

Love, Me

# Love, Me

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Seperated for so long can Jeremy and Lizzy find their way to each other again? You will just have to read to find out..

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Conclusion

## Love, Me : Chapter 1

"You can use my crayons if you want to," said Jeremy Cartwright. The new girl looked at Jeremy and smiled. "Thank you for being nice to me." Jeremy blushed and simply answered her with a nod. After a few minutes of coloring Jeremy asked, "What's your name? I was absent when you came into my class." The new girl smiled which Jeremy noticed reached her crystal blue eyes. "My name is Elizabeth Jones, but everyone calls me Lizzy." From that day on Jeremy and Lizzy were always found together. The youngsters spent their time eating lunch together at school. It was a couple of days before Christmas vacation began that Mrs. Hardy announced to the whole class about having a Christmas Party. She then pulled out a small clear colored jar. Mrs. Hardy informed the children about them exchanging gifts. "Now there are only two guidelines. The first one is you can't trade names. Once you draw out the name keep your comments to yourself. The other guideline is being appreciative towards the gift you receive. Remember it's the thought that counts. I don't want to hear any snide remarks from anyone. Do I make myself clear?" The class looked at each other and told their teacher they understood the guidelines.

After school Jeremy walked Lizzy home. They were talking about the class party. Lizzy told Jeremy that she will be bringing Christmas cookies for the class. "So who did you get?" asked Jeremy. Lizzy giggled and shook her strawberry blonde hair. "You know I ain't gonna tell you. That wouldn't be right." Jeremy made several more attempts, but Lizzy wouldn't budge. The youngsters soon arrived at Lizzy's home. Mr. Jones was busy mowing the lawn while Mrs. Jones tended to her flowers and the vegetable garden. "Hello kids I just finished baking a batch of chocolate chip cookies. Y'all are welcome to help yourselves to a few if y'all want," said Mrs. Jones.

## Chapter 2

Jeremy sighed, "Sorry, but I gotta go help my dad with the horses." Then looking at Lizzy Jeremy smiled, "I'll see you tomorrow okay." Lizzy smiled back and answered, "Sure thing and Jeremy I still ain't telling you who I got." Jeremy laughed and responded with a shrug. "Can't blame a guy for trying." Then he waved to her parents and ran home. Mr. Jones smiled at the interaction between Jeremy and his daughter. "And so it begins," he thought to himself and went back to mowing the lawn. Later that evening Jeremy and Mr. Cartwright were returning from their evening ride. "Dad what do you get a girl for Christmas?" Mr. Cartwright chuckled warmly at his son. "Well it depends. You gotta first find out what she loves doing. Hmm also seeing what catches her interest. Once you got that figured out then you'll know what to give her."

Meanwhile Lizzy drove with her mother to the general store. While her mother was shopping, Lizzy wandered over to where the crafts were. Lizzy smiled to herself as she thought about the name written on the small piece of white paper on her dresser. Who would have thought out of all her classmates, she would end up drawing Jeremy's name. Lizzy was looking at the woodburning kits. Jeremy loved art and he knew how to mix colors. Turning to look at the paint supplies, Lizzy looked down. "Oh wow," said Lizzy to herself. She picked up the paint set. The set was in a cherrywood box. Lizzy also noticed the different colored pastel chalk as well as the different types of art brushes. Walking down the aisle Lizzy found the artist sketchpad which would go great with the paint set.

## Chapter 3

The next morning Jeremy waited for Lizzy. All night he kept thinking about Lizzy's gift. It has to be something special he thought to himself. "Hi Jeremy hope I didn't keep you waiting long, " said Lizzy. Jeremy shook his head and smiled. "Nope wasn't waiting too long. Lets get going." Jeremy and Lizzy walked in a comfortable silence. A cool breeze greeted them causing Lizzy's strawberry blonde hair to shine. Jeremy couldn't take his eyes off of her. "Have you bought your gift yet?" asked Lizzy breaking the silence. Jeremy just shook his head. "Nope, I'm having a little trouble with that." Letting out a frustrated sigh, Jeremy adjusted the shoulder strap of his back pack. Trying to lighten up her friend's mood, Lizzy looked up at the clear blue sky and snapped her fingers. "Hey I got an idea. Why don't we go horseback riding after school?" Jeremy looked over at Lizzy and smirked. "You have a way of making something so simple seem exciting you know that."

Lizzy's shoulders slumped and her smile flattered a little. "Sorry I guess we can skip it." Jeremy felt like a heel and quickly spoke up. "No I didn't say it was a bad idea. It's cool with me. We can meet over by the old oak tree." The spark was back in Lizzy's eyes which made Jeremy's heart beat a little faster. The school day was filled with talk about the Christmas party. Mrs. Hardy had a Christmas tree all decorated and ready for the presents. Jeremy's mind was in overdrive especially since the party was in two days. After school Lizzy went home and saddled her horse Sandy. Jeremy was already at the oak tree with Lightning. " I love riding don't you?" asked Lizzy. Jeremy nodded, "But it ain't exciting as jumping out of a plane." Tilting her head Lizzy smiled and urged Sandy to a full out gallop. Taken by surprise, Jeremy went after his friend.

## Chapter 4

The two friends raced across the open green fields. Lizzy laughed and with a click of her tongue the horse galloped even faster. Jeremy felt Lightning trying his best to catch up with the other horse. They finally came to a stop at Snider's pond. "Wow what a ride," commented Jeremy. His heart was beating a mile a minute. Giggling and trying to catch her own breath Lizzy said, "And you thought this was just a simple ride." Jumping off his horse, Jeremy tied Lightning onto a fallen log. Following Jeremy's lead Lizzy tied Sandy by Lightning. Walking along the pond when something shiny caught Jeremy's eye. It turned out to be a small diamond quartz. Lizzy watched as Jeremy carefully cleaned the precious stone. "It's pretty ain't it. What are you gonna do?" she asked. Tucking the quartz in his pocket Jeremy said, "Don't know yet, but it will come to me."

The sun was beginning to set when the two friends returned to their horses. "Well I better head on home. Gotta help mom bake the cookies for the class party. I'll see you tomorrow Jeremy." Jeremy watched Lizzy ride toward home. Heading back, Jeremy took out the quartz. Suddenly an idea came to him. "Dad will you take me to the jewelry store?" asked Jeremy. After explaining to his dad about what he planned to do with the quartz, Mr. Cartwright drove his son to the store. When the Cartwright men returned home, Jeremy immediately disappeared into his room.

## Chapter 5

Mrs. Hardy's class party was at full swing. The class was either watching a movie or sitting in their own groups chatting away. She had given each of her students a goodie bag filled with candy and small trinkets. It was an hour before the bell rang when Mrs. Hardy gave her class the go ahead to exchange gifts. Jeremy was very nervous when Lizzy approached him. "I drew out your name so here you go." Handing her gift to Jeremy Lizzy smiled at his reaction. "Oh wow Lizzy this is exactly what I've always been wanting." Right before Lizzy turned around Jeremy grabbed her hand. "Believe it or not I drew out your name too. It ain't much but here you go." Jeremy handed Lizzy a small silver wrapped box. Unwrapping the gift Lizzy lifted the lid. There nestled in some green colored paper was a quartz shaped as a star.

Lizzy kept silent as she gently held the delicate gold chain in which the quartz hung on. Jeremy was on pins and needles trying to read his friend's reaction. "This is the same quartz you found by the pond isn't it?" Jeremy nodded, "I wanted to make you something special. Something unique and that also reminded me of you.." Lizzy tried desperately to hold back the tears that threatened to fall. The last thing she wanted to do was embarrass herself and Jeremy with being so emotional. "Why a star?" Jeremy didn't know how to put his feelings into words without them sounding mushy. "Every time you smile, your eyes sparkle like the stars. Do you like it Lizzy?" Lizzy put the necklace on and smiled. "Yes Jeremy I like it very much."

## Chapter 6

Mrs. Hardy watched from her desk and smiled. Looks as if I'm witnessing a special love at its special beginning she thought to herself. The school bell rang and the students took their turns as each hugged their teacher. As Jeremy and Lizzy walked home, Jeremy reached over and took Lizzy's hand. Lizzy looked over at Jeremy and simply smiled. No words didn't need to be said that day, but for Jeremy and Lizzy it marked for a special beginning. For Christmas vacations Lizzy and her parents left to visit family in upstate Nebraska. Jeremy and his father on the other hand flew down to southern Florida where his uncle Mike and aunt Lori lived. Although Jeremy and Lizzy were miles apart both promised to watch the stars every chance they got.

"Son we need to have a talk," said Mr. Cartwright. Sensing the seriousness in his father's voice, Jeremy knew he wasn't going to like what he was about to hear. "Lets take a walk son." Following his father down to the shoreline, Jeremy's heart began to race. It felt like an eternity before Mr. Cartwright said anything. "Dad what's going on? What's with the secrecy?" asked Jeremy. Taking a deep breath Mr. Cartwright faced his son. "Jeremy I'm dying." Jeremy couldn't believe what he was hearing. Tears began falling uncontrollably as Mr. Cartwright held his son. "Jeremy my son there's a reason why we're in Florida. You see son I have cancer. This kinda cancer has spread through out my body. Doctors can't stop it." Jeremy learned that his uncle and aunt will be taking care of him while his dad went back to the valley in Colorado. "Why can't I stay with you dad? I can take care of you," pleaded Jeremy. Those words alone broke Mr. Cartwright's heart. "Son I know you mean well, but I need you to stay with uncle Mike and aunt Lori. I'm going back to settle things in school and make sure the ranch is taken care of as far as selling the horses. I love you son very much. Every day I thank the Lord above for you. Remember that I'll always be proud of you." Jeremy hugged his father and together father and son wept.

## Chapter 7

Lizzy and her parents were returning home after a long and tiring visit with relatives. Just like she promised Jeremy, Lizzy gazed at the stars. "I'm so excited to be coming back home." Mr. and Mrs. Jones exchanged smiles. They both knew the real reason why their daughter was so anxious to be home. After unpacking her suitcase, Lizzy called the Cartwright's place. The phone rang and rang. That's funny I thought Jeremy and his dad would be back by now thought Lizzy. Maybe Jeremy is savoring all the sunshine he can get smiled Lizzy.

Before his father left for Colorado, Jeremy wrote Lizzy a letter. He made his father promise him that Lizzy would receive his letter directly from his father personally. "I promise son and will watch over her the best I can." Jeremy nodded and watched his father board the plane. Uncle Mike placed his hands on his nephew's shoulders. "Everything is going to be alright Jeremy. Your aunt and I love you very much. I'm sure this special girl loves you too." Jeremy exhaled the breath he had been holding. Facing his uncle, Jeremy allowed the tears he was holding to fall freely. "Uncle Mike tell me the truth. How long does dad have?" Clearing his throat uncle Mike said, "Doctors believe he won't make it next Christmas." Jeremy threw his arms around his uncle and wept.

## Chapter 8

School had begun, but still no sign of Jeremy. Lizzy had an awful feeling in the pit of her stomach. Right before lunch, Lizzy could've sworn she saw Mr. Cartwright in the principal's office. Lizzy decided to visit the Cartwright's home after school. She had to know for herself what exactly was going on. Mr. Cartwright looked around the house. He and his late wife Katherine designed the home and hoped to live a long and happy life. But fate wasn't so kind. Katherine died during child birth. Doctors told him that Katherine used her last breath to deliver Jeremy. Now he will be joining his wife where together they can watch over their son. A knock at the door brought Mr. Cartwright back to reality.

"Hello Mr. Cartwright is Jeremy home?" asked Lizzy. Shaking his head and stepping aside, he led Lizzy to the livingroom. "Sweetie, Jeremy isn't coming back to Colorado." Lizzy gasped, clutching the star pendant. "No it can't be true," she wishpered. Mr. Cartwright went to the bookshelf. He returned with a letter. "Jeremy wanted you to read this. Please don't be angry Lizzy. None of this was his fault." With shaky hands, Lizzy opened the envelope:

*Dear Lizzy,*

*As you know by now i won't be coming back the way I planned.*

*I still plan on keeping the promise though. I will keep looking at the stars.*

*Don't worry Lizzy, I know deep in my heart I'll see you again. Do me a favor,*

*Please take care of dad. Even though he's trying to be strong I know he's*

*scared. Don't forget me Lizzy, because I won't forget you.*

*Love,*

*Me*

Lizzy's tears fell upon the hand written letter. Then looking at Mr. Cartwright she asked him why Jeremy didn't return. Mr. Cartwright's voice faltered, but he explained about the cancer and how short his time was. With a heavy heart, Lizzy listened to Mr. Cartwright and after he was done more tears cascaded down his cheeks. "You are a sweet young girl Lizzy. My son is a blessed young man to have someone special in his life. You are the world to him." Lizzy silently promised to Jeremy after leaving his father's home that she would watch over Mr. Cartwright.

## Chapter 9

Days came and went for Jeremy Cartwright. He grew to be a handsome man. An athletic build, golden tan that came since he took up surfing. Uncle Mike and aunt Lori were very proud of him. Jeremy graduated top of his class and went on to UCLA. Every chance he had, Jeremy would take the time to paint. He even entered his paintings in art shows. "Uncle Mike I decided to join the army," said Jeremy. His uncle was taken back by the news. "Are you sure you want to do this Jeremy?" Looking out onto the blue ocean from the deck Jeremy let out a sigh.

"I need to get out on my own uncle Mike. Do some traveling and who knows find something that's been missing." Mike knew all too well what's been missing in Jeremy's life. It has been over ten years since the passing of his older brother. Jeremy was in UCLA when word reached him. Elizabeth Jones had done a remarkable job with handling his brother's funeral. Mike remembered when he and Lori met Ms Jones. She was a young and attractive woman. Strawberry blonde hair that had been layered. Bluest eyes that made the deepest blue sea pale in comparison. But what caught his attention was the pendant that hung around her neck. Jeremy once confided in him about the necklace and his feelings for the young woman. After the funeral Ms Jones had flown back to London. She was involved in a special project that needed her attention. Although his brother left the ranch to Jeremy it was Ms Jones that had taken the time to care for and watch over the property. Mike and Lori knew that Elizabeth Jones was everything and more to his brother and especially to Jeremy.

## Chapter 10

"Look Jeremy I understand where you're coming from. We want you to be happy. It's just with the war going on overseas there's a good chance you might be deployed," said his uncle. His aunt had joined them outside. Jeremy can see the look of worry on her face. "I know the risk I'm taking. But I need to go and live my life," said Jeremy. Lori wrapped her nephew in a tight hug. She loved Jeremy as if he was her own son. "If this is what will make you happy then go with our blessing," said his aunt. Mike hugged Jeremy and told him that he was proud of him.

Lizzy had been in board meetings all day. She was CEO of a prestigious advertising company called BAURER and CURTIS. The founders of the company had chosen Lizzy from a dozen applicants. They were looking for an employee with gusto and the take charge attitude. Lizzy was exactly what they were looking for. Sitting in her corner office overlooking the skyline of New York City, Lizzy had been typing up reports. Ever since Mr. Cartwright's passing as well as her parents, Lizzy threw herself into her work. It was her way of grieving. She was pleased to have met Mike and Lori Cartwright. It was them that shared information on Jeremy. Just thinking about him made her cry. Although Lizzy was single and independent, she didn't spend her time socializing. The women at her job tried to set her up with blind dates. Lizzy smiled and repeatedly told them that her heart belonged to another. The women decided to give up on the setting up. However they didn't believe her when it came to Jeremy.

## Chapter 11

If it's one thing Lizzy hated and that was being double teamed especially by two men where more stubborn than her. Mr. Bauer filled Mr. Curtis in the discussion they were having. The older gentleman simply looked at Lizzy and smiled. "Well there's a black tie event taking place in Colorado. Now if I am not mistaken that's your home state isn't it?" Lizzy already knew where this conversation was headed to. "I need to attend a meeting with a client in a few days," said Lizzy who tried desperately to come up with excuses. "Ms Jones let me remind you that there's no point in arguing with us," said Mr. Curtis who leaned his hip against her desk. Mr. Bauer smiled and said, "We are better at it than you." Looking at the men Lizzy said, "Alright I'll go ahead and take a few days off." Mr. Bauer and Mr. Curtis shook their heads. "Lets try two months." Lizzy's mouth dropped and then she began to ramble. Mr. Bauer held up his hand. "Look Ms Jones my nephew had just finished his third year tour. He will also be attending the event, but he will be bringing a friend along." Lizzy's cheeks reddened, " Are you trying to set me up?"

Jeremy Cartwright was having second thoughts about the whole set up. "I can't believe I agreed to this. How am I gonna recognize this woman?" asked Jeremy. Daniel Lee was placing his ranks in their spot. "Come on Cartwright all this work and no play is starting to get old. Don't tell me your're still hung up on that girl from grade school." Jeremy fixed his army suit's cuffs. "You don't understand dude. Lizzy and I are connected and that special bond can't easily be broken." Daniel shook his head, "Man for once just have a great time. My unle assured me that this girl is drop dead gorgeous." Chuckling at his friend's comment. Ever since their first year tour, Daniel has tried setting him up with every female they encountered. The guy just didn't understand that his heart already belonged to the girl with the star quartz pendant.

## Chapter 12

Lizzy arrived at the event escorted by both Curtis and Bauer along with their wives. The women were very nice and loved to talk. That didn't bother her though besides it kept her from fidgeting with her pendant. "Here's our table," announced Mr. Curtis. The women excused themselves to freshen up. "I hope this young man Daniel is bringin lives up to Elizabeth," said Mr. Bauer who appeared more nervous as if he was on his first date. Daniel and Jeremy arrived at the event a few minutes later. "There's my uncle, come on Jeremy," said Daniel as he led them to the corner table. Jeremy was introduced to Mr. Curtis as well as Daniel's uncle Mr. Bauer.

"If you don't mind I see a lovely woman that desperately needs my attention," said Daniel as he headed for a red head. Mr. Bauer smiled, "Seems as if Daniel still is a lady's man. Takes after yours truly." Jeremy and Mr. Curtis laughed. "So tell me Jeremy what type of woman sparks your interest?" asked Mr. Curtis. Jeremy looked at the men and instinctly knew some how that these men can understand the way he felt. "Well to be honest with you sir there's only been one woman in my life. At that time we were both in grade school. Her name was Lizzy well actually Elizabeth Jones." Mr. Bauer nearly choked on his champagne. "Ms Jones you say, well I hope you won't be disappointed." Jeremy smiled and promised to be civilized.

## Chapter 13

Lizzy followed the women to their table. She saw the two men in uniform. I hope I look alright Lizzy thought to herself. Daniel was the first one to see Lizzy. "Oh my God now that's what I call a goddess." Jeremy turned and felt his words leave him. A stunning woman wearing a thin strapped black gown approached. Strawberry blonde hair was clipped up by a diamond barrett. The woman's eyes were as blue as the crystal sea. "Would you wanna dance?" asked Jeremy. The young woman's smile reached her eyes causing them to sparkle. Lizzy accepted and was taken to the middle of the dance floor. Jeremy couldn't take his eyes off the young woman. As the young couple danced Mr. Curtis and Mr. Bauer exchanged smiles. Daniel couldn't resist it any longer. "Uncle where on earth did you find that woman? She's the only one who ever has gotten my friend to smile like that. And Jeremy hadn't smiled like that in a very long time."

"Daniel what we are going to tell you must keep between us do you understand?" Taking a seat by his uncle, Daniel gave his word. "We get the feeling that those two knew each other in the past. In fact they have been in love with one another for a very long time." Daniel's mouth dropped, "Are you telling me that Jeremy is actually dancing with his long time sweet heart Elizabeth Jones?" Mr. Curtis nodded, "That's what we believe." Letting out a low whistle, Daniel was lost for words. Jeremy noticed the pendant that hung around his partner's neck. "That's a beautiful star quartz you're wearing."

## Chapter 14

Lizzy smiled and subconsciously touched the pendant. "Thank you it was a gift. A special gift from someone that I long to see." Jeremy nodded, but couldn't ignore the anxious feeling so he pressed a little more. "I'm just a little curious, but what's the name of this special person that you long to see?" The song had just ended when Lizzy answered, "His name was Jeremy Cartwright." Jeremy nearly passed out right then and there. It couldn't be could it? After so long could this actually be Lizzy? Returning to the corner table, Lizzy sat by the other officer who had introduced himself as Daniel. After placing their meal orders, Lizzy felt as if the spotlight was on her although she couldn't figure out why. "So tell me how long have you and your friend been over seas?" asked Lizzy to Daniel. "I met my friend on the first year tour. He saved my life countless of times." Lizzy turned toward the other officer. "Forgive me but I didn't catch your name."

Jeremy felt like he was under interrogation with the way everyone's eyes were upon him. Just before he could answer the waiter came back with their food. Lizzy could've sworn the young man looked relieved when the food came. Jeremy leaned over so that only Lizzy can hear him. "I'll tell you my name if you dance with me again." Lizzy smiled and agreed to the dance invitation. All through dinner Lizzy stole glances at the officer beside her. The way he looked at her was the same way Jeremy did. It couldn't be him, could it thought Lizzy to herself. Daniel watched his friend look at Ms Jones. Jeremy had this look on his face that he recognizes the young woman. So Daniel decided to take a risk and asked Ms Jones to dance. If his friend really has feelings for this woman then lets see how long it takes for him to cut in thought Daniel.

## Chapter 15

Lizzy looked at Daniel then toward the other officer. "Alright I'll dance with you Daniel," she answered. Daniel winked at Jeremy as he led Lizzy out to the dance floor. Mr. Bauer and Mr. Curtis noticed the way Jeremy stared intently at Daniel and Lizzy. "You look as if my nephew stole a priceless treasure," commented Mr. Bauer. Jeremy looked at the man, "Do you think I look like a jealous guy? Besides what would you do if you were in my shoes?" Mr. Curtis and Mr. Bauer chuckled. "Well if I were you I would go claim what's been mine for so long." Jeremy smiled and went to the dance floor. "Excuse me, mind if I cut in?" Daniel looked at his long time friend. "We were wondering how long it was gonna take for you to come." Lizzy smiled at the exchange between the two friends. Slapping his friend's shoulder, Jeremy took Lizzy in his arms.

"I think you already know who I am, " whispered Jeremy. Lizzy swallowed a lump that had begun to form. "Yes I .know who you are," she whispered back. A single tear slowly descended down Lizzy's cheek. Jeremy caught the tear and smiled. "You are as beautiful as the sunrise." Blushing a deep rose color Lizzy shook her head. "You must be mistaken me for someone else Jeremy." Taking the risk of being slapped, Jeremy tilted Lizzy's chin. Dropping his gaze to her full and luscious lips, Jeremy pressed his lips onto her. Lizzy sighed and leaned into the kiss. Mr.Curtis, Mr. Bauer along with their wives and Daniel were smiling at the sight. "Now that's what I call a long awaited reunion." said Daniel. The others had to agree with the young man.

## Chapter 16

Through out the entire evening Jeremy and Lizzy never left each other's side. After the event was over everyone went their seperate ways all except Jeremy and Lizzy. The couple found an all night diner. "What a way to be dressed for a place like this," joked the waitress when Jeremy and Lizzy walked in. "We didn't want the night to end," answered Jeremy. After taking their orders, the waitress slipped into the kitchen. "So tell me all with what's been going on with you Jeremy. What made you enlist?" asked Lizzy. Jeremy took Lizzy's hands in his. "Don't know how to explain it. I guess you can say that I was looking for some way to fill an empty place in my heart." Lizzy could sympathize with that all to well. "How about you Lizzy, what made you chose your kinda work?"

Lizzy explained to Jeremy about her interest in marketing. Then the waitress returned with their order along with a rose in a small crystal vase. Lizzy looked at the waitress with a puzzled look. "Henry can spot love from a mile away. He's a big softie when it comes to the matters of the heart," answered the waitress. Thanking the waitress and spotting the cook, Jeremy smiled and nodded. The old cook winked in reponse and went back to his duties. Jeremy and Lizzy laughed about old times as they savored their meal. "I tried to make it to dad's funeral, but with all that was going on in school I couldn't get away. When uncle Mike and aunt Lori informed me of all you've done. Oh Lizzy it just made me missing you a whole lot worse." Jeremy watched Lizzy's reaction and noticed how solemn her eyes became.

## Chapter 17

"I made sure the property was always kept up so that way you would have a descent place to come back to," said Lizzy. When his uncle and aunt informed him about Lizzy being caretaker over the Cartwright ranch it made him glad to know that someone was watching over his home. Now hearing the words straight out of Lizzy's mouth made Jeremy fall more in love with her. "Are you on vacation?" asked Jeremy. Lizzy laughed softly which made Jeremy grin. "I was forced on a two month vacation. It seems I don't get out much." Taking a sip of his coffee, Jeremy laughed. "Daniel said the same thing to me. Believe me I've been about the call of duty for so long. In fact my buddy would've drugged me just to make sure I joined him on this leave. Now I'm glad that I came." The couple left the diner just as the first rays of the sun became visible. "I'm staying in the Holiday Inn with Daniel, seperate rooms of course. Where are you staying?" Lizzy told him that she was staying at her old house. The couple agreed to meet later for some horseback riding. Before driving off, Jeremy held Lizzy. Kissing her with so much passion clearly sending her a message that she belonged to him.

Jeremy was on cloud nine when he returned to his hotel room. Being with Lizzy was exactly what he needed. Now the difficult part was leaving her when his time was up. Lizzy fell fast asleep as soon as she got out of the shower. She dreamt about being in Jeremy's arms. It was passed noon when Jeremy and Lizzy met up at the Cross Creek Ranch. They rented horses and spent the day riding the trails and picnicing by the sparkling stream. "When do you and Daniel return overseas?" asked Lizzy while she put away the picnic basket. Jeremy was seated at the kichen counter watching her bustle around in the kitchen. "We'll be leaving in a few days," he answered. Lizzy walked toward him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Connecting her lips with Jeremy's Lizzy passionately and yet firmly kissed Jeremy. Responding to Lizzy, Jeremy brought his arms around her. After the kiss ended both Jeremy and Lizzy were trying to catch their breaths. "I'm gonna miss you sweetheart, but for now lets enjoy our time together," said Jeremy. Lizzzy nodded in reponse.

## Chapter 18

All the way up till Jeremy and Daniel left Colorado did Lizzy and Jeremy enjoyed their time together. Every moment they spent was a priceless memory made. Lizzy made sure that Jeremy had her address. At the Colorado airport Daniel said his goodbye to Lizzy and boarded the plane. "Promise me that you'll write to me every chance you get," pleaded Lizzy with tears in her eyes. Jeremy hugged his love and promised her that he would write. Embracing Lizzy one last time Jeremy turned and boarded the plane. Lizzy watched with a heavy heart as Jeremy's plane took off. Driving back to her childhood home, Lizzy allowed more tears to fall freely.

"You'll see each other again dude," said Daniel as he tried to comfort his friend the best he could. Jeremy simply nodded as he loaded his pack and set out on patrol. Lizzy spent the remainder of her vacation either shopping or on horseback. During all that time memories of Jeremy's lips played repeatedly in her mind. Sure she had a bright future in B&C, but deep down Lizzy knew she wouldn't be happy. Lizzy stopped by the Cartwright ranch. She didn't know why she stopped there but still it didn't hurt to check on the property. Looking at the empty corral that once were filled with horses needed to be replaced. The stables had a musty smell since it had been closed up for so long.

## Chapter 19

Fetching the house key from her pocket, Lizzy inserted it and walked into the house. Even though the home was bare, Lizzy can imagine the good times that were shared in the home. Lizzy walked from one empty room to the other. I wonder what Jeremy would think if she spruced up the place. Closing her eyes, Lizzy can already see children running through the home. Laughter and warmth from family gatherings. Shaking herself back into reality, Lizzy locked up. Returning back to her childhood home, Lizzy packed her clothes. Early the next morning catching an early flight, Lizzy walked through her front door shortly after four in the evening. Lizzy had taken a much needed relaxing bubble bath. Changing into comfortable sweats, she curled up on one side of the couch.

Bill, bill, junk mail Lizzy read as she went through her mail. There was a letter from Afghanistan. Ignoring the rest of the mail, Lizzy opened the letter:

*My dearest Lizzy,*

*I just returned from a 12 hour shift. The days are so blistering hot,*

*but when night comes I still look up at the glittering stars. Just by*

*me looking at them makes me remember your eyes. I love you*

*Lizzy and am counting the days till I see you again.*

*Love,*

*Me*

After rereading the letter for a second time, Lizzy went to her office room. She started a letter for Jeremy. Before catching a cab to work, Lizzy mailed off the letter and prayed that it will reach him.

## Chapter 20

"Lt. Cartwright you got a letter," informed one of his comrades. Slipping off his gun strap Jeremy took a seat on the sandy ground. Smiling when he saw the New York return address, Jeremy opened the letter:

*To my sweet soldier,*

*I arrived at my apartment and was excited to see your*

*letter. Do you know what i did before I went to bed?*

*I looked at the stars and blew a kiss as well. I bet*

*that sounded corny. I love you Jeremy with all my heart*

*and await your safe return to me.*

*Love,*

*Me*

Jeremy clutched the letter close to his heart and felt the moisture in his eyes. Most guys would laugh when men would cry. In this case where people are dying left and right nobody makes fun when a soldier cries especially if they receive a letter from home.

"Welcome back Ms Jones," said Mr. Bauer. Lizzy smiled in return as she headed for her office. There were reports stacked on her desk that needed much attention. Mr. Curtis checked in on Lizzy before heading out to lunch. "Do you want me to bring you anything for lunch Ms Jones?" Lizzy looked up from reading a report and shook her head. "No thank you I just placed an order for some chinese." Giving her a nod Mr. Curtis went on his way. Sending faxes eating a few bites of her food Lizzy was in overdrive. Her phone beeped at an incoming call. "B&C Elizabeth Jones speaking how may I help you," answered Lizzy in her professional manner. The line wasn't very clear especially with the static. "So that's how you sound when you're in work mode," chuckled Jeremy.

## Chapter 21

Lizzy smiled at the sound of Jeremy's voice. "Yes it is, ain't you suppose to be sleeping right now?" she asked. Adjusting the ear piece Jeremy smiled. "Yeah I am, but I had to hear your voice before I hit the bed. I also wanted to answer your question about me thinking you blowing a kiss at the stars was corny. Sweetheart just knowing that those stars are sharing your kiss with me doesn't sound corny to me at all." Jeremy and Lizzy spoke for a few more minutes before saying I love you's. Jeremy laid his head on his cot. Sweet slumber came upon him as he dreamt about Lizzy. Smiling to herself, Lizzy continued with proof reading the reports. It was well after ten when Lizzy turned off her office lights. "You don't mind if I walked with you do you Ms Jones?" asked Mr. Bauer. Welcoming the company Lizzy and Mr. Bauer made their way toward the elevator. "I hope you don't mind me tagging along. It's just that ever since Mrs. Bauer's mugging a few nights ago Mr. Curtis and myself have become very protective over our female employees." Lizzy knew about the mugging and was glad that the woman was recovering nicely. She understood perfectly clear especially since security has been very tight. A cab came around the corner for Lizzy. "We'll see you tomorrow morning Ms Jones," said Mr. Bauer as he waved for the cab driver to drive off.

Love, Me letters were received from both Jeremy and Lizzy. With each passing year their love grew. Lizzy's 30th birthday came and the company threw her a surprise party. It was such a shock especially since Jeremy was there. "Oh sweetheart how I've missed you," said Jeremy as he held on to Lizzy. The women were in awe especially witnessing Jeremy and Lizzy shared a heart melting kiss. Mr. Bauer spoke with Jeremy and asked how Daniel was doing. While the men were talking, Lizzy was standing with some of her coworkers. "Wow he's such a hottie," commented Linda. Another coworker joined the bantering. "Now we know that your Jeremy is the real deal." Lizzy giggled as her and Jeremy's gaze locked on each other.

## Chapter 22

Jeremy and Lizzy went to Lizzy's apartment. The couple spent the entire night in each other's arms. Lizzy woke up to the smell of sizzling bacon and fresh coffee. "MMM nothing looks more sexier than seeing a man in the kitchen," said Lizzy. Jeremy laughed as he led Lizzy to the table and pulled out her chair. Setting her plate and coffee before Lizzy, Jeremy quickly served himself and joined her. "I've been thinking about dad's place. After this tour is over I'm going back home," said Jeremy. Processing the words Lizzy smiled. "Whatever makes you happy hon," answered Lizzy. Looking at Lizzy Jeremy smiled. Grabbing her hand Jeremy kissed her finger. "I'm hoping that you would come with me."

Lizzy almost choked on her coffee. "Are you proposing Jeremy?" Jeremy simply grinned. "Well that would mean I have to go all out for that special question don't you think?" asked Jeremy. Lizzy giggled then grew serious. "Are you sure you want me by your side?" Jeremy helped Lizzy to her feet. "Elizabeth Jones I love you with all my heart. You are the only woman I could ever need and want in my life." Then Jeremy pressed his lips unto Lizzy's. Pressing herself to Jeremy. Lizzy deepened the kiss. "I better get ready for work before Mr. Curtis and Mr. Bauer call a search party on me," said Lizzy. Jeremy reluctantly let her go. He made sure the kitchen was spotless before he headed out on his special errand.

## Chapter 23

"Well don't we look so chipper," joked Mr. Curtis. Lizzy laughed as she headed for her office. "Oh yes and floating on air as well," answered Lizzy. While Lizzy tried to make a dent on the stack of ads and looking over a presentation that she was preparing, Jeremy was doing furniture shopping. He stepped into a high class furniture store. There he purchased stainless steel appliances. Jeremy knew that the Cartwright ranch is going to be needing serious updating. He made sure that all his purchases were delivered to the ranch the same day he would return. Then he thought about the rest of the furniture. Maybe he can ask uncle Mike and aunt Lori for help in that department.

By the time Lizzy returned home she was exhausted. Jeremy had drawn a hot bubble bath complete with scented aroma therapy candles. "Oh Jeremy how did you know I needed this?" asked Lizzy as she leaned on the bath pillow. Jeremy took the loofah and gently scrubbed Lizzy's shoulders and spine. "I had to make sure my girl is being taken care of," answered Jeremy. Leaving Lizzy to enjoy her bath, Jeremy went to check on dinner. Candle lit dinner was the perfect way to end the day. Lizzy savored the hawaiian chicken and steamed white rice. "I'm going to see uncle Mike and aunt Lori before I head back," said Jeremy. Lizzy understood and asked when his flight was. "I'm going to be headed for JFK early tomorrow morning." Jeremy and Lizzy shared a special night filled with love, passion and fire.

## Chapter 24

*Dearest Lizzy,*

*I didn't want to wake you up.*

*You looked so sweet and well I didn't want*

*to disturb you. I love you very much and*

*will be coming back for you.*

*Love,*

*Me*

Lizzy placed the letter in a flowered colored momento box with the others she had collected. Getting ready for another full day, Lizzy couldn't help but hug the pillow Jeremy used. Meanwhile Mike and Lori were ecstatic when they saw Jeremy. "Oh sweetie we've missed you," said Lori as she embraced Jeremy. Mike joined in on the group hug as well. "Do you know how proud we are of you? I'm sure your mom and dad are proud of you as well," said Mike. Jeremy felt tears wanting to fall, but instead he blinked them back. Returning back to the beachfront home seemed surreal. After settling in the guest bedroom, Jeremy asked his uncle and aunt for a huge favor. "Do you all think you can help me out?" asked Jeremy after he explained to them about the Cartwright ranch.

"Of course we'll help you," said Mike. In fact after lunch Jeremy and his uncle went to the Home Depot. There they picked out brand new honey colored hardwood flooring. Along with neutral colored paint and light fixtures. While the men were gone, Lori did furniture shopping on her own. After purchasing the furniture, the Cartwrights returned back to the house. Jeremy confided to the both of them about his return home and why he wanted to fix up the ranch home. Mike and Lori understood Jeremy's feelings and were happy about the marriage proposal he was planning to do upon his return. "I want to make sure Lizzy has a home to come back to," said Jeremy. Mike looked at his nephew and once again told Jeremy how proud he was of him.

## Chapter 25

Two days later Mike, Lori and Jeremy stood outside the Cartwright ranch home. "Okay the first thing we ought to do is paint the rooms. After we do that then we can lay down the hardwood," said Mike. Acquiring help from neighbors, everything was done in record timing. Lori made sure that there was plenty of refreshments on hand. Jeremy told his uncle about the appliances being delivered the same day he would be returning back to Colorado. Both his uncle and aunt assured him that they would be there to help him with the appliances and furniture deliveries. Jeremy along with his uncle and aunt returned to Florida. Jeremy spent the last of his time in Florida surfing and spending time with his uncle and aunt. After a tearful good bye Jeremy boarded the plane and returned to Afghanistan.

Lizzy was working late on a Friday night making sure that her presentation for the NIKE division was well organized. Mr. Jamison the head of security was making his final rounds before a shift change with Mr. Reynolds. "Are you okay in here Ms Jones?" asked Mr. Jamison. Looking up from her computer, Lizzy smiled and nodded, "I'll be leaving shortly, but I hope you have a good night." Mr. Jamison nodded and left Lizzy to her work. Thirty minutes later after saving her presentation on disk, Lizzy got ready to call it a night. There was a 24 hour Starbucks Coffee Shop around the corner that Lizzy wanted to head for. Scanning her surroundings, Lizzy tightened her trench coat and proceeded to her destination. Passing the first alley way there were a few homeless sleeping on the ground. Lizzy was just passing the second alley way when a pair of strong arms grabbed her from behind.

## Chapter 26

"Well ain't you a pretty thing," sneered a big burly man. Lizzy could smell the whisky in the guy's breath. Trying not to show any fear, Lizzy tried to talk herself out of the situation. "Look if you want money here's my purse. You can have my watch too," said Lizzy. The big burly man wasn't paying any attention to what Lizzy had told him. "Sweet thing I ain't interested in money," smiled the man. The man moved towards Lizzy. Trying to dodge her attacker, Lizzy tried to run. "Trying to play hard to get. I love that cutie," said the man.

The big burly man tackled Lizzy to the ground. He began tearing at her blouse. Lizzy began screaming as loud as she can. "Help! Somebody please help me!" Placing his big sweaty hand over Lizzy's mouth, the man desperately tried to hike up Lizzy's skirt hem. Struggling with all her might, Lizzy managed to bite down on her attacker's hand. "Sonofa...!" yelled the man. He punched Lizzy's mouth and continued with his assault. All Lizzy could think of was Jeremy and their life together. Just those thought's alone gave her the strength she needed to fend off her attacker. With a swift motion, Lizzy kicked the man's groin causing him to double over in agony. Getting up with wobbly legs, Lizzy made another desperate escape out of the alley.

The security guards Mr. Jamison along with Mr. Reynolds heard Lizzy's cry for help. The men saw Lizzy running toward them. "Ms Jones look out!" yelled Mr. Jamison. Mr. Reynolds drew out his side arm, but Lizzy's attacker was too fast. He pulled out his own revolver and with one shot to Lizzy's back brought her down. Mr. Reynolds along with Mr. Jamison fired their own side arms killing the assailant. Mr. Jaimson held on to Lizzy as he fellow officer called for an ambulance.

## Chapter 27

"Sir you gotta incoming call. It's from a Mr. Bauer and he sounds extremely upset," said private Jones. Lt. Jeremy Cartwright went to the base's office. "Mr. Bauer what's the matter?" asked Jeremy. Mr. Bauer had informed him about Lizzy. Daniel was told by private Jones about his uncle calling so he went to where Jeremy was. He walked in just as Jeremy began yelling at the top of his lungs and falling on his knees. "Dude what's going on? Tell me now," demanded Daniel. Never in the whole four years that he's known his friend that he's seen him lose it. With tears falling like Niagra falls, Jeremy told Daniel what happened to Lizzy. "Your uncle is with her now. I gotta get to her man," said Jeremy. Daniel nodded and accompanied him to Major Davis's office. The commanding officer didn't think twice and had Jeremy's discharge papers signed. "Just to let you Lt. you are a good soldier and my prayers are with you," he told Jeremy. Giving the officer a salute, Jeremy packed his gear and was driven to the airport by Daniel. "Keep me posted okay Jeremy," said Daniel. Jeremy simply nodded and boarded the plane.

Between connecting flights Jeremy called his uncle and aunt. He told them about Lizzy and also about him being discharged. "Don't you worry Jeremy your aunt and I will fly to New York," assured Mike. Jeremy thanked his uncle and closed his eyes. Dear Lord please let Lizzy be alright Jeremy silently prayed. Mr. Bauer and Mr. Curtis along with their wives took turns watching out for the doctor. It wasn't long after Mr. Curtis and his wife left that Mike and Lori showed up. Mr. Bauer introduced himself and his wife. "How's she doing?" asked Lori. Mr. Bauer told them that they haven't heard anything so far. "From what the officers told me it appears that Ms Jones put up quite a struggle. Her attacker thought that by shooting Ms Jones he would have the upper hand." Mike asked Mr. Bauer if the attacker had escaped. Shaking his head Mr. Bauer told Mike that both security guards shot the attacker. Dr. Talbert entered the waiting area.

## Chapter 28

Both couples crowded the doctor and asked about Lizzy's condition. "Ms Jones is a very lucky young woman. The bullet missed her spinal cord completely. We were able to extract the bullet. However her spinal nerves are tensed with the trauma due to the bullet. What she needs now is her family. After she regains her strength, Ms Jones will need to be cared for," said Dr. Talbert. Right at that moment Jeremy appeared. "That's where I'll be taking over." Mike and Lori rushed toward Jeremy. Mr. Bauer and his wife were equally happy to see Jeremy. "Can I see her doc?" asked Jeremy. Dr. Talbert nodded and led Jeremy to Lizzy's room. "Don't stay too long, Ms Jones needs her rest," said Dr. Talbert. Jeremy told the doctor he understood and entered the hospital room.

Jeremy took a chair and placed it by the bed. He saw that Lizzy was hooked up to a heart monitor as well to an I.V. Taking Lizzy's hand in his, Jeremy allowed the tears that he had been holding on to fall. He saw the black and blue bruise along Lizzy's jaw. There was also a small cut on her lower lip. "I'm glad that the security officers took care of the thug, because I would have done something far worse," said Jeremy. Lizzy whispered, "You know perfectly well that wouldn't have been a smart move hon." Jeremy wiped his tears and gently kissed Lizzy's hand. "How do you feel sweetheart?" he asked. Slowly moving her head, Lizzy looked over at Jeremy. "I feel a whole lot better now that you are here," answered Lizzy. After a few minutes a nurse came and informed Jeremy that he had to leave. Jeremy leaned over and ever so gently he kissed Lizzy's lips and assured her that he'll return later.

## Chapter 29

Before Jeremy stepped into the elevator an orderlie stopped him. "Here's your wife's personal belongings." Jeremy smiled and accepted the bag. He didn't bother correcting the orderlie, because he knew that Lizzy will be his wife soon enough. Thankfully Jeremy had Lizzy's apartment keys on hand. After a well deserved shower, Jeremy opened the plastic bag. He pulled out the trench coat along with the torn blouse and skirt. Jeremy saw the blood stains on the blouse. He muttered a curse and was glad that the guy was dead. He found the star quartz pendant, the clasp of the necklace had broke. Then an idea began forming. Now all he had to do was get to the jewelry store in the morning. Just before he headed for bed Jeremy placed a call to Daniel. "She's gonna be just fine. All Lizzy needs is some T.L.C." Daniel chuckled, "And of course you're the perfect guy for that duty sir." Jeremy laughed and hung up the phone.

"What do you mean a leave of absence? What about the NIKE meeting?" asked Lizzy. Mr. Bauer and Mr. Curtis looked at each other. "Look Ms Jones at this moment your well being is more important than any meeting. Besides it has already been taken care of," said Mr. Curtis. Crossing her arms Lizzy cocked her eyebrow. "Who made the pitch?" Mr. Bauer cleared his throat. "It was Ms Mason." Lizzy shook her head, "Yall know that woman has been after my job for as long as I can remember. I guess this situation will make her dream come true." Mr. Curtis and Mr. Bauer each took Lizzy's hand. "Well lets just see where your happiness truly lies shall we?" Lizzy knew deep in her heart that the men were right.

## Chapter 30

Jeremy stepped into La Diamond Magnifique. "How may I assist you today?" asked a young sales clerk. Looking at the name tag, Jeremy smiled. "Yes Nancy I was wondering if you can use this stone for an engagement ring," said Jeremy pulling out the broken necklace from his coat pocket. Nancy examined the star quartz. "Whoever designed this sure was very talented." When Jeremy didn't comment, Nancy looked at him with a surprised expression upon her young face. "Wow you did a fantastic job. Not many jewelery are made with this much detail. To answer your question yes we can mount this stone on your choice of band." In a few minutes Jeremy selected a gold band. "The ring will be able for pick up in a week Mr. Cartwright. I know you've probably heard this before, but whoever this woman is must be one special woman." Jeremy replied, "Yes she is a very special woman indeed."

Dr. Talbert was checking on Lizzy's progress when Jeremy walked in. Seeing the man she loved for so long made Lizzy smile. "How's my girl doing doc?" asked Jeremy as he placed a gentle kiss upon Lizzy's forehead. "Ms Jones is doing quite well actually. She will be using a wheel chair until her legs are able to carry her full weight." Lizzy felt the air being sucked out of her upon hearing what the doctor had shared. It was Jeremy who asked the question that popped into her head. "How long exactly will Lizzy be in the wheel chair?" After checking Lizzy's vitals he told the couple that Lizzy's recovery depended on how well she does in physical therapy. "As long as Ms Jones keeps up with the sessions I see no reason for a speedy recovery."

## Chapter 31

After Dr. Talbert left the room, Jeremy and Lizzy simply held on to each other. Lizzy began sobbing on Jeremy's chest. "Sweetheart whats with the water works?" asked Jeremy in a soothing tone. "I lost the necklace you gave me," Lizzy finally said. Cradling his beloved, Jeremy told Lizzy not to worry. "It's alright honey, it needed some work to be done." Lizzy felt her blood heat up. "That bastard broke my necklace!" It took a few minutes for Lizzy to calm down. "You know I'm glad that the guy isn't around. I hate to see what you would do to him," joked Jeremy. Lizzy chuckled and stayed in Jeremy's arms. When Lizzy's breathing quieted down Jeremy saw that the pain medication was starting to take affect. He gently laid Lizzy's head on the pillow.

After making sure Lizzy was comfortable Jeremy went back to the apartment. He called his uncle and aunt and told them how Lizzy was doing. "We're glad that Lizzy is doing much better," said Mike. Lori picked up the other phone. "Have you proposed to her yet?" asked Lori with an anxious tone. Jeremy laughed and said, "Not yet aunt Lori. I'm gonna spent my time seeing that Lizzy's physical therapy sessions are going the way it should be. Then I want to make sure all the furniture and appliances are already set up. That is as soon as I can call the store and have them move up the delivery date." Mike spoke up at that moment. "Just take care of Lizzy Jeremy. Your aunt and I will handle the ranch." After a few more minutes Jeremy hung up the phone and decided to take a nap before returning to the hospital.

## Chapter 32

Daniel had called Lizzy's apartment knowing that his friend would be there. "How's Lizzy doing?" asked Daniel. Jeremy told his friend exactly what Dr. Talbert had said. "So I take it you're holding off on proposing to Lizzy." Jeremy chuckled, "You know me all too well." Daniel laughed, "It's my job to know how my best friend thinks. Oh hope you don't mind but me and a couple of guys sent Lizzy some flowers." Jeremy told his friend that the flowers would cheer Lizzy right up. Lizzy was in complete and utter shock when a flower delivery man kept returning with several bouquets of flowers. The delivery guy just finished delivering the last bunch when Jeremy walked in. "Wow you didn't tell me you were starting a flower shop business," joked Jeremy.

Lizzy cried as soon as she read Daniel's card. "These guys don't even know me. How could they spend their money on a complete stranger?" Chuckling to himself Jeremy responded, "Lizzy they know that you're the one who made their commanding officer come alive. Also they had it pretty easy when I told them that I had reunited with my girl." Lizzy inhaled the fragrances that lingered in the room. "At least I get to smell flowers instead of sterilized hospital equipment," giggled Lizzy. She promised to send Daniel and the guys a care package as soon as she was discharged. Then again might as well do it sooner rather than later. "What do you think the guys need over there?" asked Lizzy. Jeremy said, "The simplest of things that we take for granted over here. toilettries, books, bibles, music cds, simple things like that. Let me guess the guys are gonna get the Lizzy Jones loving package." Lizzy grinned from ear to ear. "You bet your bottom dollar hon."

## Chapter 33

A week of intense physical therapy had taken so much out of Lizzy, but she was determined to do all she could to get her strength back. Dr. Talbert was impressed by his patient's determination. He noticed how the other patients that also had physical thereapy looked upon Lizzy as a great example of sheer will and dedication. Jeremy had flown to Colorado. He wanted to be there for the deliveries. Mike and Lori arrived the following day. Together the Cartwrights turned the empty ranch home into a welcoming sight. The honey colored hardwood floors complimented the freshly painted room. Lori decorated every room with some knickknacks and made sure that each room had Jeremy's paintings. "This place looks amazing. Now all we need is to get the wedding planned," said Lori. Mike and Jeremy laughed, "Well I first gotta propose to the girl before a wedding can take place,"said Jeremy winking at his aunt.

Lizzy was returning from a session when the hospital phone began to ring. "Hey cutie we wanted to thank you for sending us the packages. you are truly a God send," said Daniel. Before Lizzy can repond every soldier which were under Daniel's command took the time to speak with Lizzy. By the time Daniel hung up, Lizzy had already burst into tears. The phone began to ring again. "Hello," sniffed Lizzy. "What's the matter sweetheart? Are you okay?" asked Jeremy with an alarmed tone. Lizzy explained about the phone call from Daniel. Jeremy relaxed his shoulders. "How's your sessions going?" Lizzy told Jeremy that she was able to stand longer and took a few steps. "That's awesome Lizzy, I'm so proud of you. I will be flying to you tomorrow," said Jeremy.

Feeling as if her heart was about to burst, Lizzy told Jeremy that she loved him. "Okay Ms Jones time for you to rest," said Dr. Talbert. Saying another love you Lizzy hung up the phone. "How am I doing so far?" asked Lizzy. Dr. Talbert marked her chart and smiled. "Well by the way you're progressing I am predicting two more weeks of being wheelchair free." Lizzy felt her body cramp up and was grateful to the pain medication. Slowly slipping into sweet slumber Lizzy dreamt about Jeremy.

## Chapter 34

Jeremy had barely stepped into Lizzy's apartment when the phone began to ring. Nancy from La Diamond Magnifique informed him that his order was ready for pick up. After unpacking his duffel bag, Jeremy headed for the jewelry store. As soon as the door chimed Nancy was already leading Jeremy to where the ring was. "I hope this is to your liking Mr. Cartwright," said Nancy as she handed Jeremy the ring. Sparkling with every movement, Jeremy inspected the ring. "This is exactly the way I wanted it. Thank you for your business," said Jeremy. Nancy placed the ring in the black velvet ring box. "I wish you and your special loved one all the happiness," said Nancy. Smiling in response, Jeremy left the store and headed for the hospital.

Meanwhile Lizzy was in the pool. The physical therapist known as Casey explained to her that being in the water would help her strengthen her legs. After the pool session, Lizzy decided to use the walker instead of the wheelchair. Casey at first didn't want to chance it with Lizzy, but looking into Lizzy's eyes and the determination behind them made Casey give the go ahead. Lizzy held on to the walker and began taking small but steady steps. As she rounded the corner heading for her room, Jeremy was standing right outside her room. "Jeremy I'm over here," called Lizzy. The look upon Jeremy's face was priceless. Standing there watching Lizzy approaching with the walker made Jeremy swell up with pride. This is the most courageous woman I've ever seen, thought Jeremy. He held the door open for Lizzy. When she made it to the bed Lizzy felt like she was on top of the world.

## Chapter 35

"You did awesome sweetheart," said Jeremy as he kissed Lizzy. "Nothing can top how I'm feeling right now," said Lizzy. Jeremy tilted his head to one side and crossed his arms. "Nothing can compare with what you've accomplished true, but I know what else can get ya." Lizzy's curiosity was peeked and said, "Oh really Mr. Cartwright well then do tell. What on earth can possibly get me?" With such love shining through Lizzy's crystal blue eyes, Jeremy decided that this was his chance. So he gently brushed her lips and on bended knee declared his love. Lizzy gasped as she looked at Jeremy. "Ms Elizabeth Jones I love you more than life itself. You've been my guiding star in the darkest of times. I wonder if you would do me the honors in becoming my wife?" asked Jeremy opening the black velvet box. Taking a cloer look Lizzy's mouth dropped.

"Isn't this the star quartz from my necklace?" stammered Lizzy. Jeremy nodded and said, "This stone began with a necklace between two friends. Now this ring is the symbol of another chapter in our lives. Lizzy felt tears slide off her cheeks. "Yes Mr. Cartwright, yes I will be honored in becoming your wife." Slipping the ring onto her finger, Jeremy deeply and passionately kissed Lizzy. They heard clapping coming from the doorway. Dr. Talbert along with a nurse and Daniel had huge grins on their faces. "I knew I picked the right time to come," said Daniel.

## Chapter 36

Dr. Talbert congratulated the newly engaged couple. The nurse was congratulating them as well between sniffing. "Well then allow me to present you both with the first wedding gift," said Dr. Talbert. As the nurse checked Lizzy's vitals, the rest of the people along with Lizzy anxiously waited for the doctor to continue. "Your physical therapist stated that Ms Jones is doing remarkably well. Also I will be allowing Ms Jones to be discharged depending on how she does in her therapy sessions in two more weeks." Jeremy hugged Lizzy while Daniel hugged the both of them. "I will work harder," promised Lizzy.

Daniel and Jeremy left Lizzy so she can rest. The guys decided to go out and catch a movie. After deciding on a horror film, Jeremy asked Daniel how his career was going. "Well would you believe that the only reason I'm here is because the guys wanted an update on what's been going on with you and Lizzy. Something tells me that yall's engagement is really going to be the talk for awhile." Jeremy laughed, but then grew serious. "Okay now tell me what's really going on." Daniel was silent for a bit then shook his head. "I hate it when you read between the lines." Jeremy sighed and said, "It's my duty sir. Now out with it." Daniel explained about the new commanding officer. "The guy's name is Joe Skinner. He wants me to bring you back. Reinstate you as your current ranking as lieutenant."

## Chapter 37

"Okay why does Skinner need me? He has you and the other guys," said Jeremy. The movie had started so that meant the conversation would have to wait. Lizzy was just finishing the dinner plate when Daniel and Jeremy returned. She could feel the tension radiating from both men so she didn't hesitate. "Alright what's going on you two?" Daniel smiled, "Yep you are definitely Cartwright's girl. I'll let Jeremy tell you while I go get some coffee." After Daniel left Jeremy pulled up a chair. "Lizzy it looks as if I'm gonna be reinstated as lieutenant." Lizzy felt her heart race. "Why honey? Is it really getting that bad?"

Jeremy explained about Joe Skinner. "Looks like the guy doesn't know how to be a leader. The guys need someone whose more trustworthy. There are other officers who believe Skinner shouldn't have been chosen as commanding officer." Lizzy took in everything Jeremy had shared with her. "How long will you be gone?" Holding Lizzy's hand and kissing her palm Jeremy looked at Lizzy. "I'll be gone up until someone is worthy enough to take Skinner's place." Daniel walked in and said, "Don't worry Lizzy I'll be watching out for Jeremy as well as the rest of the guys." Lizzy looked at Daniel and held out her hand toward him. Pulling Daniel close to her, Lizzy whispered in his ear. "You better make sure nothing happens to him, because you'll have to answer to me." Releasing Daniel Jeremy could've sworn Daniel looked as if he seen a ghost. "Yes ma'am order understood," answered Daniel. Jeremy bit back his laughter knowing all too well what had just happened.

## Chapter 38

The next morning Jeremy and Daniel went to see Lizzy before leaving for the airport. Watching the couple saying their good byes tore at Daniel's heart. "Get over here and give me a hug soldier," ordered Lizzy to Daniel. Jeremy smiled as his future wife hugged his friend. "You know you're a great guy Daniel. Please be careful," pleaded Lizzy. Looking into the blue eyes that were damp from the crying he responded, "I will Lizzy and will carry out your order too. Besides I don't think I can take you on." Lizzy laughed and watched Jeremy and Daniel leave. I am going to walk on my own Jeremy Lizzy said to herself. All through the flights Jeremy was quiet. Daniel knew that Jeremy needed the space. As soon as they reached the home base, Jeremy was immediately taken to Skinner. Jeremy left Skinner's office thirty minutes later. "Well how did it go?" asked Daniel. Jeremy looked at his friend and said, "Looks like I'm gonna be here for quite awhile.

"Great job Ms Jones. You're doing a terrific job," said Casey. Lizzy dabbed at the beads of sweat from her forehead. In three hours, Lizzy had completed the excersises. "Wheww, thanks I'm beat. But I want to keep going after I rest," said Lizzy. Tossing her patient a bottled water Casey sat beside Lizzy. "Why are you pushing yourself so hard? You are way ahead of the goal mark." Taking a gulp of water Lizzy looked ahead. "The pushing makes it easier for me not to miss my fiance." That answer alone was all that Casey needed to hear.

## Chapter 39

Jeremy Cartwright was fixing to hurt Skinner. The man single handedly led the troops into an ambush. Despite the warnings Jeremy and Daniel tried to give him. Thankfully nobody lost their lives, but now Jeremy had an idea of why the guys were so anxious to get him with them. "Now you see what we're talking about? This guy is gonna kill us all before our enemies get a chance," said Daniel. Jeremy took off his boots just to get the sand out. "Yeah now I see and boy we need to do something about this," responded Jeremy. Before heading for chow, Jeremy sat down and wrote to Lizzy. He made sure to include a picture of him along with his troops. The officer in charge of mail sent out every soldiers' letters along with packages later that day.

"Ms Jones I have a letter for you," said the mail carrier. Lizzy had just finished a pool session which she did much better with each passing day. Thanking the man, Lizzy opened the envelope:

*Sweetheart,*

*I first want to tell you that I love you very much. You are the world to me and I am missing you.*

*How's your physical therapy sessions going? Please try to take it easy Lizzy. The strength*

*in your legs will grow in time, I also don't want you hurting yourself. Stars are so bright over*

*here, but they don't compare to your gorgeous eyes. Joe Skinner is exactly how Daniel described him.*

*Darling I have my work cut out for me that's for dang sure. Do you know what keeps me going?*

*It's the thought of seeing you and holding you in my arms. I'll see you soon sweetheart.*

*Love,*

*Me*

*P.S. Here's a picture of me and the guys.*

Lizzy's eyes swelled with tears, as she fell asleep clutching the letter close to her heart.

"Look Skinner you are spreading the men too far!" yelled Jeremy over the walkie talkie. Gun fire exploded, Jeremy and Daniel shielded themselves the best they could. "We need to get these men outta here!" yelled Daniel to Jeremy. Jeremy nodded as he tried to figure out their next move. By the way the gunfire sounded its as if they were completely surrounded. Then a shaky unsure voice could be heard from the walkie talkie. "What do we do?" Jeremy and Daniel knew that voice belonged to Skinner. Grabbing the walkie talkie from Daniel, Jeremy radioed for fighter jets. "On our way Lt. Cartwright, just hang on tight; over," answered a pilot. The fighter jets came to their assistance faster than anyone anticipated. There was a rescue chopper waiting for the men. The troops that survived along with the wounded made it to the chopper.

## Chapter 40

Mr. Bauer along with Mr. Curtis observed Lizzy as she made an attempt to walk without any support. Standing with full of confidence Lizzy walked from one side of the room to the other. The gentlemen were grinning from ear to ear. "I'm feeling more better and stronger. Pretty soon I'll get to go home. Which reminds me I need to speak to the both of you," said Lizzy. "I'm gonna go grab a cup of coffee. Do you need help heading back to your room?" asked Casey. Mr. Bauer said, "We will escort Ms Jones if that's alright with you." Casey looked at Lizzy who told that she didn't have a problem with it. Lizzy used the walker, but at the same time bearing her weight upon her legs.

Reaching for her bed Lizzy was finally able to relax. "I wanna talk to you about my position at B&C." Both men knew that Lizzy would choose to resign from her position once Jeremy Cartwright returned. "We understand my dear and just to let you know you are welcome anytime if you ever choose to return," said Mr. Bauer. Lizzy told the men how grateful she was for their mentoring and taking her under their wing. "I consider yall as my family," said Lizzy. Mr. Curtis and Mr. Bauer took turns in hugging Lizzy. After a few minutes the men left. Slowly making her way to the window, Lizzy looked at the sky. Barely making out the stars she blew a kiss and prayed for Jeremy's safe return.

## Chapter 41

Jeremy was polishing his gun when Daniel took a seat beside him. "Hey you got mail." Handing his friend the letter, Daniel watched Jeremy tore it:

*To my sweet soldier,*

*I love you so very much. My legs are getting stronger with each passing day. Mr. Curtis and Mr. Bauer*

*know that once you return I will be resigning from B&C. I don't regret the decision I've made honey. My place is with you besides I love*

*being a homebody. I know that you are a great leader one that men can trust and follow. I miss you a lot, but I know we will be together soon.*

*Do you know what's the first thing I'm going to do when I get out of here? Go dress shopping with your aunt Lori. Tell Daniel I said hi and*

*to be safe. Until we're together again, I've been looking at the stars.*

*Love,*

*Me*

Jeremy closed his eyes. "I can't wait to back dude. You do know you're my best man so you have no choice but to be there." Daniel slapped Jeremy's shoulder. "Dude you know I got your back."

It was well into the evening when the stars sparkled brighter than ever before. Jeremy took that sight as a sign that he'll be returning home. He walked along the assigned post with finger on the trigger. Just like a hawk, Jeremy scanned his surroundings. Before he began his patrol, Skinner told him to report back to his office once he was relieved from duty. I wonder what that guy wants now thought Jeremy. Ever since Jeremy and Daniel arrived Skinner had been picking at Jeremy's brain. Skinner had been asking him what he should do if he ever led the troops into an ambush. Shaking his head, Jeremy wondered how Skinner ever made it to his position. "Sir I came to relieve you," said the young soldier. "Oh joy that means I get to talk with Skinner," said Jeremy. The soldier known as Thomas grinned. "Yeah that guy is missing a few screws."

## Chapter 42

Skinner wasn't the only one waiting for Jeremy. Major Harris along with Daniel were there as well. Saluting to his commanding officer Jeremy was asked to be seated. Major Harris stood to address the men. "I went over Sgt. Lee's report on the attack that occurred outside the perimeter. I also interviewed the rest of the troops who were with the both of you." Then looking at Skinner Major Harris stripped Skinner of his rank. "You have been demoted down to private. I know that you've been relying on Lt. Cartwright to regain the trust of your men. Now I'm giving you two choices. You can either accept the rank of private or you can go home. The choice is entirely up to you. Without looking at Daniel and Jeremy, Skinner chose a civilian life. Then without a backward glance he walked out the door.

"Okay Ms Jones it's time to see you walk this entire floor," said Casey. Lizzy knew that this day was coming and she prayed that her vigorous therapy sessions helped. Walking slow then gradually increasing the pace, Lizzy passed with flying colors. She even went down to the nursery. Lizzy smiled at the babies in their bassinets. I wonder if Jeremy would want to have children. What on earth am I talking about I need to marry the man first giggled Lizzy to herself. She walked back to her room without feeling the least bit tired. "So how do you feel?" asked Casey. Lizzy hopped out of bed with a big smile on her face. "I feel like I can fly right now. Not feeling tired or in pain. Do you think I can explore the hospital?" The physical therapist smiled and said, "Well I don't see any problems with that. I will let Dr. Talbert know how you're doing. For now stay put young lady."

## Chapter 43

Major Harris didn't say a word as he reviewed both Daniel's and Jeremy's files. "Both of you have been highly recommended to take over Skinner's position. The only problem I see is whom this position is going to." Jeremy cleared his throat and asked, "Permission to speak freely sir?" Major Harris looked up at Jeremy. "Permission granted, what do you have to say?" Looking at Daniel and smiling he proceeded. "Sir I can help you make that decision for you. I believe that Sgt. Lee will be the best man for the job." Leaning back on the chair Major Harris asked, "Lt. Cartwright I understand that it was you who single handed led the troops when Skinner failed to do his job. What can possibly be more important than leading these troops?" Closing his eyes Jeremy answered, "It's not a what but a who sir. I have lost so much in my life sir. My father passed away while I was in college. Then a few weeks ago I nearly lost the love of my life. It's time for me to go home."

Dr. Talbert walked into Lizzy's room. "Well Ms Jones I reviewed your chart. How would you feel in being discharged tomorrow morning?" It took everything in Lizzy to keep her from jumping and screaming for joy. "You are a courageous young woman Ms Jones. You've been an inspiration to other patients as well as to myself and the nursing staff. I wish you all the the best." Blinking back tears, Lizzy nodded and thanked the doctor for the kind words. After Dr. Talbert left the room, Lizzy called Mike and Lori. "That's wonderful sweetie, we've been praying for you," said Lori. Then Mike picked up the other phone. "Are you planning to return back to B&C?" Lizzy told the couple about the decision she had made. "Well then I'll be flying to New York that way we can start looking for your wedding dress," said Lori excitedly. After hanging up the phone, Lizzy walked toward the elevator. She pressed the button for the top floor and stepped onto the hospital's roof top.

Looking up at the starry sky, Lizzy felt tears falling down her cheeks. She thanked the Lord above for being her strength. Then she blew a kiss and prayed that the evening breeze will carry her love to Jeremy.

## Chapter 44

"I'm sure gonna miss annoying you," said Daniel. Jeremy laughed as he stuffed his belongings into his duffel bag. "Yeah well I'm sure you'll be able to find some poor sap to pick on." Looking around the small room, Jeremy was all too anxious to return to the states. The next morning Lizzy was waiting to be discharged. Mr. Curtis came the same time Dr. Talbert did. "Okay Ms Jones here are your discharge papers. Do you have someone to come get you?" Before Lizzy could speak, Mr. Curtis spoke. "I'll be Ms Jones' driver. Is there any special instructions for her?" Lizzy smiled as Dr. Talbert told her former employer about getting plenty of rest. A nurse arrived with a wheelchair. When Lizzy gave the doctor a puzzled expression, he assured her that it was standard procedure.

"Thank you for bringing me back to the apartment, said Lizzy to Mr. Curtis. The gentleman smiled, "It's no problem Lizzy and make sure you get some rest." Lizzy stepped into her apartment and smiled. She can still smell faint rugged aftershave that Jeremy used. Looking around she noticed how clean and tidy Jeremy left the apartment. Jeremy made sure that all the bills were taken care of before he left, because the bills were nicely placed in her office area with receipts. Laying down on her nice soft bed Lizzy soon fell fast asleep. She didn't know how long she was out, but the knocking at the front door woke her up. "Hey are you up for some shopping?" asked Lori. The women embraced as Lori stepped into the foyer.

"Of course I am lets go," responded Lizzy. Jeremy had phoned his uncle and told him of his returning home. "That's great Jeremy when's your flight?" Jeremy laughed and said, "Well I'm at the Miami terminal. Do you think you can come and get me now?" Mike nearly dropped the phone, but quickly recovered. "I hate when you surprise me like that. Alright I'll be there in a few just sit tight." Lizzy and Lori went to several dress shops and boutiques. "Oh I like this one," said Lizzy when she stepped out of the dressing room.

## Chapter 45

Lori turned around and went pale. "Are you okay Lori? Do you think this dress is all wrong?" Stepping closer to Lizzy, Lori finally let out the air she was holding. "I don't know if its fate or somebody is lending us a helping hand. You see sweetie this is the exact style Jeremy's mother wore on her wedding day." Lizzy wasn't able to speak for minute. When at last she spoke her words were whispered. "Do think Jeremy wouldn't be happy with me if I chose this one?" Lori shook her head and hugged Lizzy. "Sweetie I think Jeremy would be happy to see you in this special dress."

Mike easily spotted his nephew. He noticed the young women trying to get Jeremy's attention with their flirtacious moves. However Jeremy wasn't paying much attention to them. Mike knew that Ms Elizabeth Jones is the only woman who could ever catch Jeremy's attention. "Hey Lt. Cartwright give your uncle a hug," said Mike. Jeremy saluted his uncle before giving him a big bear hug. "Where's aunt Lori? I expected to see her here," said Jeremy as he and his uncle headed for the truck. "She's with Lizzy right now," answered Mike. Jeremy's heart began to skip a few beats. As his uncle started the truck, Jremy asked if anything was wrong. "Nope actually quite the opposite in fact. Your aunt flew to New York to go shopping with Lizzy."

## Chapter 46

After buying the dress and shoes Lizzy and Lori decided to grab a bite at a bistro cafe. "Do you and Jeremy have a church picked out yet?" Lizzy shook her head, "I was thinking of flying back to Colorado. There's a church where my parents were married at. Honestly Lori I don't think too many people will show up for the wedding," Lori smiled, "That's how it usually starts but you will be surprised how many people will be more than happy to come. You and Jeremy are so loved." Lizzy hadn't thought about that, "Lets go see about picking out invitations," said Lori. Lizzy raised her hand, "I think Jeremy and I need to set a date first. Lori giggled, "Forgive me sweetie, when I start something I get so caught up with it."

Jeremy and Mike spent their time getting fitted for tuxedos. "Daniel will be here tomorrow just so he can get fitted, but he has to report back in two days." While the tailor pinned the arms sleeves, Mike was standing there with his arms open wide. He had asked Jeremy about the wedding date. "I need to call Lizzy about that. Hopefully it will be soon," answered Jeremy. It was an exhausting but a fun day for both Lizzy and Lori. Lori decided to spend the night. Early the next morning Jeremy called Lizzy. "Hello sweetheart how are you feeling?" The sound of Jeremy's voice made Lizzy's morning. "I'm doing really good honey except for one thing. When are we getting married?" Jeremy chuckled, "I was gonna ask you the same thing." After an hour Jeremy and Lizzy decided to get married on Valentine's Day.

## Chapter 47

Lori's mouth dropped when Lizzy told her the date. "That's four months away. We need to get started." Lizzy knew to expect that reaction. "How about we make this an adventure. Come with me to Colorado." Lori smiled and accepted the invite. "When do we go?" Lizzy giggled in two hours so lets get going." Lori playfully tugged Lizzy's ponytail, but was ready to go in record timing. Jeremy was given the honors in picking out the wedding bands. Daniel had got fitted for his tux and tagged along with his friend. They stopped at a quaint little jewelry store. Daniel found a pair of wedding bands that were gold but had a silver trim. "Dude what about these? These suit you and Lizzy to a tee." Jeremy looked at the rings and agreed with Daniel. He even had Lizzy's ring engraved with two simple words: *Love, Me*.

The flight to Colorado was a pleasant one for the women. Lori didn't waste any time so after dropping off the luggage in Lizzy's childhood home, both women headed for the church. Pastor Lander congratulated Lizzy and told her that the church will be reserved for her and Jeremy. After reserving the church, the women went to find a place for the reception. "How about we have the reception at the Cartwright ranch. It would be a symbol for fresh beginnings," suggested Lizzy. Lori thought it was a wonderful idea. "The place has been updated since the last time you saw it." Curiosity filled Lizzy as she and Lori headed for the ranch. Lori opened the door and stepped aside.

## Chapter 48

Jeremy took Daniel to the airport early the next morning. "Send the invitations to me dude and we'll see how many of the men show up." Jeremy promised that he would. When he returned to the beachfront home, Mike was just hanging up the phone. "Hey your aunt took Lizzy to the ranch." Jeremy headed for the kitchen. "Well what was the verdict?" Mike was grinning from ear to ear. "She loved it Jeremy and says she's gonna put her home up for sale. That woman is on the go right along with my wife." Jeremy laughed and knew that Lizzy has always been that way.

Months flew by faster than anticipated. Daniel had phoned Jeremy and told him that few of the men would be coming with him. Jeremy and Lizzy made sure that the guests were booked in a bed and breakfast in town. Lori had placed the veil on Lizzy when Mr. Curitis along with Mr. Bauer peeked in. There were honored to be chosen to walk Lizzy down the aisle. "My dear you look stunning. We've come to take you to the church." Although Lizzy wasn't returning to B&C, she still remained in contact with her formal employers. "Okay lets be on our way," said Lizzy. Daniel stood by his best friend. Lori walked down the aisle holding onto Mike's arm.

## Chapter 49: Conclusion

Everyone rose as the song for Here Comes the Bride began to play. When Lizzy appeared with Mr. Bauer and Mr. Curtis Jeremy was taken back. Lizzy looked absolutely gorgeous and what made tears appear in Jeremy's eyes was the dress she had on. It was exactly like his mother's wedding dress. Taking Lizzy's hand, Jeremy helped her up the two steps. Pastor Lander didn't waste any time in starting. Lizzy loved the wedding bands that Daniel had chosen. Jeremy kissed his bride and soon the couple were dancing to their song Wind Beneath My Wings. Just before the couple left for their honeymoon the guys drew out their sabers. Jeremy and Lizzy didn't expect that, but happily walked under them. Before stepping into the limo, Lizzy tossed the bouquet which to everyone's surprise landed in Daniel's hand. Jeremy laughed when Daniel mouthed "No Way."

Walking along the beach of Tahiti, Jeremy held onto Lizzy's hand. "I was wondering if you saw what was engraved inside your band," said Jeremy. Lizzy slipped off her ring and smiled when she saw *Love, Me*. Looking into Jeremy's eyes Lizzy answered, "Always." Jeremy gathered Lizzy near to him and together shared a kiss underneath the stars.

Love, Me

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