

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

By : Cherie Arlavine

Life in the military isn't at all easy for Rachael. Where to begin? First, she's in love with a guy who's much older than her and who she's sure could never love her back. Being one of the only girls with all the soldiers, the other teenage boys are often trying to persuade her to be their little toy, and being objective just isn't becoming one of her best choices. Not to mention, she has no mother to take care of her. Rachael is on her own for the most part, and her life is just one big living hell. Fairness doesn't exist for Rachael.



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Chapter 1

ã Chapter One ~ Why it's Crap

I smiled down at the page of my twelve-year-old journal. My third day in the camp with the army. I missed my mom at the time. I still do, but things are easier now, sort of. I've accepted that she's passed on. I've been handling things now. I've grown up. But I still kick myself for not being able to face the other ones my age.

They always make fun of me, and I always take my secret routes to wherever I'm heading. I've been doing this since I was fifteen. Why was I such a cause for attraction? Or for ridicule? Why was I hated? Why was I pushed around? Why were they so mean to me?

And why was I so scared of them?

Because they are scary. All of them are boys. Big boys for that matter. I am a cause for attraction because I am the General's daughter. I am sixteen. I am the only girl their age in the whole camp. And according to all of my friends, most over twenty, I am pretty. And all of the boys are begging for a fight with my best and over protective friend, Danny.

He's gotten me out of a lot of bad situations. He's twenty years old. Three and a half years older than me. I need him, and his advice. Also, I hate to admit it, but I am in love with him. I don't want to be. But I am. And there isn't a damned thing I can do about it. I put away the journal.

I crept out of the tent. I took my secret route, but unluckily it didn't help this time. I caught a glimpse of Shaun. He was laughing about something with the other boys. I immediately turned back toward the tent. I didn't even hear him. His arm came out of nowhere, and grabbed my wrist. He jerked me around to face him. I could smell whiskey on his breath.

It was dark. It was late. Most were sleeping. I started hyperventilating. I panicked. I already knew where this was going. It was the same thing every time. The other seven were already surrounding me. I felt the tears start coming. Shaun pulled me to him.

"Danny's gone to fight. He won't be back for a few days. You're father went with him, and all of your friends." He said matter-of-factly. I sobbed. He let go of my wrist and wrapped both of his arms around me. He rocked me side to side gently, and stroked my hair.

"Don't cry, it will be over before you know it." He promised. I'm not a very good fighter. I don't like to fight and I don't want to. But I was out of options. I looked up at him.

"Really?" I asked, pretending to believe him. He loosened his grip on me.

"Yeah." He replied. Then I brought up my knee to his crotch. He let go of me immediately. I pushed him aside and tried to run. But three of the other boys quickly caught up to me. They grabbed both my arms and dragged me back to the circle. They shoved me down to the ground when they got me back. Before long Shaun had recovered.

I was pinned to the ground by four. The other three watched and laughed as I struggled. No one else was around. I was on my own. I continued to struggle, with no effect. I knew my luck had run out. And worse, Shaun was angry and drunk.

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I sobbed louder. I let out a scream. The boy holding my right arm, Chris, was quick to cover my mouth. I licked his hand, but it didn't bother him. So I bit it. He pulled it away.

"Damn it!" he yelled. Then he slapped me as I screamed again, cutting it off. He covered my mouth again. Shaun stumbled toward me. He pointed a finger at me.

"You're gonna pay." He slurred. I cried, and it was muffled by Chris' hand.

"C'mon, hurry up." Lucas urged, at my right leg. Shaun stumbled a few more steps forward. I struggled again, and there was a gunshot. All of the heads turned to see a man about twenty-five holding a pistol in the air.

"What the hell is going on here?" he snapped. All of the boys let me go and Shaun backed away.

"Nothing, we were just leaving." Shaun said, then he and the others walked off. I sat up, put my arms around my legs, and hugged myself tightly. Then I cried. I felt an arm come around me.

"Are you okay, Rachael?" Jared asked. I didn't know him very well, but we'd met before.

"I think so." I sobbed.

"Where is your father?"

"He's fighting."

"Where's Danny?"

"He's fighting too."

"But I just saw him a few moments ago. I'm surprised he wasn't with you."

"He's back?"

"I think they all are."

"I'd better get home. My father will get worried if I'm not in bed."

"He should be worried. Does he know about this?"

"I would tell him, but you know how the General is. He'll kill them if he finds out."

"Maybe they deserve it." Jared said, his eyes dark and his brows pushed together.

"How bad do I look?" I asked, wiping tears from my face.

"Pretty bad." Jared replied apologetically.

"I'll just tell him I was crying about mom again." I reasoned, mainly to myself.

"I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything. Let's just keep quiet about this."

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"I'm going to walk you back." he said.

I was going to object, because I was afraid father would get suspicious. But I couldn't do it. I didn't want to go back alone.

"Okay." I replied.

I hate this place! Why am I here? I don't belong here. Here in the army, it isn't for me. It's cruel, and it smells. When are we going to leave? I don't know how long I can stand it. I want to go home. Please oh please just let me get home. This place is hell!

Chapter 2: No Hiding It From Danny

"Thanks for walking me back." I whispered to Jared. He kissed me on the cheek, then sighed and left. I quietly entered the tent. Father and Danny were both already sitting in it, talking quietly in the light of a lantern. I turned my head away from them, so they wouldn't see I was crying. Danny had quite a temper, too. I didn't want to upset him either. ¤. Maybe I should take his advice, and get a boyfriend. There was a neighborhood nearby.

"Hey Rachael, where have you been?" Father asked.

"I was just taking a walk." I replied. I had pretty good practice at keeping my voice steady after crying. So father didn't notice.

"Well, aren't you going to say hi?" he asked.

"If I do I'll never get to bed, I'm just going to sleep." I forced out a fake laugh. They laughed along.

"Well, I suppose she's right. I'm going to use the toilet before getting to sleep." Father said. He exited a moment later. I lay down, still facing away.

"I guess I'd better get to sleep too." Danny said. I heard him stand and stretch. He walked over to me and kissed my cheek.

"Goodnight." He whispered.

"Night." I whispered back. After I heard the zipper I sighed then sat up. I put my head in my hands. I sniffed. I then felt a hand on my shoulder. I knew right away it was Danny. He'd tricked me.

"What happened tonight?" he asked angrily.

"I had to get out of the tent. I was missing her again." I replied. His grip tightened, hurting.

"Tell me the truth." He commanded.

"That is the truth."

"The hell it is." He snapped. "Was it Shaun or one of the others?"

"No! I told you, I was just missing my mom."

"Then why was Jared walking you back?"

"He saw I was crying and he felt bad for me. He's a softie."

"Okay, fine. If that's it, then that's it. I believe you."

"You're just going to ask him aren't you?"

"Because you won't tell me."

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"Maybe it's none of your business, damn it!" I yelled. He took a hold of my jaw and turned my faced so I was looking at him.

"Watch your mouth!" he ordered. I jerked away from him and lay back down, holding back tears. He sighed.

"I'm sorry, but this is getting old. It was pretty bad tonight wasn't it?"

"Yeah." I admitted.

"How close?"

"Too close." I breathed.

"All eight of them?"

"Yeah."

"Damn it." He murmured.

"Don't worry, nothing happened. I'm fine." I whispered.

"Yeah, you look great."

"Just go away."

"Sit up, I need to give you something." He pulled me up and turned me to face him. Then he paused, and softly ran his hand across my face, sending shivers down my spine.

"Why is your face red?" he asked. I looked away. "Did they hit you?"

"Yeah, because I tried to scream. I really tried to get away, I swear. I kneed Shaun."

"And you still didn't get away?"

"There were eight of them." I reminded.

"Oh. Well, hereâ!" He opened his bag and pulled out a round plastic case. It was white. I already knew what it was. "I don't want to hear it, Rachael. At least if you get raped, you won't have to worry about getting pregnant. Or if you finally get a boyfriend. Who you loveâ!" he didn't finish the sentence. He just shoved the birth control into my hands. "Don't let your father find them." He warned. I nodded, and hid them under my pillow.

"This isn't saying that I'm giving up. I promise I will never give up." He whispered. "But, just in caseâ!"

"I know. I understand. Thank you so much."

"You're welcome."

"You look tired, get to sleep."

"You don't look so great yourself."

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"You already said that."

"I know, but you're still beautiful, even after crying."

"Thanks. Goodnight, Danny."

"Goodnight Rachael." He leaned forward and kissed my forehead. Then stood and left. I had a feeling he wouldn't be doing much sleeping. He was probably going to look for Shaun and the others. He would have never known about any of this if he hadn't been at the right place at the wrong time. I was being harassed again. It was actually the first time Shaun was considering going as far as raping me.

But Danny unluckily was there, and saved my butt, but I didn't want him to see. It was embarrassing, and I didn't want him to worry about me. It was nice that he cared, but it would only hurt that much more knowing that when he got a girlfriend, or fianc

If I could find a good, strong boyfriend to love and take care of me, Danny wouldn't have to worry about me anymore; and if I kept up the birth control. Then he'd have nothing to worry about, and it would be easier for me to accept him finding someone else. Someone his age, and who's right for him. So that was my plan for now, stay out of Shaun's way, and find someone else.

Chapter 3: A Slip of the Tongue

I got up very early. About four in the morning. I needed a shower, but it was too dangerous to take one while the guys were awake. Nothing would stop them from walking right in. I looked around; to make sure they weren't in sight. It was all clear. One of these days though, I was going to lose it.

They were driving me insane. Not a safe thing to do to a person who lives around a lot of guns. And I mean a lot. I ran into the shower and locked the door. Not that it would stop them. It was only a measly hook-in-latch kind of lock. Not so hard to break.

I took a quick one, as always. I was done in fifteen minutes. I quickly dried off and dressed. Then snuck back toward my tent. It scared the hell out of me when Danny came out of nowhere.

"Holy shit!" I said as he came out from behind a tent. I then sighed and put my hand to my heart. "Damn it, Danny! You scared the hell out of me!" I whispered. He gave me a look. Oops, I forgot he didn't like it when I cursed. I grinned. "Sorry." I whispered. He rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Where are you going? You got a girl waiting for you?" I joked, then winked at him. But the idea that it might be what he was doing hurt.

"No, I was justâ€¦ checking the surroundings."

"You look horrible. Did you sleep at all last night? You didn't stay up looking for them did you?"

"I tried to sleep, I just can't."

"Get to bed! You never know when you'll have to fight. You don't need to be half asleep when you do." I walked over to him and took his hand. "C'mon." I pulled him toward his tent; he didn't fight, just laughed.

"I guess you're right." He muttered.

"I know I'm right."

He followed me all the way to his tent. I went inside and pulled him along.

"Now get some sleep. I'm staying in here until I know you're sleeping." I told him. He dragged himself over to his cot and lay down. He just lay still for a moment, his eyes still open. He stared at the wall of the tent.

"Go to sleep." I told him.

"Just give me a few minutes. Let's talk for a minute. It might help."

"All right. What do you want to talk about?"

"I don't know, anything."

"Well, I have a solution to my problem, and yours."

"What?"

"I'm going to get a boyfriend. I figure I'm sixteen, I'm old enough."

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"I didn't give you birth control so you could just have sex." He still looked at the wall.

"No! That's not what I meant! Damn it! I just meant I was going to find another guy to take care of me. So you don't have to anymore. You won't have to worry about me when you're away. So you can worry about staying alive."

"You don't need to worry about meâworrying."

"I don't want you to worry. It's not your job. We're supposed to have fun together as best friends, not always be complaining about a group of horny teenage boys."

"I'll always worry. And honestly I don't want you to get a boyfriend."

"And why not?"

"I'd have to worry about him too. I'd have to worry about whether he's pressuring you, if you're sleeping with him, if he's strong enough to protect you. It would just bring on a new line of problems."

"Well, it's really none of your business whether I sleep with him or not. But that's not going to be a problem."

"What if he's like Shaun?"

"I'll make sure he isn't before we start dating."

"It's not going to work." he sighed.

"Well, even if it doesn't work out for keeping me from getting raped, at least I'll have someone my age to hang out with. All of my friends are older than me."

"There's nothing wrong with that."

"Andâ!" I wasn't sure how to say this. "I have to tell you the truth. I mean you might already know, but I'll get jealous if I see you with another girl. If I had a guy, if I fell in love with someone else, it wouldn't be quite as hard to watch you be with someone else." It was quiet for a moment. He finally looked over at me. I looked at the ground and twirled my thumbs.

"Fall in love with someone else? You're in love with me?"

"I know, I know! I don't want to be. If I could stop it I would. I know you don't feel the same, and even if you did it would be wrong. Not that you do. Maybe I just spend too much time with you. If I'm going to fall in love it needs to be with someone my own age."

"Rachaelâ!"

"I'm gonna leave, get some sleep."

"How do you expect me to sleep now? When I know you feel the same way I do?" he asked. I was almost out the door when he said that. I froze, my heart stopped for a moment. I gasped then turned around to see him.

"Feel the same way? Are you insane? No one should be feeling like this. It's wrong, so wrong." He sat up.

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"Why is it wrong? Because I'm too old?"

"No, well, sort of. You're not too old, I'm too young. You need to be with someone your own age, who can take care of herself a little better than I can, and is mature enough for you." He stood now.

"You're very mature."

"And if my father ever found outâ!" I couldn't finish the sentence. He walked over to me and took my hand.

"He doesn't have to know." He promised. I pulled my hand from his.

"No! No! We couldn't even sleep together for two years. It would be illegal, I think. Oh hell! What am I even saying? This is crazy!" I turned and ran out of the tent. Danny caught me before long. He grabbed my shoulder and spun me around.

"Let me go damn it!" I snapped.

"Would you stop cussing?" he asked, annoyed.

"No, I sure as hell won't. How can I when this is happening? Why is this happening?"

He got on his knees. He took my face in his hand. "Listen, I can wait. I will wait for you to get old enough."

"You've done enough for me."

"And I want to do more. This is for me too."

"Get up before someone sees us."

"Not until you tell me whether you are going to do this."

"No, I won't. And I'm not saying it because I don't want you, but because I'm no good for you. I'm trouble. So, no."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

He stood up.

"Now get some sleep." I told him, then I turned and walked back to my tent without looking back.

Chapter 4: The Breaking Point

Father wasn't at the tent when I got back. So I could cry all I needed to. But unfortunately my friend Jennifer, who was a nurse, heard me as she walked by.

"Rachael?" she whispered then entered. I wiped the tears from my eyes and sat up.

"Yeah?"

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Why are you crying?"

"It's nothing. Just that time of month."

"You said that last week."

"Did I? I've really got to keep track of my excuses."

"You should just tell me the truth."

"You don't want to hear it, and I just want to forget about it."

"You can tell me can't you?"

"I can't tell anyone."

"Alright, but when you're done crying, I want you to meet someone. A new boy has come to the camp. We're keeping him away from Shaun, so you might have a chance to be friends. You said you wanted a friend your age right?"

"That's sweet, but he'll join the group anyways, just like all the others."

"Well, your father wants you to meet him too. He ordered me to come get you."

"Just let me clean up, and I'll be there in a moment."

"You want me to walk with you?"

"No, I'll be okay."

"Alright." She left the tent and I got up then washed my face with water we kept in a bowl. I looked at myself in a hand mirror. All better.

"Rachael, this is Robby." My father introduced. I shook his hand. "He's seventeen, fine young man. And Robby, this is my daughter, Rachael, she's sixteen." He introduced. Oh great, my father was trying to set me up. Sure, he was hot. But he couldn't have picked a worse time or maybe a better one. I was thoughtful for a moment. Maybe he could help me get my mind off of Danny. No such luck, because Danny showed up just

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then. I looked at the ground.

"Shit." I muttered to myself.

"There you are. Danny, meet Robby." Father said. I looked back up. Danny shook Robby's hand. Father leaned over to Danny and whispered something in his ear. Danny's face turned red at hearing it. Father elbowed him jokingly. It wasn't hard to know he was talking about Robby and I.

"You think so?" he asked Danny.

"Yeah." Danny muttered then looked at me. I looked down at the ground again.

"Why don't we all let Robby and Rachael get to know each other? Besides we all have work to do." Father said. He ushered everyone out the door. Danny stayed in place.

"Well, c'mon." said father.

"One moment General. I need to talk to Rachael for a moment. She asked me a question earlier. I told her I'd answer it as soon as I knew it."

"Alright, but don't take too long." Father grumbled. He then left, my face turned white. Robby noticed, and looked at Danny suspiciously. He put a hand on my arm.

"Are you okay?" he asked. I couldn't answer, because I couldn't breathe. Danny walked over to me and pulled away from him.

"Do you know what's going on?" he whispered. I nodded, still unable to speak.

"Are you okay with this? Is this what you were talking about?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything. How has everything fallen apart so quickly? I should have kept my mouth shut."

"It would have come out sooner or later."

"Better later."

"It would have been worse."

"But I would be happy now."

"Well, it happened, so you'll just have to deal with it."

"As if I don't have enough problems. You'd better go, before father gets angry. And for the last time, get some damn sleep!"

* ***

I sat across from Robby in silence. He fidgeted, not sure what to do.

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"So, what's it like being the General's daughter? I mean, being the only sixteen year old girl here?" he asked. I looked up at him, and smiled. Then burst out into laughter. His eyes widened.

"What's so funny?" he asked. I held up a finger. It took a minute to calm down.

"It's complicated." I said, still trying not to laugh.

"Well, what's it like living here?"

"Simple as this, welcome to hell."

"That bad?"

"For me it is. And I'm not even in the war. But you still see a lot of people die. A lot of people you've come to know. I've been to a lot of funerals. It's life and death around here. And if you're not in the war yourself, then it's all about watching your back."

"From what?"

"For me, it's Shaun's group. You probably haven't met them, but you will. You'll probably end up joining them too, just like the others, and if you do, we'll be worst enemies."

"Why?"

"If you do join them you'll figure it out."

"Then I won't join them. I want to be your friend."

"Thanks, that means a lot. But it's easier said than done." And then they came. All eight of them entered the tent. Right on cue, dammit. I stood up and backed away.

"Oh, I see you've already met the new guy." Said Shaun. He took a step toward me and I backed against the wall of the tent. He smiled. Then he closed in the space between us. He put a hand up and ran his fingers through my hair. Then he grasped it and pulled me from the wall. He led me over to the group.

"Guys, take her to our special spot while I talk to the new kid here. I'll be there in a moment." He said. Allen took a hold of me and covered my mouth. I didn't try to fight, knowing it would be useless. But then Robby stood up.

"I'll ask you one time to let her go." He warned. They laughed at his threat.

"Hey, we're here to offer you a deal. We'll share her with you." Shaun promised.

"Is that a no?"

"Sure is." I don't know how it happened, but suddenly Robby was punching Shaun and he was on the ground unconscious. Robby looked at the others. It was fast, and a little scary.

"Any one else going to refuse?" Allen let me go then. Then he pushed me toward Robby, who took my arm and pulled me to him.

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"Now I'll ask you one time. Leave, and I don't want you to ever touch her again." All of them started to leave. They were nothing without their leader.

"Take him with you." He said, then nodded toward Shaun. They picked him up and carried him out of the tent. Robby released his grip on me. Then Danny came running in.

"Rachael, are you okay?" he said to me. "Why was Shaun being carried out? What happened?"

"They came in here to meet Robby. Then they tried to take me away. Robby knocked out Shaun. Danny, come here." I said. He quickly closed in the space between us and hugged me. I hugged him tightly for a minute then I pushed him away a little.

"I need to breathe." I lied. I waited for him to let his hands go to his sides, then I snatched his gun from his belt and bolted out of the tent.

It was breaking time.

I ran faster than I ever had before, and for once no one could catch me.

"Rachael don't!" Danny shouted from behind me. I ran even faster.

"Someone stop her!" he shouted. People started coming out of their tents to see what was going on. I sped by them. Eventually they figured out something was wrong with me when they saw I was running with a gun, and started chasing after me.

"Stop Rachael!" I heard father shout. I did something I never did; I ignored him and kept running. Then I saw them. Shaun was walking with his arm around Ben. I was sweating as I stopped right behind the group. They heard the shouts coming from the mob that was after me and all turned around.

I raised the gun and pointed it at Shaun. He would be first. I fired the gun, and missed. All the boys ran in different directions as I shot again, and again, and again. I missed every time. I was about to shoot again when the gun was snatched from my hands. It was an officer. Officer Jones, I think.

"Are you crazy? What has gotten into you? I should put you under arrest." I saw the rest of the group was catching up, all of them sweaty and angry. So I did something stupid, I turned and started running again. Just as fast as last time. Maybe even faster. But I cried this time. I was well out of the boundaries of camp when I collapsed.

I put my hands in front of me to catch my fall. Then I turned onto my back and cried. I couldn't believe what I'd just done. But I almost didn't care. Because I realized I was free now. Free from father, free from Shaun, free from Danny, Robby, the war. I was done.

I slowly stood up. So maybe I didn't have much. No clothes, no food, no friends, no family and no money. But it was worth it. Yeah, I'd miss them. Without a doubt I'd miss them. But I had to get out. Besides, if I went back, I'd be put in jail for attempted murder. Wouldn't I? Probably not, I was the General's daughter after all.

I guess I just wasn't good at handling my problems. So leaving them behind seemed like a good thing to do. I didn't deserve it. I didn't deserve to be scared, to be in love with someone I could never be with. I was only sixteen damn it! I had my whole life ahead of me. But the thing I wanted to get away from the most, was watching my friends die. I was thinking about promising myself I'd never go back, that I'd die before I would. But I knew it was a promise I couldn't keep. I'd have to go back, to finally kill them, to see if he moved on, to

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let my father know I was safe. I'd write them I decided. No return address. Let them know I was alive. I at least owed them that.

Chapter 5: The New Life

Chapter Two - Letters

Dear Father,

I am writing you to let you know I am okay. I'm not coming back anytime soon. I'm not telling you where I am, and I'm not telling you about any relationships I may have. All you need to know is I'm safe, I've found decent shelter, and I have food in my stomach. I have acquired all of it legally.

Sincerely,

Rachael, a free woman

I sighed and folded up the letter then placed it in the envelope I had bought. Then I started the next one.

Dear Danny,

I'm sorry about what I did. I probably scared the hell out of you. Sorry about that, I promised myself I wouldn't cuss in this letter. Oh, it's not like you haven't heard it before. And if I didn't cuss, you might think I wasn't as okay as I said in Father's letter. I miss you, and I think about you a lot. I think about everyone. But I will not come back for a long time, so get another girl. I will come back one day, I won't tell you when. But I will, and I will leave without seeing you. It will be easier for both of us.

Love,

Rachael

P. S. I would advise you didn't let father see this letter.

I folded the second letter and put it in a separate envelope. Only one more.

Shaun and you other Sons of Bitches,

I'm coming back for you. I will have my revenge. You will pay for all the times you tried to rape me. You will pay for making me go through that kind of fear. Watch your back.

Your friend,

Rachael

I smiled as I put the last letter in place. I sealed all three envelopes, addressed them, then put on the stamps. I stood up, taking them with me, and started a walk to the post office. After I put them in the mailbox, I checked the time. I still had an hour until I started work. I was a maid at an elderly woman's house. That way there was no paperwork.

I'd told her I lived nearby, and that my parents knew the neighborhood well. I've been gone for two weeks now. I've been boarding at Mrs. Smith's house. I pay her two hundred dollars a month, buy my own clothes, buy my own food. Well, only when I need to. Mrs. Smith insists on cooking for me and has given me tons of hand me down clothes. All the people in this town were very nice and polite.

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I even had a few friends that I didn't have to worry about going to war. And best of all, all three were girls. I'd love to tell Danny about them, but it's too risky. I was sure Father had detectives on my trail. And they would use their names as clues. The letters were risky enough. I was praying they wouldn't be able to track them. I liked where I was.

If I could keep this up for a couple of years, they'd stop looking for me, because I'd be an adult. I think. Or that would just provoke Danny to keep looking for me, because I'd be old enough. At least a year then. A year would be nice to be away from everyone. By then I'd hopefully have a plan to either stay away, or have a plan about what to do when I got back. One year, that was all I was asking.

I finished sweeping the floors. Then started mopping. I was almost done cleaning.

"Oh my! You've done a wonderful job child!" Mrs. White exclaimed. I looked up and smiled at her.

"Why thank you ma'am." I replied. She smiled.

"I've never had any one do such a wonderful job. Where did you learn?"

"My father was sort of a neat freak." A General neat freak actually.

"And you're so pretty too. You'll make a lovely wife. Can you cook?"

"I don't know, you tell me." I said. I walked over to my backpack and pulled out a container of brownies. Mrs. Smith had let me bake them this morning. I found I liked to cook once I tried it a few times. I cooked whenever I got the chance, it relaxed me. I walked over to Mrs. White and opened the container.

"Oh my!" she exclaimed. She carefully picked one and took a bite of it. She closed her eyes as she chewed. She swallowed after a moment.

"That was heaven! You must give me the recipe!"

"It's just the regular recipe. Maybe they taste good because I made them from scratch."

"Perhaps that is the reason." She reached out with her free hand and held out a few strands of my hair.

"I've never seen hair like yours. It seems to be strawberry blond and dirty blond mixed. Do you dye it?"

"No, it's all natural."

"You must be an angel."

I laughed. "Nope, far from one."

"Not too far."

"Thank you ma'am."

"And so polite! I must meet your parents."

"I, uh, they are out of town for a few weeks."

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"They left you by yourself?"

"The neighbor checks on me. I'll finish up here and be heading out, I have some errands to run."

"I understand dear, but I would like to meet them when they return."

"Sure, I'll see to it that you do." Oh shit.

Chapter 6: Home Sweet Home

Eight months laterâ

I looked at the different flavors of ice cream. Chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, chocolate mint, chocolate chip cookie dough, rocky road. I couldn't seem to decide, so I just skipped it all together. Ice cream usually gave me a stomachache anyways. I went to the frozen dinner trays next. After I finished getting every thing on my list, I started toward the check out counter. Then I saw two army officers talking to my friend Anna.

They were showing her a picture. Her eyes were wide. She then saw me. I could tell they were asking about me. I shook my head, my heart raced. Those letters were a bad idea. I put my hands together and mouthed, please. She looked at the officers again, then shook her head.

"No, I haven't seen her." She said aloud.

"Are you sure?" one of them asked.

"Yes." I took the time to tiptoe away. Then hauled ass out the back of the store. I ran straight to Mrs. Smith's house. Someone was bound to say yes. I sprinted up the stairs as I got into the house, taking three at a time. I ran to my room and started shoving my things into a duffel bag I had purchased a while back, in case this ever happened.

I was finished quickly and ran down the stairs. I busted through the front door and to my dismay ran into the same two officers. I stumbled back a few steps.

"That's her!" one exclaimed. I pushed them both back then ran as fast as I could toward the bus station. Would a bus be there? I could only hope. They were right on my trail. Only ten feet back. I made it to the bus station, but there was no bus.

I panicked as I saw they were three feet behind me. They tackled me, and I went down. Then they handcuffed me. They led me back to their army jeep. A crowd of people was gathered in the middle of the street. All of them gasped when they saw me. Several people I knew very well stepped in front of us.

"Where are you taking her?" Mrs. Smith asked.

"Back to the army. She's a runaway ma'am." One of them explained. She looked at me.

"You ran away from the army?" she asked.

"No, I'm not in the army, but my Father is a General. I ran away because I was having trouble. I would never do something like this if I didn't have to."

"She shot at a group of young boys about her age." The officer explained.

"Rachael!" Mrs. White exclaimed. I felt tears come.

"They deserved it! They tried to rape me!" Oops. I wanted to cover my mouth, but I was handcuffed. Instead I bit my lip.

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"Yeah right." The officer said. I let out a sigh. They didn't believe me, thank God! Father would kill them. That was what I wanted to do. It was my revenge.

"Well I believe her. And I won't let you take her back." Mrs. Smith said.

"I won't let you either!" Mrs. White chimed in. The whole crowd was soon standing in their way chanting, "Let her go!" repeatedly. The officer whistled loudly. They quieted.

"If you do not let us take her peacefully, you will all be put under military arrest!" he warned. They remained quiet, but didn't move. I could tell they were trying to decide whether or not they should let them.

"Let them take me. I'm almost seventeen, I'll be eighteen in no time, and I promise I'll come back here when I get out." They all slowly moved aside to let us through, then softly laid a hand on my shoulder as I passed through. The officers lifted me and placed me into the jeep. Then we left. I looked at the people behind me.

"I'll write you every week!" I promised as we rode away. Everyone waved goodbye sadly. Then I left my home.

I didn't meet anyone's eyes as the officers lifted me out of the jeep and removed the handcuffs. I still didn't as everyone came to hug me and tell me how much they missed me. I didn't answer their questions. I just looked at the ground. I was taken to the captive tent. They were afraid I'd try to run away again.

I was allowed visitors. I sat on the cot and listened to them talk, hardly ever looking at them. Then finally Danny entered. I glanced up at him then immediately looked down again. He sat down next to me on the cot.

"You have no idea how mad I am at you." He whispered. I still didn't look at him. I didn't speak.

"I didn't know if you were dead or alive, if you were safe, if you had food to eat."

"I wrote a damn letter. And I was just as safe there as I was here. Safer actually."

"I missed you."

"That was your mistake."

"I would have missed you even if I only thought of you as a friend. I read the letter you wrote to Shaun."

"I hope he enjoyed it."

"He didn't read it. I burned it, so your Father wouldn't find it. I burned the one you wrote me too."

"Good, that was a smart thing to do."

"What you did was stupid."

"It was the best choice I've ever made in my entire life. I've never been that happy before, exceptâ!"

"What?"

"Nothing, just go away now. I'm tired. You can come back if you can sneak in some whiskey."

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"You're under age."

"I thought you would say that. Then I guess its goodnight then."

"He found them."

"Who found what?"

"Your father found the birth control."

"Oh, was he mad?"

"Not really, just surprised, and suspicious. He thinks you were going out with Shaun or someone."

"Not if my life depended on it. You know, maybe I should just tell him the truth. I don't want to lie to him anymore."

"It's up to you."

"But you're part of it."

"I'd prefer if you didn't tell him that part."

"I wonder if he'd care. He might not."

"Um, he might. If you tell him, he'll immediately think the birth control was for me."

"Not if I start by telling him what it was for."

"If you want to, then you can. I'll accept whatever consequences come of it."

"There won't be any. I can't lie to him anymore. And I just can't do what everyone else wants. I'm tired of doing the right thing. Soâ€¦" I turned and pulled his face to mine and finally kissed him. He responded immediately. Wrapping his arms around me, opening his mouth, and pulling me against him.

I wrapped my arms around his neck. Then realized this was a bad idea. I immediately wanted him. But that wasn't something I could do. Not yet. I felt desire rush through me. Shit. But I didn't stop.

I didn't have the strength to. It took enough of my strength not to rip off his clothes right then and there. Eventually though, he had to go. Others wanted to see me, and only one person was allowed to be in here.

"Times up, Danny." The guard called. I could hear him walking to enter. I immediately pushed Danny away. He stood up and turned then went straight out. I lay back, and the next person entered.

"Ten minutes." The guard warned.

"Whatever." He replied. It was Shaun who entered next. He stood in front of me. I glared at him.

"Get out!" I shouted, so the guard could hear. Then Shaun poked out a little barrel through a hole in his jacket pocket. It was a gun. I froze.

Chapter 7: Caught with the Captain

"Are you okay Rachael?" the guard asked.

"Y-Yeah, I thought he was someone else for a second." I lied. Shaun grinned and took a few steps toward me.

"We don't have a lot of time. Let's get this going."

"He'll hear us."

"I don't care."

"They'll try to stop us."

"Nope, I've got a plan."

"Attention, all officers to main station now! This is urgent!" I heard the speaker announce.

"It takes a half an hour to get there." I whispered. Shaun nodded. The guard had already taken off.

"Oh no."

"I'm pretty good ain't I?"

"You could go to jail."

"You'll go to jail if I press charges."

"On what?"

"You tried to kill me."

"I-Iâ I was going to die."

"You're out of options."

"I should have aimed better, was what I was going to say." I retorted.

"But you didn't. Let's get to this."

"You can just press the charges." I snapped.

"Oh, c'mon, it will be quick." he promised, grinning.

"Over my dead body."

"Is that a suggestion?" He cocked the gun.

"Sure is." He fired the gun, it just missed my waist. I screamed.

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"I missed on purpose." he breathed.

"Leave me alone!"

"I'll leave you alone after I get what I want."

"I won't give it to you. I mean it, you'll have to kill me first."

"No I won't. Come in guys, looks like you're going to have to hold her down." He yelled. Terry, Ben, Allen, and Chris all entered.

"Help!" I screamed. Someone had to be here, and I was right. Robby came rushing in a moment later. I was already being held down when he arrived. He had them all knocked out in less than a minute. I don't know how he did it. It didn't matter. He'd saved me again. I was tired of needing saving though. He hugged me.

"Are you okay?" he asked. I sighed, a few tears escaped.

"I'm so tired of this. Maybe I should just sleep with him so he'll leave me alone."

"I know a better person you can sleep with."

"Who would that be?" I asked. I grinned at him. He grinned back.

"I think you know who."

"I'm in love with someone else."

"Is it Danny?"

"No." I said, too quickly.

"Liar." he scoffed.

"Maybe."

"He's too old for you."

"I know. But I can wait." I argued.

"Can you?"

"I think so."

"You wouldn't have to worry about me being to old."

"No, I wouldn't, but I don't love you."

"How do you know?"

"Trust me, I don't." I replied.

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"You could."

"Just let it go." I sighed, irritated now.

"Sorry. But now you know the offer's on the table."

I cuddled closer to him. He wrapped his arms around me. I sighed.

"What's wrong?" Danny asked.

"I wish I were eighteen already." I whispered. He laughed quietly.

"One more year."

"It seems like forever. It will be strange that you'll be able to drink and I won't."

"I won't drink if you don't want me too."

"Well, I *can* drink, but it would be illegal."

"I won't let you."

"You won't see me doing it then." I could almost hear him roll his eyes. Every night after Father fell asleep I snuck into Danny's tent. He was a captain, so he got his own tent. I closed my eyes.

"Hey, none of that. If you fall asleep then I might fall asleep too. The General wouldn't be happy to find us both passed out in my cot."

"I wish that his suspicions would be correct."

"It was your idea in the first place to wait."

"I know. But I think I'm changing my mind."

"You can wait."

"It gets harder and harder to everyday."

"For me also."

"One day it will be too much to handle."

"Hopefully it will be a year from now." he murmured.

"Don't hold your breath."

"Danny, Danny!" someone shouted. It was Peter. He rushed into the tent before I had time to hide. Peter froze when he saw us.

"Oh dear God." He gasped.

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"Shit." Danny whispered. He sat up, and I sat up. We were both shirtless. I crossed my arms over my breasts. Peter was one of Danny's best friends. He covered his mouth.

"Shit is right." he agreed. Danny stood up, and I pulled the blanket up.

"What do you want?" he asked, his hand to his head.

"I was just going to say that the General wanted to see you. He didn't seem happy. I think I know why now."

I gasped. "Oh no." I looked around for my shirt and quickly found it then put it on. Danny found his shirt also and slipped it on.

"Then he told me to find you, Rachael." Peter added.

"Do you think he knows?" I asked Danny. He shook his head.

"I don't know. Just play it cool, in case he doesn't."

"Okay." I squeaked. Oh God, I thought. We were busted.

Chapter 8: Confessions

Peter slowly led Danny and I into Father's office. I tried to keep an innocent face. Father glared at both of us.

"Sit, now." He ordered. We both sat. "I can't believe this. How long has this been going on?"

"How long has what been going on?" I asked. Father's eyes burned into mine.

"How long have you been sleeping with him damn it!" he yelled.

"I haven't been sleeping with him." I replied.

"Don't lie to me!"

"I'm not lying!"

"The hell you aren't. Danny, tell me."

"We haven't had sex, if that's what you mean." Danny replied.

"Then why did I find birth control in her cot?" I looked over at Danny; I guess it was time to tell him.

I was a little surprised he believed it all. Everyone thought Shaun and the others were great kids, and not many knew why I hated them. Only the ones in on the secret. But Father was upset that I was in love with Danny. He went over the issue of age, and I explained that we'd already been over that, thoroughly. So I didn't know where I was at anymore. A two-year-old secret had finally been exposed.

What now? That secret was a big part of my life. A big reason for all the things I did. So what now? And what about Danny and I? Do we go public? What about Robby? What would father do to Shaun and his gang?

Should I break up with Danny? Was I right in the first place to stay away from him? Maybe Robby was better for me. I wasn't sure what to do about anything.

Chapter 9: Danny, My Love

Chapter Three - Danny

I sat up. Danny's eyes opened.

"What are you doing?" he whispered, then his hand gently rubbed my back. I closed my eyes, loving his touch. I felt him sit up, then he wrapped his arms around my shoulders. His lips pressed to my neck. I sighed happily.

"I was just thinking." I replied.

"About?"

"Everything. About what to do."

"Have you decided?"

"Not at all."

"Are you glad you don't have to worry about Shaun anymore?"

"I still wish father would let me kick his butt."

"You know you wouldn't have a chance."

"I would if I was angry enough."

"I won't let you either."

"Like you can stop me."

"I'll stop you all right." He pulled me back so I was lying down then crawled over me. He pinned my arms above my head.

"Try to do it now."

"You can't do this forever."

"I will if I have to. And if that can't convince you to stay," he leaned down and kissed me. Then he let my arms go and I wrapped them around his neck. His arms went under me, then pulled me so we were both sitting up. Desire fired up inside me again. Too strong. I pulled up my legs and put my feet at the brim of his sweat pants. He lay us down again. I slid my feet down his sides. His pants coming down with them. He pulled away.

"Stop it." He ordered. I sighed. He pulled up his sweat pants. "Not yet." He reminded.

"How are you so in control?" I asked, honestly curious.

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He laughed. "Years of practice."

"I'm still in training, obviously."

"Very much in training." he agreed.

"Still, you're only twenty. Even you have to slip up." I mumbled.

"Sometimes."

"Any time soon?" I asked, raising my eyebrows.

He shook his head. "Not tonight if that's what you mean."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I just am."

"I wish I had your strength." I sighed.

"You have to work for it." He put his hand on my leg and massaged it.

"I keep getting these blasts of desire, and I feel like there's no stopping."

"You can do it, I believe in you."

"But I don't want to. I just want to give in." I took his hand and pressed my lips to it.

"I feel the same sometimes."

"It's hard."

"Really, I'd rather we waited to get married."

"Married!" I exclaimed and sat up.

"Yes, married."

"Well, no such luck. Not unless you want to get married on my eighteenth birthday."

"Okay." he said casually.

"What?"

"Let's get married when you turn eighteen, or now. Why wait?"

"Iâdon't know."

"Why not?"

"I don't know what father would think. He'd have to sign the papers."

"You love me don't you?"

"Of course."

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"So why not? If you really love me, you can do this."

"I'm a little afraid of him I admit." I murmured.

"I'll be with you." he promised.

"And, what if you die?"

"I don't get it."

"Maybe our relationship isn't a good idea, because with you being in war, you could die any day. I don't know if I could bear it."

"I could die by just simply tripping and breaking my neck."

I flinched as he said that. He hugged me.

"But it's scary knowing you're putting yourself in the way of a bullet."

"I'll be okay." he assured me.

"You don't know that."

"And how will I feel if you die?"

"I guess as bad as I would."

"Maybe even worse."

"Maybe." I agreed with clenched teeth. As if he'd feel worse than I would. But I let it go. I wasn't going to get some stupid argument started. I was trying to be mature, but then again. Maybe we needed to argue. So he would realize he needed someone else, someone older. So I faked it.

"What's wrong?" he asked, noticing that my voice was tense.

"So you think you would care more if I died than I would if you died?"

"I didn't mean it that way."

"Then why did you say it? You could have just said yes."

"You're not seriously arguing about this are you?" he chuckled.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked, raising my voice.

"I mean you're being a little immature." he admitted.

I used that. "Immature! Ugh, I knew it! You do think I'm too young!"

"Why are you making a big deal out of this? And that's not what I meant either."

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"Sure it wasn't! You know what, I'm going to my tent. Goodnight." I stood up and quickly found my shirt and bra. I put them on quickly.

"C'mon Rachael, don't be a baby."

"Oh! I'm a baby now!" I asked. I was a little too good at this.

"What is wrong with you? You're never like this."

"So something's wrong with me?" I pushed.

"No, dammit you know what I mean."

"Yes, I'm not mature enough for you. Well, you're absolutely right. I was right to try to stop this in the first place. Goodbye." I felt guilty as hell as I stormed out of the tent.

"Rachael, come back." Danny called. I think I was doing a pretty good job. I didn't want to, but I knew what was best for him. And it wasn't me. He followed me out of the tent.

"Let's talk about this." He called.

"No, leave me alone!" I said, then started to quicken my pace. He caught up to me easily. He grabbed my arm and spun me around to face him.

"Look, I think you're overreacting. Are you doing this on purpose?"

"What, you think I'm trying to cause drama or something? I'm not a jerk. I wouldn't start an argument on purpose. That's profanity!"

"Then what is up?"

"Nothing is up damn it."

"Are you going to start cursing now?"

"Well, as long as I'm being immature!"

"Would you stop it!"

"Shit, damn, hell, fu-"

"Stop it!"

"Make me!" I held my breath. If I could only get him to hit me! That would be the deal breaker. I saw he was already clenching his fist.

"My patience is running thin."

"Maybe mine is too!"

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"What do you mean?"

"You're so annoying sometimes!"

"Like how?" I realized some people were staring at us.

"Well, first, you won't sleep with me, you're always bossing me around, and you think you're always right. You're worse than my father sometimes. Just because you're older than meâ!" He took a hand full of my hair. Good, I was getting him really angry now; it was only a matter of time. "Let go of me!"

"Not until you tell me what is wrong."

"Nothing is wrong Danny."

"Something is wrong."

"Fine, you want to know what's wrong? It's you. You're what's wrong."

"What's wrong with me?" I yanked his hand from my hair.

"Figure it out yourself." I turned and walked away, knowing he wouldn't come after me.

Chapter 10: Battle

I didn't really feel like going back to my tent, but I pretended to go there, then walked by it and away from the whole sight. I didn't realize how far I'd gone, until my ankle cuff shocked me. I looked back and saw I was well away from everyone else. I sat down and hit the stupid cuff. You run away one time and they put you under house arrest. But then again I did shoot at the boys.

But really it was just so I wouldn't run away again. I looked at it for the hundredth time. I had actually gotten it off one time, but it set off a silent alarm and got me in trouble. Could you imagine, being married and under house arrest? Not much of a honeymoon when you can't go more than one thousand feet away from your home. Or three hundred thirty three point three yards. I got bored one day.

I lay back and sighed. I felt a thick wave of guilt wash over me. Then I felt really bad. So I started crying. I didn't want to not be together. I loved him more than myself. I loved feeling his warm body next to mine.

I loved him with no doubt. And I wanted to marry him, even if the honeymoon would have to be postponed. But I just wasn't what he needed. It wasn't even the age difference. Age didn't exist when I was with him. I guessed he was cussing and pacing back and forth in his tent right now; it's what he usually did when he was upset. I loved the feeling of the sand underneath my body. I dug my fingers deep into it.

There was a lot of sand here. It matched my hair color, sort of. Sandy blonde, if you don't include the other colors blended in. The sky matched my eyes during the day, brilliant blue. I've always been very proud of my eye color. I know I'm pretty, and I know that has nothing to do with why Danny loves me. Well, it might be part of it.

"So, do you and Danny fight like that often?" Rob called out.

"No, I did it on purpose, just like he said."

"Why? Do you actually like drama?" He sat down beside me.

"No, I was just trying to be immature so he'd realize what he needed. Someone who can understand him better than me."

"You know what would get him really mad?"

"Getting caught cheating on him?"

"How did you know?"

"I've already thought of it, and since that offer you made, I could guess."

"Oh, you're good."

"But I wouldn't do that to him."

"What offer?" another voice said. It was Danny. I sat up.

"Shit, how long have you been standing there?" I said.

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"Getting caught cheating on me. And, well, I heard everything. But I'm curious, what offer has Robby made you?"

"Well, tell him Robby."

"I told her that I'd gladly sleep with her and with me she wouldn't have to worry about age with me." He said matter-of-factly.

"As if that's the problem." I mumbled. Danny walked over to him and pulled him up by the shirt. Then he pushed him towards the tents.

"Get out of here you little bastard."

"Be nice Danny." I warned. He watched Robby until he was a good ten yards away. Then walked over to me and looked down at me. I stared at the moon, to avoid his eyes.

"This is ridiculous."

"Yeah, I guess it is."

"What do you plan to do about it?"

"Nothing, I'm just going to relax. I finally don't have to worry about Shaun anymore. I think I'm going to take a few minutes to just take it easy, and push my unsolved issues aside. I need some peace of mind. I haven't had hardly any time to myself since I 'joined the army'. I just want to sleep under the stars one night, and not worry about anything."

"The snakes might come get you."

"Let them."

"What about coyotes?"

"They can join the party." I said lightly.

"Scorpions?"

"They're invited too." I closed my eyes and sighed contently. I wasn't worried about desert animals. They hardly came around camp. And if they did happen to come around tonight, well, I think that'd be okay. I was suddenly lifted.

"Put me back down." I whined.

"You wanted me to sleep with you, didn't you?"

"I was trying to argue with you."

"So you don't want to?" I opened my eyes and bit my lip. After a moment I shook my head.

"No, not tonight. I just want to sleep on the sand."

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"There's sand beside my tent."

"No, I like it right here."

"Alright." He set me down and walked away. I closed my eyes. I stretched out, shoving my arms and legs under the sand. A moment later Danny came back with blankets and pillows.

"Oh, you didn't have to do that."

"Yes I did. It gets very cold."

"You don't have to stay."

"You're not staying by yourself."

"I can't run off, it hurts."

"Did you try?"

"No, I didn't realize how far I went. Besides, I know you don't like sleeping outdoors. Maybe Robby would like to stay out here with me."

"Over my dead body."

"Careful what you wish for darling."

Danny grumbled something unintelligible. I felt a breeze as he spread out the blankets on the ground. He lifted me and I felt cloth under me a second later. My head rested on a pillow. Then I felt a blanket come over me. Then Danny's arms were around me. He pulled me close to him.

"Goodnight Rachael. I'll let you off tonight, but tomorrow we've got some things to discuss."

"We'll see. I might take a week off. I haven't felt this good in a long time."

"Since you ran away."

"Yes. Except this is better, because you're here."

I awoke with the sun shining down on my face. I saw Danny was gone. I wondered if he had to leave. I knew he wasn't much for sleeping under the stars. I sat up. Then I heard someone clear their throat. I turned around to see a large group was looking at me. All of my friends. I wasn't sure what was going on.

"Um, hey guys. Nice night for sleeping out side don't you think?" No one replied. "What?" I asked. Then it hit me. It kind of slipped my mind that I should tell them about Danny and I. And after seeing the argument, after what I had shoutedâ I covered my mouth. "Oh dear God." I gasped. The second time I had been caught. Everyone sat in a circle around me.

"What the hell is going on Rachael?" Harold asked. There were ten of them. Harold, Greg, Alec, Niles, Johnson, Jennifer, Hannah, Alex, Rodney, and Isaac.

"I guess I have some explaining to do. Where's Danny?"

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"He's been assigned to clean the kitchen this morning." Hannah explained. I sighed.

"So how much did you hear last night?"

"Oh, something about being a baby and immature." Rodney said.

"Something about wanting to sleep with him." Alex added.

"Something about being bossy." Johnson said.

"Something about how you two are together. And that's all that needs to be said since you haven't told us about it!" Isaac barked.

"Yeah, so, Danny and I are going out."

"No, really?" Alec said sarcastically. I stuck my tongue at him.

"I think I shouldâ" I stood up and ran. I jumped over Niles while running. He grabbed my ankle and I tripped.

"You're not going anywhere."

"Does it really matter? We're going out, there's not much more to say."

"And when did you plan on telling us? Does your father know?"

"Yes, Father knows. And I was going to tell you, I just sort of forgot." I was still standing, with my right foot on the air because Niles was still holding it.

"Could you let go?" I asked.

"Are you going to run?" he asked.

"No." He let go. I sat down beside him. "It's hot out here. Let's go sit in some shade." I suggested.

"Attention, there has been a direct on enemy approach. All soldiers please report to the front lines." The speaker said. Everyone was standing in a few seconds, including me. We all ran back to camp. I quickly found Father, who was getting his gun.

"How many are there?" I asked.

"A lot. Maybe six hundred."

"That's a hundred more than us." We had a smaller army because we usually joined others to fight. Well, they did.

"I'm coming, I want to help."

"No, I don't think so. You're going to stay in the safety of the shelter."

"No, I want to come."

"Are you testing my authority?"

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

"No sir. I just want to help. You need everyone you can get."

"We'll be fine, now get to the mess hall. We'll be back soon." He started running towards the front line. I could shoot (I'd been practicing after the disappointing misses at Shaun), I wasn't scared, and they needed me. I ran to the gun supply and waited. Everyone was taking a gun and heading toward the enemy. I jumped in line and had a gun in my hand in seconds. I kept my head down, so no one would recognize me. I arrived at the front lines soon.

"Anyone who isn't fighting please report to the mess hall." The speaker announced. This wasn't like me, to disobey big orders. But that was what I was doing, and it was too late to turn back now. I was in the third row as I arrived. I loaded my gun with ease, quicker than some.

"Everyone get ready, they're coming." Father shouted. He started barking out orders, telling us what to do. I saw Danny was in the first row. He was only a few people over. All he'd have to do was look back. I kept my head down. But I had to look up as the enemy approached.

"Rachael, is that you? What are you doing here?" I heard Greg whisper.

Chapter 11: The Fairness of War

"I'm helping. Just shut up!" I snapped.

"Go home, you'll get yourself killed!"

"I'll be fine! Butt out!"

"Damn it! Are you insane?"

"A little."

He groaned and turned his attention back to the enemy. I saw father walk forward to talk to the leader of their group. He spoke to them in a different language, Arabic, I think.

"Danny, Danny!" Greg whispered.

I turned around and gave him a look. "Don't you dare!" I turned forward.

"Danny!" Greg said, a little bit louder.

Danny turned around, looking annoyed, then angry. "Rachael, what are you doing here?" he snapped.

"Don't worry about me, pay attention." I told him.

"Go home, that's an order."

"You can't tell me what to do, I'm not in the army."

"Which is why you shouldn't be here."

"I'm already here, and I'm staying."

"Greg, take her home."

"Bad idea, you need him."

"Go home, now!"

"No!"

"Ugh! You are in so much trouble!"

"I don't care! Now pay attention!" He gritted his teeth and turned back around.

Then there was a gunshot. I looked over to see father had been shot. He fell to his knees, to reveal it had been in the chest. "Father!" I screamed. Heads turned to see me, then quickly looked back at the now approaching enemy. I felt angry now, and I was definitely ready to fight. I felt tears fall down my face.

"Charge!" Danny shouted, and everyone started to run forward.

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

It was like a dream, a nightmare. I ran with all my might. I shot the gun, and I killed people. And I didn't care. I saw Danny kill others; I saw some fall down next to me, from being shot. People I knew well. Some I didn't know at all. And it made me even angrier. I saw someone was about to shoot Danny, and I shot them, and they fell. It was over before I knew it. Even though it had to have been hours. And somehow, we had won. It didn't feel like winning, because I saw dead friends all around. I stumbled over to where father lay.

I fell to my knees. He was dead, I could feel it. I was an orphan. I sobbed onto his chest. I didn't want to believe it. But I knew it was true. "I'm sorry." I cried.

I felt a hand on my shoulder. "It wasn't your fault." Danny whispered.

"I'm sorry I disobeyed you." I whispered to Father.

"I know he's already forgiven you."

"I have no family."

"You have me."

"Yes, I have you." I agreed then sniffed.

"I'm sorry Rachael." Danny said and tightened his grip.

"It wasn't your fault either. Where is he?" I asked between my teeth.

"Who?"

"The damn bastard who shot him."

"He's been taken captive. We're going to hang him tomorrow."

"I want to pull the lever. I want to kill him."

"It's not your job."

"It should be. Let me do it."

"It's not a job for a young girl."

"I guess I'm going to an orphanage now." I mumbled.

Danny shook his head. "No, were getting married, you're staying here."

"I think I should go to an orphanage."

His brows pushed together. "Why?"

"That's where orphans go." I replied almost incoherently.

"I don't understand. You want to go?"

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

"No, but I should." I was speaking gibberish really, I didn't know what to say. He picked me up, and I hugged him. I cried into his shirt as he carried me back. He took me to his tent and lay me down in his cot. I just couldn't grasp it. He was gone. I was never going to see him again. It didn't make sense. Father had always been there. "I want to go away." I said after a moment.

"Where?"

"Anywhere. I can't stay here anymore. Take it off."

"I can'tâ!"

"I know you have a key. I want to go, now. And I want you to come with me."

"I can't leave-"

"Fine, then stay."

"I can't leave until I get a discharge." he finished.

"So do you want to come or not?"

"Of course I do. Do you want to get married? I'll take care of you."

"Who will sign the papers?"

"Your father already did, this morning."

"Oh. Then yes. When?"

"Whenever you want to."

"Next week?"

"If that's what you want."

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

Chapter 12: The Trade...The Miracle

I snuck out to see it. Danny ordered me to stay, but I had to see it. I stayed in the back though. I deserved to be here, I deserved to see this. I wanted to watch him die.

"You have been accused with murder. Witnesses stand here that saw the death of General Meyer Clanes. They now are ready to witness your death." I didn't know the man at all who said these things. I watched the man who killed my father plead for his life. And I felt sorry for him. He begged over and over again in poor English. The man ignored him. He walked to the lever. I had to do something.

"Stop! Don't kill him!" I yelled. All heads turned to see me. I made my way forward. Danny glared at me.

"I told you to stay!" he started to say, I held out a hand to stop him.

"I am General Meyer Clanes' daughter, and I am asking you to spare this man's life." I walked up the stairs and onto the deck where they were going to be hanging him.

"You wish for the man who took the General's life to live?" The man who had been talking earlier asked. Commander something.

"If we kill him, then we're no worse than him. Killing him won't bring my father back will it? If that's the case then do it now. But you know it won't."

"Eye for an eye. He killed, so he must be killed."

"Then so should I. I was in the fight, and I killed. Put me in the ropes now. I don't have a license to kill. He did have one. Let someone who deserves to die take his place. Put me there instead."

"You fought for your friends and your country."

"So did he."

"You wish to let this man live, and you take his place?"

"If someone must die, then let it be me." I stepped toward the man and removed the rope from his neck. I began to place it around mine. Then man who killed my father took it from me. I looked at him curiously. He opened his mouth.

"I-I, sor-ry I kill your fath-er." He whispered.

"I forgive you."

"I thought he try to kill me. He reach for some-thing, I thought it was gun."

"I understand, mistakes happen." I took the rope from him again. "Which is why I'm taking your place." I placed the rope around my neck. The man shook his head.

"Do not die." He insisted. I only had one thing worth living for. Danny. I looked at him. He had tears in his eyes. This was my choice, and there was nothing he could do about it. It was a law. If I wanted to take the place of a prisoner, I was not to be advised otherwise. He was not allowed to say anything.

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

"I'm sorry Danny." I said to him. He turned and stomped away, shoving through the crowd. I didn't blame him for hating me. I looked at the man who was to execute the prisoner, and I nodded. The executer was still for a moment, not sure of himself.

"I accept the charges placed to the prisoner to be placed upon my life." I said aloud. He sighed then moved toward the lever. I looked out and saw Danny was gone. Good, he didn't need to see this. I looked at all the shocked faces. Then I closed my eyes.

"Th-this girl has accepted the charges of the prisoner and is taking his place in death." He took a deep breath, then pulled the lever.

I don't know why I'm alive, or why I'm here. Or why my neck is killing me. Why wasn't I dead? I opened my eyes, and saw Danny crying over me. Where was I? I was strangely comfortable. I opened my eyes some more. What the hell?

What was I in? I saw it was wooden, whatever I was lying in. I could see a preacher. He was talking about how everyone would miss me. Maybe I was dead. But then why could I feel me? I could move my fingers, my toes. I could move.

How long had I been out? What the hell was going on? I could hear sobbing. Danny walked away, still crying. Then I figured it out. I was alive, and I was at my funeral. They thought I was dead? Maybe my heart stopped, or they didn't bother to check. Weird.

I had to clarify I was alive. I wasn't going to let them bury me. But then the lid started to close.

"No, stop!" I yelled, it was hoarse, but someone heard me, because it was immediately opened again. The preacher rushed over to me. I blinked and looked up at him. He gasped.

"She's alive!" he called out. Then everyone was over me. Danny was the closest.

"Oh my God!" he said.

"Get me out of this damn thing!" I said, feeling claustrophobic. They opened the second half and Danny and Rodney carefully lifted me out.

"Someone find a doctor!" Danny shouted. They set me down across a few chairs.

"Jeez guys, didn't you check to see if I was still breathing? You about buried me alive!" I complained. It was meant to be a joke. But Danny didn't laugh. He just cried some more. I lifted a hand and stroked his cheek.

"Hey, don't cry, it's okay." I soothed. But it didn't help. He just kept sobbing. "Shh." I said and hugged him to me. I would have sat up, but like I said, my neck was killing me. Soon a doctor was at my side. Everyone was gathered around. It was utterly annoying. Danny stepped back, staring at me the whole time. I hadn't expected it to happen like this. I should be with my father right now.

He stared at me all the time. Maybe he was still trying to believe I was alive. Or afraid I'd die any second. I pulled at the brace. It was like a having the rope around my neck again. But this time it wouldn't kill me and go away. I started to take it off. Danny took my hand.

"Leave it." He warned. I sighed then looked over at him. He looked tired.

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"Are you okay? You look like you need some sleep."

"Why did you do it?" he asked. I already knew what he was talking about.

"Because I didn't want him to die."

"Why not? The day before you said you wanted to be the one to kill him."

"I thought I did want him dead. But when I saw him begging for his life, I couldn't let them. And it was only an accident."

"Of all the days you chose to be compassionateâ"

"I'm trying to be an adult. I don't have parents, I'm getting married soon, and it's time I start growing up."

"No one asked you to grow up."

"Because it wasn't a choice. Didn't you feel sorry for him?"

"I felt more sorry for your father."

"Well, who's being immature now?"

"It's not immature to want justice for people you love."

"Maybe not. But it's very mature to want someone to live. Even if they deserve to die."

"So it was all about maturity?"

"No, I guess I just missed him. And I thought it would fix things. The man would live, you could get a woman your own age, and I could be with my father."

"I don't understand you anymore."

"I don't understand myself much either. I think I just want to be alone Danny." He sighed then stood and left the tent. I closed my eyes, but couldn't rest because the brace was bugging me. I pulled at it.

"Keep the brace on." Danny called from outside the tent. I groaned.

Chapter 13: Leaving

Chapter Four - Leaving

I was happy, really. Maybe a bit jealous, but happy. I watched as Danny held hands with a beautiful twenty one year old woman. A real woman. I sat against my tent and watched them laugh and smile. I don't think I've ever been this happy, ever. Robby had been repeatedly telling me his offer was still available ever since Danny and I broke up. It was for the best that we split up, and what I had always wanted.

And I couldn't be happier that he was happy. But I wasn't ready to move on yet, much less with Robby. I was waiting for love again, and I knew I might not ever find it. I went back inside the tent. Everything was ready. I was eighteen, and everyone had forgotten I'd ever run away, except for me. I still wrote to the town. And tonight, after everyone was asleep, I was going back.

I'd already called Mrs. White and she said she'd be more than happy to give me my job back. Mrs. Smith said she'd let me board again. I could go back, and no one would stop me or come after me. And I was sure I'd be happy. I didn't have father to worry about me, Danny had finally found someone his age, and I have hardly spoken to any of my friends. So I doubt they'll miss me. I was finally free. And I know Robby will recover, probably after about five minutes.

I hid my bag so no one would get suspicious. I didn't want to say any goodbyes. I just wanted to go. I don't think anyone will know for a while. Like I said, I hardly talk to anyone anymore. Even Danny and I haven't spoken in well over two months. I would miss them all no doubt. But it was time to go.

Without Danny, there was no reason to stay. I wouldn't join the army, my cuff was off, as well was my brace. I was, as the doctor told me, as healthy as a horse. I don't think anyone really knew I was alive. I made sure the letter was ready to go. It seemed everyone was still pretty ticked about the almost dying thing. A mystery that still hadn't been solved. I sighed happily, everything was ready. No more death, no more Danny, no more war. It was surly time to go.

Dear everyone,

I'm glad I can finally tell you where I am going, because this time I know I can stay. When I ran away, I went to a town, and when the officers came and got me, I promised to return when I was eighteen. I already have everything set up. I have two jobs, and a house to sleep in. I'm starting my life over. If you wish to visit, you may. But don't feel obligated, because I know you may not want to. Scratch that, I know you don't want to. Danny and Jane, I wish you two a happy life. I'll stop this letter, so you can get back to your lives.

Sincerely,

Rachael

I couldn't figure out how I'd memorized it. But I had. I went over the letter again in my mind. No, it was fine. It was perfect actually. And no one would probably find it for a while anyways. They'll probably notice I'm not around after a week or so. I'd miss them. I had grown up with them after all.

Danny had been my best friend for six years. So yeah, it would be a little hard, but I'd move on. Eventually, I'd forget all about them.

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

I rung up the items quickly and placed them in the grocery bags. I smiled at the elderly lady Mrs. Daniels as I handed her credit card back.

"Have a nice day. By the way, I love that shirt." I said to her. She smiled back.

"Thank you dear." She said then took the card.

"Would you like some help with those?"

"No thank you sweetie, I've got them."

"As always?"

"Of course dear." She said. I laughed and she pushed the buggy out of the store. No one else was in line, so I opened up the cash register and started counting the money, making sure it was all there. I was very thorough. My boss really liked me. I'd been here for three months. I was happy, still.

"Hey, is this check out open?" someone called. I closed the cash register.

"Yes, sorryâ " when I looked up, I saw a familiar face.

"Oh, hey." I said to Jerry. He was a kid I'd met. He kind of liked me. He'd asked me out a few times, but I politely said no, and told him I wasn't ready to be in a relationship. He'd told me he understood.

He set some items down and I quickly rung them up.

"So, I'm cool about you not wanting to date, but I wanted to know if you wanted to hang out as friends. It would just be a couple of kids being friends, I swear." He said. I was thoughtful, then nodded.

"That sounds nice. I'd love to. Where should we meet?"

"How does bowling sound?"

"That sounds like fun." I'd only been bowling a couple times before, when I was eight. But it would be nice to get out and do something fun. "But I'm not very good."

"That's okay, I'll go easy on you."

I arrived, very nervous. I could hardly remember how to hold the ball. I paid for shoes then saw Jerry.

"Hey!" I called out as I came near. I was surprised he had invited other people, only about four, but I was still surprised.

"Hey, come join us." He yelled back. I felt good, I felt normal. I walked over to the group. I smiled and sat down. All of the kids introduced themselves. Eric, Sarah, Manny, and Tyler. They were all nice kids. We started bowling, and I felt my stomach flip. I was third. I stood up uneasily. I got a ball. I looked at it and turned it until I found the holes. I bit my lip.

"Is something wrong?" Jerry asked.

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"I haven't played this game in ten years. I don't know what to do."

"Let me help you." He stood and walked over to me. He stood behind me, and took my hand. He showed me how to stand and showed me how to swing my arm. Then he stepped aside and let me try. I did exactly as he showed me, and I got a strike! I cheered and jumped up and down in excitement. Then I ran over to Jerry and hugged him.

"Thank you so much!" I cheered. He squeezed me back then picked me up and spun me around.

"That was awesome!" he shouted. As we waited for the others to take their turns, we talked. I got to know him very well. And I started to really like him. He drove me home and walked me to the door. We stood in front of the door and talked some more.

"Oh, I've got to get some sleep. I have to get up for work tomorrow. Thank you for inviting me, I had a lot of fun." I said.

"Thanks for coming. We should hang out again."

"We should, and next time, let's make it a date."

"That would be awesome." He leaned in and kissed my cheek. I waited until he drove off then unlocked the door. I entered quietly and closed and locked the door. Then I smiled the whole way to my room. I lay down on my bed. I loved it. I loved being normal. I closed my eyes, and I suddenly couldn't wait to see him again.

I rushed down the stairs when I heard the doorbell.

"I'll get it!" I called as I flew down the stairs. Mrs. Smith laughed at my excitement.

"Hot date tonight?" she asked.

I winked at her. "You bet." I opened the door. Jerry stood there dressed up, like me, and was smiling. Like me.

"I'll be back later." I said.

"Not to late I hope." Mrs. Smith said.

"It depends." Jerry and I had been dating for a few months now. I've been living here for six months now, and I was happy. I never knew it could last this long. He took my hand and led me to the car.

"Have fun!" Mrs. Smith called.

"I love this restaurant, it's my favorite." I said as we sat down in Ethan's House.

"Mine too." Jerry agreed. We chatted for a few minutes. I really liked talking to him.

"And I thought I hadâ " I couldn't finish because I was trying to figure out what two army officers were doing here.

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

"What is it?" Jerry asked then turned around in his seat. The officers were talking to the host of the restaurant. I decided to ignore them; they probably weren't even from the same camp. Even if they were, what would it matter? Maybe they were here to eat. That seemed very probable.

"Nothing, I just thought for a moment that I knew them." I said. He turned back around and shrugged. We continued talking. I was taking a drink from the water that had been brought to the table then they turned around. The faces were familiar, and ones I hoped to never see again.

I choked on the water, and started coughing violently. Jerry stood up and patted my back. It drew a lot of attention, including Shaun's. He smiled when he saw me, I glared back. I guess I never did explain exactly what happened to him. I had no evidence that he'd tried to rape me. So father just simply moved him and the others to another camp. I finally stopped coughing.

"Are you okay?" Jerry asked.

"No, let's go somewhere else." I said then stood. I pulled out my wallet to pay for the already ordered food.

"No, I've got it."

"I already have my wallet out." I said then threw some money on the table without counting it, but I was more than sure it was enough. Then I quickly pulled him out of the restaurant. I avoided Shaun's eyes on the way. But as we left the place, six other familiar faces were outside. Would it never end?

"Hey, Rachael." Chris said. I ignored him and pulled Jerry away from the group.

"What the hell are they doing here?" I muttered.

"Who are they?"

"Some kids I used to know. We didn't get along well."

"Are those the guys you shot at?"

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be, it's not your fault they're here."

"I know, but I am sorry. If it makes you feel better, you can stay with me until they leave."

"I think I'll be fine."

"It would make me feel better knowing you're safe."

"No reallyâ!"

"Please." He said, looking concerned. I sighed.

"Okay, but Mrs. Smith will be wondering where I am."

"You can tell her in the morning."

"All's Fair in Love and War", The Biggest Load of Crap I've Ever Heard

"What if they don't leave tonight?"

"You can stay as long as you need to."

"Thank you Jerry."

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