marines, so why don't you show them what it is." I nodded my head and pulled my shirt over my head, untied my skirt and stood stark naked in front of Parker. He turned beet red and moved towards me as to either ravish me or cover me, but I had a surprise up my sleeve. As his hand reached for me I grasped his arm, pulled it behind him and wrapped my leg around his body. David, the accomplice smiled at me. "Now now Parker, careful she is dangerous. I figured after you embarrassed the hell out of Mike and I, well we would get retribution." All six guys were red faced and shaking. I could feel the pulse in Parker's wrist and it radiated through my hand.

I got close to him so only he could hear. "Are you going to be a good boy now or do I have to keep you restrained." He shook his head and I let go of him gently. He looked at the other five and they ganged up on David and Mike. I started to laugh as Sarah handed me a tank dress.

"I figured that would get them in trouble, but they have been friend's all their lives. The guys thought it would be funny last time to tie them naked to a flag pole and leave them there all day. So parading around something that those boys can't have is more than enough to drive them over the edge."

I put my hand over my mouth to stifle a giggle. "One time the guys in my husband's platoon sabotaged our date and ended up hanging him upside down from the back of the truck. To get even my husband put itching powder in their uniforms. Trust me I know how it goes, been on the receiving end of it a few times." My face fell, I put up my finger for her to hold on and I ran to the bathroom as the tears streamed down my face. I felt the pain of his loss a thousand times over as I curled up in a ball on the floor. The two girls I spoke with earlier came rushing in and held me tightly as I cried, the pain more than I could bare.

"It's alright Sid, mourning isn't a bad thing. I bet you haven't had much time to do it, trying to stay strong for those kids of yours." I shook my head at her, tears still blurring my vision as I felt strong arms around me and the smell of cologne and starch. I lost myself in it, remembered the smell of that cologne from earlier.

The director came over to me and held me tightly as I tried so hard to compose myself. I started to feel trapped and I didn't like it. I tried to move away only to feel those strong arms go around me once again. I grasped tightly and ripped myself away running for the parking lot. My lungs burned from under use and my legs started to shake. I felt myself fall, the hard concrete digging into my knees. Chastity and Grace came over to me and pulled me close.

"Breathe Sid, everything will be okay. I know it is painful now, but you have so much to be thankful for." I fell into their arms and cried until I fell asleep, my world had finally collapsed and I had no idea how to pick myself back up.

Chapter 4

I woke up in a strange place, my kids not in sight. I became frantic as I searched for my phone, keys and purse. I looked at my phone and saw it was morning, I had slept through the night and didn't call my kids. I heaved a sigh and looked at myself to see I was in a guy's shirt that went all the way to my knees. I looked around and found my shirt and skirt from the show and quickly put them back on. I grabbed my sandals and quietly moved to the front door. I unlocked it with a resounding click and made my way to the Nanny's car. I got in and programmed my home address into the GPS and made my way home.

I kicked myself for the break down, for losing track of time, and for not being the woman my husband fell in love with. I slammed my hand into the steering wheel for not being the strong woman I had always been, the one that kept it together. As I got to the apartment I saw my van was there and I parked next to it. I slowly got out of the car, adjusted myself and fixed my hair, ran my fingers under my eyes to fix my makeup and then walked upstairs to the door. As I unlocked it I heard the soft sound of music and knew that Laura was on the computer. I heard a muffled giggle then a sigh. I opened the door to see Laura doing her work, the Nanny cleaning up one hell of a mess from breakfast and all of the other kids gone.

She smiled at me and nodded. "How was the shoot?" I looked at her and grunted before I moved up the stairs and into the bathroom. I heard Laura get up off her seat and rush after me as I walked into the bathroom and shut the door.

I heard a soft knock. "Momma, can I come in?" I turned the water on and got underneath it before it had the chance to turn warm.

"Come in Laura." My mind was reeling from everything, the shoot, the story and the feeling of complete loss that engulfed me after I relived a memory that belonged to my Harley.

I heard Laura put the toilet seat down and I waited. It seemed she too was waiting, but I languished in the silence.

"Momma, what happened? We got a phone call last night from a woman named Grace saying that you broke down, but one of the cast members was going to let you rest at their place."

I peaked my head around the corner and looked at her. "Grace called you?" She nodded her head. "The shoot was fine, they were pranking the bride along with six marines. I was to escort one into the wedding and reception so that they could play the joke on him. Everything was going fine until the bride came over to me and told me some of the stupid things they had done. I told her about the time that Harley's platoon tied him upside down on the truck and I lost it. I felt guilty for having fun, I felt guilty that I haven't given you guys enough and I felt like it should have been me and not him, he was always stronger."

She shook her head frantically. "No momma, it shouldn't have been you or him. It happened and there is nothing we can do but pick ourselves up and move on. Yes, daddy is gone, no he isn't coming home, yes we all miss him but we are strong for each other just as you are strong for us. The pain won't ever fully stop, but it will lessen to the point of being bearable. We won't ever forget momma, but we have to make new memories and celebrate the time we had with him. It has been six months momma and still you don't cry. Let the walls down and realize that to us you are superwoman, but you can't do it all."

I looked at her for a moment, a shocked expression on my face and she laughed. I turned off the water and grabbed the towel she held out for me. "When did you get so smart?"

She smiled at me and giggled. "When I screwed up my life and got pregnant. I have figured out a few things momma and thought about a lot more. I was going to talk to you, but you need to be in your right mind for it. Now go get your gym clothes on and have fun. I am going to finish my schooling and then I have to go to the doctor."

I nodded and went over to the closet and grabbed my grey capris and a grey tank. I grabbed my gym bag that I never unpacked and headed for the door. I looked back over my shoulder at Laura and smiled. "I will be back in more than enough time to take you to the doctor hun, I promise."

She nodded and waved as I headed out the door to the gym that was three doors down. I paid the fee and put my bag in the locker room. I grabbed out my Zune and headed for the elliptical machine. I turned it all the way up and rocked out as I moved. I increased my speed until I was at a comfortable pace. I stayed on the machine for about two hours before my alarm went off on my Zune telling me it was time to get changed and take Laura to the doctor. I headed for the locker room when I bumped into someone. I put my hand out and apologized, then looked up to see a very familiar face.

"Hi Sid, how are ya?" His masculine features grasped my attention and I had to tear myself away.

"Hi, Andrew right?" He nodded his head. "Good to see you again."

He looked at me for a moment and then smiled. "Are you doing better, it seemed like you were distressed yesterday. I don't like a damsel in distress."

I giggled. "I'm fine, just some memories that were better left buried for now. Did you guys have fun after David pulled the prank on you?"

He nodded. "Yea, but Parker didn't come. He watched out for you the whole night, he is sleep deprived today or he would have joined us. By the way, I have to tell you, you have a gorgeous body and I would love to see if your skin would rival the softness of my sheets."

I giggled. "I bet you say that to all the girls, and I actually have to go. I have to get my girl to the doctor. I promised her I would take her, so if you don't mind excuse me." He quickly moved out of my way and I quickly changed and then ran out the door with my gym bag. I made it just in time to see Laura coming down the stairs and heading to the car. "Sorry I got held up, one of the guys from the show was in the gym and wanted to ask how I was."

She smiled at me. "No problem mom, now let's go see if you are having a grandson or daughter." I nodded and put my arm around her shoulder, leading her gently to the car. We got in and headed off, I saw Andrew come out of the gym with four other guys and I smiled to myself. If only my daughter knew what I did, she would have strung me up alive.

We arrived at the doctor's office twenty minutes early, I was too eager to sit still and I began to fidget with my phone, tap my fingers and then tap my foot. Laura started to laugh as I started to pace, then they called her name. We headed back into the ultrasound room where they took her weight, blood pressure, temperature and measured her "bump." As they put the gel on her stomach I started to feel giddy and looked at her for a moment before I grasped her hand. The sound of a heartbeat assaulted the silence of the room and I couldn't help but stare at the screen.

"Alright, well you and the baby look at healthy as can be, now let's see if we can get a pink or blue answer." Laura gripped me tight and I felt how anxious she was. I watched as the tech moved the wand into position and cried as I looked up at the screen. Laura looked at me and then at the tech.

"Momma, why are you crying, everything's alright isn't it?" I nodded to ease her worry and then showed her what I was looking at.

She was speechless and I smiled as I looked into her eyes. "It's a girl, you're gonna have a baby girl." She smiled as it slowly started to sink in. The tech started to rub off the gel and then quietly left the room. I looked at her worried expression, but held her hand tightly.

"Momma, I have been thinkin, and thinkin, and thinkin and I came up with a solution to our problem, but you have to agree on it. Do you think you can fully hear me out before you answer?" I was worried but I nodded. "I still have two years of school left before I go to college. Yes, I could finish them up online and start college early, but then there is the problem of Claudia. I am going to be a teenage single mom in college with no income and no way to raise her. That is why I was thinking that maybe you could raise her as your own, I could go to school and make something out of myself. Momma I am not ready yet and I know it, I am not even close to ready to being a mother. I would still help out with her of course, but I need a chance to do something with myself."

I looked at my little girl, little no longer. Such a grown up choice she had to make, that I couldn't help but respect her wishes. I nodded my head. "There will be rules Laura Marie Reynolds, do you understand?" She nodded. "If you ever feel like you are ready and you want to have her, the choice will be there for you, but I don't want you to think for one second that I would keep her from you. Each choice you make is going to affect what happens, do I make myself clear. Mess up once, and get yourself in this situation again and she is all yours, you will bring her to school with you, and you will be a full time mother, do I make myself crystal clear?"

She nodded. "Momma I don't want to be in this situation again, I don't want to hear of the word sex until I am thirty at least. This is an experience that I just wasn't ready for, I jumped way ahead of myself and I won't make that mistake again." I nodded and held her close as she got off the exam table and we headed out to the car. Things in my life were changing quicker than I could plan for. I was starting to wonder if I could even keep control or if it was all going to spiral into something I just couldn't do.

Chapter 5

It had been a few weeks since the doctor's appointment and I saw the guys at the gym every day. I had apologized to Parker for the break down and naked tease, but he wouldn't even let me finish a sentence. We had all become good friends and they had known to stay away from the subject of the military as it made me cry, but they had no idea why. I had talked to Chastity and Grace a few times and escaped to the "Massage Parlor" to do my homework when I needed peace and quiet. It was a week before my birthday and it wasn't something I was really looking forward to. I went to the gym just like everyday where I ran into Parker and the guys, but today they didn't seem so happy. I walked over to him and put my hand on his arm.

He turned around and gave me his usual one arm hug, but it looked like he was angry. I took a step back and ran into Andrew, he looked at me with sorrow and I was starting to get scared. "Alright, what's going on? You guys seem down and out, am I missing something?"

Tyson came over to me and hugged me tight and whispered in my ear. "We got an ERD notice, we ship out tomorrow for God knows how long. We don't even get time to adjust to it." I felt like I had been slammed in the chest. Harley's last set of orders were ERD and I never saw him again. I was close to these guys, they had let me into their tight knit group and they didn't even know a lot about me. I took a step back, then another. My mind was racing at the thoughts that crossed my mind, the fear, the sorrow and the pain that seeped through the walls I had built around myself. I felt myself start to lose control when Parker came over and held me close.

"Just breathe through it, whatever it is. The pain will subside, we will come home I promise." I shook my head frantically and tried to break loose but Parker held me firm. "Yes, we will come home, and when we come home I want to see the strong woman we have come to care for over the last few weeks. She has been like an annoying sister that you just can't get enough of. Now put a smile on your face, promise us you will be there tomorrow to see us off and I don't want to see one tear fall from your eyes. Do you understand?"

I nodded my head, took a deep breath and put my hands on his chest to get him to let me go. "Alright, if you promise to come home, then you better damn well come home. While you are gone you better keep each other safe, do I make myself clear?"

I saw them all stand at attention and smile. "Yes Ma'am." I giggled to myself and then hugged each one of them before I punched Parker in the arm.

"Annoying sister huh? Well better that than the meat head brothers. What time tomorrow?"

They looked at me before they pulled out a letter and handed it to me. I read it over and then nodded. "Alright I have to drop the kids off at school and daycare, but then I am free until 4:00pm."

I smiled as they tried to figure out just how many kids I had and the specifics that I wouldn't tell them. We worked out for a while before I had to go, I waved goodbye with another promise that I would see them off and then ran into the rat race that was my children.

Once I had all my kids home and dinner started there was a knock on the door, I quickly went to open it and found Parker and the guys there. I looked at them dumbfounded before I opened the flood gates of utter chaos as the kids ran around getting everything ready for the next day. I closed the door after them and nodded to the couch. Once they sat down they got the kids attention and all of them came running to check out the guests. I tried hard to stifle a giggle as six of my seven kids squared up to the six burley men on the couch. Tyson looked at me for a moment before he smiled.

"So how many of them are yours?" He looked like he was hoping it was only one or two of them. I laughed at the expressions on their faces.

"All of them, but we are missing one, she is a little slow these days on moving around." I smiled as I heard Laura curse from the stairs.

"Mom, really, you be seven months pregnant and try to get down the stairs. It is...." She paused and looked at the guys on the couch. "I'm sorry, momma when did company arrive?"

I raised my eyebrow at her. "About three minutes ago, do you need some help?" She shook her head at me and made a beeline for the recliner. I laughed as the guys looked her over and she stared at them with daggers in her eyes. "Alright, I see I am going to have to make some introductions before my daughter blows up the room with all that hostility. Who wants to go first?"

Parker looked at me and then nodded. "I think we should because we intruded. My name is Parker and these are my friends Bradley, Tyson, Andrew, Dewayne and Jordan. We kind of adopted your mother as our honorary little sister at the gym." He looked so nervous as he sat face to face with my seven children.

I smiled. "Alright let me go from oldest to youngest, might help you guys remember their names. First is Laura, she is almost sixteen, then we have Aleria who is seven, Reese is six, Christian is five, Celeste and Charles are four and Scott is three. And that is my zoo, kinda scary being face to face with so many kids huh?"

Tyson nodded before he put his hand out to Laura. "It's nice to meet you Ma'am, sorry to just intrude on your time with your mom, but we were wondering if we could talk to her for a minute."

Laura looked at Tyson but didn't shake his hand. She crossed her arms over her chest and squared up to him. "And what per say would you need to speak with my mother about? You have to understand us kids are very protective of her and she hasn't been having an easy time of it."

I bumped her a bit with my arm and nodded to the stairs. "Laura we will talk later, if you could please go get the horde cleaned up for dinner." She looked at me for a second before she rounded up the youngins and headed upstairs. I looked at the guys and put my hands on my hips.

Andrew stood up with his hands out defensively. "I'm sorry I know it was rude of us to drop by we just wanted to know a bit more about you. You are like the mystery woman that keeps so much locked inside. When you said you had kids, I didn't think you had so many."

I smiled a bit. "Well, there are circumstances behind these children. See my husband and I dated in high school, we got into a nasty fight, split up and went our separate ways for a while. I ended up in a relationship with Laura's father and I got pregnant which gave me Celeste. When Celeste was eight months old we broke it off since we were poison to each other. I got back home and found out two weeks later I was pregnant with Scott. Two days after he was born Laura was on my doorstep because her parents called her a problem. My husband had four kids with two different moms. Aleria was his first born with Rina, then he had Reese, Christian and Charles with another woman named Kayla."

They all looked at me like I grew a second head. Jordan looked at me for a second before he put his hand up. "You mean you're married?"

Before I could answer I saw Laura with tears in her eyes. "She was married and we did have a dad, but seven months ago while he was deployed he was killed in combat and sent home to us covered in the flag. Momma

has been alone since with us and she has worked so hard to keep us fed and clothed since the military turned their back on us. They found it convenient to tell us that due to recent economic changes they couldn't afford to pay us when daddy died. Don't get me wrong we would rather have had our dad back but it was just how they threw us down like we were nothing. Mommy has worked two jobs, she goes to school, finds time for all of us and I don't think she has had a decent night's sleep since before he died."

They looked at her for a moment and then back at me. I put my arms protectively around my pregnant daughter as she broke down. I held her to me as the rest of the kids came over to hold her as well. I watched Jordan and the rest as they saw us band together through the pain. I saw the six of them stand up and it got the attention of all of the children as well. They stood at attention and saluted the kids and I. Reese, Christian, Charles and Scott saluted back while Aleria, Celeste and I held on to Laura. I kissed the tops of each of the kid's heads and sent them back upstairs. I then had six sets of eyes all on me and I was scared.

"Sid, why didn't you tell us this, that was the reason for the breakdown at the shoot. You were talking to Sarah about what happened to your husband, you relived the memory in your head and broke down didn't you?" I nodded. Parker stood up and looked at me, he took a step forward, grabbed my wrist and then held me tight. "You could have told us Sid, we would have understood, why didn't you tell us the military didn't do anything for you? It isn't right Sid and we would have worked to make it right."

I quickly pushed against his chest. "It isn't your problem Parker it's ours and we will deal with whatever is to come. I don't ask for pity, or remorse or help, I don't need it. I have eight great reasons to live and they keep me going every day of my life. I didn't ask for the hand that I was dealt, but I don't whine about it, I only cry when I am alone and I work damn hard to make sure that my children want for nothing. So now you know the big secret, the one that I have been locking up inside, makes you look at me just a bit different doesn't it?"

Andrew shook his head at me. "No, we don't look at you any different, you are still the annoying little sister, but you are the annoying little sister that we have worlds of respect for."

I rolled my eyes. "You guys need to go get some rest. Tomorrow is going to be a long day for you, and I promise I will be there. Now get going before I make you take on the horde." I started to laugh as two ran for the door while the other four ran for the stairs. I was going to miss them and that was the honest truth.

After they all left and the kids had been fed, bathed and put to bed I looked at my phone and saw a message. I opened it up and smiled at Parker's words.

Just because you are too strong to ask for help doesn't mean we don't want to give it.

I looked at the message a few times before I answered back.

What is it that you are going to do, petition the government to make them give me money that I will just turn around and send back to them?

I was never one for charity, even Chastity and Grace had tried to help me out to no avail, why would I let them try as well? I heard a beep and looked at the message on my phone.

Nope, no petition, but you better watch out cause we have a plan now.

I giggled before I sent a message back.

OMG you have a plan..... I think.... I need.... to... RUN!!!!!

I turned off my phone as sleep started to pull me under. Tomorrow was going to be a long day and I didn't know how I was going to fare with so much emotional damage already inflicted.

Chapter 6

Morning snuck up on me like a rabid ninja and I wanted nothing more than to crawl in my bed and never come out. I got up started breakfast, got everything ready for the kids and then sounded the alarm. They descended upon me like a pack of wild dogs and finished their breakfast before I could blink. I had them all ready to go when I remembered that I didn't turn my phone back on. I smiled at how panicked the guys would have become as I listened to beep after beep on my phone. Laura looked at me with her eyebrow raised.

"Mom, what did you do?" She looked shocked that I was smiling.

I giggled. "Well ya see, they figure that we need help so I sent them a message last night and then turned off my phone. I think that I worried them though."

She looked at the van and then back at me. "I think you did too and I think that is why there are six oversized guys around the van."

I quickly looked over and tried to stifle my smile. Bradley came over to me, put his hand on my shoulder before he spanked me like a naughty kid. I heard all the kids take a deep breath that turned into a gasp before he quickly stepped back. "Don't worry us like that, we thought something happened to you damnit."

I walked up to Bradley, my smile completely gone. "You watch your mouth around these children, we don't use that language now do we?" I grabbed his ear and yanked him down to my height. "Consider that smack your free pass, touch my ass again and I will smear you all over this wall. If you drew the short straw, well consider this a life lesson."

I heard Laura start to snicker until I looked in her direction, then it became a cough. I moved the guys out of the way and started to load up the kids then I turned around. "I am going to take them to school, then I will meet you on base. I will tell you one more time, I don't do charity and I never will. Now excuse me or we are all going to be late."

They stepped out of the way and Parker put his hand on Bradley's shoulder before he looked at me. "Hey, brother's prerogative to punish the sister for stress, but I think you just scared this Marine to death."

I shrugged my shoulders, got into the van and backed up. I watched the looks on their faces before I tore out of my parking spot like a bat out of hell. I got them all off to school as quickly as I could and the headed all the way across town to the base, making it with only ten minutes to spare before they had to leave. The six of them sat huddled in a group, their hands together like they were praying. I smiled to myself before I dove into the middle of them forcing them to catch me.

Andrew hugged me tight. "We thought we had made you too mad to come say goodbye. We were only messing with you." I nodded and hugged him back as I put a note in his pocket and he put a key in my hand. I looked at him for a minute. "It's a family home and too big for just the six of us, my family had a thing for the extravagant and we need someone to watch the house while we are gone. The whole first floor is yours except for dinner and video game time. Before you ask, it isn't charity, I really need you to watch over my house."

I nodded and put the key in my pocket before I hugged Jordan, Bradley, Dewayne and Tyson. Parker stood back and waited for the rest of them to talk to me. I did the same for each one putting a slip of paper into their pocket as I hugged them. Parker put his hand out and I smiled as I placed the slip of paper into his hand and he grabbed me hugging me tight. "Remember I promised that everything would be okay. You are our friend and we kill for our friends, pack up your things stay at the house and know that when we come home, you are

still welcome to stay there. We talked it over last night, and next month you will be getting some papers in the mail to sign and send back to us, please do it."

I nodded and squeezed the breath out of him before I let him go as the buses came into sight. I felt the tears start as the white buses opened their doors and I pictured Harley stepping on to them, the last time I saw him alive. Each one grabbed my hand and said goodbye before they made their way to the buses.

I wasn't sure how long I stood there, but by the time I came back to myself, my head was reeling and my phone was ringing. I looked at the caller ID to see Laura's picture.

Me* Hello

Laura* Momma, help, please help my water broke.

The pain in her voice brought me fully to my senses.

Me* I am on my way love, call the Nanny to pick up the other kids, I will be there in ten minutes.

Laura* Okay momma, please hurry.

I hung up the phone and made a beeline for my van. I drove like a nascar racer the whole way back to the apartment and saw her being loaded into the ambulance. I rushed over to her and held her hand. "Baby you will be alright, Momma is here. I am going to follow behind the ambulance okay, so you just do what they tell you to do and I will hold you soon, alright baby?"

She nodded as she was told to breathe. I watched as they belted her to the gurney and raced away to the hospital with me not far behind her. My mind was in every which direction as I worried about Laura and Claudia. As I pulled into the Emergency Department parking lot I rushed to get inside. As I got to her side they were already telling her to push. I held her hand as she bore down. Tears streamed down her face as she screamed at the top of her lungs.

"One more push Laura, one more and she is here." The doctor smiled at her as I felt her prepare to push. Her hand gripped mine tightly and she screamed in pain. I heard the doctor laugh, the baby cry and Laura gripped me tightly. I looked at her and smiled before I kissed her on the head.

"You did it, and so quickly too. Laura I am so proud of you. She's here, your little Claudia is here."

Laura looked at me for a moment then at the baby they were placing in the incubator. She started to look at me scared. "Momma what's wrong with her? Why are they sticking her in that thing? Did I do something wrong?"

I shook my head. "No baby, you didn't do anything wrong. It's an incubator, she is two months early so they are going to have to keep a watch on her for a while. She is in the best place right now. Just rest my dear, I promise you will be able to see her soon." I smiled at her. "You know you couldn't have given me a better birthday gift than that."

I saw realization in her eyes. "Oh momma, I completely forgot your birthday is next week. I am so sorry momma."

I shook my head. "No my dear, it is fine, you have given me the best gift ever, and I also have a gift for all of you kids. I am excited to take you there once you are able to get home, now get some rest dear and the

surprise will be ready when we are." I kissed her head and smiled as I pulled my phone out of my pocket to call the house. The Nanny answered the phone with a flourish and I could hear laughter in the background.

Nanny* Ross and Reynolds residence, Nanny McPhee speaking

I giggled at her reference.

Me* I just wanted to let you guys know that Claudia Faye Reynolds was born twenty minutes ago she was 2lbs 3oz and about 14inches long.

I heard her squeal with delight.

Nanny* That is wonderful, tell Laura congrats and congrats to you too grandma.

I groaned and laughed at the same time.

Me* Well you had to remind me didn't ya? I might be home tonight because I actually have to go to a staff meeting tomorrow before I go to class. If I get the chance I will take them to school, but things are about to pickup and here soon we are going to be moving, but please don't tell the kids, I want it to be a surprise.

I heard her close a door.

Nanny* You aren't leaving town are you, cause I would miss your munchkins so much.

I laughed.

Me* Nope, not leaving town, just upgrading so I can do work and school more efficiently. A few friends are overseas for a while and invited us to stay there even after they get back. Apparently there are ten bedrooms on the bottom floor and they are all ours so each kid gets their own and I get an office. I thought it would be a good pick me up for the kids and they could help me redecorate.

I heard her clapping her hands and giggling.

Nanny* That is wonderful. I promise, not a word from me. I will take the horde to school and daycare, you make your meeting and start to move things over. I will try to keep them busy as possible, how does that sound?

Me* Sounds great, listen I have to get going please let them all know that I love them and everything is going to be okay.

Nanny* Will do, you enjoy your new granddaughter.

I hung up the phone and smiled to myself. I went back into Laura's room and saw her fast asleep. The nurse came in and smiled at me and went to speak. I put my finger to my lips and pointed outside. As we got outside the door I smiled at her. "So how is our Claudia doing?"

The nurse smiled at me and nodded. "She is doing much better than someone who is almost full term. Are you sure that she is a preemie?"

I nodded. "I went with her for the ultrasound when they told her how long she had left to go. Are you saying that her lungs are fully developed already?"

She nodded. "I want to keep her for about a week to observe her, but it seems that she is going to be just fine."

I nodded. "Good, can you do me a favor, I have to go check something out and I was wondering if you could tell Laura that I will be right back."

She smiled at me. "Of course I will. She is in good hands here, you don't have to worry about that."

I looked at the nurse one more time before I left. I pulled the key from my pocket and read the address that was on the tag, plugged it into my GPS and followed the directions until I got to the huge gated mansion. I flipped the tag over and punched in the code for the gate and then drove in. I was in awe at the sheer size of the place and wondered why they were marines if they could live in a place like this.

I parked in the large circular driveway and made my way up to the front door. I took a deep breath as I turned the key and opened the door, and then I began to laugh. There were clothes everywhere and I was surprised that they could tell what belonged to whom. I walked throughout the house until I got a feel for the layout. I smiled as I came to the back door and saw a beautiful swimming pool. I knew it was going to get a lot of use with my bunch of heathens and hopefully even more so when the guys got back. I walked outside and saw a huge apartment out back. I opened the door to see a huge laundry room with three sets of washers and dryers. I giggled since it was defiantly going to come in handy with the amount of people in the house.

I walked back inside and into the kitchen to see two oversized fridges and laughed, I was going to have a blast in the kitchen. I saw an envelope with my name on it and opened it to see Andrew's handwriting staring back at me.

*Aloha Sid,

Why Aloha do you ask, well isn't this paradise, between the bedrooms, the kitchen, laundry room (yes I knew you couldn't resist) and every other amenity that your family may ever need. Now before you drop off the key and lock the door how about I tell you a little about our plan (You know you want to know). Parker, Jordan, Tyson, Brad, Dewayne and I all had a long discussion and we know that your life centers around those children. So now we are taking it upon ourselves to give you everything you need to spend as much time with them as possible. This also includes a way to fuck over the military so that they have no choice but to give you what you need. How you may ask, well that is easy. We all drew straws and found out who would be the best to help you and well, I get the privilege or affliction (or however you see it) to ask you a question that will not only set you up for life, but those children as well. So I am going to ask you this and you can laugh in my face when I call, tell me no, hell no or even if you feel you are up for this plan, yes. So Sidonie, would you do me the honor of being my wife in name as I know you aren't looking for someone to replace the love you feel for your husband. I want you to understand that even if you do say yes, I want you to keep YOUR wedding band on since it is him who will always have your love and I wouldn't want it any other way. If it isn't me you are interested in, that is fine as well, and you can ask any of us. We hold no illusions on where your heart lies we just want you to get what you deserve for the rest of your life and the lives of those children. We hope to call not long after we get there but you know how these things go and it could take weeks for us to call. Hell you never know I could call as soon as you are done with this letter. Think it over Sid and know that no matter your decision, we trust your judgment completely.

Annoyingly yours

Andrew*

I read the letter over and over and over and over again only to have more questions than answers. My phone rang and I answered it without looking, thinking that it was Laura.

Me* Stressed out Psycho Mom's Club, Head nutter speaking.

I heard a masculine laugh

Andrew* Well that is a way to answer the phone. How are you doing?

Me* Well you guys left about four hours ago and in that time I became a grandmother, got proposed too and now I think you are stalking me virtually.

Andrew laughed again and I smiled to myself.

Andrew* How about this, I promise I am not stalking you, I just wanted to see how things were going and Yay Grandma. How are Laura and the baby?

Me* The baby is doing much better than Laura, but she is in the stressed out new mommy club. I am giving her the chance to renege on our deal about me taking over as mommy. I am hoping that when she holds Claudia for the first time, she will feel what I did with Celeste and Scott.

Andrew* I can understand, but with her being so young she may not be ready for that type of thing and then you will make an awesome mommy again. No matter what know that there are six marines that will always have your back. Now while I am on the phone do you need anything?

I thought for a second.

Me* I am going to rattle a list off to you and figure out if you have everything. Food, laundry soap, broom, dustpan, laundry baskets, internet, a desk, home phone service, a decorating service and labels in all the clothes that are on the floor.

Andrew hooted with laughter.

Andrew* There is a black credit card with no limit on it that my mother gave me. Run it up as much as you want and do whatever you need to. If she calls the house tell her that you are my fiancÃ© and you had to get some things for the house since I had to leave on ERD. She will come bug you, but if you decide not to go through it with me, then you can wait till we get back and tell her it didn't work out. She is pretty laid back for a rich bitch. Now we have to board our next flight so we will call and write when we can. Give the kids a hug and kiss for me and the rest.

Me* Will do and you all better stay safe Marine, do you hear me.

Andrew* Yes Ma'am

The line went dead and I felt the fear take me over. I started to get things cleaned up and put to rights when the house phone rang. I could tell that I wasn't going to get any work done before I had to get back to Laura in the hospital.

Me* Hello

Woman* Uh hi I think I have the wrong number I am looking for Andrew, my son.

Me* Hi, oh goodness you are Andrew's mother. I'm sorry to tell you but he got Emergency Readiness orders and deployed about four hours ago.

Woman* I am sorry if I sound rude, but what are you doing in his house?

I giggled.

Me* I am Andrew's fiancÃ©; he gave me the key to move in when him and his friends left today. I thought he would have called you to let you know.

Woman* No he doesn't like to stress me out, so he usually waits until he gets there. My name is Madi by the way.

I put my hand over my mouth.

Me* I am so sorry for my lack of manners, my name is Sidonie. Well, it's Sid for short, no one uses Sidonie unless I am in trouble.

Madi* Well it is wonderful to meet you Sid. For you to have captured the heart of my son you have got to be something special.

I giggled again a bit hysterically.

Me* I am something alright. I am sorry to have to cut this call short, but I have to go check on my eldest at the hospital.

Madi* Oh my, well please don't let me stop you. I will have to drop by sometime and meet you and your children. By eldest I figured you had more than one.

I sighed and realized I had better drop the shoe.

Me* I have eight. Well seven and a granddaughter that was born today. Andrew just called and I told him that Claudia had been born. He also told me to tell you that I need to pick up some things for the house and told me that I was to tell you I needed to use the black card.

I heard silence on the other end of the phone.

Me* Are you there?

Madi* Yes so sorry was trying to get over the number of kids.

I smiled

Me* Yes it is a shock at first, but they are wonderful kids. I really can't delay any longer I need to get back to my daughter. Drop by and see us anytime.

Madi* Yes, I think I will. Have a good day.

I hung up the phone with a huff, grabbed my keys from the table and locked up the house before I left and closed the gate behind me. I rushed back to the hospital to see Laura holding on to Claudia and I smiled.

"Nothing like it, is there?"

Chapter 7

Laura looked up at me with tears in her eyes. I could see the second guess starting to form before her eyes and she tried so hard to shrug it off. "Momma, I don't know what to do, I love her so much and I want only what's best for her, but I'm not sure if I can give her up. I love you Momma, but I don't even think I could give her up to you."

I smiled and nodded. "How about you give it a try and see how you do, I will help you when you need it and if you still feel like this in about two months, then she will still be yours. If it is overwhelming to you, then you can hand her over until you are ready or until you are sure you want me to keep her. I told you I am not going to keep her from you. I do need to talk to you though and I want you to give me the benefit of the doubt and hear me out like I did you all those months ago, okay?"

She nodded to me and held her daughter close to her heart and rubbed her head. "Today I went to check out a house, it is still in the kids' school district so it won't be another adjustment period, but it would mean you each get your own room, even you and Claudia. Andrew has asked us to take care of the house while he is gone and to stay with them when they get back from deployment. It is a very, very big house with more than enough room for everyone, including the six guys, but there is something else. The guys also want to help us get the money that is owed to us by the government, that way we are well cared for, but there is a catch."

She looked at me for a moment until comprehension dawned in her eyes. "You would have to marry one of them to get the compensation."

I nodded. I handed her the letter that Andrew had written to me and waited until she had read it over. She handed Claudia to me for cuddles as she read and reread the letter until I thought her eyes would bleed. She looked at me and took a deep breath. "Momma, what are you going to do? He is pretty much saying he will even stay in his room and away from you, all you have to do is say yes."

I looked at her in shock and raised my eyebrow at her. "I want to know exactly what you are thinking Laura. Do you want me to say yes, do you think I should say yes, or are you just stating the obvious? You know that I value your opinion, but I feel that there is another problem in the mix. I have been feeling things I shouldn't be feeling, but not for the person that wrote that letter."

She looked at me confused. "Mom you have always told me things, why are you being cryptic now? I can understand that you don't love Andrew, but what is going on in that head of yours?"

I thought for a moment. "Honestly I don't know. I have started to feel something with one of them. I don't know what it is, but when he presses me against him, even when he hugs me, my body catches fire. I shouldn't feel like this though, Harley meant the world to me and still does, but I am starting to become attracted to someone, and I don't know what to do about it."

Laura looked at me for a minute before she burst out laughing. "Oh Momma it sounds like you have a crush on someone. Maybe you should talk to him about it and see where things go. Don't rush into anything Momma, that is all I can say. I mean you have talked to him and he told you that if it isn't him then you can choose one of the others. So take your time."

I nodded at her, kissed Claudia and handed her back. "I love you and thank you for giving me something to think about. I need to go home and get some rest, I actually have to go in to work tomorrow for a staff meeting. If you need me at anytime just call alright?"

She nodded and hugged me tight. "I love you momma and thank you so much for being there for me. It means more than you will ever know."

I smiled at her and walked to the door. "I will always be there for you love, no matter what. Now make sure you let that baby get some rest Momma bear. Good night."

I walked out of the room and out the doors to the car. I felt myself smile as I looked up at the sky and talked to Harvey. "I am doing the right thing aren't I? Giving her the chance to be the mother she should be? I wish I had a bit of your advice right now love."

I got into my van and smiled as I put my key in the ignition. My phone beeped and I looked at the message that I missed and started to involuntarily smiled.

Have another layover, will be able to call you in the morning if you would like me to. P

I felt my heart thump in my chest at his initial and hit reply.

Would like that. I need to talk to you about something. Be safe soldier. S

I tuned the key and started the van. I put it in gear and hoped that I would make it home soon enough to see my children before they went to bed. As I got to the door I could hear some giggles and laughter coming from behind the door. I looked at my watch as a smile played across my lips. I quickly opened the door and rushed in, automatically I got run into by Celeste and Aleria. They giggled and rushed at me hugging me tight.

I reached down and hugged them to me and squeezed until they squeaked. I smiled and laughed as they ran across the apartment. I chased them down one by one and plopped them on the couch. By the time I was done I was laughing and breathless as I held them tight to me. My life didn't feel complete but so much better as I huddled up with my kids. I looked at all of them and smiled as I rubbed my hands together. "I have something to tell you guys, and I want your opinion before I decide what I am going to do."

They all looked at me and the older children nodded. "Mr. Andrew gave me a chance to move us into a bigger place, a place where all of you will have your own room, a big back yard to play in and a pool that you can use whenever you like. I won't tell him yes unless we all agree to it. So does anyone want to skip school and go with me there tomorrow?"

I was met with a chorus of cheers and I giggled. "Alright, well then why don't we get ready for bed because tomorrow is going to be a busy day and it is going to take all of us together to get it done. Now let's tuck up and get some rest."

I herded them all upstairs and tucked them in one by one. As I got to Aleria she looked at me and I smiled. "Momma, is Laura alright? She hasn't been home all day and I am scared that something is wrong with her or the baby."

I nodded. "Baby they are just fine, they just needed some rest and with Claudia being early. They will both be fine. Laura will be home in a couple of days and Claudia in about a week or so. I will take you to see them some time tomorrow, for now just rest my love." I kissed her head and hugged her tight. As I walked out of the room I heard her roll over and I smiled to myself.

My phone buzzed in my pocket and I pulled it out and looked at the number. I felt a smile cross my face as I answered.

Me* Hello

Parker* Hey, you said we needed to talk. How is everything?

I sighed but quickly pulled myself together.

Me* I found the letter about Andrew and the house, I want your opinion on everything.

Parker* Well, I think you guys moving in would be a good thing. It would be wonderful for us to be able to protect you. As for Andrew's proposal, I know he won't force you into something that you don't want to do. If you accept and then find that you don't love him, you don't have to stay with him. None of us would ever force anything on you.

Me* Parker, I am feeling things for someone that I thought I would never feel again and I am scared that if I do this and the person doesn't like me back then things would get odd. I don't want to come in between anyone, I don't want to do one thing and regret it later on.

Parker* Sid I understand, but you have to think it over and decide what is best for you. We don't want you to suffer in silence if there is something wrong. Talk to us, we will always be there.

Me* I just want to know if he feels the same way, it would make my decision so much easier. I just don't know how to ask him if he likes me the way that I like him.

I heard Parker sigh.

Parker* It is one of us isn't it. You are scared that you will come between us. Sid whatever choice you make, as long as it makes you happy, then we will be behind you.

Me* Parker, tell me. Please tell me you like me as more than a friend. Tell me that you feel something more for me than just friendship.

He was quiet for a minute and I started to panic.

Parker* Sid, you are still healing and we want you to fully heal. Give yourself time to go through all the stages of healing. We all want to make sure that you are clear headed no matter how long it takes, and where that path may lead you.

I felt the tears in my eyes at his words and nodded, trying hard to clear my voice of the pain I felt at his obvious rejection.

Me* Thanks Parker, I appreciate the help. I have to get some things together to take to the hospital for Laura and Claudia. Make sure you and the others stay safe Soldier and don't forget to write.

Parker* You take care too Sid and kiss those kids of yours for us.

I heard the sound of the phone click and I placed my phone back in my pocket, wiped the tears from my eyes and started to text Andrew.

Getting our things together to move in, the answer to your question is Y.E.S. We will talk about it more later. Stay safe soldier.

I put my phone back and started to gather the things for Laura and Claudia and then packed up my things. It was still long before sunrise and I couldn't sleep so I started to pack up the kitchen and everything else that we would need. The nanny rubbed her eyes and looked at me.

"You seem a bit confused with some things. Are you alright Sid?" She put her hand on my shoulder and I shook my head.

"No, not alright, but I will be. I will do whatever it takes to make sure that my children know they are the only things in my life. My heart doesn't matter anymore and I think that I have had my happiness and now it is my time to go all out for my children and make their lives as full as Harley made mine. It may not be fair that we lost Harley, but I will make damn sure that I am the best mom that I can be to all of those kids. I don't want them to feel like the leftovers that their families didn't want, that is what Harley and I strove for. The one person that I start to feel things for tells me that it is the depression talking and I am not ready. He didn't even give me the chance to find out if what I was feeling was real or not, he just told me no chance."

She held me tight as my chest started to feel like it was caving in. I thought back to memories of my Harley and how I had the same feelings for him the day I met him in High School, how it was love at first sight and withstood years of us being apart. Now that was he was gone from my life forever I couldn't figure out if I was trying to replace it with someone new or if I truly felt for Parker what I thought I was feeling. Part of him reminded me of Harley, his dark brooding nature, his quiet but helpful side along with his soft touch that made me forget myself so quickly. The more I thought about it the more I thought he might be right. I would go along with my plan until I knew for sure where I stood in my own life.

"I guess that he may be right, but it doesn't make the pain any less from his words. I guess that there still are a few more things that I need to get my head around." I laughed at my comment. "I guess I need to get my head around my whole life. I have just been skating by and you have showed me that. The kids smile so much when you are around, they are like their old selves again and it makes me so happy to hear the laughter that has been missing from all our lives. I think them getting their own space and live going back to a semi-normalcy will do us all a world of good."

She nodded at me. "Well you know that you have me for as long as you need me and I know that you have been busting your butt with two jobs, school and now eight children. Goodness knows that sometimes you do too much and your head spins around like the exorcist and you looked like you are about to explode. I won't abandon you or the kids for any reason Sid. Now why don't you try to get some rest and I will do some of this for you."

I shook my head and started to get back to it to get most of the things together before the kids awoke and I wasn't able to. I looked at her and smiled as I put my hand on her shoulder. She nodded her head and put on a pot of coffee as her and I got back to work. I smiled as I moved around the apartment. I docked my Zune and put it on quietly as Lana and I packed up everything. I started to dance around to Nickelback and each word hit me to the core as I lost myself in the music.

Nickelback - Lullaby

I know the feelin

Of finding yourself stuck out on the ledge

And there ain't no healin

From cutting yourself with the jagged edge

I'm telling you that, it's never that bad

Take it from someone who knows where you're at

Laid out on the floor

And you're not sure you can take this anymore

So just give it one more try to a lullaby

And turn this up on the radio

If you can hear me now

I'm reaching out

To let you know that you're not alone

And if you can't tell, I'm scared as hell

Cause I can't get you on the telephone

So just close your eyes

Oh, honey here comes a lullaby

Your very own lullaby

Please let me take you

Out of the darkness and into the light

Cause I have faith in you

That you're gonna make it through another night

Stop thinking about the easy way out

There's no need to go and blow the candle out

Because you're not done

You're far too young

And the best is yet to come

So just give it one more try to a lullaby

And turn this up on the radio

If you can hear me now

I'm reaching out

To let you know that you're not alone

And if you can't tell, I'm scared as hell

Cause I can't get you on the telephone

So just close your eyes

Oh, honey here comes a lullaby

Your very own lullaby

Well, everybody's hit the bottom

Everybody's been forgotten

When everybody's tired of being alone

Yea, everybody's been abandoned

And left a little empty handed

So if you're out there barely hanging on

Just give it one more try to a lullaby

And turn this up on the radio

If you can hear me now

I'm reaching out

To let you know that you're not alone

And if you can't tell, I'm scared as hell

Cause I can't get you on the telephone

So just close your eyes

Oh, honey here comes a lullaby

Your very own lullaby

Oh, honey here comes a lullaby

Your very own lullaby

Chapter 8

Months passed in bliss with the kids fully settled into the big house and us back to our normal routine. I had gotten letters from the guys and gotten to know them all better. I sent them pictures of all of us together and videos of birthdays, Claudia and everything else that they were missing. I talked to Andrew more about his proposal and all the things that I expected and didn't expect. It seemed like we spent more time negotiating and laughing at things. Both of my jobs were going well and it seemed like my life was getting back on track. I was civil to Parker when we talked, but I kept my distance for obvious reasons.

My phone rang as I ran from the office to a parent teacher conference at Aleria's school. I answered it professionally just to cover all my bases, but smiled at the voice that answered me back.

Me* Sid Anderson, how may I help you?

Andrew* Wow, I don't get bored of hearing that, ever.

Me* Hey Drew, how are things?

Andrew* Hot as usual, listen I just wanted to let you know that my mother should be there in the next day or two so that she can actually meet the woman I love.

I giggled at his sarcastic tone.

Me* No prob, house is clean, kids are good and Claudia has been a dream. I am really proud of Laura, she has stepped up as a mother and made me ecstatic.

Andrew* I am glad to hear it. So I was wondering what you were doing in the next couple months?

I thought for a second.

Me* Well I graduate in three weeks, I have a contract I have to work on in Cali and I still have to put more time into my Virtual Rep job so I don't let my old boss down. When it comes to the kids, Aleria decided she wants to do Ballet and Karate. Reese and Christian decided on Soccer and of course the younger two want t-ball. So I seem to be a bit stretched, why?

Andrew* We got out date to come home in about 6 weeks and I was wondering if you could come pick us up.

I jumped up and down, I had become so close to the guys over the past few months.

Me* Yeppers, just let me know the day and I promise that I will be there.

Andrew* Great, I can't wait to see you guys.

Me* I can't wait to see ya'll either. I hate to be the one to cut this short, but I have to go, I am at the school and the teacher is waving to me.

Andrew* Alright, take care and let me know how things go with Aleria's teacher.

Me* Alright, stay safe soldier.

Andrew* Yes Ma'am

The phone clicked off and I walked over to the teacher who smiled at me before she held out her hand. "Hi Ms. Anderson, I am Joanie Walker, Aleria's teacher.

I shook her hand. "Nice to meet you. Sorry I didn't come right over but I have a few friends overseas and they call when they can to check on us. So how is my daughter doing in school?"

The teacher looked at me for a moment. "Aleria is such a beautiful bright little girl, but she seems distracted by things. Every now and then she just zones out and then starts to cry. Every time I try to ask her what's wrong she just looks away. I was wondering if you could shed some light on what's going on."

I looked at her for a second. "What is it that you are studying?"

She looked at me confused. "Well in Reading we have been working on a story about war, History I am teaching them about different military tactics through time."

I nodded my head. "I see, I think I understand now. As you know I have seven kids, well eight now and we moved here after losing my husband. He died in the military, was brought home covered with the flag. Anything to do with the military still kinda makes us a bit emotional, I hope you understand. Aleria's mother didn't want her and her father took her and her brothers in just as I took in my oldest step daughter. We are all so close, so protective that we don't give ourselves time to mourn. I mean Aleria, Reese, Charles and Christian lost their real father as Laura, Celeste and Scott lost their step dad. I wonder sometimes how they don't explode, but they want so much for life to be normal again. Please take your time with her and understand that it hurts her to think of the military since they let us down and she blames them for her father's death."

The teacher put her hand to her mouth. "I had no idea, it makes so much more sense now. You guys are such a strong family and I will work harder to start to recognize the signs in her and help her through her grieving process."

I nodded. "Is it effecting her grades at all? I know she works so hard on her homework, shows it to me when she is done, so I guess I didn't think there was anything wrong."

The teacher shook her head. "No, her grades are wonderful, she is top of her class, she is a study hard and play harder type of girl and I was glad she went out for the soccer team. It seems to alleviate some of the stress that she accumulates throughout the day."

I nodded. "It is hard sometimes when they smile so much, to see that they are in pain. I am sorry and I will pay closer attention from now on. It seems that we just kinda put it on the back burner in hopes that it would go away."

She nodded. "I understand, when I had to bury my son, I pushed all the pain behind me and tried so hard to forget. All it does is linger under the surface until you snap and I don't want to see Aleria get to that point, she is so wonderful."

I put my hand out and shook her hand. "Thank you, I promise to be more attentive to them. I guess between two jobs and school I am pulling myself just a bit thin. I appreciate your time, and thank you for the warning." I got up and nodded before I headed out of the classroom and sighed. I wasn't doing such a good job at being the mom I should be and it was even more evident than I was able to see. I hoped that when the guys got home, things would get better and I could spend more time with them, but with the turmoil in my heart I wasn't sure that would be the case.

I walked out to the soccer field and watched as Aleria kicked the soccer ball and giggled with her friends. As I looked at her I couldn't see the pain that she hid, she was good at it and I was a fool. I stayed until the end of practice and watched as she bent over to catch her breath. I whistled and smiled as she looked over at me. She came running and launched into my arms.

"Momma, what are you doing here, didn't you have to work." I could still hear the pant in her voice as she tried to catch her breath.

I shook my head. "I had to meet with your teacher, she has been worried about you, and I can under. Honey why didn't you tell me that your school work has been stressing you out?"

She shrugged at me and looked down and kicked the ground. "I don't want to be a bother, I mean you have the new baby to help Laura with and then work and school. I am afraid that you will ship me back to my mom and I don't want that. I keep my head down and stay quiet so I don't bother you."

I pulled her to me and hugged her tight. "Baby, I would never send you back there. You are my daughter and I will always love you. You may not be of my body but Aleria you are my daughter in my heart and soul and I won't ever let anything happen to you. Now sweetie, go get showered and changed and I am taking you guys out to dinner tonight. No second job, no school work just us as a family."

She looked up at me and smiled before she hugged me back and ran for the locker room. I smiled at myself and decided right then and there that I would slow myself down and take more time for my family. No matter how much I hurt from Parker's rejection, I will carry on and love my family with every bit of myself that no one else seemed to want.

My phone rang and I looked at it before I smiled and answered it.

Me* Sid Anderson

Madi* Hey Sid, wanted to let you know that I am going to be coming over tomorrow, maybe you me and the kids could do something together. I need to get to know you guys if you are marrying my son.

I giggled.

Me* Sure, how about we go to the big park on the far side of town and have a picnic before it gets too hot, it seems like summer is trying to sneak up on us.

Madi* Sure. How about 11am by the playset near the fountain.

Me* Sounds good. I will see you then. Tonight I am taking the kids out so we can have some fun as a family. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

Madi* Wonderful see you tomorrow.

After I hung up the phone I smiled evilly to myself and wondered if I could convince my children to behave or if the horde would ensue chaos. Well I guess tomorrow we were going to find out.

Chapter 9

As I got home Aleria rushed from the van and into the house before I could even get out. She screamed the house down as she worked to get everyone ready to go out to dinner. Laura looked at me and smiled her great smile. Mommyhood was doing wonders for her.

"What is Aleria screaming about?" She looked wonderful walking around with Claudia in her arms.

I rubbed Claudia's head. "How about you get a diaper bag ready so I can take you guys out to dinner. We haven't done much together and today I found out how much I am letting you down."

Laura shook her head. "No Momma you aren't letting us down, you are trying to be there for us the best you can while trying to support us and be both parents at once. Some of us may try to be stronger than they truly are and it hurts sometimes but it isn't because you aren't a good mother."

I raised my eyebrow. "Laura, Aleria thought I was going to send her away if she was sad. She was scared I was going to send her back to her mother if she got in my way. I have let you guys down if that is what even one of MY children thinks. I don't know what to do Laura, I really don't."

She looked at me shocked. "Mom, Aleria loves you, don't ever doubt that. Each of us has problems coping sometimes. There are times that Reese will cry at night, but it doesn't mean he loves you any less. He doesn't know how to let you know these things, of course we all deal with it in our own way."

I nodded. "Well from now on I think that I am going to be paying more attention, not working too much and I am also not going any further in my degree. I am going to do so much more than I have been for you guys. I felt horrible after hearing that Aleria thought that I was going to send her away just because she thought she was in the way. Laura, I don't ever want ANY of you to feel that way."

She looked at me for a second before she nodded and went to get her things together. I quickly went upstairs and changed out of my work clothes, left a message for my boss and then pulled my long hair back into a loose braid and slipped on a comfortable pair of white sandles with a small heel and smiled at myself in the mirror before I went into the bathroom to take off my professional face and put on one I was more relaxed with. I quickly walked down stairs and saw all the kids were already changed and assembled and waiting.

I laughed as we walked out of the house and into the van. I was excited tonight and I was bound and determined to make the changes in my life that needed to be done. It didn't take us long to get to a large cheesy diner not too far off the strip. We piled out of van and into the diner and I helped Laura get her diaper bag and we walked inside and the cool blast of air felt wonderful. It wasn't long before we were seated and checking out the menu. I ordered the milkshakes I knew each kid wanted and set Claudia's carseat on a high chair between Laura and myself.

I started to hum along with the music that came dimly through the speakers and smiled to myself. It took us five minutes to order everything the way it had to be for each kid but then we all looked at each other and smiled. I kept humming with the songs as they came on oblivious to the fact that I was doing it. I heard one of my favorite songs come on and I started to sing it lightly but as I moved into the song I started to belt it from the top of my lungs.

Pink - Sober
I don't wanna be the girl who laughs the loudest
Or the girl who never wants to be alone
I don't wanna be that call at four o'clock in the mornin'
'Cause I'm the only one you know in the world that won't be home

Ah, the sun is blindin'
I stayed up again
Oh, I am findin'
That's not the way I want my story to end

I'm safe up high, nothing can touch me
But why do I feel this party's over?
No pain inside, you're my protection
But how do I feel this good sober?

I don't wanna be the girl that has to fill the silence
The quiet scares me 'cause it screams the truth
Please don't tell me that we had that conversation
'Cause I won't remember, save your breath
'Cause what's the use?

Ah, the night is callin'
And it whispers to me softly, "Come and play"
But I, I am fallin'
And if I let myself go I'm the only one to blame

I'm safe up high, nothing can touch me
But why do I feel this party's over?
No pain inside, you're like perfection
But how do I feel this good sober?

Comin' down, comin' down, comin' down
Spinnin' 'round, spinnin' 'round, spinnin' 'round
I'm lookin' for myself, sober

Comin' down, comin' down, comin' down
Spinnin' 'round, spinnin' 'round, spinnin' 'round
Lookin' for myself, sober

When it's good, then it's good, it's so good 'til it goes bad
'Til you're trying to find the you that you once had
I have heard myself cry 'never again'

Broken down in agony, just tryin' find a friend, oh, oh

I'm safe up high, nothing can touch me
But why do I feel this party's over?
No pain inside, you're like perfection
But how do I feel this good sober?

I'm safe up high, nothing can touch me
But why do I feel this party's over?
No pain inside, you're like perfection
But how do I feel this good sober?

As the song ended I heard clapping from all around and started to blush. I looked at my sides to see both Laura and Aleria beside me, I heard their voices jump in somewhere in the middle of the song. I didn't even remember standing up but I sat down quickly and put my face in my hands. It felt strange to sing again after so long. The waitress came over to us with a man in a suit and I swore they were going to tell us to leave.

The manager looked at us with shock on his face. "That was amazing, absolutely amazing. How do you three sing like that, you sounded like angels?"

Laura looked at him and smiled. Since I was still speechless she answered for me. "Well mom has always sung, sometimes we join her, others we don't. Every now and then a song just hits us. Of course that isn't the one my mom is best at. She used to sing a song while our Dad was deployed and they actually had her do it on base the day they came back from an extended deployment. It was the most beautiful thing I ever heard."

The manager looked at me and I took my head out of my hands and looked at Laura. "How did you know about that? That was before you came to us?"

She smiled at me. "Daddy showed it to me, he said he was so proud of you for that." She looked over to the manager. "You know if you ask her enough she just might sing it. It is the most beautiful song I have ever heard."

The manager looked between me and Laura and then got down on his knees beside my chair. I was so embarrased, but it was amazing to know that my children supported me no matter what I did.

"Ma'am please. I would love to hear that song. Your voice is amazing and I know the other patrons enjoyed it too. Would you sing for us one more time."

I looked at him and sighed. The song was painful, Harley's favorite to hear after a long deployment. I looked at each of my kids in turn and they all nodded to me and I smiled. I looked at the manager and nodded. He looked at the waitress and had her rush back to turn the radio off.

I stood up and cleared my throat, each word rolled through my head as a stabbing memory, but my voice rang clear.

Theory of A Deadman - Wait For Me
You are not alone tonight
Imagine me there by your side
It's so hard to be here so far away from you
I'm counting the days till
I'm finally done
I'm counting them down, yeah, one by one
It feels like forever till I return to you
But it helps me on those lonely nights
It's that one thing that keeps me alive

[Chorus:]
Knowing that you wait for me
Ever so patiently

No one else knows the feeling inside
We hang up the phone without saying goodnight
Because it's the sound of your voice that brings me home
It's never been easy to say
But it's easier when I've gone away

[Chorus:]
Knowing that you wait for me
Ever so patiently
Yeah, you're everything I've ever dreamed of having and
It's everything I need from you just knowing that you wait for me

[Bridge:]
What I'd give
What I'd do
Knowing I'm not there for you
Makes it so hard to leave
What I'd give
What I'd do
Anything to get me home to you
And this time I'll stay

And you wait for me
Ever so patiently
Yeah, you're everything I've ever dreamed of having and
It's everything I need from you just knowing that you wait for me

As I finished I looked at my wonderful children and saw the tears in their eyes. It was a part of mourning and we all had to go through it. I put my hand to my face and felt the trails of tears that had leaked down my face and sung. I sat down and all of the kids gathered around me in a mess of hugs, tears and kisses just to feel the

closeness they needed.

I looked over the mass to the manager and his eyes were wide and there were tears running down his face too. "That was amazing, just stunning. So much pain in that song, why is there so much pain with that song?"

I held his gaze. "My husband Harley was in the Army and on his last deployment he came home covered with a flag. We burried him three days later and moved here to start over. Things have been rough, but I have such a wonderful family that I couldn't ask for more."

The manager was shocked. "For that awesome performance, your dinner is on us tonight and bless you for everything you have done and do. It's amazing. We will let you enjoy your dinner now, thank you so much for letting us be a part of something, your voice is astounding and so powerful."

I nodded and he walked away. I held the kids tighter to me until the food came and then ushered them back to their seats. As we all ate I looked at them.

"Alright guys I need to talk to you. Tomorrow Andrew's mother Madi would like us to meet her in the park for a picnic and to meet all of us since I am marrying him. I know that it seems very soon for Mommy to remarry, but there are reasons. I want you to be on your best, and I mean BEST behavior tomorrow. I have every confidence that you won't act like the heathens that you really are."

I heard a laugh around the table and smiled to myself. I knew they were going to try something so I had to be ready for anything.

Chapter 10

The night was wonderful and I had a blast with the kids. We stayed at the diner for hours on end and laughed and talked more than we had since we moved to Vegas. People came over to us and thanked us for staying strong now that my husband was gone. The children cried a few times, but people understood why and respected our privacy in those moments. Our meal was covered by a veteran and his family. Once we got home we plugged in the Xbox and turned on our American Idol game and played it until we all felt sleepy. Laura helped me place them all to bed and then I gave her a kiss and headed to bed myself as she went to her room to feed Claudia.

As I got into m PJs my phone went off with a text. I looked at it and my heart sank.

P* Andrew told me you said yes, maybe it is best this way.

I couldn't believe that he said that, but of course I don't think he actually understood how I really felt about him.

Me* I did say yes, but it is convenience only because my broken heart is elsewhere and it will stay that way.

P* I understand you are still broken hearted about your husband and it isn't a bad thing to be, but maybe Andrew can help your heart heal.

I sighed in frustration.

Me* You know you can be real dense. Yes, I am sad that my husband is gone, but I know he wouldn't want me to dwell on it. The person I am talking about is alive and broke my already fragile heart. I guess I should have expected it, but maybe in time he will come to figure out I wasn't speaking from grief when I said that I cared for him. Maybe, just maybe he will figure out that he could help me heal because I have done all I can on my own with the kids.

I was getting angry at his dense brain and how much he seemed to want to avoid the subject.

P* Sid it is nothing against you, we just don't want to pressure you into anything. If at some point in the future you still feel the same, then act on it. Until then Sid, there are things you need to get straightened out.

Me* Damnit all to hell Parker how can you like tell that I like you, that I want a chance to be with you, but you are so put offish that I don't know what you are thinking, and you being gone makes it even worse. I am going to tell you how I feel and what you do with it, you do with it. Parker I care about you, you make me feel things I haven't and I know it has been less than a year since my husband died, but I want to live again, love and feel again and I know Harley wouldn't hold it against me let alone the kids. So you figure it out from here and I will do what I have to do, but don't expect me to wait forever.

My phone was quiet for a few minutes and I was taking my hair down and brushing it out when my phone went off again. I looked at it in total shock and read it again and again to myself.

P* I know you won't wait forever, but did you honestly think you were the only person in the world trying to get over something. Maybe you should think about that. Maybe the reason I can't tell you is because I have my own demons to work out. Sid, things aren't always as easy as they seem.

I let the conversation go after that. I felt like such an ass. I curled up on my bed and let the tears roll down my face. How could I have not known that he was trying to work through his own demons? How could I have not guessed with how quiet he was, withdrawn and aloof? I felt stupid, so stupid for pressing him on things he may not be ready for. I closed my eyes and started to drift off into a fitful sleep.

Morning came quicker than I would have expected and I was frantic that I slept past my alarm. I quickly jumped out of bed and down the stairs. All of the kids were eating breakfast thanks to Laura and I smiled.

"You know girl, I am not sure what I would do without you. We still have to figure out lunch and get everyone dressed. It is going to be warm today so choose the clothes accordingly kids. I am going to go run my head under the water and get dressed so that I look at least human when I meet Andrew's mom.

Laura looked at me, handed me a cup of coffee and then pointed her finger at the door. I nodded and went back to my room, started the shower and hopped in quickly. With the towel wrapped around me, I got my make up done, put on some comfortable clothes to play with the kids in and loosely braided my hair. When I was done I left the room to see that the kids had the same idea that I had and I giggled.

"Looks like we are all going to match today aren't we?" I looked at Laura who smiled and laughed.

"You know Mom, seems like we can read each other's mind. Might as well let her see who we really are and not fake anything ya know. The nanny got our lunch together and she is putting everything in the back of the van along with four of our old riding blankets for us to sit on. There are like five baskets so I think that there is more than enough food for all of us."

I looked at Laura and something seemed a bit off, but until the meeting was over I decided to shrug it off. As everyone got rounded up I sighed with relief that we still had more than enough time to get there and get settled before Madi showed up.

As we got in the van and ready to go I started to brief the kids. "Alright guys please, please be on your best behavior today, we need to show her that we are nice people, not a pack of wild animals. I know you guys are my angels so let's show it to Ms. Madi alright."

I heard the murmers from all around me and laughed at the lack of enthusiasm. I pulled up in the parking lot and got out of the van. Laura started to get everything together, handing kids the baskets that they would carry, getting the blankets settled with the smaller children while she got Claudia set up in her stroller and I grabbed the last two baskets before locking the van and heading for the large tree that would serve as our picnic spot.

"Guys can you help me set up before you go play, I would greatly appreciate it." All of the kids spread out and started to get the blankets set along with a few of the pillows they managed to sneak on the picnic and laura got Claudia all set up and ready to go while the baskets were set up and I made sure that the kids had sunscreen and water. I nodded to each in turn as they went to play on the mostly shade covered playground that spanned out in front of us.

I looked at Laura's face and started to worry as she bit her lip in frustration and looked at me before she looked away. I smiled at her. "Laura thanks so much for your help, you have been so wonderful in helping me out. I am sorry though, I feel I put so much on you."

She just shook her head and started to rub sun screen on Claudia. It wasn't long before I heard a feminine voice call my name.

"Sid, wow, Sid is that you?" Her voice was like honey as she spoke and I smiled as I stood up to shake her hand.

"Hi Madi, it is nice to meet you, please come sit and join us." I pointed to the rough thread of the riding blankets that were spread out like a patchwork quilt in front of us. She nodded and sat down, as she did she looked me over and nodded.

"My goodness, that is a lot of kids you have there with you." She looked over Laura and smiled. "Hi, my name is Madison, Madi for short, who is this beautiful little girl?"

Laura smiled sweetly as she could. "This is Claudia, she is my daughter, about two months old."

Madi smiled. "She is absolutely stunning, such a beautiful little girl you have there. You must be Laura then, your mother told me about how amazing you are."

Laura nodded uncomfortably and smiled before she turned her attention back to Claudia. I looked over at the children and laughed. "Celeste, Charles, Scott, Christian, Aleria and Reese, please come here for a minute there is someone I want you to meet and you guys need to get some water."

They came over and sat down long enough to gulp down some water, meet Madi and then scamper off again. I laughed as they got so excited about playing until Scott came over crying that he fell.

I cuddled with him for a minute with my cheek against his head before I kissed him and sent him on his way.

"My goodness Sid, you have your hands full, how is it that you keep track of them all?" She was shocked and awed by my little family and I laughed.

"I have a lot of help in Laura, she is amazing and the Nanny that my company hired to help me has helped a lot as well. I wouldn't give them up for anything and they mean more to me than my own life. Even if they aren't mine by blood they are mine in heart and spirit."

Madi looked at me confused for a moment. "What do you mean they aren't yours?"

I sighed. "Well Laura is my step daughter, but still the daughter of my soul and I love her and Claudia so much. Aleria, Reese, Charles and Christian are my husband's kids and then Celeste and Scott are mine with Laura's father. When we became a family we fully adopted them all and those who wanted to change their last name could, if not they could stay how they were. Some of them to this day haven't decided and that is alright with me."

She looked at me in total shock. "So you took a bunch of children from broken homes and gave them a place to be not just themselves, but a part of something bigger."

I shook my head. "No Madi, I gave our children, blood related or not, a stable home to be themselves. I know it is difficult to understand, but they are mine and I would never trade them for the world."

Madi smiled at me and as the day went on she started to grasp who was who and even had all the kid's names correct. I smiled to myself and laughed as she got up and played with them.

Laura still weighed heavily on my mind and I was more worried than before as I watched her. When we got home I would have to talk with her about what was wrong.

http://www.polyvore.com/meeting_mother_in_law/set?id=61592678

http://www.polyvore.com/girls_meet_mom_in_law/set?id=61602892#stream_box

http://www.polyvore.com/boys_meet_mom_in_law/set?id=61603214#stream_box

Chapter 11

By the time we all got home, we were exhausted and sunburnt even through the sunscreen. Laura helped me get the kids fed, bathed and in bed then we both dropped on the couch with a loud sigh. I looked at her before I put my arm around her and pulled her close.

"I am so proud of you girl, you have really stepped it up between school and Claudia and I can't even begin to tell you. You are going to be a great mom and your head is on so straight that I can't even fathom. Something has been bothering you today, and it has been getting to you more and more. Talk to me Laura, tell me what is bothering you."

She looked at me for a moment, put her arms around me and held me close. "Mom, I know you miss dad and that you are trying to mend your heart, but when you started to cry last night I kinda went through your phone and saw all the messages between you and Parker. I am confused on why you said yes to Andrew if you are in love with Parker."

I looked at her and smiled. "Honestly I said yes because Andrew knows my boundaries better than I do and he understands that I don't want anything between us that shouldn't be. We will be the perfect couple when we need to be, but he knows that I am in love with someone else. He isn't sure who, and honestly he doesn't care as long as I am happy. He will play any part I need him to play and I understand that he cares for me, but not in the way that would make it like Daddy and I. Parker though, he is so much more than I could have ever wanted and yet he has his own demons to face before he can think of anything else. Yes, it is rough, but you have to understand that the pieces need to fall where they may and what ever the outcome is what it should be my love."

She looked at me with her eyes wide, stood up and slapped me across the face. "What the fuck have you done with my mother? I want her back, and I want her back now. How the hell did those words even come out of your mouth? What happened to my strong protective mother that stripped while daddy was gone to make sure the bills got paid? What happened to my mother who was a great street fighter and used that to her advantage? Where the fuck have you gone mom because this sounds nothing like you.. NOTHING."

She stormed away and left me shocked to say the least. I got up from the couch and went to the hallway mirror. Had I changed so much? Was relying on someone something I wouldn't ever have done? Was I doing what was right for my children or easy for me? So many questions passed through my head as I looked at the red hand print on my face. I was angry then, angry at thoughts I couldn't even begin to form in my head. I looked over at the nanny, her hand over her mouth and her eyes wide I stormed out of the house and to the gym that was towards the back of the property. Everything in me was screaming, in pain and horribly wrong and I didn't know how to stop it. These guys had come into my life, railroaded me and now here I was with so much pent up anger and frustration I didn't know what to do with it.

As I entered the gym I looked around at my surroundings. It was time for me to vent the anger, frustration and hate that had been in me for so long. I found a punching bag in the corner of the room and decided it was time to get back into fighting shape. Hit after hit and I felt everything in me build, crest like a wave about to break on the sand. Each memory that passed through my brain was a stab at my heart and a pain in my hand. I hit until there was nothing left in me and I was about to break. I screamed at the top of my lungs, the damn of pain finally breaking the surface. Dimly I heard my cellphone ring from my pocket.

Me* This is Sid

Man* Hi Sid, it's Tommy

Me* Hi bossman, you got my message did you?

Tommy* Yes Sid, is everything alright?

I shook my head, then remembered that he couldn't hear me.

Me* No, I need to fix a problem and honestly I am not sure how.

Tommy* What's wrong did something happen to one of the kids?

Me* No, but I have to make some changes, and those changes could effect a lot of people's bottom line.

Tommy* You're scaring me girl, what's wrong?

Me* I need to find a better way to balance my kids and my work. I only have 3 weeks left before I get my degree and I am scared to finish it because it takes more time away from the kids. Don't get me wrong the nanny is a wonderful gift and she is amazing, but when my children think I am going to send them away for grieving there is something wrong. I can't manage two jobs and schedules for 8 kids. Between Karate, Soccer, T-Ball, Ballet, Piano and Theater the nanny and I are going to be stretched horribly thin even if I am not working at all. What can I do? How am I going to make this work.

I heard him sigh into the phone.

Tommy* Sid don't you worry about a thing. We are going to give you two months paid vacation. Finish your degree and set up a routine to your life and we will find a way to make it work. I have never met anyone with the creative intelligence that you have and I don't want to lose you. Hell right now I am thinking about hiring a full on staff to help your family. We haven't ever met anyone like you and for you to be asking for help must be huge for you.

Me* Yes, it really is, I am in over my head and until I can get things on an even keel there is nothing I can do but drown. I don't have any time for myself to do anything and school is now being done online in between making lunches, creating advertisements and speaking to customers all over the country for my old boss.

Tommy* Don't worry Sid, we will help you the best we can to make sure that everything starts to go smoothly for you. I know that your family is everything and when the guys get back it will be easier, but I will still help the best I can. I need your creative genius.

Me* Thank you Tommy, I greatly appreciate it. Hopefully here soon I will have another little handy helper, I just need to buy her a car, a very safe reliable car for her and the baby. Of course right now there is no way that is going to happen, but we will do our best.

Tommy* Go rest Sid, you sound winded, I will cover whatever you need. With the last commission you got, you could buy whatever you want and here soon we have high end client coming in and they have asked to speak with you. The commission from that would be enough to last for years.

Me* You are the best. Thank you so much.

Tommy* Rest your two months starts tomorrow. You need to finish that degree of yours, and we want you at the top of your game. Don't be surprised if you have a gift waiting for you tomorrow. Call it a late baby shower present for your daughter.

I laughed as he hung up the phone. It seemed like everyone wanted to help me in this new life, but first I really needed to learn to help my family first. I had been up on the fence about a lot of things, but honestly changes had to be made and life needed more than just a little bit or normalcy.

Chapter 12

I went to bed that night with a heavy heart, sore hands and tears. What else can I do for my family. I felt so in over my head that I just didn't know what to do. One thing I did know was that I had to break things off with Andrew, even if that meant we lost the roof over our heads I would still find a way to make it work. My family was the most important thing to me. If what my boss said was true then I wouldn't have to worry. I would go in tomorrow, meet with the clients, pitch my ideas and then be back home in time to see everyone home from school. I smiled slightly to myself as I rolled over and let sleep take me over. Things were about to change and with as much change as my kids had already been through maybe this one would be for the best.....

Morning came too soon for my body to recoup from the torture I had put it through the night before. I got up to my alarm, zombie walked into the bathroom, threw myself under the water and washed off the sweat, pain and panic that had crept it's way into my life. When I was done and dressed I walked out to feel an icy anger running through all my kids. I looked them over to see that it was me that they were angry with. As they gathered around the table for breakfast it was Scott that spoke up first.

"Mommy, we are really tired of all the changes but I don't like it here. Sissy says that you can't follow your heart and we know that you miss daddy, but don't do it for us."

I looked at my little girl and I was completely shocked. In turn each kid nodded until my eyes fell on Laura.

"What is going on here? What am I missing?"

She looked at me and shook her head. "Do you really think I am the only one of your kids that has noticed that you aren't yourself. That you would sacrifice that which is yours alone for us. We don't want that. We want out. All of us want out. I don't care what you have to do to make it right, but do it. If we have to cut out our acitivities then we will, but this is damn rediculous mom. We know that dad wouldn't have wanted this for you or for us. He loved your strong nature, your kick ass and take names attitude and your never quit, never ask for help mentality. Now you are about to do something stupid just to settle for something that you will never be happy with. How rediculous is that?"

I nodded my head. "I don't like moving you guys around like this. I was trying to find a solution where there wasn't one. Maybe for us the solution is solitary and maybe if you can give me a few days I will have everything figured out to where none of us need sacrifice who we are."

All the kids looked at me, the younger ones confused, but laura smiled. "Now see, that is the mom that I know, the mom that decided that cage fighting and stripping were better than asking for help. None of us are ashamed of what you have had to do for us, and we will back you until we stop breathing. Don't pull something stupid like this though, there is no call for it. Sacrifice should come in the form of family decisions, not matters of the heart."

I smiled at her. "No the heart should never have to sacrifice when the strength starts to waiver and thank you for reminding me of that."

I kissed each of my kids in turn before I walked out the door with a renewed sense of self and a smile that wouldn't disappear. I turned on my phone to see messages from my old boss, my new boss, and a couple from the guys. As I started to text my boss my phone rang. I smiled at the out of country number.

Me* Hello

Andrew* Hey how are you?

Me* I am good Andrew, how are you?

Andrew* Doing good. Sweaty, dusty and in need of sleep, but what else is new.

I laughed at that. The memory of the sweaty ACU smell filling me with so many happy and sad memories that I just couldn't process them all.

Me* Well isn't that just the norm. What's up?

Andrew* Listen I need to talk to you about a few things. I know you probably need to talk to me too, but please let me get this out.

I was silent for a moment before I responded, my heart pounding in my chest.

Me* What's up Andrew?

I heard him sigh on the phone and knew that this wasn't going to be good.

Me* Andrew, is everyone alright?

Andrew* Yeah, yeah we are all fine, this has to do with the two of us and maybe my kindness took away from you something it shouldn't have.

Me* Are you a psychic or something?

I heard him chuckle into the phone.

Andrew* I must be. I know you don't want to marry me, and the suggestion was just to make your life easier. I know it may have been impulsive and I am giving you the chance to back out. You and the kids can still stay at the house. I won't put you guys out. It felt weird to ask you as I think of you as a sister. I was just doing what I thought was right.

I nodded my head then remembered he couldn't see it.

Me* You know I was gonna talk to you when you got back about this. I can't go through with it and in all honesty I have a revolt on my hands that I need to handle. The kids don't want to stay. Nothing about you guys, but they feel that they have lost their mom and they want her back. They wan't their kick ass mom back. I feel like I have lost myself and I don't like it one bit. My boss cut me a huge commission check from my last project and I am on my way to meet with my last client for two months because I am getting a paid vacation to finish up some things that I want done. I need time to focus on more than me and that is what it feels like I have been missing. Trust me it is nothing against any of you. You guys are amazing and I thank you for the months of friendship. It has meant a lot to us. Don't even think that we are going to cut you guys out of our lives. The kids love you and that is good for me.

Andrew* Well you won't be able to get rid of us anyway. We found a sister that we can protect now and we are going to take full advantage of it. Don't make us hunt you down and you guys had still better be at the airport to welcome us home.

I laughed at that.

Me* You can't get rid of us that easy you have nieces and nephews that can't wait to see you and a pain in the ass sister that will keep you in line now.

Andrew* You know Parker has been a bit of a bear lately. I know the two of you had a falling out. He won't let anyone near his phone right now and he walks around like a kid who had his favorite toy taken away. I know you care for him and he cares for you. You both need time though. Time to come to terms with everything that has happened in your lives. He still has a lot to work through himself.

Me* Well I am not sure that it is going to work out. He made it clear that his demons over shadow the chance of us being together so I am going to move on from that and focus on the treasures I have in my life.

Andrew* Don't count him out just yet. He went through trama almost a year ago and it has taken its toll on him. You just have to be patient with him. He doesn't know how to deal with that fact that he cares for you after what he went through. His whole life was taken from him as well, and there was nothing he could have done. He was deployed and it was just too much for him to deal with.

Me* Well if he would open up and talk to me, maybe I could understand better.

Andrew* It isn't that simple. He isn't that simple, but he is worth it. Trust me. When he comes to terms that they aren't coming back, his coping will kick in and then things will get better. Until then he still dreams that when he comes back she will be there.

Me* Oh like I don't know what that is like. Like I am the one person that wouldn't understand completely.

Andrew* She was pregnant and both her and the baby died in a car accident. He was hoping to be home by the time the baby was born, but it just didn't work out that way. His whole world was shattered and he wasn't there for her when she needed him the most. It tears him up inside.

Me* Yes it does and it will every day. Doesn't mean you stop living. It is like he is a machine and auto pilot is his only setting.

Andrew* That is about it, he still wakes up and tries to look for her. He has been found sleep walking to her grave a number of times. I don't think he expected to fall for someone again, I don't think he ever expected to feel again.

I nodded.

Me* Neither did I, but when I saw him I lost what was left of my heart. Andrew it kills me to know that he may feel the same way but won't talk to me. That is another reason I can't stay in the house, it would be too awkward for the both of us. I need to start standing on my own again. I mean my boss helping me is one thing. I have only known you guys for a few months and even though you guys are like family to me, I still need to stand.

Andrew was silent for a moment before he spoke again.

Andrew* I get ya sis, and to be honest I am really proud of you. You can stay at the house until you find something that is just yours. I wouldn't ever, and I mean ever put you guys out.

Me* Thank you Andrew, that means a lot. I just need to find the lost pieces of me, the pieces of myself that were once strong.

Andrew* Do what you have to do hun. Know that we will be with you through everything that you need. Don't ever hesitate to contact us, and don't you EVER lose touch with us.

Me* I promise Andrew. I promise.

Andrew* Good, now I have to get going. Keep texting Parker, please don't give up on him.

Me* Alright, alright I promise, now stay safe soldier and make sure that you give my love to the others.

Andrew* Yes Ma'am.

As I hung up the phone I smiled to myself and finished up my text messages as I got into my van. I turned the music up loud and enjoyed rocking out as I headed into the office. The commute itself was enough to finish wiping away the pain that I had been hiding deep inside. As I walked into the office I had such a smile on my face that everyone seemed to stare as I walked past. As I entered my office I saw Tom standing there waiting for me.

"Good to see you Sid, you look a ton better. Things starting to straighten themselves out for you?" The look of concern on his face made me smile even brighter.

I nodded. "Yes, one problem down and only two hundred more to solve. Of course there are all things I need to work through with my family. First of all I need to get through this pitch, then I need to do a bit of research. Goodness knows that with me moving out of the house I am in, I am going to have to find something just as big for the kids. They need their space, and we all need our own private time."

Tom looked at me and smiled. "Don't worry, you just pitch to this client and you could retire if you want to. Two commission checks and you are breaking the bank here Sid. How about I look for a place for you and you do what you do best."

I nodded. "Alright, well I am off to the conference room to get all set up before they get here. Hopefully I will get this contract for the firm and we can all retire somewhere nice."

He laughed as I walked out of the room. I was smiling from ear to ear when I went into the conference room and got my presentation ready. With such a major company I was really going to have to be on my "A" game.

It took me only twenty minutes to prepare and as the client walked through the door I took a huge breath and smiled my brightest smile as I began the pitch of a lifetime.

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2014-10-30 08:41:52