Where Home Really Is

By : FrootLoop246

Comeplete Jordyn Hamilton is having the summer of her life in her coastal California hometown. But things are about to change for the sixteen-year-old surfer/dancer. Thanks to a recently found will, her family is moving cross country to rural Pennsylvania, where Jordyn is convinced she doesn't belong. Soon, she's noticed by the hot, senior, football QB, and put on the black list of her popular classmate Ashley. ~~~~Please comment, whether good or bad, I need to know how to improve myself :) Thanks for reading~~~~~~~

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Where Home Really Is : Chapter 1

***I know I already posted this once, but I posted it in the wrong format so I couldn't add chapters. :) Sorry about that. Thanks for reading!!

Chapter One

The sun had just started to set over Moon Bay Beach, California, as Jordyn Hamilton padded barefoot up the wooden, sand-covered steps from the beach. With her surfboard tucked snugly under her arm, she pushed open the gate and stepped into her backyard, theblades of the lush grass feeling soft between her toes.

She glanced back at the ocean, catching one last look before before the sun dipped beneath the horizon, ending the first day of summer vacation. She took a deep breath, inhaling the salty fragrance carried over by the coastal breeze. The tides were picking up, and the waves were crashing harder against the shore. Today had truly been an amazing day for surfing, the waves perfect, the beachfree of tourists.She just smiled, already excited to do it all again tomorrow.

Jordyn dropped off her surfboard in the backyard shed with the rest of her and her brothers' recreational equipment. She stepped up to the outside shower, stripped out of her wet suit,exposingher hot pink bikini,then rinsed the sand and salt off of her.

Jordyn got herself cleaned up and wrapped in a beach towel before walking into her kitchen, where she found her mother, Zara, in front of the stove, working on dinner.

Zara turned around at the sound of the sliding glass door opening and closing. She was dressed simply in her yoga clothes, with her white-blond hair hanging down in its usualjust-walked-off-the-beach waves.

She smiled. "Hey. You finally came in, huh? Thought maybe the ocean washed you away."

"Yeah," Jordyn sighed. "The waves were amazing today." She walked over to glance at what her mother was cooking. She was slightly surprised to see Swedish pancakes simmering in the pan. "Mm. Pannkakors? What's the occasion?"

Zara only cooked traditional Swedish meals on Mondays, so pannkakors was a surprise to come home to tonight. And it was Jordyn's favorite. Unusual even for a Friday night.

Jordyn studied her mother. Zara smiled, butit looked forced, nevertheless."No occasion. I know you and your brothers love these, so I decided to treat you all."

Jordyn watched as her mother anxiously fiddled with her fingers. Jordyn knew something was up. Playing with her fingers was a tell tale sign she was worried about something. It was a tic she'd passed down to her daughter.

Jrdyn raised her eyebrows. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Zara said quickly. "It's nothing. I just wanted to treat my kids to their favorite dinner on their last day of school. It's a little celebration."

Jordyn wasn't sure she was bought completely, but she nodded and smiled nevertheless. But she wondered, still, as she headed up the stairs to her room. Pannkakors on a Friday night, last day of school or not, was a

little suspicious.

Jordyn reached the top of the steps, and heard Eminem blasting from behind her older brother, Ty's, closed bedroom door. Across the hall, her younger brother, Logan's, door was open. She peaked in as she walked by and saw the thirteen-year-old lounged out in his game chair, playing a Tony Hawk video game.

"Hey," Jordyn called to him. "Logan, you missed some awesome waves today."

Logan paused his game and turned to look at his sister with regret. "Don't remind me. My room's clean, now, see? Spotless. I'll be in the water first thing tomorrow morning."

Jordyn chuckled and glanced around his bedroom. Their mother had informed Logan the night before he wasn't leaving the house until his room was clean. Sure enough, it was clean, now. Impressively so, too. It was a typical thirteen-year-old California boy's bedroom, the light-blue painted walls covered in surfing, skateboarding, and rock band posters. His dresser was filled with trophies from surfing and skateboarding competitions, and then there were the baseball and basketball ones on his chest of drawers.

But Jordyn had to admit, she was a little jealous of the set up her little brother had.

Mainly, she wished she had his energy.

Jordyn was headed back out of Logan's room when she heard Ty's door open.

"Where were you today?" she asked him.

"Uh, Courtney's," Ty answered reluctantly.

Courtney was the name of the perky private school cheerleader that had taken a liking to Ty a couple of months ago. She'd come to dinner a few times, and Jordyn determined quickly that she didn't like the girl. She was clingy, she always spoke like someone was pinching her nose, and she was obsessed with manicures, hair appointments and shopping. Not Jordyn's cup of tea at all.

Nothing against Ty, but Jordyn never quite saw why Courtney was dating asmall townguy who lived about a halfway normal life compared to the extravagant, spoiled Courtney. Not to mention, Ty was a public schooler. Courtney's type liked boys with the collars on their Lacoste polos turned up, their hair gel and spiked, and who drove Lamborghinis and Ferraris paid for by the rich daddies and trust funds in the hundred thousands. Ty was popular at Reed High School, no doubt. He was cute, Jordyn guessed, and a football star, but he didn't drive a Lamborghini, he drove a 1970 Mustang he was gradually restoring with the help of their father, and he worked for his money; it wasn't handed to him like the boys she was used to.

Once, Jordyn remembered Holly Daniels, a *popular* girl in her grade, commenting on how hot-*gross!*--Ty was. He could have had any cute, normal girl at Reed High, and here he was chasing after plastic Courtney.

"You don't sound too happy," Jordyn commented.

"Yeah, well, we broke up."

It took a lot to fight the smile that wanted to cross Jordyn's face. "Oh," she said. "Uhm, sorry?"

He looked at her for a moment, then chuckled. "No, you're not. But it's OK. She was a superficial, spoiled brat. Not my type at all."

"I could have told you that weeks ago-"

"Yeah, yeah," Ty interrupted.

"What happened?"

"Like I'm really going to share the details of my love life with my little sister," he teased.

"Little? Can I remind you I'm only 20 months younger than you?"

He smiled, and ruffled her hair. "Key word is younger, *little* sister."

Jordyn rolled her eyes. "Better get ready for dinner. We're having pannkakors."

"I know. See you downstairs." Then he turned and disappeared back into his bedroom.

Jordyn followed suit, walking into her own room, eager to get into the shower and wash the ocean and sand off of her, and hopefully enjoy some of her mother's delicious pannkakors without a stigma attached to them.

Chapter 2

Chapter Two

Jordyn was stepping out of the shower when she heard the distinct ringing of her cell phone from her bedroom, so quickly, she wrapped a towel around her dripping body, another around her hair, then bolted into her room for her phone.

"Hello?"

"Bout time you answered your phone," came the voice of her best friend, Shannon, or *Shay-Shay* Shapiro. "I've called you about a million times."

"I was in the shower," Jordyn said. In the background, she could hear the beat of loud, echoing music playing. "Where are you?"

"Blue Moon!" Shay shouted over the banging music. "You need to get your butt down here!"

Jordyn groaned, wishing she could. Blue Moon was the most popular place for teenagers in Moon Bay Beach. She and her friends were regulars there on Friday nights, for the music mostly, but the pizza was the "best south of San Diego." At least, that was what was on the sign. And who was Jordyn to argue? She gave Blue Moon a ton of business, and was a huge fan of their pizzas. Dominoes had nothing on a Blue Moon supreme pizza, no sir.

"I can't," Jordyn said regrettably. "My mom made pannkakors tonight, and I have to stay for dinner. We can hang out after, though?"

"You're skipping Blue Moon for pancakes?" Shay asked, her tone flat.

"They're Swedish pancakes, and my mom never makes them. I would feel terrible leaving after she put all that work in them."

"Sure, call me after," Shay said. "Just know that Ryan's here." Jordyn groaned. *Of course he was.* "And he's asking about you." *Of course he was.*

"Sorry," she said with a sigh. Though it was herself she was more sorry for. She thought about Ryan, his big brown eyes and the way his shaggy, sandy-colored hair fell over them. He was a basketball, soccer, and baseball player, and it left him tall and lanky, yet toned.

Holly Daniels even crushed on him-when she wasn't busy drooling over Ty, of course-and it made Jordyn feel extra accomplished that Ryan was talking to *her* and not miss popular cheerleader, Holly Daniels.

She thought about his comment on her updated Facebook profile pic last night. *"Cute, pic, Jordyn ;) Looken sexy. I love your hair like that, honey."*

She thought it was cool how he'd called her honey, but calling her *sexy*? That was a foreign thought to her.

Jordyn didn't think of herself as anything fabulous. She thought her looks were normal, that she had an average, sixteen-year-old girl face, nothing like the make-up-covered faces of Holly and *her* friends. Her hair was bleach-blond, naturally inherited from her mother, along with her bright, cerulean-blue eyes, and a light

dusting of freckles across her small nose. Nothing extraordinary, in her opinion.

According to Shay and the rest of their group, though, Ryan included, she was gorgeous. She was too comfortable being plain-looking Jordyn though, to take to those accusations, so she would just continue to grin in private and go goo-goo-eyed-then deny it later-over the comments and likes Ryan left on her Facebook pictures.

"He wants to know if it's OK for him to call you later," Shay said.

Jordyn lit up, a smile spreading across her face, and she nodded. "Yes! Of course."

Shay giggled. "Aye-Aye, Jor. Go have your pancakes. Call me after and we'll meet up."

"Definitely. See you later on. Have fun!"

"You, too."

Jordyn sat her phone down, and finally yanked her towel off, dressing in a simple pair of white, cotton shorts and a hot pink t-shirt, then headed downstairs where she found her entire family already seated, including her father, who hadn't been home earlier. And Jack Hamilton must have just walked in, because he was still in his black San Diego Police Department t-shirt and navy blue cargo pants from work. He spotted her and smiled.

"Hey, little girl."

"Hey, daddy," Jordyn said, kissing her father on the cheek and taking her seat next to him at the table.

After Zara sat, they said a quick prayer over their food, and got started talking about normal, everyday business.

"So, how was everyone's day?" Jack asked his family with a smile.

"My room's clean!" Logan volunteered, his hand shooting up. Jordyn chuckled as she stuck her fork into her blueberry jam-covered crepe-like pannkakor, and stuck a small piece into her mouth. Logan really wanted to surf tomorrow. She swore sometimes that kid was going to grow gills with as much time as he spent in the ocean.

"I'm very proud of you, Logan," Zara chuckled, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. Suddenly, Zara cleared her throat nervously, then Jordyn saw her exchange a look with Jack.

She *knew* these pannkakors weren't just a treat for the end of the school year. Something was going on. She could tell it in her mother's eyes earlier, and now her suspicions were confirmed. Something was going on.

"Ok, just tell us," Jordyn blurted out. "What's going on? You two are driving me crazy."

"Jordyn, what are you talking about?" Zara asked.

"The pannkakors."

Logan put his fork down. "Even I knew there was something up with these."

Jack finally sighed and put his fork down, lacing his fingers together on the table in front of him. He was tensing. Jordyn could see it the way his worked biceps flexed a bit under the tightness of his t-shirt sleeve.

"OK," he finally said. "You're right. Your mother and I have a little news for you kids. It's not bad news, it's just, well, we weren't exactly sure how to break it to you."

Quickly was preferred, Jordyn thought. *Quick was the best way to rip off a bandage. Just rip it off with no hesitation. It would sting a bit, but it wouldn't last long*.

"Do you three remember my father's will?" Jack asked.

They all nodded.

Three years ago, Jack's dad had died, and no one had a clue as to where his will was, so no one had a clue whether Jack or his big brother, Tommy, got the old family fortune. It caused a bigger rift between Jack and Tommy than was there before, and for the past three years, the money sat, untouched, picking up more and more interest, in a bank in Cedarwood, Pennsylvania.

It was pretty obvious the money, the old estate in Cedarwood, everything would be Jack's. Tommy was pretty selfish, and he was fairly estranged from his father at the time of his death, but he was sure he was entitled to that money, because he was the oldest, and he never left Cedarwood like Jack had.

Even Jordyn had watched the old 80's drama, *Dallas*. They weren't in Texas, and they weren't fighting over a horse ranch, but her family was in the middle of some genuine Ewing drama, and even she knew who got the money and Southfork when Miss Ellie died.

And Jack was Bobby.

"Well I got a call from dad's lawyer a couple of weeks ago," Jack continued. "They found the will."

Jordyn perked up. Oh, this wasn't bad news at all.

"He left me everything," Jack said. "The money, Hamilton Estate, all of it."

"Dad, that's great!" Jordyn exclaimed. "We can go on a cruise!"

"We could buy a summer house in Maui!" Logan suggested excitedly.

"And one in Aspen, maybe?" Jordyn tried with a small smile.

"We're not going on a spending spree," Jack clarified. "Mind you, there's plenty to go around, and yes, we can live a lot more comfortably." He cleared his throat again, then shared a look with Zara, not a happy one, either. "But there's more, guys."

Jordyn's excitement began to fade.

"Kids," Zara said, clearing her throat. "We're moving to Cedarwood."

Jordyn tugged on her ears. She was *definitely* hearing her mother wrong.

"Moving to Cedarwood?" Logan exclaimed. "To Pennsylvania? Where there's no water!"

"Lake Erie is about two hours north of Cedarwood, and the town itself sits on a nice-sized lake, too," Jack tried, unsuccessfully, to sway his son.

"So, we're moving to the middle of nowhere in Pennsylvania, landlocked, so we can't surf?" Jordyn exclaimed. "We can't! Moon Bay Beach is our home! It's the only one I've ever even known."

"We have to go, Jor," Zara said sympathetically.

"Why do we *have* to go?" Logan asked.

Jack shrugged. "Part of the will. Dad didn't want the house to be lived in by anyone but a Hamilton, and didn't want it to go to ruins. His will explicitly states that if we don't take the house, the money will stay in the bank, frozen."

"That's possible?" Jordyn asked, incredulous. She had no idea that ultimatums could be attached to wills.

"It's legal," Jack assured, nodding.

"But, I don't want to go to Pennsylvania," Logan whimpered. "I want to stay here."

"Me, too," Jordyn muttered.

"Kids, we understand this is hard," Zara said. "But Cedarwood is a great little town. You'll really like it there. You'll see."

"It's a lot of money, guys," Jack said, softly now.

"When are we leaving?" Ty asked.

"We're waiting until August," Zara explained. "So you guys can enjoy your summer here."

Jordyn just nodded, staring at the plate full of pannkakors she hadn't taken a bite of since she heard the news. Suddenly, she wasn't at all hungry anymore. She pushed the plate back. "May I be excused," she said more to her lap than her parents. "I'm not hungry."

Her mother nodded, sympathetically, and when she reached out to touch Jordyn's shoulder, Jordyn ducked the gesture and walked up the stairs to her room, slamming the door loud enough she made sure they heard her downstairs.

Chapter 3

Chapter Three

Saturday, June 2, 2012

The next morning, Jordyn stood in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirror in Miss Victoria Joy's dance studio, in black spandex dance shorts, and a black spandex, sports-bra-like top, typical dance wear for a four-hour-long Saturday dance rehearsal at the La Jolla Dance Academy.As her group finished their new jazz piece, Miss Victoria Joy stood near the front of the room, clapping.

"Yes, ladies!" she praised. "Great job! You are gonna take first place at Star Quest next weekend, no doubt about it!"

Jordyn wiped the sweat from her forehead, and put her hands on her narrow, toned waist, glancing at herself in the mirror. She was the featured dancer for next week's completion in Los Angeles. She was also Miss Victoria Joy's favorite student, or her "protÃ©gÃ©," as she'd called her since she started at the dance company nine years ago.

At seven, Jordyn had already been doing gymnastics for four years, but wanted to try dance, like her mother back when she was a little girl in Sweden. So Zara brought her to Victoria Joy, one of the best in the business. Miss Victoria had insisted on instead of trading gymnastics for dance, to keep up with them both, just make dance a priority. A good gymnast would make her an even better dancer, Miss Victoria Joy told Zara on the first day there. So, like a good little dancer who was lucky enough to work under Miss Victoria Joy, she'd done what she was told and kept up with gymnastics, and it had worked. At home Jordyn's dresser and chest of drawers were all full of dance trophies and ribbons.

Jordyn loved to dance, and she was good at it. She was good at it because she was passionate about it. But doing it for five hours every day-five on Saturdays, was getting to be a bit much. Dancing had stopped being fun long ago, and it showed right now by how distracted she was getting. The idea of a move across the country in only two months didn't exactly help, either.

"Alright, ladies," Victoria Joy said, checking her watch. "It's noon. Time to let you go. Make sure you stretch plenty tomorrow. Don't come back in here Monday all stiff and pull a muscle. One week until Star Quest! It's crunch time!"

The girls grabbed their gym bags, and headed out, but Miss Victoria stopped Jordyn in her tracks as she tried to do the same.

"Jordyn, not you," she said. "I need to talk with you a moment, sweetheart."

Jordyn had a feeling she knew what Victoria Joy was going to be talking to her about. She hadn't exactly been on top of her game today, what with the move and everything on her mind. She'd daydreamed plenty today, and Victoria Joy called her out in front of everyone several times. That had been embarrassing.

"Jordyn," Victoria repeated. "I won't keep you long. I know you have gymnastics to get to."

"I'll call you later," Jordyn replied glumly. Alana nodded, then walked out, leaving Jordyn to face her fate with Miss Victoria all alone.

"I'm sorry I was a little off today, Miss Victoria," Jordyn started.

Miss Victoria just shook her head sympathetically. "Jordyn, you obviously have something on your mind. It's understandable, of course. Life happens, I get that. But here, in class, you must be as if you're on the stage. Put a smile on, and clear your mind of all that's going on in the background. You are my star dancer, after all. My protÃ©gÃ©."

Jordyn just nodded. Oh, but if only Miss Victoria knew. This was hardly in her background.

"So, you're going to work on the group number this weekend?" Victoria asked. "And practice your solo, yes?"

"Yes, ma'am," Jordyn said, sounding like the loyal little puppy she was.

"Good girl! You may go! I don't want to you to be late for gymnastics."

So Jordyn left, thinking hard about the conversation she and Victoria had. There was no way she was going to be able to put this horrible news out of her head. Eventually she would have to tell Miss Victoria, anyway. That wasn't a moment she was looking forward to at all. Not with all that "protÃ©gÃ©" talk.

Jordyn knew Miss Victoria had plans for her "star dancer-she hated that nickname, by the way. Miss Victoria had *big* plans. She wanted Jordyn on *So You Think You Can Dance*, then she had dreams of Broadway in New York City. Of course, Victoria didn't know that dance was not about to be Jordyn's career. That decision had been made long before news of the move.

Jordyn loved dance, that fact was undeniable. But she also loved being a teenager, and she wanted to do teenager things. Be carefree and party during the summer, not spend eight to nine hours on Saturdays and five hours every weekday dancing, flipping and twisting. She just didn't have the heart to tell Miss Victoria. Quite honestly, Jordyn was sad it had come to this, that she was finally tired of the one thing she loved the most. She hated that her rigorous rehearsals, classes, and training had jaded her from dance. It was kind of like hearing a new song, falling in love with it, and listening to it so much it wasn't the same. She didn't want to hate it; she loved it too much. But she was getting there.

Jordyn walked out onto the sunny, southern California sidewalk, her sweaty hair in a high, tight, messy bun on top of her head, wearing a simple pair of shorts and a t-shirt, with her gym bag tossed over her shoulder. She was prepared to make her usual two block trek to the Pacific Gymnastics Club when a thought occurred to her. Why was she going to spend another three hours testing her muscles more than she felt they needed to be tested, after a dance class that, quite honestly, wasn't going to make a difference in two months, anyway?

It wasn't like she was training for the Olympics. Not even close. For her, gymnastics was twice a week. Wednesdays and Saturdays, the only two days besides Sunday that it didn't conflict with dance, and they were to keep her limber, and to keep her flips and twists and dance tricks above average.

"Because everyone on Victoria Joy's competition team is above the average dancer," Victoria Joy often told them. "So if you're gonna do a trick in your dance, you're going to do it like a pro."

She frowned, listening to Victoria Joy's voice in her head. Then she decided the best way to spend her Saturday was not pleasing everyone else, namely Miss Victoria. What repercussions would she get if she skipped gymnastics, anyway? In two months she'd be in Pennsylvania; cold, dreary, Pennsylvania. So she wasn't going to waste what little time here she had left doing anything but living the way she wanted, just once. So she smiled to herself, reached into her pocket, and scooped out her cell phone.

"I hate lawyers, now, you know," Shay moped as she and Jordyn sat together at Surf n' Turf later that afternoon. The beachside burger bar was one of their favorite stops. Jordyn sure was going to miss this place. She'd practically grown up here. She watched as Shay stabbed her salad in a serial killer manner. "I mean, why'd that jerky lawyer have to go and find that will, anyway?"

Jordyn sighed, resting her chin in the palm of her hand and watched her friend sympathetically. She'd called Shay immediately after she got the news of the Cedarwood move last night, and like the best friend she had always been, Shay rushed over, and they cried together.

"We still have almost two months left until I leave," she offered with a shrug. "We'll make this the best summer, ever. You'll see."

"How can it be the best?" Shay demanded. "It's our last together. How am I gonna make it through junior year without my best friend?"

"You?" Jordyn sighed. "At least you *have* friends to help you through your junior year. I'm going to a town where I know no one. And dance and gymnastics are history for me."

Shay's jaw dropped. "Not possible. There's no dance school out there?"

"If there is it's probably some local beginner dance class taught once a week that performs for the townsfolk at Christmas," Jordyn said with an eye roll. "Maybe there's gymnastics there. I don't know."

Quite frankly, she didn't care.

"Speaking of gymnastics," Shay said suddenly. "Why aren't you at them right now?"

"I skipped," Jordyn said with a shrug, taking a sip of her cherry slushie. She watched as Shay's eyes widened and knew what she was thinking. Jordyn had always been the girl, well-behaved little girl who never did anything wrong. Skipping gymnastics wasn't a felony in the real world, but in her mother and Victoria Joy's, it was.

"What are you doing, rebelling?" Shay asked.

Jordyn considered the comment. No, she wasn't rebelling. At least, that wasn't exactly what she set out to do. She just wanted to have a little fun her last summer in California with her best friends. She didn't want to waste a minute that she could be surfing, or just hanging out with Shay.

"I'm not rebelling," she answered. "I'm just, well, I mean, what's the point, now? Miss Victoria gonna kick me out of her dance school if I skip gymnastics? Wow. I'll never survive."

Shay chuckled. "You wouldn't."

"I don't know, Shay. Maybe having less of dance and none of gymnastics would be a good thing," Jordyn mused. "You know, give me time to actually have a life."

Shay scoffed. "No way! Then you'll have more time with those country kids than you did with me, and more time with them is more time to replace me!"

Jordyn chuckled and turned back to her friend. "You, my friend, will never be replaced. In fact, how do you feel about coming along with me? I'll stuff you in my suitcase."

Shay beamed. "I could hide in the moving van!"

Jordyn laughed. "Shay, don't worry. You will *never* be replaced. I promise."

Jordyn sipped on her slushie some more, her eyes wandering around the burger joint, as if noticing it for the first time ever. It had a true, Southern California theme, like she was inside of a surf shop. The countertop was surfboards, all over the walls were surfing pictures, short boards hanging against the palm tree wood of the walls. There were no windows, and no doors, instead, the whole front of the place was open to the sandy beach and the ocean.

Heaven.

Just then, Shay gasped. Jordyn saw Shay looking across the beach. "Jordyn! Ryan! It's Ryan."

Jordyn gasped. "Oh my God, where?!"

"Right there! And your mouth is *red*!"

"Shit," Jordyn muttered, touching her lips when she saw him crossing the beach in red and white board shorts along with his white *Surf n' Turf* t-shirt. She hadn't known he would be working today, but yet, there he was. And here she was. She had just downed a red slushie. "I gotta go."

"Wait!" Shay exclaimed, grabbing Jordyn's arm. "Where are you going?"

"Bathroom." Jordyn grabbed her gym bag, and made a mad dash, pushing the crowd of surfers, beach bums, and tourists, until she was in the bathroom. Lucky she'd packed her bikini, hoping for some time on the beach. Ryan had shown up before she had a chance to change into it, though. She dodged into a stall, then pulled on her bikini and cover-up; they'd be perfectly acceptable in this restaurant. It was how everyone dressed. When she stepped out, she walked straight to the mirror to redo her messy bun, hoping Ryan would confuse the sweat from dance with water from the ocean, although it wasn't likely.

Once she'd fixed her hair and done the best she could at getting the redness off her teeth and tongue, she stared at the mirror, considering her reflection for a moment, mainly her torso. She had a narrow waist and toned, flat abs, but she had womanly, slender curves, unlike any gymnast or dancer she knew well. And her breasts were C-cups, something no one at dance, not even Miss Victoria, had.

"Lucky you're an amazing dancer, sweetie," Victoria would say about her curves and well-developed chest. "You don't have a dancer's figure so you must make up for it with your talent, and keep the judges' eyes on your pirouettes, not your, er, full-figuredness."

Full-figuredness. Yes, that was when Victoria secretly wanted to tell Jordyn her breasts were too big to be a great dancer.

Jordyn knew her dance teacher meant it as an insult, but it was a complement on the beach when guys couldn't keep their eyes off her. Shay would tell her she had an ideal figure. That she had it all. She had a butt, she had boobs, and the rest of her was toned, and tight.

"I honestly can't believe you're still a virgin," Holly Daniels would sometimes tell her. Holly Daniels, whom by the way, was the school slut along with being Miss Popular. No one would ever tell her that to her face, though. Jordyn was sure Holly meant the comment as a complement, but it didn't sound like that, especially when she would add, "If only you had a life besides dancing, maybe you would have a real boyfriend."

Right. Like the two-week flings and one-night-stands Holly had gave her the credibility to give anyone relationship advise. But Jordyn had to admit-although she would never say this out loud-Holly was maybe, sort of right. If it weren't for dance, she would have time to socialize, meet boys, and maybe, just maybe she wouldn't still be a virgin.

Deciding with a sigh that since her parents were dragging her across the country before she ever had a chance to see if this subtle flirtation with Ryan would go anywhere, much less to her coming close to losing her virginity, Jordyn walked out of the bathroom and found Ryan sitting at the table with Shay.

Jordyn put on the best, fakest smile she could muster.

"Hi, Ryan," she said, joining them at the table.

Ryan grinned. "What's up, Jordyn?"

"Not much, what about you?"

Real nice conversation, Jordyn, she thought afterwards.

He groaned and ran a hand through his soft, shaggy blond hair. "Gotta work. You two doing anything tonight?"

He asked them both, but his eyes were on Jordyn. She smiled and shook her head. "Nope, not me."

Shay flashed her a look that said 'Calm down.' So maybe Jordyn was a little eager.

"I'm busy," Shay said quickly. "Sorry. Can't do anything tonight."

He looked at Jordyn, and smiled. "So, you'd want to hang out tonight, Jordyn?"

And just like that, her day changed for the better. At least she'd have *something* to take her mind off the move. And though she was still upset and a little bewildered at the sudden fact that she would have to give up any chance she had with Ryan, she could still have a little fun with a super-hot boy. Maybe even learn the ins and outs of flirting before she met the East Coast boys of her future.

Jordyn just smiled. She'd wing it for now. She did have two months, after all. Why waste it moping?

"I'd love to hang out with you, Ryan," she told him, to which he responded with a gorgeous smile. "Great. Can I pick you up when I get off at 8:00?"

She agreed. 8:00 couldn't get there fast enough.

Chapter 4

Chapter Four

"Jordyn Alexis Hamilton, you stop right there, young lady!"

Jordyn stopped mid-step as she'd attempted to escape to her room before her mother caught her. Certainly Zara knew she'd skipped gymnastics today, and Jordyn was about to hear about it.

Please don't ground me, please don't ground me Jordyn prayed silently as she eased back down the steps to face her mother. Zara was waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs with her arms folded on her narrow hips and extreme look of displeasure on her face. Oh yeah, she knew.

"You have some explaining to do, Jordyn," she said simply. Her accent was thicker than normal as she spoke through gritted teeth. That's how Jordyn knew she was mad. Usually her accent was barely noticeable to Jordyn. To others, it was obvious English wasn't her first language, but Jordyn was used to it and barely ever thought about it. Unless she was mad.

"Mom, I'm sorry," Jordyn tried. "But, we're leaving in two months! I want to spend my time having fun and hanging out with my friends while I'm still here, not waste it on gymnastics and dance."

OK, that came out wrong, Jordyn realized when she saw that taken aback look on her mother's face.

"Jordyn," she sighed. "I understand where you're coming from, but if you're going to start at the Cedarwood Dance School as soon as we arrive in Pennsylvania, you have to audition. You'll get in no matter what. Your audition is just what determines you level there."

Jordyn was confused. The *what?* Zara was already looking at Dance Schools in Pennsylvania? Well, it couldn't be that great, if it was in tiny Cedarwood.

"You need to keep up with the gymnastics once we get there, too, Jordyn. I understand you want to spend time with your friends while you're still here in San Diego, but honey, if you slack off at all, it will greatly affect you when you get to Pennsylvania."

Jordyn sighed. Maybe now was a good time to tell her mother she wasn't exactly looking forward to another full schedule of dance in her new home. Then again, Zara would be heartbroken. She was a dancer herself, back in Sweden. She came to America when she was 17, after getting into Julliard. Unlike Jordyn, though, dance was Zara's life. There were no boyfriends, no late-night parties, none of that. Until the ankle break that ended her career. *That* was why Zara was a chef, not dancing on Broadway like she'd dreamed of doing.

Jordyn inherited the natural talent from her mother, so of course, Zara was going to push and push and make Jordyn into the dancer she'd wanted to be. Her heart had been broken when her life was pretty much ripped away from her, so Jordyn didn't quite know how to tell her she was choosing another life.

She just knew it wasn't going to be easy.

"So, mom," Jordyn said, quickly trying to change the subject. "Uhm, guess who asked me to hang out tonight?"

"It doesn't matter because you are not going," Zara said.

Jordyn's jaw dropped. Her mother could not be serious. "Mom, no."

"Jordyn, you skipped gymnastics today. You have gymnastics only once a week. It was very important you be there today."

"No, it's very important I be with my friends while I still can, mom! Please, let me go out with Ryan!"

Zara raised her eyebrows. "Ryan?"

"Yeah," Jordyn said slowly. "I told you about him. He asked me to hang out with him tonight, and I really want to go."

"You really *needed* to go to gymnastics today, Jordyn, and you didn't." Jordyn didn't respond, but waited as her mother studied her with her arms still folded over her chest. Then she finally sighed and nodded. "Jordyn, you can go out with this, uh, *Ryan*, but you better go to gymnastics Saturday."

Jordyn was beaming. "Thank you, mom! I will, I promise!"

She skipped up the stairs, not caring that she'd just agreed to go back to gymnastics next week when she should have been planning her 'I wanna quit' speech for her mom. Right now all that was on her mind was that she was about to go out with Ryan. She hurried into her room, pushing past Ty as he stepped out of his own bedroom.

"Whoa!"

"Sorry!" she said, but didn't stop.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" he asked.

She turned around in front of her bedroom door and grinned at her brother. "I have a date."

Ryan had a car. He picked Jordyn up in a nice, brand new Camaro. He worked at a beachside burger joint only to earn a little work ethic and spending money. Otherwise, his lawyer dad bought him whatever he wanted and when he wanted it. Or at least that's what he said when Jordyn had questioned the 'awesome sports car.'

She learned pretty quickly that Ryan liked to talk about himself. Once he was done bragging on his rich dad, Jordyn figured she had a chance to talk. She was wrong.

"So, you coming to my party next weekend, Jordyn?" he asked as soon as she'd opened her mouth.

"Uh, I hadn't heard about a party," she said honestly. "Your house?"

"Yeah, Friday night. It's gonna be epic. My dad's letting my use his guest house on the water, and since we own that whole part of the beach anyway, we'll have it all to ourselves. Everyone will be there."

"Cool. Yeah, maybe I'll drop by."

He flashed her a flirty, knee melting smile. "Hope you will." Then he changed gears and sped through Moon Bay Beach.

She glanced out of the corner of her eye at his strong arm, his muscles flexing as he changed gears on the 5-speed Camaro. She thought it was so sexy how he could handle a car with so much power.

"Could've had a Vette," he said with a nonchalant shrug. "Dad offered me pretty much anything. But I usually have a lot of passengers, so a Vette wouldn't have worked for me."

Jordyn frowned.

It wasn't sexy, however, how much he talked about himself. She wondered if he'd always been so into himself. Truthfully, though, this was the most time she'd spent with him, and it was the most conversation she'd had with him.

"So, where are we going?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Thought maybe we could head to my place. Watch a few movies. Just chill, you know?"

Oh she knew. First time hanging out? And he wanted to go to her house, where she was certain they would be alone.

Jordyn was squirming in her seat. She hoped Ryan wouldn't notice. She had thought they were going to Blue Moon, or to the beach or something. She didn't think they'd be going back to his house.

"Wouldn't it be more fun to just go get a burger or some pizza or something?" Jordyn asked with a shrug.

He chuckled. "I'm not really that hungry. If you are, I got a fridge full of food that I must admit, I'm great at cooking."

Of course he wasn't hungry. Jordyn didn't have the best feeling anymore. She wasn't ready to go over to a boy's house with no one home. They hadn't even been on a date, yet. She wasn't about to let him do anything she knew she wasn't ready for. She knew Holly Daniels would do anything Ryan wanted her to do. Holly Daniels would be here in August when Jordyn was freezing her butt off in Pennsylvania.

But maybe she was wrong, Jordyn thought. She didn't say much more the ride to Ryan's house, but she spent it hoping this would just be a fun visit, innocent and watching movies like he'd said. But something seemed fishy to her, and usually her gut feelings were right.

But he seemed to be a real gentleman when he pulled up to his beach house-much more luxurious than Jordyn's-and insisted on opening the passenger door for her.

"Nice place," she said as he let her into the dark living room, flipping on the light so the place was lit up and she could see the detail. The walls were covered in exquisite art work, the whole room big and open, no door or wall to the kitchen, and from there, Jordyn could see a great view of the ocean through sliding glass doors. Most important detail she noticed? They were definitely alone.

He stepped up next to her and smiled as he slid his hands into his pockets. "It's alright," he said simply. "So, you want anything to drink?"

"Sure," she said. She turned around to face him with a smile. She actually had to tilt her head back to see his face. Ryan was tall. At around 6 foot, he towered over Jordyn's 5'4. She liked tall guys, though. Especially basketball-playing tall guys. Rumor had it, Ryan was going to be senior varsity captain next year. He was going to be Mr. Reed High School, that was for sure. She'd be the envy of all the girls if she walked the halls

with him.

Not gonna happen, Jordyn, she reminded herself glumly, feeling that sickening punch to the stomach she'd been getting every time she thought about the move. Nope, Jordyn would not be walking the halls of Reed High School on the arm of Ryan Carter next semester. She'd be walking the halls on Cedarwood High, probably on no one's arms. Here? Here, Holly Daniels would be sinking her teeth into Ryan the second Jordyn was gone.

After they both had something to drink, a bottle of water for her and a Budweiser for him, Ryan lead her into the living room-thank God it wasn't his bedroom-and turned only one lamp on, shedding some light on the place, but leaving it dim enough to make Jordyn nervous.

"So, what kind of movies you like to watch, babe?" he asked, plopping down on the couch with the remote.

She sat next to him with a smile, sipping on her water. Oh, but how she loved the way he called her babe. "Uh, anything's fine with me. I'm not picky at all."

"Me, neither," he said, putting the remote down. "Who says we even have to watch a movie."

Red flag! Red flag! Alarms sounded in Jordyn's head as Ryan set his beer on the coffee table and put his arm around her.

"Ryan, I'm a virgin," she said quickly.

He looked surprised by her outburst, but not surprised by her confession. "It's OK, Jordyn, I know."

He leaned in to kiss her, but she pushed him away gently. "How do you know?"

He chuckled. "Come on, Jordyn, everyone knows. It's not a big deal, though."

Oh yes it was. She knew exactly why she was here. She might have been inexperienced, but she wasn't stupid.

"Ryan, I want something to be clear," she told him, putting her hand on his chest when he leaned in to kiss her again. "I said I was a virgin, and I'm not changing that tonight. This is only our first time hanging out. I don't know what kind of impression you have of me, but I'm *not* that kind of girl."

"Hey, it's cool!" he said, holding his hands up. "I won't push you. Wherever you want to stop, give me the word and we stop. But I thought maybe we could make out a little."

Oh, well, that sure sounded tempting. She bit her bottom lip, thinking. No harm could come from kissing, right? And Ryan looked so cute, so hopeful.

Jordyn leaned forward, touching her lips to his, lightly at first, and then when she felt his tongue pushing against her lips, she parted them and let him deepen the kiss. His hand was on her cheek, but then, he let it drop. He cupped her breast over her shirt and squeezed.

She quickly broke the kiss, pushing his hand away.

"Uhm, that's too far, Ryan," she said. "Maybe it's time I go home."

She didn't want to go, but she knew better than to let this go any further. She wasn't in a hurry to lose her virginity, although, she was tired of being inexperienced little Jordyn Hamilton. But her own self-respect was far more important to her than getting laid on her first night hanging with Ryan.

"You want to go home already?" he asked, almost in disgust.

She nodded. "I think it's for the best. I'm sorry."

"I thought you liked me, Jordyn," he said. Wow, he really was full of himself.

"I do like you," she said. "I'm just not ready for all this, and it's obvious you are. Besides. I'm sort of moving at the end of the summer."

"You're moving? Where?"

"Pennsylvania."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

"Well, uhm, OK, then, I guess I'll just drive you home if you really want to go. I'll call Holly to hang out."

Jordyn's heart skipped a beat. So he really only brought her there for sex? She was incredibly offended, but she was more offended by the fact that he probably thought by telling her that he would call Holly it would turn her around and sit her down to let him have his way with her.

She just smiled. "I'm sure she'd love to come over, too." She grabbed her purse and waited by the door, indicating she still wanted to go home. Holly could have him. She spread her legs for anybody. Well, at least Cedarwood was starting to look appealing. It meant, at the very least, she wouldn't be here in August to watch Ryan and Holly be the year's *It* couple, giggling together, her wearing his basketball hoodie, them making jokes about Jordyn.

She gritted her teeth. Yeah, Cedarwood was starting to look really good.

Chapter 5

Chapter Five

3 months later

Thursday, August 2, 2012

"This sucks, Jordyn. This really *effing* sucks!"

Jordyn chuckled as she sat on the Shay's bed next to her Thursday morning, the second day of August. The mood was grim, no doubt about it-today Jordyn's family was finally leaving San Diego-but Jordyn still found humor in the fact that that Shay didn't swear, but she still made her G-rated words sound extra angry.

Jordyn couldn't believe how fast the summer had gone by. It felt like just yesterday she'd gotten the awful news about Cedarwood, now here she was, at Shay's house, saying good-bye to the very best friend she'd ever had, and ever would have.

Shay-Shay had been Jordyn's best friend since they were seven, when Shannon first moved to Moon Bay Beach from Los Angeles. Shannon was a girly girl and her dad was an ex-baseball agent, until he'd started drinking and finally killed himself in a drunk driving accident. That was why she had moved to Moon Bay Beach with her mother, where they didn't have nannies or Porsche's, since Shay's mother could no longer afford that.

Jordyn had taken an instant liking to Shay, maybe because at such a young age she didn't understand, thankfully, what it was like to lose pretty much everything. She'd been the best friend a girl could ask for over the years, and she was irreplaceable.

"How am I gonna survive in Pennsylvania without you," Jordyn muttered as she leaned over and hugged her friend.

She heard Shay sniffle. "You have to buy a big coats and warm winter clothes. I hear it gets cold there in the winter."

"And there's no surfing, either."

"Maybe you'll learn to snowboard," Shay suggested.

Jordyn chuckled a little, wiping her tears, then leaned over to hug her friend even tighter. "I love you, Shannon. You're the best friend anyone could ask for."

"You got that right, and you better not replace me with any of those snow bunnies up there."

"Never."

They hugged a little longer. Jordyn thought of everything she'd been through with Shay. She could never have another friend like her. She knew her better than anything, and not because she told her about herself, but because she was *there* for everything; heartbreaks, bad grades, and everything else.

She thought back to the beginning of the summer, how Shay had cried with her at the news of moving, how she'd offered to kick Ryan in the balls for how he treated her that night they hung out. No, she'd never find another Shay. She wouldn't want to. Shay had been there, and that couldn't be changed, and she couldn't be replaced even if Jordyn wanted her to be.

"I have a present for you."

Jordyn raised her eyebrows as Shay leaned over and grabbed something from her dresser drawer.

"Shay, you didn't have to get me anything," Jordyn said when her friend presented the small box wrapped in pink paper, complete with a bow.

"Yes, I did," she said, handing the box over. "I've worked on this all summer. So you won't forget me."

She wiped a tear from her eye as she handed over the gift.

"You're gonna make *me* cry, Shay-Shay," Jordyn stated, trying her very hardest not to do just that as she opened her gift. And there, she saw a photo album in the box. Inside was pretty much a timeline of their friendship, photos from elementary through high school. Some of the old photos Jordyn didn't recognize. But they were sentimental nevertheless.

And the waterworks began.

"I'll come back, Shay," she sobbed, hugging her friend again. "Soon, I promise."

And she would. Zara wasn't selling her restaurant in downtown San Diego, instead handing it over to her assistant to run, and in turn, planned to open another one in Pittsburgh. Keeping a restaurant open in San Diego meant she would be making plenty of trips out throughout the year, and she'd promised she would bring her daughter along whenever she could.

"Maybe I can come visit you in Cedarwood," Shay suggested.

"I'd love that. Though, I'm not sure why you would want to."

"How many people live there?"

"Like, 7,000 or so."

"That's like she same size as Moon Bay Beach," Shannon said with a shrug.

"Yeah, it's just like Moon Bay Beach," Jordyn said with an eye roll. "Minus the beach, minus San Diego 10 minutes to the north, and plus frigid cold temperatures and snow. Oh yeah. Minus my friends."

"You'll make new friends," Shay assured her. "I mean, look at you. You're gorgeous, and a lot of fun to be around. Trust me. I give you my blessing. But you better not replace me," she added, pointing her index finger at Jordyn for emphasis. "Got it?"

Jordyn laughed. "I got it. Who, in this entire country, can replace Shannon Shapiro."

Two hours later, Jordyn stood in her bedroom, taking in the emptiness of it. Everything was packed up, on its way to Pennsylvania in moving vans as of yesterday.

She walked over to her bare wall, and saw her name, right where her bed had been hiding the third-grade permanent marker accident all these years. The nail polish stain, bright purple on the white carpet where her dresser used to be. That was from when she and Shay Shay were getting ready for their seventh-grade Halloween dance. Jordyn had been dressed as a witch, and with purple glitter all over her face, she wanted her long, press-on nails purple also.

Jordyn wiped away her tears, thinking about the only room she'd known her entire life. Now, it was unfamiliar and bare. And no longer hers.

"Jordyn!" Zara called from downstairs. "Sweetie, we're ready to leave!"

Jordyn sniffled once, stopping in the doorway of her bedroom for one last look, then walked out. Walked away from her childhood, her life, and her memories.

Jordyn stared out the window of the plan as it touched down at the Pittsburgh International Airport. Rain was falling from grey, cloudy skies, and every so often, a thunderclap and a streak of lightning across the dark sky over the tree line surrounding the airport. Jordyn sighed and pulled her iPod buds out of her ears.

What an nice "Welcome to Pennsylvania."

"It's ugly here," Jordyn mumbled as she watched the scene. "Please tell me the sun does shine."

"It does, Jordyn," Zara sighed, unhooking her seatbelt at the stewardess's direction over the intercom. "Come on." She looked at the seat behind her, where both Logan and Ty were fast asleep. "Boys, wake up. We're here."

Logan opened his eyes and stretched. "About time." He glanced out the plan window and his eyes widened. "Rain? It rains here?"

"Apparently it rains a lot, here," Jordyn mumbled.

"Come on, you two," Zara said, looking over her shoulder. Ty was walking in front of his mother, in line to file off the plan. Jordyn and Logan were the only two lingering. They both grabbed their carry-ons, and followed their mother and brother off the plan.

In the crowded terminal, Jordyn easily spotted her father. Jack smiled when he saw his family. After all, it had been over a week since he'd laid eyes on the four of them.

"Hey!" he said, kissing first his wife, then taking turns hugging his children. "Glad you landed safely. How was the flight?"

"It was nice, honey," Zara said, letting Jack put his arm around her.

"It was boring," Logan said. Ty chuckled, in the good mood he'd been in since they'd left California, and ruffled his little brother's hair. Jordyn lingered behind her family as she followed them out of the terminal into the rainy afternoon where he had their brand new SUV waiting to take them to their new home.

Chapter 6

Chapter Six

Rural Pennsylvania was exactly what Jordyn imagined it would look like. There were trees, a *lot* of them, and there were a lot of rolling green fields, but not a lot of anything else. Oh except for cows. There were a *lot* of cows in the fields they passed.

"Does everyone around here live on a farm?" Jordyn grumbled, watching the fourth farm house and field of cows pass them by since they'd left Pittsburgh.

"We're in the country, Jordyn," Jack said. "There are a lot of farm houses in the country."

"They have deer in the country," Logan commented as they passed a Deer Crossing sign.

"I bet they have deer *hunters*, too," Jordyn said. Suddenly, she imagined a hunter creeping around her house in his camouflage clothes and his orange hat, his big gun. And he would mistake Jordyn for a deer and Boom! She's dead before her life even started.

"Cedarwood seems dangerous," Jordyn said suddenly.

"Cedarwood is a beautiful town, Jordyn," said Zara informed her daughter. "And it's not dangerous."

"The house is right on a lake," Jack added. "It actually sits on a cliff overlooking the water."

Jordyn knew this. She'd been here to visit her grandfather when she was nine, but didn't remember it so well. She'd seen pictures though. She couldn't argue that the house was beautiful. It was huge, and it was old. But it wasn't her home, it was her father's. The beach house in Moon Bay Beach was her home.

"We're here," Jack said, beaming, looking at his wife when they passed the Welcome to Cedarwood sign. The sign boasted it's 6,987 population and was emblazoned with "*Home of the Cougars."*

"The Cougars?" Jordyn asked.

"Mascot for Cedarwood High School," Jack explained. "Which reminds me. Ty, I talked to the football coach at Cedarwood while signing you guys up for school. You missed workouts, but tryouts start next week. Bright and early Monday morning. And they need a receiver."

"Cool," Ty said, perking up and seeming interested.

While Jack and Ty talked football, Jordyn focused out the window. So far, since they'd passed the welcome sign, she still hadn't seen anything but trees, and fields, old barns, a few farm houses, and cows.

But then, so suddenly, the trees were gone, and they were on a wide, tree-lined streets of what Jordyn knew instantly was the main drag of Cedarwood. They passed first, a church-the biggest she'd ever seen-and after that a bakery, a library, a sporting goods store, and a post office. There were a few cars coasting up and down the wide street, windshield wipers going full speed, and several on either side in front of the long line of various, stuck-together store-fronts.

Cute, Jordyn thought, but she wasn't impressed. She glanced down the small side streets, nothing impressive there, either.

"No malls?" Jordyn asked without surprise. She noticed there was a store front, stuck between a bakerycalled Miss Bee's Buns, and a bait and tackle store,with a sign that said "Thee Olde Cedarwood Shoppe" with a few outfits in the display window. By the time they were at the very end of the street, slowing at a stop sign, Jordyn realized there was no sign of a shopping center for *this* century anywhere.

"There's an outlet mall in Woodbury," Jack said, pointing to a sign directly in front of them, stating ""Lake Cedar recreational sites." to the right, and to the left, "Woodbury, 15 miles." He made a right onto what Jordyn learned was Lakeside Road, and after passing a series of small restaurants-Thank God there was at least a McDonald's here-and a small shopping corner complete with a Wal-Mart and Winn-Dixie, they were back in the country again, with nothing but trees. Every so often, Jordyn spotted narrow, sidestreets with signs that indicated different beaches and recreation sites. Further on, Jack rounded a curve to the left, and suddenly, they were face-to-face with a huge lake.

"There's Lake Cedar," Zara said with a smile as the road began to run parallel to the water, alongside the lake shore, and several marinas. The shoreline was sea level for the most part, but up ahead, Jordyn could see it rising up to a rocky cliff, atop it, another thick line of trees.

"How much further?" Logan asked, finally looking up from his PSP.

"Nearly there," Jack said, flicking on his left signal light. "This is our road."

Jordyn peaked at the road sign of the highway they were about to turn on. *Cliff Road.* How original, Jordyn thought, seeing that the road took a sharp upward direction as it snaked through the trees, and what looked like, the top of the big cliff she'd seen from Lakeside Road, which also had been quite original. She knew they were at the top when she saw the sign that said "Lookout Point Recreational Area, two miles," pointing down a long, gravel road that disappeared into the thick trees.

Looked like a road leading to a serial killer's hideout to Jordyn.

"Kids, this is where I grew up," Jack sighed nostalgically. "Down through there is Lookout Point. Just a really nice view of the lake down there. I don't know about now, but it was a pretty popular hangout spot back in my days. Where kids used to go after football and basketball games to go parking."

"Parking?" Jordyn asked, amused.

Ty chuckled and nudged his sister. "Olden days, Jordyn. That's what they called making out."

"Gross!" Logan said.

"Not olden days," Jack said. "1987. *Good* old days. Ah, here we are."

Jordyn stretched, trying to get a good look. But besides the mailbox, there was no indication of a house, until Jack turned onto a dirt road, much like the one that lead to Lookout Point, that snaked through the trees.

"You can see all of Cedarwood from the top of the cliff," Jack said proudly. "Right from our back yard."

So Cedarwood *was* that small.

"It seems very isolated up here," Jordyn said.

"It is," Zara assured. "It's quiet, and it's gorgeous up here."

"No neighbors?" Logan asked glumly.

"No neighbors," Jack confirmed. "At least not for Â½ a mile down the road."

Jordyn sighed and pressed her forehead against the glass of the back window. Her only neighbors were trees. Back in Moon Bay Beach, there were tons of neighbors. Always someone to hang out with, walking distance of everything needed, the beach in the back yard. Judging how far up on the cliff they were, Jordyn's new backyard, being on a cliff, was going to be dangerous. She could see herself falling now, tumbling to the rocky shore below.

"Alright, this is it," Jack said, slowing down to turn left onto a long, winding driveway though the woods.

"How far?" Logan asked in surprise as they went further than even Jordyn expected through the woods without seeing anything but trees. "Are we living in the forest?"

"Yeah," Jordyn said. "Where's the house?"

How'd the moving vans get down in here, she thought with astonishment. But that thought was cut short as the house finally came into view. Surrounded by the trees of the forest, the house, with its towering three stories sat in an opening on a lush green lawn, spotted with its own trees. Jordyn had seen it before, but barely remembered it. But it was beautiful. Her memory of the place her father had grown up hadn't done it justice. Not at all.

"Whoa," said Logan, who hadn't seen the house at all before. "It's *huge*!"

Zara turned around a smiled. "There's also a basement and an attic. Plenty of room for an exercise room, maybe some extra lounging space." She looked at Jordyn. "Maybe a dance studio?"

"Wonderful," Jordyn grumbled.

"And that reminds me, honey. Your audition for the Cedarwood Dance School is Monday morning. Bright and early. Maybe after dinner we can go over some steps, make sure you're ready?"

She wasn't. And she was sure her pirouettes, butterfly jumps, or scissor leaps had nothing to do with it. She also had a feeling she wouldn't need any of that to place into the advanced class *here*.

"Mom, can we maybe go over that stuff tomorrow?" Jordyn asked. "I want to kind of get used to the house and all tonight."

Zara opened her mouth to say something, but Jack put his hand on his wife's arm, shaking his head in what he thought was a subtle manner, so she just forced a smile and nodded.

When the SUV was parked, they all got out. Ty's Mustang was already in the yard, having been hauled by the moving vans.

The family didn't waste much time outside, since it was still pouring rain, so they hurried in through the front door. And surprisingly, Jordyn liked what she saw.

The living room was big and open, and a staircase lead up to a loft above. Their furniture was already in place, but there were still plastic slip covers over the couch, love seat, and recliner. The walls were solid white, but bare, since their many paintings and various decorations were probably packed away in the piles of cardboard boxes strewn over the floor.

"Well, what do you think?" came Jack's voice as he walked up behind his daughter, putting his hands on her shoulders. She couldn't lie. It wasn't home, but it was a beautiful house. She nodded, and walked over to the fireplace on the right wall, surrounded by brick, and topped off by a mantelpiece.

"This is beautiful," she admitted, touching the old brick.

"And it's a real fireplace, too," Jack said. "And one that's really gonna be used."

"I heard it gets cold here in the winter," Logan said, also looking around the house.

"Oh, it does," Zara said, nodding. "But it's not unbearable. Either way, we're gonna finally see some real snow."

Living a good portion of her early life in Sweden, Zara knew all about snow. Plus she'd lived here in Cedarwood for the year after college with Jack before Ty was born and they headed to California. Jordyn already knew her mother was excited to see the snow here this winter.

"We're also right in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains," Jack said. "I think you three will love to snowboard."

Jordyn just shrugged and further investigated every nook and cranny throughout the big living room. There was a door under the stairs, and upon opening it, Jordyn saw that it was only a closet. In the nook by the foot of the stairs to the left of the front door, was a swinging white wooden door. Creeping over and pushing it over, Jordyn saw another room, with a beautiful chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

"That'll be the dining room," Zara pointed out when she saw her daughter looking in there. "Which means soon we'll make a trip to Pittsburgh to do some furniture shopping."

"We have plenty of furniture," Jordyn said. "Why would we need more?"

"We have a bigger house with more rooms," Jack said. "We didn't have a dining room, or a den in our old house."

"Where's my bed?" Jordyn asked.

"Put together in your room," Jack replied with a smile. "Why don't you go check it out? Top of the stairs, first door on the left."

Upstairs, Jordyn quickly realized the only doors up there were on the left. To the right was the banister, overlooking the living room she'd been in before.

"First door," Jordyn said to herself, eyeing the plain, white door that would lead to her brand new bedroom. Her brand new Jordyn-space. She took a deep breath, and hoping to God she wouldn't hate her new room, she reached forward and turned the doorknob.

Chapter 7

Chapter Seven

Jordyn's room was huge. Not just big, it was *huge*. Then again, she thought as she dropped down on the familiar mattress of her own bed, everything in this house was huge. She looked around, taking in the sight. Like downstairs, her new walls were also white. That was going to have to go. Lack of creativity was a little depressing. Jordyn wasn't a "loud" color person, but back home, her walls were a subtle, purple, her carpet soft white. Here, there was no carpet, she realized, looking down at her Toms as they rested on hardwood floor.

There were two big-no, *huge*-bay windows, side by side, each with a window bench, looking over the tree-covered backyard and the cliff a few feet further away. She got up and walked over, sitting at one of the windows. Well, she liked the view, anyway. It wasn't the beach, but it was very picturesque. She imagined the scene belonged in one of thoselandscaping magazines with atitle "Home in the Woods," or something like that.

So, she took a picture, titled it that, and sent the picture to Shay in a text.

Jordyn chewed on her bottom lip, turning her back to the portrait scene her backyard made, and studied her new room a little more. Besides the one leading into the hallway, there were three other doors on her left wall. Two side by side and fairly narrowed. Upon exploration, she learned that those opened to a double-door, spacious closet. The other door-get this-a bathroom!

"No way," Jordyn said with a smile as she gazed into the bathroom. It was fairly small,but she didn't care. She had her own, personal space, anddidn't have to sharewith Logan anymore. No more SpongeBob boxers laying around, no more finding her shampoo upside down on the floor, leaking. She had her own personal bathroom and that was a big step.

She heard her bedroom door creak open, and turned to find her mother there, smiling, holding a cardboard box in her arms. "So, what do you think?"

Jordyn's first instinct was to grin, show her excitement by jumping up and down like a ten-year-old and scream "I love it!" But she knew better. She was still angry about the move to begin with, so she placed a nonchalant look on her face and nodded, staying very noncommittal. "It's alright."

"How about this view?" Zara asked, putting the box down and looking at the two bay windows. "I knew you'd love this room. We asked you to leave your ocean-view room, so we did the best and got you a lake-view. I know it's not the same, but you have to admit. This is beautiful."

"Yeah, I guess it is," Jordyn said, finally smiling.

"Good," Zara replied. "I guess that's a step, huh."

Jordyn shrugged. "Yeah. I guess so." Just then her cell phone vibrated on her bed, and both she and Zara glanced at it. Shay was texting back. Jordyn decided she would get it later.

"We have a whole week until school starts," Zara continued with a smile. "So we're gonna decorate your room exactly how you want it."

Jordyn thought about it. Putting her own into the room made it feel permanent. Up until now, somehow she'd made this all feel temporary, as if in a month or so she'd be in California again. But that was silly. Cedarwood, this house.*This* was her home now, so she might as well get used to it.

"Sounds good," she said, grabbing her cell phone. "I guess I'll just go ahead and start unpacking. Get it over with."

"Ok, great, I'll leave you alone. We're having dinner at 8:00, OK?"

When Zara was gone, Jordyn checked the message Shay had sent.

Nice view. Your new backyard?

Yeah. I traded an ocean-view for a lake -_- Can't say I'm excited. But it's pretty, right?

Totally. But I miss you already L

Same here. L

You come back ASAP. I got to go. Skype later?

Definitely! See you!

Bye!

Jordyn sighed, looking at her phone, then she tossed it on her bed and got to work unpacked and rearranging everything to exactly where she wanted it.

Even after an hour of unpacking, she couldn't get rid of the musty, unlived-in smell of the previously very empty house. It smelled old, almost, and it was the main thing keeping it from feeling like hers. She still hadn't unpacked her cosmetics bag, yet, so she went into that and pulled out a bottle of her favorite body spray. Jordyn didn't do perfume, but she loved a clean, fresh body spray.

And now, her new room was about to, too. Spinning in several small circles around the room, she sprayed probably a fourth of the bottle, freshening up the place at least until she could get into town and buy some Febreeze.

She carried the cosmetics bag into her new bathroom, and noticed how bare it was. She made a note of all the things she would have to get to decorate a bathroom, since she'd never had her own before. She couldn't help but feel a little excited at the thought. She'd always said when she moved out the bathroom was the one thing she wanted to do the most. She looked around, picturing polka dots. Yes. Something with polka dots. Jordyn loved polka dots.

She flipped the light on, and when she saw what was waiting for her on the bathroom sink, and screamed. Like, really, screamed. She couldn't help it.

"Jordyn?"

Jordyn was backing out of the room when she backed right into Ty, who was coming to her rescue. She lifted one shaky finger, and pointed at it. "Kill it!"

Ty looked to see what *it* was, and let out a long sigh and groan. An *annoyed* sigh and groan.

"Jordyn," he said. "You screamed over this?"

"This?! Tyler it's a spider! A giant spider!"

"It's not giant, it's average," Ty said.

"I don't care if it's microscopic. It's a spider! Kill it!"

Just then, their mother appeared. "What happened in here?"

Ty slammed his flip flop onto the bathroom counter, smashing the spider. "*This* happened?"

Zara put a hand on her chest and let out a sigh of relief. "Jordyn, I thought you had broken a bone or something."

"Me, too," Ty chuckled.

Jordyn turned to face her mother and brother. "Next spider I see I'm catching a plane back to California. I'll live with Shay. She'll understand."

Ty chuckled. "Well, get that plane ticket ready. We live in the country now. You're gonna see a lot more than spiders."

And with that, he was gone.

"Great, now I'm gonna wonder what kind of creatures I'll see coming out of my closet," Jordyn declared.

Zara grabbed a paper towel and wiped the dead spider off the counter, making Jordyn cringe. "You all done with unpacking, dear? We're eating in a few minutes."

"I'm done. And please tell me there's a Bed, Bath and Beyond around here somewhere."

Zara looked at her daughter's bare bathroom. "There's a Wal-Mart in town, and there's a Lowe's Home Improvement and a Target in Woodbury. That'll work for decorating your bathroom and bedroom. Have you thought about what color you want your walls?"

No, she hadn't. "We're painting the walls?"

"We're painting all the walls. In the whole house."

This was good news. It would take some work, though. It wasn't like the house was in bad shape. It wasn't. Besides that not-lived-in must Jordyn was still faintly aware of, it was really nice and have been kept up really well by the caretaker. But the plain white walls reminded Jordyn a little bit of an institution and she was ready for something that would make this house their own.

"Think about what you want to do," Zara said. "We're going shopping Monday. Finish this up and come on down for dinner."

The Hamiltons' furniture was pretty much in place already, thanks to the movers, and most everything was already put in its place, thanks to Jack being here all week, but Zara had decorating of her own to do, and the house still had a bunch of little stuff laying around, still needing to be cleaned up, even at 8:00. So it made sense that Zara wasn't cooking dinner. Instead, they'd ordered pizza.

Thank God this place has a Pizza Hut, Jordyn thought, digging into the first slice.

After dinner, Jordyn took a quick shower, then retired to her room. She skyped with Shay for a bit, then decided to hook up her flat screen and DVD player. Adjusting to the East Coast time wouldn't be easy. Here, it was nearing 10:00, but she was still on California time, so she would need to find herself something to do to keep her busy until she fell asleep.

By midnight, she'd slipped into bed, determined to try and make herself sleep.

Under the familiarity of her own sheets on her own mattress, she almost felt at home. And when she closed her eyes, she pretended she was at home. She could almost hear the sounds of the waves crashing on the shore.

But all she could hear were crickets. And frogs. Or, at least that was what her dad had said those annoying sounds were when he suggested she open her window and let some fresh air in. She'd had no objections, since she was still eager to get the smell of must out. But she couldn't shake the feeling of a wild animal, like a rabid raccoon or a deer jumping through her window and killing her in the middle of the night.

Luckily she was tired, though, and before she knew it she'd drifted off to sleep for the first time in her new house, with thoughts of the beach, Shay, and even Victoria Joy on her mind. Her new life had officially started.

Chapter 8

Chapter Eight

Friday, August 10, 2012

Jordyn's first weekend in Cedarwood had been dark, rainy, and uneventful. Mostly all Jordyn had done was help her parents finish up the last little bit of decorating they had to do. On Saturday she, Logan, and Zara had gone shopping to buy paint, and Jordyn's much anticipated bathroom stuff. She'd been ecstatic to find a shower curtain with matching window curtains decorated with polka dots. Zara had even bought her a matching set of long pillows for Jordyn's window-benches.

After a round of Febreeze and candles all over the house, the musty *old* smell was nowhere to be found, although, some rooms still smelled of paint since painting and redecorating were all her parents had done this week.

On Monday, after Jordyn's tour and audition of the Cedarwood Dance School-which, by the way had not been up to Zara's standards as Jordyn had a feeling it wouldn't be-they had gone grocery shopping, filling their fridge to the brim with necessities.

By Friday, Jordyn was sure they were officially moved in. And perfect timing, too. It was a beautiful day, and the very first sign of sunlight Jordyn had seenin the week sincethey'd arrived. For a little while, she was certainthe drizzling rainand grey skies were a permanent fixture in Cedarwood.

But today, she'd woken up to sunlight streaming through her window and quite possibly the bluest blue sky she had ever seen. Finally, she didn't have the feeling of being in Forks, Washington, waiting for either a vampire to sneak through her window sparkling under the moonlight she still hadn't seen much of.

She'd told this theory to Shay on the phone yesterday, the fourth day of rain in Cedarwood since they'd been there. Shay had simply replied, "Jordyn, don't be silly. Vampires have to be invited to come inside. They can't just waltz right in."

After that, they'd gotten into a serious conversation about Edward Cullen, and why he shouldn't be sparkling to begin with-this was an age-old debate they'd had. Jordyn, a realist, knew vampires didn't sparkle. Shay, a die-hard Twilight fan, didn't care if Edward wore a pink tutu; she'd still be obsessed.

When she finally came downstairs and found her mother up and dressed already messing around on her laptop, she'd learned that Ty was at his last day of football tryouts-though, from what her father had said, he wouldn't be worrying about getting cut-Logan had gone down to that skate park by the lake, and Jack was working.

"You should take the car and explore town a little bit, Jordyn," Zara had suggested. "You have two days until school starts and you've been cooped up in this house since we got here except on Saturday and Monday."

"Well that's because I'm not a duck," Jordyn replied. "I was beginning to think it would never stop raining here."

"Well the sun's out now. Get out of here. You can take the Mercedes."

Oh yeah. On Wednesday her mother and father had gone into Pittsburgh, and bought a Mercedes. A *Mercedes.* Yes. The Hamiltons would definitely fit in here in small town Pennsylvania driving around in a brand new, shiny black Mercedes.

"I think I'll run to town, instead," Jordyn said. Zara looked at her like she'd just spoken Arabic.

"Jordyn," Zara said. "It's five miles to town and five back."

"I've run that far before," Jordyn said. Ten miles was quite a stretch, even for her, but if she had to slow to a walk on the way back, she would be fine.

"Ok, well, two of the five miles back is up a hill. Fair warning."

Jordyn shrugged. "No big deal. It's not like I have something better to do today."

And she didn't. Just because it was sunny, didn't mean she had friends here today any more than she had the last four days when it was raining. She had humored her mother a few times this week by actually going down to the basement-where there was no dance studio, yet-to practice what Zara requested her to. Zara had been pretty displeased with the Cedarwood Dance School, even though Jordyn had placed into "advanced." To Jordyn's surprise, Zara had expected something more prestigious-They walked and danced in the town Christmas parade, for crying out loud. So based on this, Zara had deemed it necessary to work Jordyn how she saw fit at home.

"How on earth do they get away with training six hours a week," Zara had complained Monday after signing Jordyn up. Jordyn wasn't complaining one bit, though. More opportunity for her to have an attempt at a real life here.

At least now she wouldn't have to tell her mother she wanted to quit dance. Six hours a week? That was perfect.

Jordyn ran back upstairs to her room, and quickly changed into a pair of black mesh shorts, and a tight Nike t-shirt and sneakers, then stuck her iPod ear buds in her ears and was ready to go.

Out in her front yard, Jordyn took a couple of minutes to stretch. She knew her muscles would hurt in the morning. She hadn't done anything strenuous except walk up and down the steep steps of her house since she'd been in town. All the better reason to get back to work.

Jordyn made the first five miles easier than she'd expected, dodging water puddles along the roads that lead into town. Everything here seemed so rural, even the strip mall that made up the supermarket, Wal-Mart, and the few fast food places on Lake Road. But once she was in the Cedarwood City Limits-odd description, "city limits," was to Jordyn, considering it was at best a village-she saw the sidewalks and stuck-together storefronts she'd seen when they'd come down Cedar Street for the first time the week before.

Once on the sidewalk, Jordyn slowed to walk, wanting to explore and see what the place had to offer. She passed a Sporting Goods shop, called *Touchdown*. In its big window was a banner with "Good Luck Cougars!" hand-painted in orange and brown. There was an antiques shop called *Back in Time*, and a bank, among others. All of them had banners wishing the Cougars good luck. People stared as she passed, a few of them waving, others only smiling. A couple even said "Good morning." But none of them were rude.

Jordyn felt like she was in a story book. How clichÃ© could a small town be? Wide, tree-lined streets, overly friendly locals. It was right out of a movie. Apparently the sunshine in this place was so rare it made people

crazy.

Jordyn's nose was suddenly filled with the fragrance of coffee. Strong coffee. Inching further down the sidewalk, passed a lawyer, doctor, and vet's office, she was in front of the open door of a lovely little coffee shop, called *Ye Olde Coffee Shoppe.*

Cute, she thought. She glanced across the street, where she saw a sign that intrigued her. *Maggie's Used Books.* The storefront had a bright yellow awning, and looked very welcoming, so Jordyn crossed and, upon seeing it free of customers, entered.

It smelled like a library, and there were aisles, with books on every one, and on every wall. Behind the counter, sat a girl, who looked to be about Jordyn's age. She looked bored as she flipped through a magazine and popped on gum.

"Hi!" the girl said, putting on a smile when she saw Jordyn. "Welcome to Maggie's Used Books! I'm Alice. Let me know if you need anything."

"Uh, thanks," Jordyn said, smiling back. "I'm just looking, though."

Jordyn browsed the selection, surprised at everything the small store had to offer. There were a lot of familiar titles, Jordyn saw, and seemingly in good condition. She picked up what looked to be a good romance novel for the heck of it and took it to the counter, where the girl called Alice was still flipping through her magazine.

She put the magazine to the side when Jordyn stepped up to pay for her book.

"$2.50," Alice said with an overly friendly smile, and Jordyn could easily tell it was forced.

Jordyn gave her a five, and studied the girl while she counted her change. Alice had a face full of freckles with wild, but still pretty, golden-brown curls pulled up into a high, messy ponytail, and she wore a black t-shirt that said Cedarwood Cougars on the front.

"Hey, so I don't mean to be nosy," she said suddenly as she handed Jordyn her change. "But are the new girl? The one living in the old Hamilton Place up on the cliff?"

Jordyn raised her eyebrows. People knew her around here already? That was a little creepy.

"Oh, I'm not a stalker!" the girl, Alice, said quickly, apparently seeing the confused look on Jordyn's face. "Sorry! I'm really not trying to be nosy or anything, but Cedarwood's a small town, you know? News in small towns travel fast. And the Hamilton place is pretty famous."

"Why?" Jordyn asked in surprise making a face. Her house, her grandfather's old house, was famous in Cedarwood? It was big, yes, and old, God yes, but famous?

"It's featured in a lot of Pennsylvania magazines," Alice said with a shrug. "It's a beautiful house. But to be honest, most kids around here thinks it's haunted."

"Haunted? Why?"

"It's nothing personal at all. It's just old. But good old. I don't think it's haunted, I think it's a classic, and I've always wanted to tour it."

Jordyn just smiled. People around here sure were talkative. "I'm Jordyn Hamilton. Nice to meet you."

Alice beamed. "Alice Doherty. Great to meet you, too." She held out a pack of gum. "Want a piece?"

"Sure," Jordyn said, taking it. "Thanks." Was she making a friend already? She hoped so. Alice seemed nice.

"So, where are you from? If you don't mind my asking."

"I assumed you would already know that, you know, being a small town, and all," Jordyn teased.

Alice just smiled. "I don't know everything."

"I'm from San Diego," Jordyn said. There was no need to tell anyone she was from Moon Bay Beach. No one would know where she was talking about if she did. Besides. Alice seemed interested enough in San Diego. Her hazel eyes went wide.

"Cool! California? You're lucky."

"Yeah," Jordyn mumbled. "Real lucky."

Lucky would be if Jordyn was still in California.

"What kind of stuff did you do there?" Alice continued.

"Everything," Jordyn sighed. "I miss it already. What do you do here?"

"Well, there's football games, parties, we go to the mall. Mostly just hang out. We ride around a lot. That's fun."

"And expensive."

She chuckled and shrugged. "I guess. But there isn't too much else to do. Well, except go to the lake and Pittsburgh. Have you been?"

"To the lake?"

"To Pittsburgh."

Jordyn shook her head. "Not yet."

"Well, don't worry. This is no San Diego, but Cedarwood's a pretty cool place. I've lived here my whole life and I don't have a problem with it. You play sports? Cedarwood High rules in everything."

Jordyn shook her head. "Not really. I surfed back home and danced, but that's it."

"You danced? Like, ballet?"

"A little bit of ballet when I was younger, but mostly contemporary and lyrical, some jazz. I was on a competition team at my dance company and we went all over the place competing."

"Sounds fun. Are you good?"

"Miss Victoria Joy thought so. My teacher. She owned the company. We won a lot, so I guess so."

"It's OK, you don't have to be modest," Alice chuckled. "If you were good, you're allowed to brag."

Jordyn chuckled. She liked this Alice girl already. "So, do you go to Cedarwood High?"

Alice smiled. "Yep. Junior as of Monday. What about you?"

"Same," Jordyn said with a smile as she pulled her bag off the counter. "Well, I better get back home. It's a five-mile run back. But it was nice meeting you. Maybe I'll see you on Monday."

Alice chuckled. "It's a small school. You probably will."

Jordyn smiled, then headed out the door, prepared to make that five-mile run back. It was going to be harder going up than it was coming down, but she didn't care. She had sort of made a friend. Finally. The sun was shining, and things were finally looking up for her.

Chapter 9

Chapter Nine

By the time she got home, Jordyn was sweaty and sore, but she felt good. Even better knowing she had at least one friendly face to look for at Cedarwood High Monday morning. She couldn't believe how friendly Alice was, so open and welcoming to the new girl whom she didn't know. She hoped she'd run into her Monday, though. Originally, she'd thought making friends in a town full of people who'd probably known each other their whole lives was going to be hard. She figured she wouldn't be welcome into their already tight-knit society. But after the friendliness of the town people today, she wasn't dreading Monday so much anymore.

Jordyn had slowed to a walk by the time she'd made it to her driveway, the gravel path so long it took her nearly ten minutes to walk to her house through the trees. There, she was surprised she didn't see her brother's Mustang. Weird. Tryouts ended at noon, and he had been home by quarter after or 12:30 every day this week. Now it was nearly 1:00, and he wasn't there. But there was a shiny new Dodge Charger with a siren on top and *Cedarwood Police* splashed across the side. Her dad was home.

Inside, Jordyn could hear her parents in the kitchen, talking. She decided she would peak in, let them know she was home, then she planned to disappear up to her room and Skype with Shay for a little while.

When she walked into the kitchen, she found her mother washing her hands and her father leaning against the counter with his arms folded over his broad chest. They were discussing dinner, it seemed, because she heard the words "--have really good steak."

"Hey, guys," she said. "I'm home."

"Did you have fun?" Zara asked with a smile.

"It was just a run, mom," Jordyn chuckled, walking over kissing her father's cheek. "Hey, daddy."

"Afternoon, baby girl," he replied with a smile. "How did you like Cedarwood."

"Up close, I guess it's alright," she said, grabbing an apple from the fruit bowl and taking a bite. "Where's Ty and Logan?"

"Ty went out with some guys from the football team after final cuts," Zara explained. "And Logan has a friend he met at the skate park. He's hanging out at his house tonight."

"Wow, they're adjusting, huh," Jordyn said. She just realized she hadn't seen a lot of her brothers this week. Logan had quickly fit with the skateboard kids, and now Ty was hanging out with his football friends. Jordyn was really falling behind, she realized. She thought her brothers were as bummed about the move as she was, but apparently she was wrong. They weren't even home because they already had friends. One week in and they had friends. Jordyn knew the name of the really nice girl at the bookstore and was spending all her time indoors.

"School starts in two days," Jack said with a smile. "You'll make friends quick."

"Actually I met someone today," Jordyn said. "This girl named Alice works in the book store downtown. She says she's a junior at Cedarwood."

Zara looked excited. "Aw, that's wonderful, honey! And there'll be even more on Monday. Just you wait. And you still have dance Monday night to look forward to."

Jordyn cringed. "Yeah." She took another bite of her apple. "I'm gonna go upstairs and see if Shay's online."

She headed upstairs to her new room-which now had sky blue walls with white trim so it felt like her own-and pulled out her laptop. She texted Shay, *"Skype?"* and waited for a response while she booted her computer up. It came quickly. *"Yes, please!"*

Jordyn chuckled, and pulled up her Skype. She couldn't wait to tell Shay all about Cedarwood. But mostly, she wanted to see her best friend's face, something familiar. Something to remind her that her previous life actually happened.

When her screen filled with Shay's smiling face. "My love!"

Jordyn grinned back. "Shay Shay! I miss you!"

"I miss you, too, girl. What are you up to?"

Jordyn just shrugged. "Not much. Just went for a run. Five miles to town and back."

Shay's jaw dropped. "Ten miles? Wow. You *are* bored out there. You make any friends yet? Any country "folks" replace me?"

Jordyn chuckled and shook her head. "Nope. Well, I talked to one girl today. But for like five minutes. I mean, school doesn't start until Monday, so we'll see what happens then. And shut up! You can't be replaced."

Shay gave a smug grin. "Of course I can't. There's only one Shay Shay."

Jordyn laughed. "I agree."

"So you see any boys, yet?"

"No. I've only left my house once besides shopping with my mom. And that was to run this morning."

"Unsociable, much?"

"There's nothing to do here. There's a Wal-Mart, but it's not even a Super Wal-Mart. I didn't think those things still even existed."

Shay laughed. "Oh, wow. Are you joking? No malls?"

"In Pittsburgh. But that's obviously not walking distance. There's a Target in Woodbury That's just slightly closer than Pittsburgh."

"Wow," Shay laughed. "Seen any cows, yet?"

"Yes. Plenty. Oh, and the football team here is like, crazy worshipped."

"Is Ty on the team?"

"Yep. You know it. He's already hanging out with guys on the team. And Logan's made friends at the skate park. Neither of them are home, right now."

"Wow, lucky you."

Jordyn twirled a loose strand of hair that had escaped from her messy bun around her finger. "Yeah, I guess. If you consider sitting at home while your brothers are living it up in hillbilly land, yeah, I'm lucky, then."

"What, you're looking forward to tractor pulls and cow tipping?"

"It's not that bad, here." Jordyn saw the look of surprise on Shay's face. She was surprised, too, that she'd said it. But it was true. It wasn't so bad here. Nothing too awful had been happening. She had this awesome new room, and she wasn't even in school, yet, but she already knew someone.

"You're high, right?" Shay asked. "You let peer pressure get to you? Jordyn, did someone get you hooked on crack?"

Jordyn laughed. "Hell no. It's not Moon Bay Beach, but it's alright."

"You've been smelling the fertilizer too much there, Jor," said Shay in a sing-song voice. "Look, I gotta go. Me and my mom are gonna do a little back to school shopping. Text me later?"

"Sure," Jordyn said. "Talk to you later."

"And hey! Stop sniffing the fertilizer."

Jordyn just smiled, waved, then shut her Skype off. She closed her laptop just as she heard her brother's Mustang. She peaked out the window, wondering if any of his new friends were with him. No such luck. But her eyes widened and her jaw dropped when she saw there was something else new with him.

"Oh my gosh," she whispered before turning around and bolting out of her room. She hadn't made it halfway down the stairs before she heard her mother.

"Tyler Hamilton, what on *earth* have you done to your hair?"

Jordyn walked into the kitchen, and saw her father smirking as he sipped on his coffee. Zara's face supported the shocking exclamation she'd just made. Jordyn was shocked herself at what her brother had done.

Ty was smiling as he took a long drink from his water bottle. He reached up and rubbed his new buzz-cut. Last time Jordyn saw her brother, his hair was almost at his shoulders, surfer-style shaggy.

"You like it?" he asked.

"I like it," Zara managed. "It's just, well, different."

"What possessed you to cut your hair?" Jordyn asked in astonishment.

"Made the football team," Ty explained. "Coach said it was too long, needed it above my ears."

"Well, that's *way* above your ears," Jordyn said. She touched her brother's head. "There isn't a lot left at all." She exaggerated a gasp, putting her hand over her mouth. "Oh my gosh, Ty, they sucked the California right

out of you. This place is like the Stepford Wives or something."

"Who did this?" Zara asked.

"It's a buzz cut, mom," Ty chuckled, rubbing it again. "It's not rocket science. One of the guys from the team did it."

"That's cute how you and your new friends give each other make overs," Jordyn teased. "Do you have pillow fights, too?"

Ty cleared his throat loudly, and narrowed his eyes at his sister. "What'd you do today?"

"I went for a run," Jordyn replied.

"That's all?"

"To town and back."

Ty's eyes widened. "Whoa."

"Yeah, that hill coming up Cliff Road's a beast."

"Who were you hanging out with today, Ty," Zara asked her son.

"Just some guys from the team. We went to Mickey's."

"Mickey's?" Jordyn asked.

"Oh, Jordyn, the place is awesome," Ty said. "I've never tasted pizza like that before. They got this arcade in the basement, they got pool tables, a DJ on Friday and Saturdays. Well, it's like Blue Moon a little. You have to check it out."

"By myself?" Jordyn asked, her arms folded over her chest.

"You can go with me tomorrow," Ty said. "Hey, better yet, there's a party tonight. One of the guys on the team is having, like, an end-of-summer thing."

Jordyn had a feeling it wouldn't be long before she was tired of hearing "one of the guys on the team." She figured soon enough they'd learn names. It was weird to think Ty had gone from cool, California surfer kid with shaggy blond hair to Mr. Popular East Coastall of a sudden. Now he was 'one of the guys on the team' himself. He was hanging out with the football team, officially making him small-town royalty, and he hadn't even started school, yet.

"What party?" Zara asked.

"Honey, it's fine," Jack said. "We can trust him. He'll be fine. Won't you Ty?"

"Yeah, I mean, if this wasn't a good idea, I wouldn't invite Jordyn," Ty said, motioning to his sister.

Jordyn rolled her eyes. Of course big man Ty wouldn't put his baby sister in any danger she couldn't handle. He got that overprotectiveness from their father.

"That's OK," Jordyn said. "I'm not really in a party mood. I'm just gonna grab a shower and kind of chill out tonight."

"You sure, Jor?" Ty asked. "There's going to be a lot kids from school there. Give you a chance to meet some people before school starts on Monday."

Jordyn knew her brother had a point, but the way she saw it, she didn't want to go to a party with a bunch of people she didn't know, and she didn't want to tag along with Ty and his friends, either, looking like an annoying little sister. Because *that* was not the reputation she needed.

"I'm sure," she said.

"It's probably for the best," Zara said. "Ty you be home by midnight, OK? Jordyn, you and I can work on some combos tonight. You need to get yourself ready for Monday night."

Jordyn reluctantly nodded, then excused herself to go get her continuously detoured shower. Right. Because she wanted to spend her Friday night with more dancing.

Yep. Just great.

Chapter 10

Chapter Ten

Monday, August 13, 2012

Jordyn stood in front of her full-length mirror Monday morning, the very first day of school, examining her outfit. Jordyn was a surfer. She was a southern California surfer girl, and that was the only life she knew. She knew how the California rich girls dressed, but the Pennsylvania small-towners she wasn't sure about.

Jordyn decided in order to make her best first impression, she would keep it simple, yet classy, and go for a navy Abercrombie polo-she was certain polo shirts and Abercrombie were both popular in the northeast-and a pair of slightly ripped, Abercrombie jeans and her favorite pair of Toms.

She'd learned quickly that Pennsylvania was humid, and her normally, naturally wavy, beach-breeze-blown hair hadn't done exactly what she'd wanted it to this week, so she'd bought a straightener. She liked the new style it left her with. After she determined pearls were the best direction to go with neck-wear, she deemed herself ready-finally-for her first day at Cedarwood High, and hoped she looked enough like a small-town Pennsylvania girl, but not too much that her California roots didn't show.

"Oh, Jordyn, you look lovely, sweetie!" Zara had told her daughter with a big smile when she got downstairs.

Jordyn gave her best smile as she pulled her back pack strap over her right shoulder, hoping her nervousness wasn't showing on her face as much as it was making itself apparent in her belly. "Thanks," she said, simply. She took the $5 bill her mother had offered, and turned just as Ty and Logan entered the kitchen.

She stared at her older brother a moment. He was going to fit in great with his brand new, East Coast hair style, his dark, fitted jeans and a black hoodie to match his black Padres baseball cap.

"Ready, Jor," he asked with a smile as he hoisted his back pack over his shoulder.

"Mhm," she grumbled before heading toward the door.She got to the car first, leaning against the door of the Mustang while she waited for Ty to unlock the doors.

"I call front!" Logan shouted, running out of the house.

Jordyn rolled her eyes and put her hand on the handle. "I'm already here, dipstick."

"Don't call me that," Logan grumbled, pushing her as he climbed into the back.

"Alright, kiddies," Ty teased, sliding into the driver's seat. "Be nice."

"Don't call me a kiddie," Jordyn mumbled. "And I'm sixteen. I shouldn't be hitching rides to school from my big brother. I should have my own car."

Ty gave her a funny look as he made it to the end of their long driveway, making a right onto Cliff Road. "You've been sixteen for three months. Why are you mentioning it now?"

"Before, I was walking distance from everything I needed," she said with a shrug. "Now, I can barely make it to the end of my driveway."

"You ran all the way to town Friday," Logan said.

"It took me twenty minutes to get there," Jordyn said. "I'm not sureI'll make a good impression on my first day by showing up sweaty and smelling like a road."

Ty just chuckled as he drove.

They dropped Logan off at the Cedarwood Middle School, then Ty headed down the road a bit further to Cedarwood High.

Jordyn had seen the high school once. Monday, when she and her mother had gone shopping, Zara had driven her passed to show her. It wasn't so impressive. Just one big building, tall, boxy,three stories, and worn, red brick, with the rest of the buildings circling around one courtyard in the middle. Behind the school, Jordyn knew there was a gym and the athletic fields, but because it-like most of the town-was surrounded by trees, she couldn't really see anything.

Seniors got to park in their own lot, behind the school, right by the doors, Jordyn learned as Ty avoided the traffic of parents dropping their kids off and took the long road around the building. There, she saw another tall building, which she learned from Ty was the gymnasium, and behind that, the football stadium, which she'd, of course, figured out on her own.

"You have your schedule and your map, right?" Ty asked as he parked his Mustang beside ablack SUVin which two girls were leaning, both smoking cigarettes. They looked down at Ty as he parked, and when he peaked up and smiled with a wave, Jordyn knew he already knew them. They were gorgeous. Yeah, Ty really was in with the popular crowd already.

"Yes, Ty, I do," Jordyn said with an annoyed sigh. "You know, I'm not on my way to my first day of kindergarten."

"I don't care if this is your first day of college," Ty said. "I'm your big brother and I'm gonna look out for you. Whether you like it or not." And with that, he got out of the car and went straight for the two girls.

Jordyn just rolled her eyes and got out.

"Hey, Jordyn," Ty said. "This is Natalie and Lydia. Girls, this is my little sister, Jordyn."

"Not so much emphasis on the little, thank you very much," Jordyn grumbled.

"Hi, Jordyn," Natalie said with a big smile.

Jordyn replied with a wave, but Natalie was busy staring at Ty.

Make me puke, why don't you, she thought as she walked with the three of them into the building. There, they met up with a red-haired girl, whom they introduced to Jordyn as Meredith.

"Jordyn, do you need help finding your class?" Ty asked. "One of the girls can show you where to go."

"I'm fine, thanks," Jordyn said, looking at her map.

"You'll be OK," Natalie assure her, locking her arm with Ty's. "It's not a terribly big school. Just follow the map and you won't get lost. Promise."

"Thanks," Jordyn said flatly.

"Well, good luck, then, Jor," Ty said, nudging her before he disappeared into the crowd of students. So she stood, lost in the crowd, with her schedule in one hand, a map in the other.

She felt incredibly lame as she walked down the halls, reading a map. She couldn't have made herself look more obviously the new girl. Maybe she should have taken the offer to let Natalie show her to her class? But, no, that wouldn't work, either. It was obvious Natalie was in a hurry to get Ty away from the tagalong little sister, and she wouldn't want to play tour guide any more than Jordyn wanted her to.

Jordyn wondered if Natalie would become Ty's girlfriend soon. Probably. They were already walking with their arms locked.

Apparently, though, focusing on her map and her brother's potential new love life took away a little attention that should have been focused on watching where she was going. While looking at the map, she could see the navy and white tiled floor, and suddenly, a pair of new, running, Nike sneakers appeared, and she walked right into the body they were attached to.

"Whoa," a deep voice chuckled, grabbing her shoulders with two strong hands to steady her.

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed. She opened her mouth to say more, but when her eyes locked on his and she took in quite possibly the most gorgeous male face she'd ever laid eyes on, she forgot where she was, much less what she was going to say.

She felt silly for becoming distracted, shaking herself back to reality as the guy kindly bent over to pick up her spilled schedule and map that now lay on the floor as a result of their collision.

"You're new," he said. It wasn't a question.

Jordyn just smiled nervously. With all her time in dance and gymnastics, she didn't have time for boys back in California, except for the minimal flirting she had done with Ryan, and that had lead up to nothing but a kiss, which, on her part, had been awkward. So there was no way she was prepared to stand here and carry on casual conversation with this unrealistically cute guy.

So she pretended she wasn't Jordyn from California. Instead, she was new and improved Jordyn. Jordyn without all the dance lessons to get in the way of a possible new social life. And this was a step in the right direction. So she plastered on a smile.

"How obvious is it?" she asked, trying all her might to fight her nervousness. She hoped it didn't show.

He chuckled. "About as obvious as that map in your hand," he teased, pointing to the map. He looked at her schedule, which he still held in her hand. "You a senior, Jordyn Hamilton?"

She opened her mouth, about to make a fool out of herself and demand how this gorgeous stranger knew her name, but realized, just in time, that-duh!-he'd probably read it on her schedule.

"Uhm, no," she said instead. "I'm a junior."

He raised his eyebrows and a look of impression crossed his face. "Wow. Where you from?"

"California," she said as she reached over and suspiciously took the schedule back. "And 'wow' what?" She wondered if maybe she looked older and he'd mistaken her for a senior. Her tight shirt was showing off her well-developed chest than she'd meant for it to. But she hadn't seen him glance at it. His beautiful pale blue eyes were locked to hers for the entire, short conversation they'd had.

"You're taking A.P. Calculus," he said. "And Honors Chemistry. Those are senior classes. *Smart* senior classes."

Oh. He was looking at your schedule, not your breasts, you do-do, she told herself.

"I like math and science," she admitted, then regretted it. He hardly looked like the type of boy who would go for science and math nerd, something she wasn't, but obviously looked like now.

"I'm Cole," he said smiling. "Cole Anderson."

Jordyn smiled back. "I'd introduce myself, but it's probably unnecessary."

He chuckled a low, sexy, *husky* chuckle. "Welcome to Cedarwood, Jordyn Hamilton. I think you'll like it here."

With one last, adorable smile, he turned and headed down the hall. Jordyn smiled to his back. Maybe she would, she mused. Maybe she would.

Chapter 11

Chapter Eleven

Being late for homeroom was not a good way to start off the school year, especially as a brand-new transfer student. But nevertheless, when the final bell rang, signaling the beginning of homeroom, Jordyn was still in the hallway, hurrying to find Mrs. Roland's homeroom class.

Room 214. *Yes!* She'd spotted it. Quickly, she yanked open the door and walked in, and suddenly 15 pairs of eyes were locked on her.

In the front row, she spotted an unfriendly looking girl withher long, dark hair held in place by a headband, wearing her own Abercrombie gear and sitting straight and tall; *unnaturally* straight and tall. She looked Jordyn up and down, almost like she was analyzing her with her icy, slate-grey eyes. She popped on her gum and just stared. She smiled, but it wasn't friendly, then she leaned over and whispered something to the red-haired girl beside her. They chuckled.

"I'll take it you're Jordyn Hamilton," the tall, slender woman standing in front of the class said pleasantly. Jordyn looked away from the girl with the headband and her red-haired friend long enough to smile at her teacher.

"Yes, ma'am. And you're Mrs. Roland?"

"The one and only! Welcome to Cedarwood High!" She turned to the class. "Everyone, this is Jordyn Hamilton. She joins us all the way from California."

A series of oohs, and ahhs, erupted in the classroom. Sad part? They were genuine. These kids were impressed?

"Where at in California?" one girl asked.

"Are you from Los Angeles?" another one chimed in.

"Uhm, I'm from Moon Bay Beach," Jordyn said. "It's a San Diego suburb."

"Guys," Mrs. Roland chuckled. "Save the 20 questions for later. We have to get to school stuff."

The class groaned, and Jordyn smiled.

"And, uh, Jordyn," Mrs. Roland said. "For future reference, class starts at 8:00, not 8:10."

Jordyn nodded. "Yes, ma'am. I, uh, got a little lost."

Snickers from her new classmates.

"Well, I'll let it slide this time, since you're new, and all," Mrs. Roland said. "But be on time tomorrow."

"Yes, ma'am," Jordyn said, sliding into the only empty seat, right up front beside theheadband girl who stared at her. And she kept staring, even as Jordyn sat down. Jordyn didn't look at her, but instead chose to ignore her, but it was hard, still feeling her icy eyes on her while she sat.

She felt a tap on her back. She turned around and saw a boy, a rather cute boy-this school was crawling with them, apparently-smiling at her from his desk. He wore a beanie over his sandy-blond hair, shaggy in an almost-Justin Bieber style; the old one, not the new. He also wore a black Billabong t-shirt and sort-of-tight, fitted jeans.

Skater punk, Jordyn decided immediately. That took her almost no time to figure out. Being from California, she saw them all the time. He probably listened to Green Day, Fall Out Boy, maybe Slipknot? Because God knew there weren't any good punk rock songs out anymore.

Shame, Jordyn thought.

"California, huh?" he asked her. "I'm Blake Cormann."

"Jor-"

"Blake, I love your new hair cut!" a tiny girl with a short, copper-colored bob squeaked from the seat next to Blake and behind the staring girl with the headband and dark hair.

"Thanks, Shari," the punk-boy called Blake said with a flirty smile. Boy, what an attention span he had, Jordyn thought, watching her bat her eyelashes at him while he ate it up.

Dark-haired-headband-girl looked to her red-headed friend and laughed.

When headband girl went back to staring at Jordyn again, she turned to face front and let out a deep, obvious sigh. After a few more moments of staring, Jordyn started to feel a little uneasy.

"Is your hair color real?"

Jordyn narrowed her eyes and finally met headband girls' eyes. Involuntarily, she reached up and touched her hair. "Uhm, yes?"

Headband just shrugged, then faced back to the front, finally, as Mrs. Roland began to call the roll.

Once roll had been called, Jordyn learned that the dark-haired, headband-wearingstarer was called Ashley Moore. Her red-haired friend, was Leah Turner, and the tiny girl with the copper-colored bob was Shari Howell. Blake, she'd already been introduced to.

Finally, Mrs. Roland passed out the papers for everyone to sign, signifying they'd read the code of conduct and understood school rules and levels of penalties for breaking such rules. Jordyn skimmed them, noticing they were generic school rules-no cheating, no smoking, no leaving campus for lunch without a special "lunch pass," five tardies and a detention, blah, blah, blah, so one and so forth. She scribbled her signature then, along with the signed paper from students behind her, handed it over to Mrs. Roland when she came to collect.

"Alright, everyone," she said in a happy, friendly tone. "Get used to each other because we'll all be the first faces each other sees every morning for the next 179 days. Now, pay close attention while I read off the announcements."

Jordyn peaked over out of the corner of her eye, and saw Ashley was still watching her. Talk about weird. She could tell easily that this girl was popular. She knew enough about cliques-though she had nothing to do with them back home; she just hung out with whoever in whatever crowd and never really labeled herself as

anything but Jordyn. Here, though, there seemed to be an abundance of cliques.

Ashley, Shari and Leah were obviously snobby, intimidating types, although Jordyn didn't see what she'd done to them other than sit down. But they were on point with the staring. No, Jordyn wasn't intimidated. She wasn't immature like that. But she was getting a little weirded out. She just sat back in her desk, tried her hardest to ignore Ashley, and listened to the morning announcements.

Mrs. Roland went over the general rules, handed out guidelines for tardies, like how many you could have before getting a detention, how many detentions you could get before you have to Saturday School, and how many of those you could get before expulsion.

"Alright, now," she said finally. "On to the fun stuff. As you all know, this Friday is the first football game of the season."

"Go Cougars!" a boy near the back shouted. A few students laughed, and Jordyn peaked back grinning. Even Mrs. Roland was chuckling when Jordyn turned back around.

"Yes, Go Cougars," she laughed. "As I was saying, the first football game is Friday night, which means the carnival starts right after school. It's being put on by the boosters and the PTA. Come out and show your support, have a good time with some games and refreshments."

She spoke overly enthusiastically, and Jordyn could see she was reading straight from the paper, word for word.

"Next," she continued. "For anyone interested, the cheerleading squad has an open spot due to an unfortunate ankle break during pre-season workouts." Jordyn heard Ashley gasp, and looked over to see her extra stiff, her hands gripping the sides of her desk. "Tryouts are tomorrow after school. Contact Captain Natalie Bishop for information."

Natalie Bishop? Was that the same Natalie that Jordyn had been introduced to that morning by her brother? She figured it was. This was a small school, and Ty's Natalie looked like she would be a cheer captain.

Meanwhile, next to Jordyn, Ashley seemed to be near hyperventilation. "Oh my gosh, open tryouts! I can't wait."

Jordyn fought the urge to roll her eyes. Cheerleading. She wouldn't say "what a joke," but really? No one cared about cheerleading at her old school, but here? It looked like here everything was right out of an 80's teenager movie. Cheerleaders probably ruled the school, and the football players were royalty.

Mrs. Roland listed other activities coming up, but apparently, in the eyes of the females that were whispering nonstop, nothing held a candle to that one open spot on the cheer squad.

Jordyn was happy to hear the bell and see the end of homeroom. She could finally get away from that girl, Ashley and her big, icy grey eyes. She shuddered as she stepped out into the hallway, into the crowd of students, thinking about Ashley and hoping the rest of her classes would be Ashley-free, or at least no one would be staring at her like she was some sort of new species that just crawled out of the lake.

In the hallway, with more than enough time to spare, Jordyn was able to take in the sight of her new school, whereas before, she was rushing so much she didn't have time to see anything but her map,and, of course,the beautiful Cole Anderson when she'd crashed into him like an idiot. She'd studied her map during homeroom so she knew she had to go toward the front of the school, to the big lobby and office area, in order to get to her

next class, AP Chemistry.

The school was old, but it looked and smelled fresh and new, like a mixture of Pine-Sol and old textbooks. Apparently no matter what state you were in, on what side of the country, the school-smell was universal.

The floors were black and white tiles, the lockers, freshly painted silver. In the high-ceilinged lobby hung a banner like the ones Jordyn had seen all over town Friday.

Go, Cougars!

She found a trophy case, a *big* trophy case on the far wall near the offices, holding all the trophies from over the years from many different sports, but mostly football.

Jordyn tugged her cell phone from her pocket, checking the time. None left to waste. She *wouldn't* be late twice on her first day. Mrs. Roland was very understanding about it, and seemed to be a friendly woman. She didn't know anything about her AP Chemistry teacher, Mr. Newton, and if he wasn't friendly, being late wasn't the best impression to make on him. So she bolted, praying she would make it.

Chapter 12

Chapter Twelve

Mr. Newton was probably the most unfriendly-looking man Jordyn had ever seen. He had short, tight grey curls, a pointy nose and seemingly permanent pursed lips. Behind his thin-rimmed glasses were a pair of beady eyes, which watched them like they were beneath him somehow. They especially locked on Jordyn as she nervously made her way to her seat.

She sat, then without speaking-she really didn't have anyone to talk to in here anyway-and she pulled her notebook and Chemistry book out, ready to start this class off on a good foot. Not because she was into chemistry like that, but because, to be honest, she was afraid of her teacher.

He wore a white collared shirt, and the collar looked a little too tight, like it was choking him. Maybe that was why his face was a reddish tint and he looked extra pissed off. He even wore a red bow-tie, something Jordyn had never seen in real life. He looked a little silly, but Jordyn had a feeling he didn't get teased to his face. Ever.

She looked around her room, seeing there were only seven others, all nerds, and geeks. There were a couple of them that were dressed preppy, but somehow, Jordyn knew they were nerds.

The bell rang, and Mr. Newton slammed the door shut, right in another guy's face. He locked it, and turned to face the class. "I do *not* tolerate tardies."

Jordyn actually heard someone gulp behind her. Well, no three-strikes-and-you're-out in here.

"Good morning, students," he finally said in a less-than-friendly tone. "Welcome to AP Chemistry. I don't expect any shenanigans in this classroom. You all are advanced enough to be in this class, I suspect you're mature enough not to act like the under-developed high schoolers you are. You all know the school rules, you know how everything here works. I won't waste my time going over anything. We have a lot to learn this year, so take out your chemistry books and turn to page 1."

The rest of Jordyn's morning was fairly normal. Her second period class, English Lit, was great. The class reading list started with Slaughterhouse Five, which Jordyn had read back in ninth grade at Reed High School. Third period, Jordyn had gym. There she was issued her very own grey gym t-shirt with Cedarwood High School in big black letters on the front-yay-and was told to have fingertip length black shorts tomorrow. Unfortunately, though, Ashley and her friends were all in gym with her, and all Jordyn heard for an hour and a half was how *hot* Coach Peters was. Yuck! Her ears really tuned into the conversation when she heard Leah say, "Oh my gosh, have you *seen* the new receiver for the football team?"

"Yeah, Tyler, or something?" Shari asked. "He's new in town, and super-hot."

Oh, shoot me now. Jordyn thought as punky Blake Cormann sat next to her on the bleachers.

"Hey, California, what's up," he said with a grin. This was annoying. She looked at him with a smile. His eyes were sleepy, and he smelled strongly of weed.

"Hi," she said, still trying to hear the conversation about her brother two bleachers down. But Ashley had whipped her head around to stare-what was *with* this girl?!-and Shari and Leah followed suite and turned around, too.

"Hi, Blake!" Ashley said, turning her attention to him.

"Yeah, hi Blake," Shari and Leah copied. Jordyn was learning something about them already. Ashley was the queen of them, and they were her second in command. She would bet they probably did everything Ashley told them to, too.

"Hey, what's up," Blake said back. Then he turned his attention back to Jordyn. "Hey, uh, isn't Ty Hamilton your brother."

Jordyn nodded, keeping Ashley, Leah and Shari in her peripheral view to watch their responses. When their jaws dropped, Jordyn felt accomplished.

"That dude is cool as hell," Blake laughed. "He's a helluva receiver, too. What part of California did you say you came from?"

"San Diego. You've seen my brother play?"

Blake chuckled. "I'm on the football team."

That was a surprise. And here Jordyn thought she had the cliques all figured out. Because Blake definitely didn't strike her as the jock type. She wondered if the rest of the football team smoked weed between classes, too.

Jordyn heard a vibrating sound come from Blake. Quickly, he reached into his jeans pocket and pulled out a cell phone. He read a text message, then quickly texted back, shoving the phone back into his pocket. He flashed Jordyn a flirty smile, then stood up. "Gotta run. Catch you later."

Jordyn watched as he hopped up and walked over to their coaches, said something, then waved as he walked out.

"How hot is that?" Leah asked. "He can just up and leave whenever he wants."

"That's because he's a football player," Ashley said, twirling a strand of dark hair around her finger. "Coaches love the guys who bring home the trophies. They can do whatever they want."

Shari giggled. "They wouldn't be able to if they knew where he was going right now."

Ashley scoffed and jabbed her friend in the side with her elbow. "Uhm, hello, Shari. Shut up." Then she looked back at Jordyn, her eyes narrowed. As if that wasn't a kick in the gut. She might as well have blurted out, "Don't say anything in front of the new girl," because that was what she'd meant.

Jordyn just rolled her eyes and pulled out her cell phone. She wondered how Ty's day was going. Mr. Popular was probably having an excellent day, covered in cheerleaders, and getting to leave class whenever he wanted.

But she texted him anyway.

Hey, how's your first day going?

He texted back pretty quickly.

Pretty good.:) How about you? You find all your classes OK?

Yes.

You made any friends?

She thought about Blake. She thought about Ashley and her friends, and instinctively her nose turned up into a cringe.

I think I kinda made one, she replied back.

That's cool!

Yeah -_-

LOL. Don't worry, Jor. It'll get better.

She slid her phone back into her pocket with a sigh. Yeah. Because how could it get worse than those three diva-wannabes staring at her.

Speaking of themâ ¦

"Excuse me," Jordyn sighed. "What can I help you three with?"

Ashley's jaw dropped and she made a face. Then she smirked, and turned around. Finally.

Jordyn rolled her eyes. "I mean, damn." With that comment, Ashley whipped back around, her teeth gritted and her eyes narrowed. Jordyn figured that she was supposed to be intimiated. She rolled her eyes again, then pulled her phone back out and played with it until Ashley finally faced forward again.

But she could hear them whispering about her.

Jordyn sighed. Wonderful. She'd made an enemy on the first day. *What* an accomplishment.

Chapter 13

Chapter Thirteen

The Cedarwood High cafeteria was like Reed High School's. Almost. This one was a little smaller, and still managed to be less crowded. It was by the courtyard, behind the main building, and had long, tall windows, covering pretty much the whole wall, giving Jordyn a nice view out into the courtyard, where there were even more tables. Out there, Jordyn could see a group of punks playing hackeysack, with another group of kids gathered around a boy playing guitar and singing soulfully with his eyes closed.

Jordyn took a seat in one of the many white and black chairs-every table was white, with a mixture of black and white chairs-by the big window and underneath yet another "Go Cougars." This one, though, didn't come on a banner. Instead, it was a painted banner on the wall in big black and white letters, halfway between was the illusion of a Cougar running through andripping the banner in half.

Clever, Jordyn thought, studying the artwork. Whoever painted it was pretty talented.

Jordyn glanced down at her trey, at her school spaghetti-yuck-and her peach yogurt. At Reed High, they served Domino's pizza, Subway, and even Chik-Fil-A. Here, well, it looked like your average every day high school lunch.

Jordyn picked up her fork and took one bite of her spaghetti, then she was done. "Ugh."

"The spaghetti here's really gross," a voice said behind her. A familiar voice, actually. Jordyn whipped her head around and was pleasantly surprised to see Alice.

"Hi!" she said.

Alice beamed. "Hey, mind if I sit?"

"No, of course not!"

So Alice sat across from Jordyn with her trey. Alice had chosen the safer pizza. "This isn't fantastic or anything," she said, holding up her rectangular-shaped pizza. "But never, *ever* go with the spaghetti."

"I see that now," Jordyn laughed. "Hopefully the yogurt's better."

"Oh the yogurt's delicious," another voice said. Suddenly, they were joined by two other girls.

"Hey, you guys," Alice said to the girls. "This is Jordyn Hamilton. The one who moved into the house on the cliff. Jordyn, this is Erin Lee, and Bethany Jennings."

"Nice to meet you, Jordyn," Erin said sweetly. Erin was pretty, small, and had silky, straight black hair. She was Asian. Maybe Chinese, or Korean, and wore a button-down, light blue collared shirt and a simple pair of jeans. She sat with excellent posture, and even wore a silver watch.

Bethany, who was taller, with wavy golden hair, had a sweet, wholesome looking face. She wore a t-shirt, tight-fitting, with Cougars Volleyball on the front.

"You live up on the cliff?" Bethany asked.

Jordyn nodded. "My grandfather's house."

"I told them the house wasn't haunted, but they didn't believe me," Alice said simply.

"I don't think it's haunted," Jordyn said with a shrug. "I haven't seen Casper, yet, anyway."

The girls chuckled. They talked about their classes, while Jordyn absently played her plastic spoon in her peach yogurt-which, by the way, was delicious. She let her gaze drift over the students, all in their little cliques at their table, talking and laughing loudly. Everyone had friends here.

Finally, Jordyn spotted what she instantly knew was the senior popular table. She knew, because at the table, which sat in the middle of the cafeteria, like, *dead* middle of the room, was her brother, along with Natalie, Lydia, Meredith and two boys with letterman jackets.

And Cole Anderson. Ty was sitting between Natalie and Cole. And Natalie was all over him.

"What are you looking at?"

Jordyn looked back and saw Alice watching her.

"Oh, uhm, nothing," Jordyn said. "Hey, do you know anything about them?"

"Who, the kings and queens of Cedarwood High?" Alice asked, chuckling. "Yeah. Everyone loves them."

"They're football players and cheerleaders," Erin commented. "Literally your most clichÃ©d set up, ever."

"In Cedarwood the football players are worshipped," Bethany explained. "They win a lot of games, and the whole town practically shuts down on Friday nights to go to them."

"Ever seen Friday Night Lights?" Erin asked.

Jordyn laughed and nodded. "Many times."

"Cole's the quarterback,"Erin said. "He's fine, I mean, every girl drools over him."

"Rumor has it he's a player," Alice said. "I've never really seen him with a girlfriend. But I heard he hooks up a lot."

"The other two guys with the letterman jackets on are Davis Martin and Jenner Parks," said Bethany. "Also football players."

Erin nodded in that direction. "That other guy is-"

"Ty Hamilton," Jordyn said with a chuckle. "I know. He's my brother."

"Oh, duh!" Alice laughed. "You're both new and you both have the same last name. I can't believe I didn't make that connection."

Bethany looked from Ty, to Jordyn . "You two kind of look alike."

"Don't put that on me."

Erin snickered. "Don't think I'm gross, but your brother's hot."

"I've lost a lot of respect for you, Erin," Jordyn teased. "So, uh, what about the girls?"

"Natalie Bishop, Lydia Carter, and Meredith Turner," Alice sighed. "Most beautiful, most popular girls in Cedarwood. Natalie's head cheerleader, and *will* be homecoming queen."

"Lydia's the student council president," Erin said, nodding toward Natalie's friend with the straight, strawberry-blond hair. "And the smartest girl in school."

"She's going to be valedictorian," said Bethany. "Her daddy's the mayor of Cedarwood."

Jordyn raised her eyebrows.

"She's also been accepted into Harvard, Dartmouth, and Columbia," Alice said.

"She's undecided," Erin added.

"And then there's Meredith," said Alice. "She's the one with the red hair. She's a cheerleader, like her friends, but she's also a track star and soccer captain."

"That's how she manages to stay in great shape," Erin said.

Jordyn glanced at the table again. This place really was like a movie. She had to finally look away when she saw Natalie reach up and touch Ty's cheek. She cringed and looked back at her new friends just as she saw Ashley, Shari and Leah walk into the cafeteria.

"Oh, look," Alice said when she herself saw the trio, her eyes looking past Jordyn. "There's *Ashley*." She said *Ashley* like a valley girl, and even added emphasis by flipping a long curl over her shoulder.

Ashley looked at them when she passed, narrowing her eyes at Jordyn and smirking.

"Whoa," Erin said once they passed. "What did you do to her?"

"Nothing," Jordyn said. "The girl's been staring at me like that all day. I have homeroom and gym with her. What's her problem."

Alice nodded in Ashley's direction and Jordyn saw her, Shari and Leah take seats at the senior popular table, with Ty and his new football and cheerleader friends.

What the hell?

"*Her* problem is that she thinks she's the shit," Alice said. "Meanwhile, she's just shit."

"Meredith is Leah's sister, so they get to sit at their table,"Bethany said.

"Ashley is also up Natalie's ass," Erin said. "I mean, way up. She has a crush on Cole, but she would never act on it because she's not stupid enough to go after someone who will definitely reject her."

"How embarrassing would that be?" Alice snickered.

"Plus rumor has it he and Natalie had a thing back sophomore year," Bethany said.

Jordyn nodded. She understood that. This was Movie High, after all. Quarterback dating homecoming queen/head cheerleader? She'd seen that scene about 100 times on screen.

"Well, she seemed pretty flirty with Blake Cormann this morning," Jordyn said.

"You met Blake?" Bethany asked.

"He's also in gym and homeroom with me," said Jordyn.

"Yeah, since Cole's off limits to Ashley, hot junior football player, Blake, is next up," Alice said.

"But he doesn't like her," Erin chuckled. "She's just the only one who doesn't know it."

"He's not sitting at the 'senior popular table?'" Jordyn asked. She said 'senior popular table in a mocking tone, her fingers making a quoting gesture when she did.

"He's not a senior," Erin said. "And he doesn't stay here for lunch."

"He's off making his rounds," Alice said. "If you know what I mean."

"He deals?" Jordyn asked. She guessed that was the case during gym today, anyway.

Alice nodded. "For his dad and older brother. His dad has a pot field like, in the woods somewhere in the county."

Well, well, well. This school sure did have everything.

"Don't look so surprised, either," Bethany laughed. "We're small-town, but not middle-of-nowhere small town."

"Yeah, we're not naive around here," Alice said. "The parents are. Well, all the adults are. They think the football players are good boys, even though they like to party drink, the works."

"They think the cheerleaders are virgins," Erin laughed, as if she had said, "They think the sky is yellow;" pretty much like it was ridiculous to think otherwise.

"Yeah, they're not," Bethany said. "Funny thing is, Ashley is a virgin."

"She's a wannabe slut, though," Erin said nodding.

"She wants to be just like Natalie," Alice said preppily, flipping her hair again.

"Natalie's a slut?" Jordyn asked. That made her a little overprotective over her brother. Not that she had a right to be. She and Ty didn't talk about a lot of personal things, but she was fairly certain he wasn't inexperienced. She just didn't want him to get played.

"No, but she's not a virgin, either," Erin said. "And if Natalie does it-"

"Ashley wants to do it," Alice finished.

Jordyn looked back at them, and saw Ashley sitting right next to Natalie, laughing at something someone had said. She looked like she was practically begging for her attention. It was interesting seeing her like that, looking so passive, so eager to please. Trying to get approval like a little puppy. Just earlier, she'd been acting like the queen bee, looking down on Jordyn for no reason.

Hmm. So Ashley wasn't on top of the high school food chain, after all.

Jordyn sighed, defeated. Cedarwood wasn't as simple as she'd thought it was. In fact, Jordyn had never been more confused in her life. She did know one thing, though. Cedarwood wasn't that different from California after all. They just did what they did with innocent smiles on their faces the whole time, fooling everyone in the process.

Chapter 14

Chapter Fourteen

Zara was waiting in her Mercedes right in front of the school when Jordyn walked out after the final bell. She sighed, especially when she spotted Ashley, Shari, and Leah getting into a 2000 model Honda in the junior lot.

Jordyn had to get a car. Soon.

"Afternoon," Zara said when Jordyn got in the front seat of the car, keeping her head sort of down, hoping Ashley and her friends wouldn't see her getting picked up by her mommy. Not that cared what they thought, but she didn't need to give them anymore ammo than they already had. So far, she had no idea where they were getting their ammo, considering she hadn't done a thing to them, but she definitely didn't want them to have a *real* reason to ridicule her.

"Jordyn, what are you doing?" Zara asked when Jordyn spent more than enough time bent over, acting like she was tying her shoe. Her Toms. Her Toms that came with no shoelaces.

She didn't sit up until she was on the road. "Nothing."

Zara just shook her head and took a sip of coffee from her-get this-McDonald's coffee cup. "So how was school?"

Jordyn shrugged. "It was alright, I guess," she said truthfully.

"Do you like your teachers?"

"My homeroom teacher is nice. My AP Chemistry teacher is scary, my gym teacher's a perv, and my AP Calculus was born to two hippies and talks to softly we can barely hear her."

Jordyn had AP Calculus with Erin and Erin had explained to her that Ms. Tumy's first name was Sunny, short for Sunflower, and she was from Arizona. She told the class she lead a meditation group in the park every Saturday if they wanted to come out.

Yeah. Right.

"Did you make any new friends?" Zara asked.

"Yes, actually, I did."

Zara looked pleased. "Oh, that's wonderful!" she exclaimed as she pulled into the parking lot of Cedarwood Middle to pick up Logan.

"And just think, honey," Zara continued as she pulled up behind a minivan with a Pro-Life bumper sticker. "You'll make even more tonight at dance."

Jordyn lost her smile, and cringed. "Oh. Yeah."

"Honey, I understand," Zara sighed sympathetically putting a hand on her daughter's knee. "It's not Victoria Joy, but it's something to keep you occupied. And it'll definitely help you keep in shape."

Oh. Her mother had really misread her disgruntlement.

They waited for Logan, while Zara talked about how Jordyn was gonna show these Cedarwood girls how to do it. Zara had just asked about Jordyn's 'new friends' when Logan popped out of the crowd of middle schoolers. He waved to someone then hopped in the back of the car.

"Hey, mom," Logan said, plopping in the backseat and slamming the door.

Zara cringed. "Logan, don't slam. How was your day?"

"Awesome!" he said. "I have almost every class with Denny and Curtis. And then there's Lucy."

He said *Lucy*, like her name was made of feathers or something.

"Lucy, huh?" Jordyn asked, smirking at her mother. Logan hadn't been around much over the week since they'd moved to Cedarwood. He'd mostly been at the skate park, or doing something with Denny or Curtis, whose names Jordyn had heard, but their faces, she'd yet to see. But Lucy was new.

"Yeah, she's in most of my classes," Logan said, his voice angelic again. "She's perfect."

"Logan has a crush," Jordyn chuckled.

"Hey, mom," Logan said, ignoring Jordyn's comment. "Can I ride home with Denny from school on Friday so I can go with the guys to the game?"

"We'll talk about it with your father tonight," Zara said.

"So, mom," Jordyn said. "Enough about our day. How was *your* day?"

Zara beamed. "You will not believe it, but Jordyn, I found a yoga studio!"

Jordyn raised her eyebrows in shock. Yoga? In Cedarwood?

"Really?" was all she could say.

"Yes! It was the craziest thing! I was grocery shopping-" *again?*-"and I ran into this very nice lady on the cereal aisle. She asked if I was one of the ones who moved into the Hamilton house on the cliff, and when I said yes, she introduced herself. Oh, we got into the longest conversation and I made the comment that I missed my yoga class the most, and she said I didn't have to! She teaches a yoga class in the basement of her house!"

"What good luck!" Jordyn said, trying to sound genuine. Truth was, she wasn't happy her mother had found yoga. This only meant she'd try to make Jordyn go like she'd done back in California. Of course, yoga in California had been Victoria Joy's idea to maintain Jordyn's flexibility.

At home, Jordyn went straight up to her new room to work on her homework-she had plenty to keep her busy until dance at 6:00. She didn't take a break until 5:00 when her mother called her down for dinner.

Ty wasn't having dinner with them tonight, Jordyn had learned as she sat at the dining room table with their parents and Logan. He'd called Zara before practice apparently to see if it was OK if he went out with a few guys from the team after practice to Mickey's.

She wondered if it was just some guys from the team that would be there, or if a few cheerleaders would be going.

OK, so she wondered if one particular cheerleader would be there. Probably, she realized. Natalie had been pretty hooked onto Ty during lunch today. She knew it wouldn't be long until *they* were a thing.

Then she wondered if maybe Cole would be there. He probably would. Jordyn figured the guys from the team that Ty kept talking about was Cole and those other two boys with the letterman jackets she'd seen him with at lunch.

While they ate, Jack wanted to know how Logan and Jordyn's first day of school had gone. Logan, of course, stuck by his "it was great!" story, and told them all about his teachers, his class, and of course, *Lucy*.

Then he asked about the football game Friday night.

"Please!" Logan begged. "All my friends are going. We're going to the carnival, then after the game just sleeping over at Curtis'."

Jack looked at Zara as he used his knife and fork to cut his steak. "Zar? What do you think?"

Zara sighed. "I don't know, Logan. It's a high school football game. You're twelve."

"Will Curtis or Denny's parents be there?" Jack asked.

"No, they're dropping us off. Dad, it's safe. This is Cedarwood, not San Diego. Besides. You're a cop. Have you seen anything, yet?"

Jack sighed and looked at his wife. "Just gave a couple of speeding tickets and broke up a fight outside the Winn Dixie."

Jordyn chuckled, then took a sip of her iced tea.

"I guess it's alright," Jack said. "I mean, we'll be there."

"But it's a football game, Jack," Zara said. "There will be a lot of people there. There could be drinking, drugs, fights."

"I'm sure it won't be anything like that," Logan sighed. "Not here. Besides. I'll be in a group of like, six or seven guys. If their parents let them go, then it must be OK. They know how it is around here. I'm already the new kids. Please don't make me to be the *lame* new kid."

"Oh, he pulled the guilt trip," Jordyn said, grabbing a fork full of salad. "You two *have* to let him go, now."

"We'll think about it, Logan," Jack said. "We'll let you know."

Logan just groaned and started on dinner.

"What about you, Jordyn?" Jack asked. "You going to the game?"

Jordyn just shrugged. "Not sure, yet."

"Hey, you haven't told me how your day went, baby. Did you like your first day at Cedarwood?"

Jordyn shrugged. "It was OK, I guess."

"Any new friends?"

Her father was asking the same questions her mother had asked, and really, she wasn't sure if she had an answer, yet.

"I met people," she agreed, noncommittal.

She proceeded to tell them about Alice, the girl she'd met at the book store, and her friends, Erin and Bethany. She told them about the Sneering Diva, Ashley, and her two little wannabes.

"They just act like that because you're new," Zara assured.

"I guess," Jordyn grumbled.

"They'll come around. You'll see."

She didn't reply. She didn't care if they came around or not. She didn't have time for girls like Ashley. They were a dime a dozen in California, and these girls came from too small of a town at the intersection of Nowhere and Nothing to be acting all high and mighty like they did.

Jordyn didn't mention Cole, or the rest of Ty's new friends. But she still couldn't hide the smile from her face when she thought about the way he'd looked at her that morning. He was no Ryan Mathews. In fact, Cole Anderson didn't have a shred of California-esque in him. But he sure did make her forget all about Ryan.

"What are you smiling about?" Logan asked.

Jordyn looked up and saw her parents and her brother looking at her.

"Nothing," she said, still smiling. She stood up. "I'm going to go get ready for dance." Then she turned on her heel, and headed up the stairs to get ready for her very first class at the Cedarwood Dance School.

Chapter 15

Chapter Fifteen

The Cedarwood Dance School was nothing like the La Jolla Dance Academy, Jordyn realized immediately after her mother had dropped her off that night. It was actually on Cedar Street, stuck between the sporting goods store and an ice cream shop called the *Creamery*. It was fairly small, but Jordyn soon realized they didn't need a lot of space. Everything was upstairs. All *three* classes. *Not* including a Zumba class, which Jordyn caught a sneak peak of as she walked past the open door. She'd never seen women her mother's age and older doing the "Wobble."

The advanced class, as she'd learned on her first visit to sign up at the Cedarwood Dance School was all the way at the end of the hall on the left. When she walked in, she was fairly certain the word advanced was used loosely.

There were about ten other girls, none of them wearing dancewear. Mostly cotton shorts, t-shirts, and--God help them--sweats. And Victoria Joy would have a cow if she saw sneakers in her studio like these girls wore here. The girls looked to range in ages 12 through, like, early twenties, and none of them were stretching, all just standing around, some sitting, and talking.

Since Jordyn didn't pay too close attention when she walked in to the faces around-seeing as how she wasn't exactly expecting to run into someone she knew-she didn't notice a threesome gathered in the corner. When she did realize she recognized them, she did a double take.

And Ashley, Shari, and Leah stared back.

You have got to be kidding me, she thought, breaking her stare from theirs. She put her gym bag down, and followed suite, sitting. She knew she should have been stretching, but she needed to see how this practice was going to go, first. No one else was doing it, anyway, which, she knew was hardly an excuse to hurt herself, but she was already the new girl, and was sure her dance clothes compared to theirs would make her look like a slut. She didn't need to get out in the middle of the floor and start her stretches and have them all stare at her. She could see out of the corner of her eye, Ashley was already doing enough of that.

At the last minute, Jordyn heard a pair of footsteps. She looked up, and with extremely pleasant surprise, she saw Erin rush in, tying her black hair into a tight bun as she walked.

She spotted Jordyn immediately and smiled. "Jordyn! Oh my gosh, you're in class with us?"

"Yeah," Jordyn said with a smile, happy to see not only a familiar face, but a friendly face.

"Aren't you the new girl?" one of the younger girls asked. Jordyn recognized her from school, but she didn't know her. She thought she might have been a freshman.

"Jordyn just moved here from San Diego," Erin said with a smile. Jordyn mentally thanked her, because she wasn't too keen on talking to this bunch that she didn't know, and didn't care to answer any of their nosy questions about where she'd come from.

"I didn't know you danced," Erin said, lifting her gym bag off of her shoulder and tugging her t-shirt off, exposing a simple tank top over a sports bra. Underneath her blue basketball shorts, she wore short cotton ones. Not exactly dance wear, but it looked a lot better than the rest of the class. Oh, and Ashley's crew?

Yeah, they were all in leotards.

Leotards.

God, Jordyn hoped this wasn't a ballet class. She hadn't done ballet since she was seven, and she hated it. She much preferred contemporary and jazz.

Jordyn nodded as she followed suit and pulled her own clothes off, exposing *real* dance clothes-a cropped tank top and spandex shorts. "I danced in San Diego."

"She's dressed like the girls from Dance Moms," a younger girl 'whispered' to her friend, who'd nodded in agreement.

Oh, kill me now, she thought, cringing.

Just then, they were joined by an older lady, who, after walking into the studio, shut the door behind her.

"Hello, hello, *hello*!" she shouted excitedly. She wore jogging pants and a white t-shirt with Cedarwood School For Dance on the front, and her red hair was high on top of her head. "Welcome back, ladies! Have a nice break?"

They all murmured their confirmation.

"It's great to see you all!" Her eyes locked on Jordyn as she stood in front of the mirrors with her hands clasped together. "And I even have some new faces this year. I'd like to welcome Macy and Deena, who's moved up to the advanced level from intermediate, and Jordyn, who's come to us from California!"

Jordyn saw Ashley roll her eyes.

"She must be really good if she gets to start out at advanced!" another girl said.

"Well, Jordyn's been competing since she was six with Victoria Joy at the La Jolla Dance Academy in San Diego," Maggie said proudly.

No one knew what that meant.

"Are they as good as Abby Lee?" one girl asked.

Oh, wow. These girls couldn't be professionals. They compared everything to a silly reality show on *Lifetime*? Did they know *nothing* about dance?

No wonder Zara was displeased with this place.

"I actually did a little research myself about Victoria Joy's comepetition team," Maggie said, winking at Jordyn. "They competed against and *beat* Abby Lee in Chicago last spring, isn't that correct, Jordyn?"

Jordyn nodded as a series of impressed oohs erupted from the girls.

"Now, Jordyn, I know I'mno Victoria Joy, but I'm really glad to have you."

Jordyn just smiled. "Believe me. That is the best thing about you. You're not Victoria Joy."

After that, Maggie got her dancers up, and started stretches. There was no flexibility. None at all, whatsoever. These girls made Jordyn feel like a contortionist.

Jordyn did start to notice the differences between Maggie and Victoria Joy right away. For one thing, they stretched with the beat of Barry Manilow's *Copacabana*-no, not kidding-and with two hours of class, they didn't have a lot of time for choreography. Instead they worked on pirouettes, and leaps the entire class. It was boring, and Jordyn easily saw that pirouettes did not come easily for these girls. It was weird seeing them with so little form, and no straight lines, no balance. Not to mention, back in San Diego, Victoria Joy would have your head if you didn't spot while turning.

Though it did give Jordyn a little victory when she did a "professional" pirouette, and a full mid-air split in her leaps, and the girls were genuinely impressed.

"We have a true professional here on our hands, ladies!" Maggie said excitedly. "OK! Wonderful first day back! See you ladies tomorrow night, same time!"

So excited, Jordyn thought. She walked to the corner where she'd left her gym bag and was putting her shorts and t-shirt back on over her dance clothes when Erin walked over.

"Have fun?" she asked.

Jordyn chuckled as she settled next to her to put her own clothes on. "It's a change."

"Oh I bet," Erin said. "But, hey. Maggie wasn't kidding, you know. You are really *good*."

"Thanks," Jordyn said. "I used to really enjoy it, too."

Erin's eyes widened. "You don't *like* dance?"

"I love it," Jordyn said. "But when it becomes all about 30 hours of training a week, the competitions, making sure everything is absolutely perfect, things change. I went to one of the top dance companies in California. That's pressure that takes away the fun in dance. With Victoria Joy, *your* best was never good enough. It didn't matter how you did, if you didn't win, there was always that "you can do better." And I got sick of it."

"Well, you'll love and this place, then. Because Maggie is all about being your best, no pressure. But you'll probably feel you're being held back. We don't do a lot of competing. Except in Pittsburgh sometimes. Mostly it's recitals, parades, and other community events."

"Cool with me," Jordyn said, hoisting her bag over her shoulder. "Just gives me time to have a life."

They walked out together, and it was on the sidewalk by the curb where they ran into Ashley, Shari, and Leah again. They were leaning up against the side of the building, talking, until they saw Erin and Jordyn. Ashley just turned her nose up and shoved her hands in the pockets of her sweatpants. She turned back to her friends with emphasis and flipped her hair over her shoulder.

"So, anyway, you guys," she started off loudly. "You know that open spot on the cheer squad? Well tryouts are tomorrow. I'm totally gonna get it."

"How can you be so sure?" Shari asked. "I heard there's a lot of girls going out for it."

Ashley scoffed. "Uhm, duh! Natalie's captain. She'll totally look out for me. You know we're like, sisters."

Erin turned to look at Jordyn, flipping her hair over her shoulder with emphasis, batting her eyelashes. "So, she's, like, totally annoying."

Jordyn laughed. "Girls in California didn't even act *that* valley-girl."

"Let's go, guys!" Ashley said loudly enough the whole street could probably hear her. "We can go to Mickey's." They started toward the same Honda they'd gotten into that afternoon. She was about to get in the driver's seat when she turned around and glared at Jordyn. "Watch your back, *new girl*."

Shari and Leah giggled, then they all piled into the Honda and drove away.

Jordyn was incredulous. "What the hell is her problem? I haven't said five words to the girl since I got here."

Erin just laughed. "I think I might have decided my absolute favorite thing about you, Jordyn Hamilton."

Jordyn looked at her new friend in confusion. "Huh?"

"You're either very modest, or very spacey."

Jordyn was still confused, and it showed in the way her eyebrows furrowed together. "Wait, what?"

Erin sighed. "Well, for starters, you're new, you're from a way cooler place than this puke-stain on a map, and you're freaking gorgeous."

Jordyn scoffed and folded her arms over her chest. "Am not."

"Are, too," Erin laughed. "You're prettier than her, like, by a lot. She knows it to. She hates you because you're hot. No homo, but you are."

Jordyn knew that she wasn't being modest. She wasn't comfortable with people thinking she was gorgeous here anymore than she liked it back in San Diego. And it was even more awkward because she didn't know these people, and obviously the fact that some people were looking at her like that was putting her on the populars' bad side.

Zara showed up about five minutes later, Erin's father on a Volvo right behind her.

"See you," Jordyn said.

"Tomorrow at lunch?" Erin asked. "Same place?"

Jordyn just chuckled and reached for the door handle of her mother's Mercedes. "Definitely. See you tomorrow."

She waved goodbye then got in the car.

"How was dance class?" Zara asked with a big smile.

"It was really great," Jordyn answered with a genuine smile as she tugged her seatbelt on. And for the first time in years, she'd finally answered that question honestly. Because dance had *really* been great.

Chapter 16

Chapter Sixteen

Wednesday, August 15, 2012

Two days later, on Wednesday, Jordyn went straight to her locker after English Lit, then headed to the basement of the gymnasium to change into her gym clothes.

There were fifteen other girls in her gym class, and it seemed like they were all already crammed in the locker room when Jordyn walked in, most of them already dressed in their grey Cedarwood High t-shirts, regulation black shorts, and white sneakers.

Jordyn had never had a dress code before, especially not for gym.

She walked in to find the girls all huddled together, chattering loudly, and laughing with each other as they dressed. With no one to talk to, yet, Jordyn just kept quiet and to herself and went to get dressed.

She saw Ashley and her friends stuck in the mirror. They were already dressed, Ashley with her shorts rolled up so they were far too short, showing far too much of her skinny, pasty legs. She made kissy, pouty faces in the mirror as she put her lip gloss on.

Jordyn rolled her eyes as she slipped out of her jeans and into her shorts. Who did her make up *before* a sweaty, hour and a half of gym class?

She was bent over tying the laces to her white Nike Air Forces when Ashley turned to look at her with a smile. "Hi, Jordyn, what's up!"

"Yeah, hey, Jordyn," Shari said.

"Hi, Jordyn!" Leah chimed in before she and Leah followed Ashley out of the locker room.

Jordyn was confused. Their smiles seemed genuine, and that was scary. Those three hadn't said a kind word to Jordyn since she'd been in Cedarwood, so why now? Why in the locker room before gym?

Jordyn dressed quickly, then made her way upstairs. When she got into the gym, she found her classmates in their spots on the floor, sitting, talking and waiting for the coach to start class. Ashley, Shari and Leah were sitting with Blake, who looked uncomfortable surrounded by the chatterboxes.

Jordyn took her spot, and turned back around to see Ashley throwing her head back and laughing. *Loudly*.

Blake forced a smile through a cringe, sticking his finger in his ear, then he turned to look at Jordyn. She watched him say something to Ashley, then he stood up. As he walked toward Jordyn, Ashley frowned at her friends, then turned to scowl at Jordyn.

Jordyn sighed. *Great*. She didn't even have a chance to figure out what the locker room friendliness was all about. It didn't matter now, because that was all over and her snarling glare was dead set on Jordyn as Blake sat next to her.

He smiled at Jordyn, completely oblivious to anything. "Hey, California. What's up?"

Jordyn sighed. "Thanks a lot."

He genuinely looked confused. "Uhm, what for?"

Jordyn groaned, glancing back at Ashley. For a quick minute, anyway, Ashley was off her back. Jordyn didn't explain, though. Just shook her head and sighed. "Hey, Blake. What's up?"

At lunch, Jordyn sat at what was becoming her routine table with Alice and her friends. They were talking about the football game and carnival Friday night, and the carnival before.

Apparently, the day of the first home game for the Cedarwood Cougars, there was a huge carnival on the field before the game. There would be food, games, the works. Jordyn remembered Mrs. Roland saying something about it in homeroom on the first day, but she hadn't been paying extra attention to it.

Alice, on the other hand, was *very* excited about the whole shebang.

"Football's like a religion in Cedarwood," Alice explained excitedly as she took a bite of her corn. "On Friday nights, everyone's at the game. Same for basketball when that starts."

"This time of year football's sort of a religion in my family, too," Jordyn mumbled. Not that she had a problem with it, of course. It took a fraction of the attention off of her dancing.

"Well, the Cougars are really good," Erin offered. "Number one in their conference last year."

"We're all going to the game together Friday night, Jordyn," Alice said. "You should totally go. No one really watches, but it's fun, either way."

"I'm going. My brother's the new receiver, remember?" Jordyn asked, nodding toward the popular table where Ty was still sitting with the senior royalty like he had the previous two days. There, she spotted Ashley glaring at her.

Bethany must have noticed. "Whoa. What is Ashley's staring at?"

"Me," Jordyn said with a proud smile. As if having Blake come sit with her in gym wasn't enough, Ashley was already pretty pissed about last night at dance when Jordyn landed her favorite Calypso jump perfectly, bringing praise from Maggie, and cheers from her less bitter classmates.

"Perfect, Jordyn, so perfect!" she'd said excitedly. "Ashley, this is what I was telling you about the Calypso jump. Oh, Jordyn, I love it! You're the first in my class to ever execute it!"

Oh, yeah, that had *really* pissed Ashley off. Especially since she probably only brought the Calypso up because she knew she finally had a student with enough training to even know what it was, much less how to do it.

"You?" Alice asked, watching now as Ashley finally turned away. "What'd you do?"

Jordyn told them about gym class and last night, and she couldn't help but smile.

"Yeah, she was pissed," Erin added with a chuckle. "Jordyn, why didn't you try out for cheerleading? I think you would have made it without a doubt. You have it *all*. Ashley just has a tiny bit of it."

"Cheerleading?" Jordyn asked, crinkling her nose. She'd cringed, but she hadn't meant to. She'd known there was a spot on the team open. But cheerleading? She'd never pictured herself as a cheerleader. The girls at Victoria Joy had always made fun of cheerleaders.

"I don't think so," Jordyn finally said. "I've never done it before. I'd make an idiot out of myself."

"Look, I've never seen you do a flip or anything," Erin said. "But if you've done gymnastics all these years and you can do what I've seen you do in the dance studio, cheerleading would be a piece of cake for you."

"And imagine how cool it would be to piss Ashley off even more," Alice said, nudging Jordyn with a chuckle.

Jordyn thought about the discomfort of having Ashley stare at her through homeroom and across the cafeteria now. She didn't need anything else to add to it.

"Ashley can have this one," Jordyn said. "I've got enough on my plate with dancing."

And frankly, she was getting used to all this newfound free time.

"You would do so great, though," said Erin.

"Anyway, back to Friday night," Alice said impatiently. "Jordyn, you're going with us to the carnival. No excuses."

Jordyn chuckled and took a swig from her bottle of water. "Yes, ma'am."

Her eyes wandered over to the popular table as discreetly as she could manage until they dropped on Cole. He wore his black baseball cap backwards, and a t-shirt nice and tight so she could make out those wonderful muscles. He had said something, and was nudging a laughing Ty. Natalie leaned over, putting her head on Ty's shoulder. Cole was turning around when suddenly, Jordyn was face to face with a red Billabong t-shirt. And it was wrapped around Blake Cormann's torso.

"Hey, ladies," he said, sitting down with them, right next to Jordyn.

"Afternoon, Blake," Erin said with a smile. "What brings you back to school so early?"

Blake smiled. "Finished up business a little early." He looked at Jordyn. "So, California. You have a boyfriend back in Moonlight Beach?" Alice, Erin and Bethany giggled.

"Moon Bay Beach, and no," Jordyn said. "I don't."

"Blake, what are you doing over here?" Alice asked. "Shouldn't you be with *Ashley*?"

Blake cringed. "Yeah. Right." Then he reached over and stole a fry from Bethany's plate.

"Hey!" she said.

"She speaks!" Erin shouted. "Get out of that book, Beth. Join the conversation."

"What conversation?" Blake asked. "What did I interrupt."

"Besides a peaceful, pleasant lunch?" Alice asked. "We were telling Jordyn about the football game."

"Oh it's the great event here in Cedarwood," Blake started, exaggerating enthusiasm. "It's where these two teams get this funny shaped ball and try to pulverize each other while-"

"I know what football is," Jordyn interrupted.

Blake smirked. "So, did they tell you about Lake Fest?" he asked.

Jordyn shook her head. "No. What's Lake Fest?"

"Pretty much the biggest party in Cedarwood," Erin explained. "It starts Friday night after the game, and doesn't end until Sunday afternoon."

"Wow," Jordyn said. Sounded more like a rave to her.

"It's sort of a family thing, too," Alice said. "Friday night there won't be any kids or anything there, but Saturday and Sunday it's nothing but booths, and families on the beach."

"Most people stay over Friday night after the game," Bethany said. "We're going."

"You have to go with us," Alice told Jordyn.

Jordyn thought about it. A whole weekend just sitting around on the lake with a bunch of families? It didn't sound all that fun. But it seemed like a real event here in Cedarwood. Alice was sure excited about it. She wondered if Ty and his new friends would go. Probably. And she didn't want to sit at home on a Friday night while the whole school was doing something else.

She glanced over toward the popular table, hoping to get another surreptitious glance at Cole's profile. No such luck.

He was looking right at her.

Jordyn flushed. Oh crap. He'd caught her looking at him. Great. Now he was going to tell Natalie and her friends, her brother, and, *ugh*, Ashley. They'd probably make fun of her for the rest of lunch, maybe even the rest of the day.

He didn't look away. He just smiled at her, so, without knowing exactly what else to do, she smiled back, and felt elated.

"So, Josh Morton is having a party night, too," Blake said, pulling Jordyn out of her dreamy state while she and Cole locked eyes for at least ten seconds.

"Lots of beer," Blake added, mostly to Alice, as he smiled at her. "Alice?"

"I'll totally be there," Alice said, smiling back.

Were they *flirting*? She looked at Erin and Bethany, who didn't seem surprised at this behavior. Maybe they weren't. Maybe this wasn't anything new.

"Cool," Blake said. "California, you gonna come, too? Let us country kids you how to *really* party?"

"Uhm, I don't know," Jordyn said. "I thought you were going to Lake Fest Friday night."

"We are," Erin said. "That ends at midnight for people who aren't camping out."

"We're going to the party afterwards," Alice said. Then she smirked. "I'm sure Cole Anderson will be there."

"Really?" Jordyn asked. "Wait, I don't care."

Alice laughed. "You're practically eye-fucking him every day, Jor. We know you like him."

"You like Cole?" Blake asked.

"No, I don't even know him," Jordyn said.

"Doesn't mean you don't think he's hot," Bethany chuckled. "It's cool, though. The whole school thinks he's hot. And he's the quarterback. Totally sexy."

"But he's a real player," Erin said. "So be careful."

Jordyn sighed. She really needed to start being more discreet when she was sneaking looks across the cafeteria at Cole.

Chapter 17

Chapter Seventeen

After school, Zara insisted Jordyn practice some simple gymnastics in the backyard, since she'd declined an offer to take up gymnastics at the local Y-Jordyn didn't even know Cedarwood had a Y.

"You don't have to do anything fancy," Zara had said as she'd turned her Mercedes on Cliff Road on the way home. "But I think you need to stretch and do a little something for gymnastics, just to keep your muscles familiar with it. If you're not going to be taking them at the Y, the least you could do is work at home. There's plenty of backyard space and you don't need a coach at your level to just practice. Keep your muscles going."

This entirely long statement had come out before Jordyn had a chance to interrupt. Zara still didn't know she wasn't entirely heartbroken about leaving Victoria Joy and 30 hours of training a week. And until it was pressed, there was no need to bring it up. Jordyn was having fun at Cedarwood's Dance School with Maggie three nights a week. And luckily, even Zara agreed that the Y gymnastics were going to be nothing fancy. Just some tumbling.

So at 5:00, after finishing up her homework, Jordyn was standing in her backyard, the short-cut grass tickling her bare feet as she worked on just a little tumbling and flipping around.

After a little while, she'd heard a loud rumbling engine pull up, and knew immediately Ty was home. She was a little surprised, since he had been hanging out with Natalie and his football friends all week after practice. This was the first day he'd come home right after practice. But she could tell by another loud rumbling in the driveway he wasn't alone.

Probably some football buddies, she thought as she did a mid-air cartwheel. Then her heart skipped a beat.

What if Cole was with him? She smiled at the thought of Cole Anderson at her house. Then she backed up, took a running start, and went into seven backhand springs.

"Wow! Impressive!"

The voice was unfamiliar, and startling when it came from behind Jordyn. She whipped around and saw Ty. But as she'd expected, he was far from alone. With him stood Natalie, Lydia, Meredith, and three football players. One of them was-*yes!*-the gorgeous Cole Anderson.

The voice Jordyn had heard was Natalie.

"Nice gymnastics," she said to her with a smile. "You're really good."

"Uhm, thanks," Jordyn said.

"Uh, guys, this is my sister, Jordyn," Ty said, his hands in the pockets of his Cougars Football sweatpants. "Jordyn, you know Natalie. This is Lydia, Meredith, Toby, Mike, and Cole."

Toby and Mike were the only names Jordyn didn't already know. But other than Cole, she'd never actually spoken to any of them.

"Hey, Jordyn, there's an open spot on the cheer squad," Natalie said with a smile. "We could really use some flips and tricks like yours."

"Yeah, we only have two other girls who can flip," Lydia said. "You should totally try out."

"I can pretty much guarantee you a spot," Natalie said with a smile.

Jordyn didn't know why but she looked straight at Cole. She watched him smile at her, his hands in the pockets of his denim jeans. He was so cute. She wondered if he was into cheerleaders? He was sure surrounded by them now.

"What do you say, Jordyn?" Meredith chimed in.

No. This was too much. She just met these girls, these cheerleading, popular new friends of her brother's. They'd seen her do a couple of simple floor tricks and were all over her. Between dance and her A.P. classes, Jordyn didn't have a lot of breathing room. It was still more time than she ever dreamed of having back in San Diego, but she wasn't ready to give it up to dance like a robot Barbie doll in front of a crowd of small-town football fans with some pom-poms.

"No thanks," Jordyn said as kindly as she could, flashing a smile. "I've got a really busy schedule."

"Yeah, Jordyn takes A.P. classes," Cole said, winking at Jordyn.

Jordyn didn't mean to smile back so hard. Surely the rest of them noticed. Ty noticed mostly, though.

"You two already know each other?" Ty asked, getting that protective big brother attitude she'd only seen in movies. Never in real life and never by her own brother. Ty didn't get protective over her.

"Bumped into her in the hallway Monday," Cole said still smiling at her.

"How do you like Cedarwood, Jordyn?" Natalie asked, beaming.

Jordyn just shrugged. "It's OK, I guess."

And it was. It got a little better every day, and she actually had people to talk to during lunch. And it didn't hurt that she was sharing smiles with the superhot Cole Anderson across the cafeteria every day.

And right now, she was sharing a smile with him across her own backyard.

Ty noticed it. He folded his arms over his chest and looked back and forth between Jordyn and Cole. Then he cleared his throat. "Hey, Jordyn, we're going to Mickey's. You want to go?"

"Uhm, sure," Jordyn said. She'd wanted to go to Mickey's ever since Ty told her about it. It sounded pretty cool, and she wanted to see for herself. Plus, it was also a perfect way to hang out with Cole.

"Go get ready," Ty said. "I'll go tell mom."

Jordyn nodded then bolted to her room to get ready.

She couldn't believe it. Not that she was all gushy over hanging out with the popular seniors. Sure Natalie and her friends seemed cool-according to Alice they were "*the* coolest"-but Jordyn didn't care about all that. She'd

just as soon as, or probably sooner than, hang out with Alice. But Cole was going. So Jordyn was going.

Jordyn quickly changed into a pair of short white Abercrombie shorts, something she would never have been allowed to wear to school, and a simple, but tight, black t-shirt. She tossed her hair into a messy bun, since it was, well, too messy to leave down, even after she'd struggled with a brush, then she stepped in front of her full-length mirror.

Jordyn had never, not once, fretted over her outfit in her life. In California, she was laid back, and whatever she felt like wearing, that was fine with her. If she felt good that was all that mattered. But tonight? Tonight she had Cole to impress. She didn't want to look like a little kid. Sure, she was only a year younger, but she knew there was a stigma attached to being someone's 'little' sister.

She examined her outfit, pleased with it, but felt like something was missing. She reached up and touched her face.

Of course. She'd noticed that even after cheer practice, Natalie, Lydia, and Meredith wore flawless make-up. Even Ashley and her friends had dabbed it on before gym that afternoon.

Typically, Jordyn didn't wear make-up, with the exception of a little lip gloss, and the tiniest amount of mascara. Her complexion was dark, and, knock on wood, had never seen a blemish in all of her sixteen years. But tonight, maybe they were just going to a little popular, small town hang out, not the prom, but Cole Anderson was going to be there, and Jordyn needed more than just her minimal.

She was careful not to overdo it, but when she was done, she wore a thin layer of foundation, hoping it didn't change her complexion enough to make it look like she'd been trying to impress, and lined her eyes off with her usual mascara, and even some eyeliner, which she typically wasn't accustomed to. She knew exactly how to apply make-up almost professionally due to many years in dance, and when you performed you overdosed on make-up.

Jordyn hoped she wasn't wearing too much now. She'd gone as light as she could, and once she'd dabbed her lips with her nude lip gloss, she was ready to go.

Chapter 18

Chapter Eighteen

So Mickey's was pretty cool. Just like Alice had told her, there were pool tables, TVs in every corner, and the food was great. This place really could give Blue Moon a run for its money with the pizzas and burgers.

Ty and Cole had engaged in a game of pool with some guys from school, leaving Jordyn at their table with Natalie, Meredith, and Lydia.

Jordyn was a little uncomfortable, sitting here with the three of them with absolutely nothing to talk about, while all they'd been talking about was Lake Fest Friday night.

"You going to Lake Fest, Jordyn?" Natalie asked, popping a French fry in her mouth.

"Uhm, I think I'm going with Alice Doherty and her friends," Jordyn said, nodding.

"Erin and Bethany?" Meredith asked.

Jordyn nodded. They knew Alice's crowd?

"Erin's a genius," Lydia said, speaking for the first time since they'd gotten there. She'd been deep into texting someone ever since they'd sat down. "She's on the school paper with me."

"Lydia," Meredith said. "Who are you texting over there?"

She checked her phone once more, then slid it into her pocket. "No one."

Natalie rolled her eyes. "Oh, I know exactly who she's texting."

"Oh my gosh, you guys, relax. It's not a big deal."

But for the next few minutes, Lydia looked pretty uneasy, every once in a while looking at her lap, or looking over her shoulder at the door.

Jordyn wondered what that was about.

"Jordyn, I have to admit," Natalie said suddenly, taking the attention off of Lydia. "I love your hair. Is that really your natural color?"

Jordyn nodded. "Yep. I get it from my mom, I guess."

"Oh my gosh, she is so gorgeous," Meredith said. "And her accent is totally cool. Where's it from?"

"Sweden."

"That is too cool!" Natalie said. "I don't know anything about my heritage. I think I'm like, Irish, or Russian like, two hundred years back on my mom's side."

"I'm a lot Irish," Meredith chuckled, holding up her red ponytail. "So, Jordyn. Leah tells me you're like, the most amazing dancer Maggie's ever seen."

Jordyn raised her eyebrows. "She did?"

"Oh yeah. She's really impressed. You should have gone out for the cheer team."

"Yeah, your brother's bragged on you, too," Natalie said, winking as she nudged Jordyn with her elbow.

Jordyn smiled. "He has?"

"Yeah. Not to mention I saw your flips this afternoon. Why the hell didn't you try out?"

"I'm not really a cheerleader," Jordyn said. "I've never done it before. I'd feel like an idiot."

"Ugh, you couldn't look much worse than Ashley," Natalie said, rolling her eyes. "I hate to say it, but she was the best out of all the girls that tried out for Cecelia's spot. Naturally, I had to give her the spot."

"Just another excuse for her to hang all over you," Lydia snickered.

"She's so irritating," Natalie said.

Jordyn perked up, very into this conversation now. Ashley got on Natalie's nerves? What?

"Ashley Moore?" Jordyn piped in, trying to sound innocent.

"Ugh, yes," Natalie said.

"She's so far up Natalie's butt she can probably tell you what she's thinking half the time," Meredith said. "The only reason we let the little brownnoser sit with us is because she's like Leah's best friend."

"You guys don't like her?" Jordyn asked, surprised by this. Because according to Ashley, she and Natalie were like sisters.

"Hell no," Natalie said. "She is annoying and acts way too high and mighty."

"And she treats my sister and Shari like crap," Meredith said. "Always telling them what to do."

Well, who knew, Jordyn though, happy with this news as she sat back. She didn't know why, but the idea that Natalie and her friends didn't like Ashley Moore gave her a little pleasure.

OK, that was a lie. She knew exactly why that gave her a little pleasure.

"So, Jordyn," Natalie said, sipping on her Diet soda. "You like anyone here?"

"You mean, guys?" Jordyn asked, then she felt like an idiot. Of course she'd meant guys.

Natalie smiled. "I meant Cole Anderson."

Jordyn gulped. What was with this school? How did everyone know *everything*? She only talked to Alice, Bethany and Erin.

Meredith laughed. "We saw you two today at lunch. *Smiling* at each other across the cafeteria."

"Don't worry," Lydia said. "He likes you. We can tell."

"Want a hook up?" Natalie asked.

"Uhm, I don't know what to say," Jordyn chuckled. "I mean, I don't know him or anything."

"He's a nice guy," Meredith assured. "I'd go for him myself if I wasn't already, you know. Committed."

Lydia rolled her eyes. "Meredith you are disgusting."

Meredith scoffed. "Am not! Scott is great. He's romantic, mature."

"Of course he's mature!" Natalie laughed. "He's 35."

Jordyn coughed, as she was trying to swallow her water when this news came out.

"Oh, yeah, Jordyn," Lydia said. "Meredith has a 35-year-old, *married* lawyer boyfriend."

"Separated," Meredith corrected. "And it's not a big deal."

"It's totally a big deal," Natalie said. "He'll have grey hairs in a year, Mer."

Meredith smirked. "Yeah, well, he's good in bed now."

"Hell, he should be," Lydia said. "He's had *your* entire life span to practice."

Meredith stuck up her middle finger at Lydia, and Natalie and Jordyn chuckled.

So these girls weren't stuck up or conceited. They were gorgeous enough to be, of course, but they welcomed Jordyn in with opened arms. And they were actually *fun* to be around. Who knew?

Jordyn couldn't wait to tell Alice all about it.

Lydia's fingers flew across the screen of her cell phone, then she slid it into her purse. "You guys we need to run," she said. "I have a quick stop to make."

"Of course you do," Natalie said with an eye roll. "Let me go check on those boys really quick. See if they're ready."

Natalie got up and walked to the pool tables. Jordyn watched as her brother greeted Natalie with a smile, and Natalie slid her hand into his back jeans pocket. She whispered something in his ear, then they both looked knowingly toward their table.

Jordyn wondered where they were going. It seemed like Ty knew.

So, ten minutes later, they were in Natalie's SUV, heading back down Lake Road the way they came. But Natalie made a quick, sharp turn onto a side road, leading into what looked like, a modern, subdivision of houses placed close together, all with manicured lawns and Hybrid cars in the driveways. So this was where Cedarwood's rich kids lived. It was strange seeing this part of Cedarwood. So far all she'd seen was good old

country living. Trees, trees, a few buildings, then more trees. This place, though? This neighborhood was about as out of place in Cedarwood as a deer hunter would have been back in Moon Bay Beach.

Jordyn was all the way in the back of Natalie's SUV with Cole. She didn't mind, and by the way he kept flashing her smiles, she thought maybe he'd chosen to sit back there with her. Like, on purpose.

But more than likely, Jordyn was imagining things. He just probably didn't want to be squished between Meredith and Lydia the whole drive.

Jordyn was so focused on Cole she hadn't noticed that Natalie had slowed to a stop and was parking her SUV on the curb in a cul-de-sac.

"Be right back," Lydia said, hopping out.

Jordyn peaked out the window at her as she crossed the manicured lawn toward the dark house, wondering where she was going. Suddenly, a porch light came on and when the front door opened, Jordyn saw Blake Cormann.

She gasped, quietly. Blake pushed opened the door and stepped back so Lydia could walk into his house, not once glancing back at the SUV.

Chapter 19

Chapter Nineteen

Natalie dropped Lydia and Meredith off, so Jordyn and Cole relocated to the middle seat behind Ty and Natalie. Jordyn wasn't happy about the extra room they had, either. She was perfectly fine with her bare knee "accidentally" rubbing against Cole's jeans during the ride.

She stayed fairly quiet as they drove back to Jordyn and Ty's house. Ty and Natalie were talking quietly while Ty played with the radio, and Jordyn sat, one leg crossed at the knee, looking out the window, and not looking at Cole.

She wasn't good at flirting and she wasn't about to make a fool of herself trying. So she thought about that weird stop at Blake's when Lydia disappeared into his house.

Like, what was *that* about?!

When they were back at Jordyn's, Ty and Cole hung around Cole's truck talking, while Natalie walked up onto the porch with Jordyn.

"Hey, Jordyn, we're really glad you came with us tonight," Natalie said with a smile.

"Thanks for inviting me," Jordyn said with a smile. She glanced back to Ty and Cole. "So, you and my brother-"

Natalie chuckled. "Don't be weirded out. I really like him. He's a good guy. Don't worry, though. I won't steal him away from you. Believe me, Jordyn. Dude's crazy about his little sister."

Jordyn just smiled. She was really starting to like Natalie.

"Oh, and by the way," Natalie said as she started back across the lawn. "Cole kind of likes you, too." She winked. "Trust me, babe. See you tomorrow."

Jordyn smiled and waved, reaching for the front door handle. She looked back out across the yard once more at her Ty and Cole. Natalie had just jumped on Ty's back when Cole turned and met Jordyn's gaze with a smile. This time she didn't pull away from his smile. Instead, she returned it then headed inside.

When Ty came in twenty minutes later, Jordyn was sitting on the couch, her bare feet propped up on the coffee table, flipping through the TV channels.

"So," Ty said with a smile, shutting the door behind him. "Did you have fun?"

Jordyn smiled. "Yeah, I did. Thanks for inviting me."

"Cole's idea," Ty teased, ruffling her hair as he passed her.

"Really?"

Ty raised an eyebrow at the way Jordyn had jerked around quickly, her eyes wide.

Ty laughed. "I knew you liked him."

Jordyn regained her composure and stood up. "Psh. I think he's cute. I don't know him enough to like him."

"He likes you," Ty said. "Want me to hook you two up?"

"No!" Jordyn said, horrified. The gesture was nice, but the idea of getting hooked up with Cole by his best friend, her *brother*? Awkward. No way. "I mean, thanks, but I can handle it."

Ty had taken her spot on the couch when she started up the steps, then she stopped suddenly.

"Hey, Ty, can I ask you something?"

Ty sighed as he took the remote. "Depends what it is."

"What's with Lydia."

He turned around. "Don't ask that."

"Is it serious?" she asked, leaning against the banister. "And don't look at me like that. I'm not naive. I learned about Blake Cormann on the first day at Cedarwood."

Ty sighed. "She's not on drugs or anything. Natalie says she just has a lot of pressure on her. Mostly from her dad."

"Oh," was all she could say. "And you don't know what she's taking?"

"No. That's all I know."

"I mean, Natalie doesn't worry?"

TY shrugged. "She doesn't say much about it to be honest, and I don't ask."

Jordyn just nodded. She didn't know what else to say. It was obvious Ty didn't know much about Lydia's problem and she wasn't going to probe him further.

"Hey, you heard about this Lake Fest thing?" she asked.

He chuckled. "Late much, Jor? That's been the talk of the town all week. Well, longer than that, but we weren't really here, so."

"Sorry, Mr. Cedarwood," Jordyn said, maybe a little too snippy because her brother looked offended. She started up the stairs.

"Hey," he said. "Why so sensitive all of a sudden, Jordyn?"

"I'm not," Jordyn said. "It's nothing. I'm going upstairs, get a shower and call Shay. Thanks for taking me tonight, Ty. Really. I had fun."

Ty smirked. "I bet you did."

She knew he was talking about Cole, so she just laughed. "Night, Ty."

Jordyn headed up the stairs, and heard her mother's voice before she'd even made it to the top.

Zara was in her bedroom, laughing, speaking in Swedish, meaning she was talking to her mother or father.

Jordyn crept by the door, peaking inside and seeing her mother putting away laundry with her cell phone cradled between her shoulder and ear.

Jordyn didn't interrupt, instead she just went into her room like she'd planned, took her shower, and called Shay.

After all. She had *plenty* to tell her best friend.

Chapter 20

Chapter Twenty

Friday, August 17, 2012

Even though she had only heard about Lake Fest two days ago, on Wednesday, by Friday, the last day of her first week at Cedarwood, it was all anyone could talk about, and Jordyn was hearing something about Lake Fest around every corner.

Ashley was still cold, even more so at dance. It was an inferiority thing, as Alice had told her. She didn't like Jordyn coming in and taking her spotlight. Not to mention, yesterday Natalie had asked Jordyn to sit at the table with the popular seniors. Jordyn had kindly declined, but nevertheless, Ashley had heard it, and narrowed her eyes even more. *If* that was even possible.

Jordyn was going to meet the girls at Alice's house at 4:30 to go to the carnival, so she went straight to her room to get ready once she was home.

It was still hot in Pennsylvania, so Jordyn opted for a mini skirt and a tight, red t-shirt, pulling her hair into a ponytail, leaving her long side bangs hanging out.

She studied herself in the mirror. The material of her shirt was stretching over her voluptuous bust, and she was feeling a tad self-conscious.

Of course, she was weird. She knew that. Shay had told her countless times she'd switch cup sizes with her in a heartbeat. But Shay didn't understand that the world Jordyn was used to, the dance world, didn't have a lot of big-busted women. Jordyn was considered, well, different there, and not exactly envied. She felt weird showing her boobs, even if they were hidden under a bra and a t-shirt. So she grabbed a black and red plaid button-down shirt and pulled it on over her t-shirt.

And she was ready to go.

She packed her duffel bag, and headed down to the kitchen, where she found her parents.

"I'm ready," she announced as she walked into the kitchen, dropping her duffel bag on the kitchen floor.

"You look nice," Zara said, smiling.

Jordyn looked down, making a face at her now simplified outfit. "I do?"

"Yes. You're losing your tan I see."

"Not a lot of reasons to go outside around here," Jordyn replied.

"Until now, right?" Zara asked with a smile.

Jordyn gave a small smile and shrugged. "Yeah, I guess so."

"Now listen, Jordyn," Zara said, putting on the serious face, sitting on the bed and motioning for Jordyn to join her. "I am happy you've made friends here and you're already getting out doing things. But I want you to

be careful. No drinking, no drugs, understand?"

Jack nodded his agreement. "And if any of the above happens, this will be both your first and last night out in Cedarwood."

Jordyn chuckled. "You guys know me."

"But we know teenagers, too, Jordyn" Zara said. "I know this is a safe town, but sweetie, anything can happen anywhere. You have a good head. Use it."

Jordyn nodded. "I will, mom. You don't have to worry. We're not partying, we're not riding around wild and getting drunk. Promise. We're going to Lake Fest then to Alice's to sleep over. We have to be there at midnight, anyway. She's got a strict mom, too."

"Who's driving?" Jack asked.

"Alice. Sixteen year olds around here have their licenses."

Zara sighed. "Get through Lake Fest. We'll talk about a license later."

Jordyn just nodded then smiled at Jack. "Like, maybe tomorrow, right, daddy?"

"Gotta work," Jack said. "Talk to your mom."

Jordyn sighed. "Let's go, mom."

"I've never been in this part of town before," Zara said as she turned into Foxwood. "Wow. There are some really nice houses, here. How did you know where it was?"

Lydia's drug dealer, she thought. But what she said was, "Alice just gave me good directions."

She'd learned earlier that day that Alice, Erin, and Bethany all lived in Foxwood, like Blake. In fact, Alice lived right across the street from Blake.

In the daylight, Foxwood was easier to see. The houses were all newer models, generous in size, and there were manicured lawns and hybrid cars in front of each one.

"It doesn't feel like we're still in Cedarwood anymore, does it?" Zara teased as they passed a couple of women jogging, then a middle-schooler on a bike.

"Stepford," Jordyn chuckled. "Alice says she lives on Dove Street. Second one on the left."

"Pigeon Lane, Eagle Way," Zara read the signs as they passed each street. "A lot of birds in this neighborhood."

Jordyn laughed. "Not all birds, mom. Look at that one. Frog Street."

Once they found Dove Street, Alice's house was easy to find. She'd said it was beige and at the end of the street, and even though she knew where Blake lived after Wednesday night, it had been dark and she couldn't even remember what it looked like. But she found Alice's easy. Beige house, red shutters, and a white minivan in the driveway, just like she'd said.

"This is it," Jordyn said, pointing.

Zara pulled into the driveway and Jordyn quickly pushed the door open.

"Jordyn," Zara said. "Remember what I said. Be careful, tonight."

"Don't worry mom. I will. Bye. Love you."

"Love you, too, sweetheart. Keep your phone on," she called.

But Jordyn was gone. Zara was backing down the driveway as Jordyn made her way across Alice's yard with her duffel bag hung over her shoulder. She took in the last lingering smells of summer; fresh-cut grass, someone cooking out in the neighborhood with the smell of charcoal permeating her nose.

It was strange, because looking around at the softer shades of light, it was obvious fall was creeping in the background, waiting to take over Cedarwood.

Jordyn stepped up on Alice's porch and spotted a yellow tabby cat, bathing itself on one of the porch chairs.

Jordyn rang the doorbell, and instantly was greeted by a little girl eating a popsicle and a barking Yorkie. The little girl was a miniature Alice, so it was easy to tell she was Alice's sister.

"Hi," Jordyn said with a smile. "I'm Jordyn. Is Alice here?"

"Elsie!" came Alice's voice as she appeared behind the little girl in the doorway. "Don't answer the door. I told you about that."

"But she's nice, Ali!" the little girl said. "She's your friend!"

Alice sighed, a sigh that reminded Jordyn of a mom sigh. "Me and you? We're gonna talk later. Go play."

"Bye, Jordyn!" Elsie said sweetly, waving with her only free hand as she skipped away.

Alice sighed and stepped back so Jordyn could come inside. "Come in."

Jordyn laughed as she stepped over the threshold into Alice's living room. It was a regular, modest-sized house, and like the rest of the houses in the neighborhood, looked very new. The living room was gorgeous, decorated with portraits on the wine-colored walls, but mostly pictures of Alice and Elsie through the years, The living room was fairly small, but not too small it was cramped. A leather living room suite sat in front of a flat-screen TV mounted on the wall. With magazines and books on the coffee table, Alice's house looked lived in. Looked like home.

Jordyn had never lived in a "regular" house before. Her house in Moon Bay Beach was the ideal beach house, the one she lived in now was practically a mini mansion, plantation style. But Alice's was just a house.

"Let's go to my room," Alice said. "Erin and Bethany are already up there."

Jordyn nodded, then followed her up the stairs and into a long, narrow hallway.

"So, I'll take it that was your sister?" Jordyn chuckled. "She's cute."

Alice sighed. "Elsie. She's a mess. This is my room."

Alice's room was small. She had a twin bed by the window, the walls painted a soft blue with white trim. She had a book shelf with more books than Jordyn had ever seen in a teenage girl's room. The curtains were white lace, and she had a small TV on the dresser by the far wall, but the room was very tidy and clean.

"Hi, Jordyn!" Erin said, running up, hugging Jordyn. Jordyn had learned earlier in the week that Erin was one of those girls that had to hug her friends when she saw them and when she left them.

"Hey, guys," Jordyn said to both Erin and Bethany, who was sitting Indian-style on the bed with a book in her lap.

Jordyn took notice that they all wore orange and brown, the Cedarwood school colors. Jordyn was wearing red, white and black.

"Is there a, uh, dress code at this thing?" she asked self-consciously.

Erin laughed. "You're fine. Not everyone is going to be in school colors. You'll be alright."

"Yeah, you look great," Alice said.

"Yeah, but you're all decked out in school colors and everything, and here I am looking like a sore thumb," Jordyn said. "Don't you have anything orange and brown I could wear?"

Alice put her hands on her hips and looked at Jordyn thoughtfully. "Hm. I think maybe we can come up with something. What do you girls think?"

Chapter 21

Chapter Twenty-One

Jordyn was not new to Friday night football. She was, however, new to Cedarwood High football.

In Cedarwood, Friday night football was like, NFL status to these people, but watching the Cougars play, Jordyn could see why. For a small town high school, they were really good. She could see why the whole town seemed to be packed into the bleachers, and plenty more of them lingering around the end zones watching.

Jordyn was squeezed in between Bethany and Erin with Alice next to Erin in the bleachers on the home side of the football stadium, doing what she'd done since she was a toddler, cheering her big brother on. She was certain she was the only one of the four of them who was actually watching the game and not the group of boys-hot, junior boys-who were sitting around them.

Ashley was nearby, close enough that Jordyn spotted her narrowing her eyes back several times. She knew her parents were somewhere in the crowd, but she hadn't seen them or Logan, yet. She had seen Natalie. Twice. Once at the carnival, with Lydia and Meredith, and of course, Ashley right on her heels. And she was wearing brown and orange. *Ty's* brown and orange Cougars hoodie, to be exact. With her hair up in a messy bun she still looked gorgeous as she sported Ty's numbers, 67, in orange and brown face paint on each of her cheeks.

Apparently they were officially a couple now.

Fortunately, though, thanks to Erin, Alice, and Bethany, Jordyn was fitting right in in her borrowed Cougars attire. She wore her white skirt, still, but she had borrowed an orange shirt from Alice, rolled the sleeves and tied them with black ties, and her hair was now in a high, curly messy bun, held up with an orange ribbon. She had orange and brown football stripes painted on her own cheeks.

The carnival had been a lot more fun than Jordyn thought it would be. There had been games, food, face painting, but mostly just hanging out. Now, the game was in the fourth quarter, and the Cougars were winning by three touchdowns.

"Let's go Cougars!" Robbie Parker shouted at the top of his lungs when Cedarwood had to finally to turn the ball over to the Hollingsworth Hornets and the Cedarwood band started playing *Louie, Louie,* from their own section of the stadium. "Man! Cole Anderson is on point tonight! And Jordyn, your brother has got to be the best receiver Cedarwood has ever had."

Jordyn just smiled. She'd met Robbie earlier in the week. He and Toby Wyler sat with Alice and the girls at lunch every day. They were friends of Blake's, Alice had told Jordyn.

They were cute, Jordyn realized, but she'd learned that they liked to party. They were proving it by the alcohol on their breath, courtesy of the Budweiser they'd snuck in in a cooler underneath sodas.

Not that Barney Fife had really searched their bags at the gate when they walked in. Jordyn figured nothing happened in Cedarwood, so why would the bored-looking deputy care if a couple of teenagers snuck in some beer?

But who was she kidding. He probably thought kids around here didn't even know what alcohol was.

Robbie and Toby were passing their beer back and forth between their friends. Even Jordyn had one in her hand.

Now who was the joiner? She thought ruefully about her brothers who had fit in since day one. She wasn't a drinker, and wasn't really sipping the beer to impress. But as the taste started to ease down her throat and she wasn't making secret faces of disgust, she at least felt *cool* for a moment. Not porcelain, perfect, dancer girl, Jordyn Hamilton. But instead, she was a regular high school girl, sitting in the stands of a football game, with friends, not her parents and Logan, and her eyes were on the quarterback.

She took a sip of her beer just as the ball was hiked to Cole. She watched as he tucked his arm back, and threw a fifty-yard pass to Ty. The crowd cheered, jumping to its feet as the ball landed smoothly in Ty's outstretched arms.

"Go, Ty, go!" Jordyn found herself screaming. Beside her, Alice was also screaming, everyone on their feet at this point.

Another touchdown.

"Your brother is Cedarwood's savior, Jordyn!" Toby yelled over the crowd cheering.

Once they'd calmed down, Alice leaned over. "Hey, why don't we get out of here and beat the traffic?" And God knew there was going to be traffic after this game. "There's only 1 minute left and we're up four touchdowns."

Jordyn nodded her agreement, dropped her beer can back into the cooler-because, as Robbie had said, if anyone finds any sign of alcohol, they'll get strict about bringing coolers in and no one wanted that-and followed Erin, Alice, and Bethany out. They found Alice's Ford Focus, and piled inside.

"Oh, man, Lake Fest is gonna be so fun!" Erin squealed as they headed out of the parking lot.

"I'll deny it in the future," Jordyn said. "But you guys have made me sort of excited about this whole Lake Fest thing."

"Whoa!" Bethany said. "Miss California is excited about a party in the woods on the lake! I'm telling the whole school Monday."

Jordyn laughed, and Alice turned up the radio. "Shut up, you guys," she said. "My song's on."

Jordyn soon found herself bobbing her head to a new pop song on blasting on the radio, and who saw it coming, but she was actually having fun. She felt bad about thinking it, but she was already having more fun with her new friends than she had back in Moon Bay Beach, minus the surfing. And Shay would always be her best friend, but she found herself getting more attached to Alice and the girls, and even Cedarwood, Pennsylvania, every day.

"Unbutton this."

Jordyn gasped as Alice reached over and ripped her oversized, button-down plaid blouse opened, exposing her black bikini top and her dangling pink belly-button ring.

"Much better," Alice said, smiling.

It was 10:30. They were all in Alice's room, getting ready for Lake Fest. Alice had told her dress code for tonight was swim wear, even though no one would be in the water until tomorrow. But Jordyn wasn't too sure about showing so much skin.

She spun around to look in Alice's full-length mirror. The opened shirt now exposed her flat, tanned belly, something she *hadn't* wanted to do tonight. She wore a pair of tiny, black cotton shorts over her bikini bottoms, and had pulled her hair into a high, messy bun. They'd all washed their face paint off, and Jordyn's face was now lightly coated in foundation, her cerulean blue eyes lined with simple mascara and eyeliner.

"Agreed," Erin said, lounged across Alice's bed with a magazine in her hands. She wore her light blue bikini top underneath a white camisole with light blue twill shorts. "I'd be showing my stomach, too, if I had your abs."

Jordyn looked at Erin in confusion. *What was she talking about? She was tiny.*

"I just don't know about this," Jordyn said. "I feel, exposed."

Not that she wasn't used to going around in public in a bikini. Back home, she practically lived in her bikini. But that was the beach. And she knew people. She was a *surfer*. Here, the new girl at school shouldn't be walking up to a party on the lake exposing her whole torso. It read as slutty.

"Jordyn, it's a lake party," Alice said. "A lake party we've been to many, many times. Trust me. You'll fit right in." Then she glanced at Jordyn. "Well, as much as you can fit in around here looking like a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader."

"Cole Anderson's gonna be all over you," Bethany said with a smile.

Jordyn self-consciously tugged the blouse back together.

"That was a complement, Jor," Alice said, pulling it back apart again.

"I'm just weird about people complimenting me or trying to say I look sexy," Jordyn admitted, then immediately regretted it.

"Why?" Erin asked. "You're gorgeous! No homo or anything, but you're hot."

"Yeah, I'd kill your figure," Alice agreed. "It doesn't make you conceited, if that's what you're worried about."

"Yeah, you got those abs from dance all those years, right?" Erin asked.

Jordyn just nodded.

"So you earned your abs," Alice said. "Therefore, you've earned the right to show them off. Now, you keep that blouse open, or I'll take it from you, got it?"

Jordyn smiled, and dropped her hands by her sides. "Well, what are we waiting for? Lake Fest is waiting, isn't it?"

And hopefully, so was Cole.

Chapter 22

Chapter Twenty-Two

Jordyn never thought she'd think of Lake Fest as cool. But, wow. It was actually *cool*! The beach was packed as Jordyn, Alice, and Erin walked up. Gosling Beach-which Jordyn learned was named for baby geese, not for that hottie from the Notebook-was the most popular recreation spot on Cedar Lake. Tonight, though, it was the most popular spot in the county.

Jordyn knew Lake Fest was big, but the beach was crowded. More crowded than she'd ever seen Moon Bay Beach on a good day, it seemed. Or maybe it was just smaller.

All around, Jordyn recognized classmates, but she also saw a ton of people she didn't know. There was a DJ booth set up by a long, wooden dock, and in front of it, a group of people were dancing, like the type of dancing someone would see in night clubs. There were coolers, towels, tents, and a few officers from the tiny Cedarwood police force were even patrolling the party.

"Lake Fest is supposed to be a family event," Alice explained as they walked past the warm bonfire in the middle of it all. "But as you can see, tonight it's not so family-oriented."

"It's a little PG-13 right now," Erin explained. "Bye about 1:00, it'll die down some, because there's a party somewhere, and we'll find out where later."

"It'll be rated G tomorrow," Alice added.

"We're gonna upgrade to R, later," Erin chuckled.

"So, look," Jordyn said as they found a spot to put their towels down. "I thought we were spending the night at Alice's. Is that right?"

"Well," Erin said. "I was kind of hoping to go to a party. I really need a drink and it's not going to happen here with Cedarwood's finest watching."

She pointed to one of the cops lining off the beach, patrolling the parking lot.

"We won't stay long, Jordyn," Alice said. "But I mean, if you don't want to go-"

"No, it's cool," Jordyn said honestly. "I don't mind. I'd love to go." She looked away as she stretched out on the blanket with the girls, watching a glow-in-the-dark Frisbee sail overhead.

"Hey, there's your brother, Jor," Erin said.

Jordyn followed her gaze as Ty walked through the gates to the beach, surrounded by his usual crowd, a few football players, Natalie, Lydia, and Meredith.

And *Cole*.

They all slapped high fives with their friends, Ty fitting right in like he'd lived here his whole life. While the football players were getting patted on the backs for a good game, Jordyn's eyes dropped on Cole, who wore a black tank top, colorful, floral swim trunks and a backwards baseball cap.

He was gorgeous, and the tank top revealed some muscles she hadn't seen this week at school. She watched them go straight for a cooler, grab a bottle of water, each, and they all headed to the dance "floor" and started dancing. Jordyn decided to look away when she saw Natalie and Ty grinding to the blasting music. She couldn't really take looking at Cole, being that he was in the middle of Lydia, Meredith and other girls.

"Hey, Jordyn," Toby said, stepping up. "Want to dance?"

"Uh, no thanks," Jordyn chuckled.

"What's wrong, two left feet?"

Jordyn chuckled, shaking her head, but didn't answer. Truthfully, this wasn't her kind of dance, and she felt more comfortable just watching.

And once Cole had stopped dancing on Meredith, Lydia, and other cheerleaders gathered in their little circle, Jordyn found herself very comfortable watching him.

And their eyes met, just like that.

"Oh my gosh, Cole Anderson is so hot," Erin sighed as her eyes landed on the group of football players.

Yes he was, Jordyn thought, following her new friends' gaze across the beach where he stood near the DJ, eyes still locked on Jordyn. But Erin and the girls didn't seem to notice.

"Did you guys see that last pass?" Bethany asked.

Jordyn saw it. She also saw when Cole smiled at her. But they didn't. She saw him lean over and say something to the others, then started toward them.

"Oh my gosh, he's coming over here," Alice said.

"He so is not," Bethany said in disbelief.

"Oh yes, he is," Erin said, close to hyperventilation.

He walked up to them, smiling, his eyes on Jordyn. "Hey, Jordyn Hamilton the Genius," he teased with a smile. "You having fun?"

"Uhm, yeah," Jordyn replied, not sure exactly what she was doing. Here she was, face to face with the hottest guy at Cedarwood High, and she was about to make an idiot out of herself. "This is pretty cool, I guess. Hey, uh, good game tonight."

"Thanks," he replied with a smile, taking a sip of his beer. Then his eyes dropped to her bared stomach, then made their way up, stopping on her chest, where they lingered for a moment. The right corner of his mouth lifted into a smile, then he met her eyes again and took another drink.

"Hey, you want to dance?" he asked. "Ty said you're pretty good at it. I kind of want to see."

"Oh she's great," Alice said.

"Really great," Erin added. "Believe me, I've seen her."

"I'm not that great," Jordyn said.

"I don't know, everyone else says different," he said. "I think you need to prove it to me."

Just then Rihanna's Cockiness started playing.

She just smiled, and went with what she hoped was best. She took his hand and let him lead her out. She glanced to the group that Cole had come from, wondering if Ty was watching. She wondered if he would mind it too much his new friend dancing with his little sister. She quickly saw that he wasn't paying attention to anything except Natalie, who laughed gracefully and flipped her hair.

Cole turned her away from him so that her back was against his hard chest. He put his hands on her hips, and started to sway with the music, moving her hips with his.

Oh, What the hell, she thought, letting go of her inhibitions as best as she could and started to let loose, moving seductively against him. So seductively that she surprised herself.

Cole was actually a really good dancer. Jordyn thought a guy that could dance like this was sexy, and the fact that he was already sexy without the dancing made it even better. She felt his hands on her bare belly, and his mouth was by her ear. She could hear him breathing, and she could smell the mixture of alcohol and pure male scent-having two brothers, she knew what guys smelled like. But she wasn't attracted to it before now.

On Cole is was very, very sexy. Mostly Axe, but plenty male.

She felt a slight tugging at the pit of her stomach, and her heart was beating faster and faster. She was having fun. Who knew?

Somewhere in the crowd, Jordyn spotted Ashley and her friends. They were watching her with envy. *Evil* envy.

Jordyn ignored her, and kept on dancing with Cole. It was no party on the beach in California, but Lake Fest in Pennsylvania was pretty awesome.

Chapter 23

Chapter Twenty-Three

Monday, September, 3, 2012

Two weeks after Lake Fest, August turned to September, and so suddenly Jordyn didn't even realize it had happened, the hot summer air had been exchanged for more dreary, but more chilly fall-like days. She loved it so far, strangely enough, though, because she'd never experienced a real fall before.

The weather wasn't the only thing changing in Cedarwood, though. Jordyn found herself adapting to Cedarwood better than ever after that night after the football game. She started to really fit in with her friends, and suddenly, she didn't feel like she was the new kid anymore, just plain, Jordyn Hamilton of Cedarwood, Pennsylvania. She'd never expected she'd ever be proud of that fact, but she was.

Oh, yeah, and her new friends? Jordyn hadn't noticed it before, but they were pretty popular. It was Ashley and her crew that were the wannabes. The more Jordyn and the girls were visited by the popular junior boys, Blake and his friends, and Ashley wasn't, the fact was more believable.

She'd already realized after that night at Mickey's Ashley Moore was simply an oblivious wannabe who was so busy being stuck on Natalie and her crew and trying to act like she was better than everyone else she didn't even know she was probably the least liked girl in school.

Dance was still going good, too. Maggie had managed, in the three weeks they'd been back, to teach several numbers in her version of contemporary and jazz, which she stated would be performed at their fall recital and even at the Harvest Festival. Erin explained that was in October, and Main Street in Cedarwood was blocked off for tons of fall-themed booths, fun games, and even a pumpkin-growing contest.

Erin had even admitted she'd searched her on Youtube.

"You did what?" Jordyn had asked with a laugh, amused by this.

"I looked up you and Victoria Joy. You're a damn beast outside of Maggie's room."

"I was alright."

"Alright? People made fan videos for you."

Jordyn had just shrugged. "People are weird."

But the biggest change so far in Cedarwood? Cole Anderson. He and Jordyn had moved up from surreptitiously flirting and smiling at each other from across the cafeteria to actually speaking almost every day, and he'd even gotten her cell number from Ty over the weekend and was texting her.

Jordyn could have squealed.

"You guys, do you think he likes me?" she'd finally asked her friends on Monday at lunch, still watching him from afar, despite all the progress she felt like they were making.

The girls had laughed, making Jordyn a little curious. What was funny?

"You guys, I think Jordyn's the only who *doesn't* know Cole's hot for her," Alice had said.

After school, Jordyn had gone with Alice to the book store to hang out, and when they weren't talking about Cole, they managed to get a little homework done.

A little after 5:00, they heard the bell over the door ring, and looked up to see a tiny, 80-something old woman, hunched over, with big, eighties-style glasses, and a sweater draped over her shoulders.

"Morning, dears," she said with a smile.

Morning? Jordyn thought in confusion. She looked over at Alice, who didn't look confused at all.

"Hi, Miss Opal! How are you!" she said instead.

"Fine, sweetheart, just fine."

When Miss Opal was gone, Jordyn glanced at Alice.

Alice smiled. "That's Miss Opal. She's ninety-four."

Jordyn's jaw dropped. *Ninety-four*?

"Yeah, she's a sweetheart, though," Alice said. "She comes in here every day. Like, seriously. She goes on walks. She lives in a tiny house at the end of the street by the lake, and walks from there to the library every day."

Jordyn was amazed. That was about half a mile, but for a ninety-four-year-old?

"She comes in, browses, never buys anything, but sometimes she'll stay and we'll talk if I'm slow here. She usually tells me a bunch of stories about when she was young, and I swear, I enjoy listening to them so much. It's so interesting."

Jordyn smiled. "I bet."

"Her husband died last year," Alice said, her expression suddenly overcome with sadness. "They were married seventy-two years. They used to go to the library together and sit in the gazebo outside just talking. When he lost his sight, she would read to him. Opal says she still goes out there every morning, sitting in the gazebo, talking to him. She says sometimes he even answers her back. Isn't that so sweet!"

It was, Jordyn thought. It was the most romantic thing she'd ever heard. "I hope I have a marriage like that."

"You and me both," Alice said.

Miss Opal did what Alice had said she would do, browsed about fifteen minutes, then headed out the door with a friendly wave and smile.

"She's a sweetheart," Alice sighed after she was gone. "I don't have any grandparents. Well, I do have them, but they aren't close. My dad's mom's dead, and his dad is a drunk. My parents were seventeen when they got pregnant with me, so my mom's parents kicked her out. I've met her parents, but don't really like them. I know that's bad. I think that's why I like Miss Opal so much. She's like this sweet old grandmother I've always wanted but never had."

Jordyn smiled. "I understand that. I met my dad's dad, the one who left us the house, a few times, but he died three years ago. I never met his mom, and my maternal grandparents live in Sweden and don't speak a lot of English. They visit once maybe every two years."

Alice beamed. "See. We have tons in common. We were meant to be great friends."

Jordyn chuckled. "I agree."

The bell chimed again over the door, this time, Erin came in in her dance gear, her duffel bag over her shoulder.

"Hi!" she said, smiling. "Is my dance partner ready for another rigorous class at Miss Maggie's?"

Jordyn chuckled. "Yes, I guess she is." She waved to Alice, picking up her own duffel bag and followed Erin out.

They passed the ice cream shop, The Creamery, on the way to the studio from the book store, and Jordyn glanced through the window. There she saw her brother and Natalie, sharing a sundae. She smiled.

They were officially the school's "It" couple, and were starting to be inseparable. If Ty wasn't at Natalie's house, Natalie was over at theirs. Jordyn had no complaints. She loved Natalie. She was like the big sister Jordyn never had. Best part? She didn't like Ashley.

"Your brother and Natalie are so cute," Erin said, nudging her as they walked.

"Yeah, she's the best girlfriend he's ever had," Jordyn commented.

"You're so lucky," Erin said. "You're a California transplant and already you're popular."

"Oh, I so am not," Jordyn said.

"Are, too. Cole Anderson likes you, that's enough. Not to mention you already have haters."

"I have *what*?"

Erin laughed. "Hello! Ashley's so jealous of you. You dance better, so she's not Miss Maggie's favorite anymore and the cheerleaders actually like you. You got everything she knew she wasn't gonna get. She was just acting like she didn't care before you came along."

"I'll be honest," Jordyn said. "I'm sort of tired of Ashley and her friends. They're really starting to get on my nerves."

Erin laughed. "They got on everyone else's nerves before you got here."

After dance, Erin drove her home. She'd started offering her rides last week since Jordyn wasn't making any leeway on getting her parents to buy her a car.

"So, does Cole come over to your house a lot?" Erin asked as she pulled into Jordyn's driveway and saw Cole's Jeep Wrangler in the driveway.

Jordyn felt her stomach flip over when she saw it. She hadn't known Cole was coming over tonight.

"Uhm, no," she told Erin, pushing the door open. "I didn't know he would be here."

"Maybe he'll ask you out," Erin said, winking and nudging Jordyn.

Jordyn shook her head. "It's not gonna happen. Like you guys said, he's a player. It's obvious. We danced at Lake Fest, but that's nothing. He doesn't like me like that. You, Alice and Bethany need to accept it. Besides, I don't care. I'm three weeks into this new school year in a new town and I already have three amazing friends. I have no reason to complain about not having a boyfriend. It's no big deal. Really. I'll see you in class tomorrow."

"Call me the second he asks you out," Erin said instead. Jordyn scoffed and chuckled, shaking her head and shutting the door on Erin's Jetta, then walked across the dark yard to her front door.

She pushed the door open and went into the living room, seeing Cole, Ty and Natalie on the couch.

"Hi," she said, smiling as she closed the door behind her.

"What's up, Jordyn?" Cole asked with a smile, and Jordyn almost melted.

Oh well. Good thing Erin didn't believe her. Because when she told her she didn't need care, she was lying through her teeth.

Chapter 24

Chapter Twenty-Four

Tuesday, September 4, 2012

The next day, Tuesday, it happened. It happened right after fourth period when Jordyn was putting her books in her locker.

Cole slipped up beside her, smiling as he leaned against the locker next to hers.

"Hey, Jordyn," he said with a smile.

She smiled back. "Hi, Cole. What's up?"

"Just wondering something."

"Wondering what?"

"If you were busy this weekend. Like on Saturday?"

And that was how she knew. Cole Anderson was about to ask her out.

Please don't act like a dork, she begged herself. Her stomach was flipping and it took every ounce of strength she had not to grin like the euphoric idiot she'd just become.

"Uhm, Saturday?" she asked. She shrugged. "Nah, I don't think so. Why?"

"I want to take you out. Can I take you out?"

She smiled. "I guess that would be alright," she teased. Or, at least she hoped she was teasing and not sounding like an idiot. It would be just like her to have the hottest guy in school asking her out and she make him regret it within two minutes.

Psh. Who was she kidding? Getting asked out by the hottest guy in school was *nothing* like her.

Luckily he smiled. "Great. 8:00 Saturday. I'll pick you up." He started to walk away.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Somewhere cool. I'll text you."

She smiled. "OK."

Cole walked away, and Jordyn was surprised to see Ashley, Shari, and Leah standing there watching. Their eyes were narrowed. They'd heard the whole thing.

Jordyn had wasted no time telling Alice and the girls about her date. She'd texted the three of them immediately, "*OMG, I have a date with Cole Anderson Saturday!*" to which they all replied their "I told you so's," and "It's about times."

Alice met her in the parking lot after school by her Focus.

"Look at miss hot in the pants," Alice said with a smile as she approached Jordyn. "I'm so proud of you!"

Jordyn couldn't help but laugh when Alice wrapped her arms around her. "I told you he liked you."

"Yeah, yeah, it's not a big deal," Jordyn lied.

"Oh, Jordyn. It is *so* a big deal. It's a *huge* deal! You've got a date with *the* Cole Anderson! I mean, how are you still on the ground? I'd be floating."

Jordyn chuckled. "Whoa, Alice. *The* Cole Anderson? Please tell me you're not on that bandwagon, too."

"Any straight girl with a pulse is on *that* bandwagon. I'm proud to be your friend. You're gonna be the envy of Cedarwood High."

"I don't think it's that serious."

"Ok, you're lying. What's your brother say about it?"

Jordyn shrugged as she plopped into the front seat of the car, hooking her seatbelt. "Alice. Cole just asked me out less than 30 minutes ago. I haven't seen Ty."

"What do you think he's gonna say?" Alice asked, plopping down in the driver's seat.

That was a question Jordyn didn't have the answer to. She figured he wouldn't care.

Tonight, though, Ty and Natalie didn't have plans together after football practice, so Ty was home. Perfect timing.

Jordyn hadn't mentioned her date to her parents, yet, and she hadn't mentioned it to Ty, either. She wondered if he knew, but kind of hoped he didn't. Not yet, anyway. She wanted to be the one to tell him, because knowing Ty, while he puts on a big brother protective front and he probably meant it, he would probably bring it up in front of her parents at dinner and it would kind of mess things up.

Jordyn would tell her mother later tonight, but when it came to Jack, well he was *real* overprotective daddy, and Jordyn hoped to have Zara tell him about the date. Jack was going to have a lot of questions, questions Jordyn didn't really want to answer right now. She didn't want the third degree, she just wanted to be a normal sixteen-year-old girl and get excited about her date.

So she was happy at dinner when Ty didn't say anything in front of her parents. It was after dinner, when she was packing her bag for dance that Ty approached her.

"So," he said with a smirk, leaning in her doorway with his arms folded over his chest. "Hear you've got a date this weekend?"

"Who told you?" Jordyn asked.

He raised his eyebrows and Jordyn sighed. Ok. So *that* was a dumb question.

"Whole school knows," Ty laughed.

"Don't tell mom and dad."

Ty raised his eyebrows. "You really think they're gonna forbid you to go out on a date? Really?"

"No I don't, Ty." It was obvious, being a son, Ty didn't understand the difficulties of getting out of the house with a guy. He was with Natalie, and her parents loved Natalie. No way did Jack get all out of sorts over him taking *his* girl out the first time. Zara even said she was a "lovely girl."

"I'm confused," Ty sighed, rubbing the part of his nose between his eyes.

Jordyn bent over and zipped her dance bag. "Obviously." She grabbed her black wind jacket, matching her wind pants over her dance clothes. "Look, I'll explain it to you. I'm a girl."

"Nice observation. I think that was motivation for Cole asking you out."

"I don't want dad being all, *dad*, about this whole thing. This is sort of my first date."

Ty's jaw dropped in surprise. "Oh my gosh! You're right, it is! I never thought of it that way."

"That's not something to repeat, either," Jordyn said suddenly. "But you know dad. He's gonna want everything short of Cole's social security number."

"I'll vouch for you, Jor. Cole's a good guy and dad knows him, anyway. I wouldn't make a big deal about it."

"You wouldn't," Jordyn mumbled. She lifted her bag over her shoulder just as a set of high beams flashed in her window. She peaked out and saw Erin's Jetta in the yard. "Erin's here. Gotta go. And don't forget. Don't tell mom and dad."

At dance, Ashley, Shari, and Leah approached Jordyn and Erin in the corner of the studio, while they were stretching.

Ashley smirked, folding her arms over her chest, in that stupid leotard she was still wearing, and Jordyn knew something was coming.

"Hi, Jordyn," Ashley said, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "I heard Cole asked you out, today."

"That's because you standing right behind him eavesdropping on a private conversation," Jordyn said with a smile. "Very mature, by the way."

Ashley rolled her eyes. "You know he only did it because he's friends with your brother. I sit with them at lunch, remember. I hear what they say about you. Ty says you need help making friends, so he asked Cole to ask you out to push you in the right direction."

Jordyn didn't even that comment the consideration Ashley wanted. She just smiled, and nodded. "Of course he did, Ashley. If that's how you handle rejection, then so be it. Word of advice, though? Stay out of Natalie's ass, and don't try to convince me I don't know my own brother."

"Ashley, you need a life," Erin joined in. "You make yourself look more and more pathetic every time you open your mouth."

"Stay out of this, Erin," Ashley snapped. "Nice charity case you got here, by the way."

So Jordyn figured out what really pushed Ashley over the limits. Cole Anderson.

Jordyn just smiled and pulled her legs into a full split, stretching. "Ashley, I don't have time for you right now. You or that ridiculous leotard."

Erin snickered.

"I can't take anything you say seriously while you're in that thing," Jordyn continued politely. "This isn't ballet, and it isn't gymnastics. You look like an idiot." Oh, that dropped jaw on Ashley's face gave Jordyn a feeling of pure pleasure. "So go away. You and your two little 'mini mes' leave me alone while I focus on what I'm doing. My life is none of your business."

"Welcome to Cedarwood, Jordyn," Ashley scoffed. "Everything is my business."

Jordyn just laughed. "Whatever you say Ashley. Now, go away."

Ashley opened her mouth to say something else, but Maggie walked in, shouting for everyone to get into place, because they were learning a new jazz piece tonight.

Ashley scowled at Erin and Jordyn, then turned on her heel and walked away.

"Wow, girl," Erin said, catching her heel in her hand, pulling it to her butt and stretching her quad muscles. "You got some brass ones, huh?"

"Psh," Jordyn scoffed, watching Ashley stretch on the opposite side of the room, still staring her down. "I am *not* scared of Ashley Moore or her two little robots."

Besides, Jordyn thought. She had a date with Cole Anderson Saturday night. No way was she about to let whiny little Ashley get to her now.

Chapter 25

Chapter Twenty-Five

Saturday, September 8, 2012

Saturday morning the sky was grey. Not the nice, crisp blue skies Jordyn had gradually started to get used to, but it was grey, gloomy and depressing. But tonight was Jordyn's date with Cole, so even these ugly skies lingering above couldn't spoil her attitude and take the smile off her face.

So at 9:30, even with the promise of rain soon, Jordyn dressed, strapped on her running Nikes, and went out for her morning run while everyone else was still sleeping.

The five miles to town had gotten easier the more Jordyn ran it, and by now, it was her routine run. She knew Alice would be at the book store today, so she jogged there, and walked into the store to find Alice behind the counter, looking tired and bored as she usually did. But when she saw Jordyn walk in, she perked up. "Hey!" she said. "Just on time. I was getting ready to fall asleep over here."

Jordyn chuckled, sitting behind the counter beside Alice, where she saw her going through a bag of butterscotch candies. "Butterscotch?"

"Yes, these are delicious!" Alice said, unwrapping one and popping it into her mouth. She offered the bag to Jordyn, who graciously took one.

"Yeah, I know," Jordyn said. "I haven't had these in forever."

"Well, welcome to Pennsylvania, then. Haven't you been in Milton's?"

A month here in this tiny town and Jordyn thought she'd learned all about Cedarwood. Guess she was wrong.

She shook her head. "No. What's that?"

"It's a store," Alice said. "Really old fashioned, sells candies no one hardly eats anymore, sells brands no one has ever heard of before, but everything is really delicious. It's by the Farmer's Market on Lake Road."

See. Jordyn hadn't even heard of the Farmer's Market.

"You don't know what that is either, do you," Alice said with a sigh. "I can tell by that blank expression you've got on your face."

"Ok, Dr. Phil, what's the Farmer's Market," Jordyn said.

"I could take you."

"Why don't you tell me, first."

Alice sighed impatiently. "Jordyn, you're in Pennsylvania. We grow things here. A lot of things."

"We? You live in a subdivision."

Alice held up her middle finger and kept talking. "We have apple orchards, dairy farms, and our maple syrup is boss. But nothing, I mean, nothing, tops our goat's milk fudge."

Jordyn cringed.

"It'd delicious," Alice said. "Don't give me that look. Everyone around here likes it."

"So, when you say Farmer's Market, you mean, it's really a market?"

"Yep. All locally grown fruits and veggies. They're so much better than in the grocery stores, too. My mom and I go every weekend. We're going after we close up shop here today. You're welcome to join us."

Jordyn thought about how fun that would be. Then she wanted to slap herself.

Fun, Jordyn? She told herself. *Fun going grocery shopping?*

Crazy, she knew. But honestly, it did sound really fun.

"What time?" Jordyn asked. "I have that date with Cole tonight, you know."

"We'll be back at 3:00. No later than that. You'll have plenty of time. And you'll be glad you did. Once you taste one of Miss Riley's fresh-picked apples, you will never go back to Winn Dixie."

"I'm sure I won't," Jordyn said. "Considering I've never been to a Winn Dixie in my life."

"Smart ass. Anyway. We're leaving at 1:00. Want us to pick you up?"

Jordyn shrugged. "Sure. Why not." She snatched another butterscotch, and started on her run back home.

When she got back, Ty was up, dressed, and about to go see Natalie.

"Hey," she said, passing him on his way out of the house as she made her way up the driveway.

"Hey," Ty said. Then he smiled. "So. Tonight's the big night, huh? Big date with Cole?"

Jordyn rolled her eyes. "Make fun all you want, Ty. You won't spoil my evening."

"In all seriousness, though. You have my blessing and all that shit. Just know, if he puts his hands on you, I'll kill him. Best friend or not."

"I appreciate the sentiment, Ty," Jordyn said. "Really. But I'm not gonna even tell you if he tries to hold my hand."

"Oh, he's gonna hold your hand," Ty said. "I'm sure of it. That's not the kind of touching I'm talking about. And don't worry. I reminded him yesterday."

Jordyn scoffed. "May I remind you you're only a year older than me?"

"Older is the key word in that sentence, Jordie. You're still my little sister, and don't make me embarrass you to remind you."

"I hope you're not home when Cole comes to pick me up."

"Oh I will be. See you later, kiddo."

He bumped her as he walked by, and she headed on into the house. Inside, she could hear her mother rapidly speaking Swedish in the kitchen.

Following her voice, Jordyn found Zara at the kitchen table, still in her pajamas, on her cell phone, beaming as she laughed into the phone. She spotted Jordyn, and waved, but continued to talk into the phone. Jordyn just went straight to the refrigerator for a bottle of water.

"*Jag Ã¤lskar dig mamma*," Zara was saying. "*Hej dÃ¥*,"

Jordyn didn't know a lot of Swedish, but she knew Zara had told her mother she loved her and goodbye before hanging up the phone.

"Good morning, sweetheart," she said, picking her coffee cup up and taking a sip from it. "Have a good run?"

"Yes," Jordyn said. "Was that grandma?"

Zara smiled and nodded. "Yes, dear. She sends her love. So. What have you got planned today?"

"Uhm, actually, Alice invited me to go with her and her mother to the Farmer's Market at 1:00."

Zara looked impressed. "Wow. That sounds like a lot of fun. I've wanted to go to the Farmer's Market myself ever since Judy Moore told me about it."

Jordyn didn't know who Judy Moore was. Probably a friend Zara had made at yoga.

"I hadn't heard of it before Alice mentioned it. Apparently it's pretty popular."

"Oh yes, it is. As soon as I get my catering up and running, which will hopefully happen in the next couple of weeks or so, I plan to go to that Farmer's Market and do some shopping for my business. Local fresh fruit is the best you can ask for."

So Zara was fitting in in Pennsylvania almost better than the rest of the family. She'd rented out a space on Main Street after they'd arrived, and had spent pretty much every waking hour setting up for Country Cookin' Caterin' Service-yes, that *was* the name her mother was going with. You'd think she'd lived here her whole life by the way she was acting.

God help her, but just yesterday, Jordyn had seen her in overalls to clean the house. Yes, *overalls!*

"Why don't you pick out something good, Jordyn," Zara suggested. "Bring us home something we can make a pie out of tonight. That sounds like fun, doesn't it?"

Tonight. So, now was a good time, probably, to tell Zara she already had plans tonight.

"What's wrong, honey?" Zara asked, apparently noting the thoughtful look on Jordyn's face as she stared at the water bottle.

Jordyn put a smile on. "Nothing. Nothing's wrong, just, well, I sort of have plans tonight."

"Oh, that's fine. With who? Alice and the girls?"

"No. Not them."

Zara shrugged. "Well, with who, then?"

"Uhm, you know Ty's friend? The quarterback, Cole Anderson?"

Zara perked up and smiled. Like, a big, genuine, "I'm happy for you," smile. "Jordyn. You have a date? Why didn't you tell us?"

"I didn't want dad to scare him out of going," Jordyn admitted.

Zara laughed. "When has your father ever been anything but laid back, Jordyn? Knowing Jack, he'll be in his chair when Cole gets here, and he'll just say, 'You two be careful, don't stay out late.'"

Jordyn chuckled. Her mother's heavily accented interpretation of her father was quite hilarious. If only Jordyn believed it was accurate.

"You're not gonna tell him, though, are you?" Jordyn asked.

Zara nodded. "Yes, Jordyn, of course I'm going to tell him."

"Mom, he's going make this my *only* date with Cole."

"Oh, Jordyn don't be silly. He will not. Your father is very understanding. He knows Cole already anyway. He likes him."

Jordyn didn't argue. She knew Jack liked Cole. But she knew he liked the Cole that was friends with Ty, not the Cole who was taking his daughter out on a date.

Jordyn checked the clock. It was 10:30 already. Oh well. She was gonna have to find out in eight more hours when Cole came to pick her up.

Chapter 26

Chapter Twenty-Six

The Farmer's Market was on a highway Jordyn had never been on before. It was down Lake Road, in the opposite direction from Woodbury, and deeper, Jordyn realized, in the country than she'd been the entire month she'd lived in Cedarwood. Going to it, Jordyn watched the scenery pass her by from the back window of Mrs. Doherty's minivan. So far, the country was beautiful.

"There sure is a lot of corn," Jordyn pondered out loud as she passed, yet another, corn field. Besides the seemingly endless, roadside array of ten-foot-tall cornstalks, they'd passed tons of abandoned farms, and even went under a cute covered bridge over a wide creek.

"I can't believe you've never been to this part of the county," Alice said, still incredulous that Jordyn had lived here this long and had managed to stay contained in one small part of the county. "There's so much more to do around here than just sit around Cedarwood."

"I see that now," Jordyn said, watching as the thick splay of trees they were once surrounded by opened up to flat, empty fields, some with old farm houses, most dilapidated, sitting maybe 200 feet off the road.

She couldn't believe she thought Cedarwood was country. There was a whole world away from it, mazes of secondary roads, farms, cows, corn; things she hadn't seen before today's trip. She wondered how much further into the sticks they would go before they reached the Farmer's Market.

Not much, she realized after they'd rounded a curve and approached what was surely the Farmer's Market. The place looked like a short, white circus tent, a wooden sign by the highway advertising that this was, indeed, the Farmer's Market. And there were a lot of cars.

"Do they do this every day?" Jordyn asked. "I mean, is it open seven days a week?"

"Not on Sunday," Alice said.

Mrs. Doherty parked and they all got out.

"*Mooooo!!!*"

Jordyn jumped when she heard the deep cry. Alice burst into laughter.

"Jordyn, you're too much!" she declared. "Turn around."

So slowly and cautiously, Jordyn turned around, and saw across the road from the Farmer's Market was a field of cows.

"Oh," was all Jordyn could say. She'd never been this close to cows in her life. And she wasn't even close.

Alice laughed and put her arm around her friend as they followed Mrs. Doherty into the "big top." "Oh, Jordyn. I have to take you on a tour of the county. We have a lot to offer to a city girl like you who hasn't seen a thing like this in your life."

Alice was right about that, too. Jordyn really hadn't seen anything like this in her life. In the "big top-" Jordyn would call it that being that the word tent didn't do this circus-like space justice-there were a *lot* of people. Crowds so thick, Jordyn felt claustrophobic just looking at them. She didn't know there were enough people in Cedarwood to make this place packed.

There were booths and booths of fruits and vegetables set up side-by-side, forming aisles between each row. Jordyn spotted apples, cherries, even pumpkins! You name it, the big top had it.

"Hey, mom," Alice said, grabbing Jordyn's arm as the three of them stepped up to a booth full of fresh apples, manned by a cute college-aged boy. "We're gonna go get some fudge."

"OK, well don't be long," Mrs. Doherty said, examining a shiny apple. "We'll be leaving soon."

Alice just nodded, pulling Jordyn with her in haste.

"Where are we going?" Jordyn asked as they whipped through the crowd.

"To get fudge," Alice said.

"To get, what?"

"Jordyn, you're in Pennsylvania. Capital of Hershey's chocolate. We have sweet teeth for chocolate around her."

"But you said fudge."

"Yes, ma'am. Look."

They had stopped in front of a booth near the back of the big top, along the banner above the booth was "Miss Betty's Genuine Goat's Milk Fudge."

"Goat's Milk Fudge?" Jordyn asked, cringing. That sounded awful.

"No, it's good," Alice insisted. "Delicious, actually. I'm buying some. And you are going to try it."

Jordyn opened her mouth to argue, but forgot about the goat's milk fudge when she saw who was manning the booth. There, in jeans, a white t-shirt and a blue apron and matching paper hat, was a smiling Blake Cormann, packing up some fudge, and saran-wrapping it for a customer.

"Alice," he said. "California. What's up?"

"What are you doing here?" Jordyn asked, then instantly realized she may have sounded a little rude.

Blake just laughed, making Jordyn feel better. "Working, California. What are you doing here?"

"Jordyn, here, is about to try some of your grandmother's famous fudge," Alice said, smiling back at Blake.

Blake took a five from his customer, and gave her her change, thanking her before turning to Alice and Jordyn.

"Well, great," Blake said. "And California, I think I'll give you a free sample, just don't let it get around."

He spoke to Jordyn, but winked at Alice. Jordyn saw Alice blush.

Now she got it. Alice liked Blake! How had Jordyn not seen it before? And by the looks of it, he liked her back.

Jordyn watched Blake take a small block of fudge from the pan and hand it to her in a napkin.

"Don't look like that, Jordyn," Alice said as Jordyn took it, making a face at the thought of goat's milk. "It's good. Eat it. I promise you'll like it."

"Hey," Blake said, holding his hands up. "I might be biased, but my grandmother's fudge is top of the line."

"Eat it, eat it, eat it," Alice started chanting. "Eat it, eat it-"'

"Alright, alright!" Jordyn laughed. "I'll eat it."

So, trying to force herself to forget that it was made out of goat's milk, she took a bite of Blake's grandmother's famous chocolate fudge.

They watched her expectantly as she chewed slowly, then swallowed. And she had *never* tasted fudge that good in her life.

"Oh my God!"

Alice laughed, clapping, and Blake just beamed. "So that'll be a pound of fudge to go, California?"

"I've got to get some of this to take home," Jordyn said after she'd scarfed down the rest of the fudge. "How much?"

Alice laughed. "I told you!"

Jordyn paid for some more fudge, then when Blake started to get busy, they left, not wanting to bother him anymore.

After Mrs. Doherty dropped Jordyn off at home, she rushed inside, eager to get ready for her date with Cole. Yes, it was only 3:00 and he wouldn't be picking her up until 6:30, but she was excited.

She wandered into the house through the front door, and found her dad in the living room, a football game on TV.

Penn State? Wow. This whole family was really conforming here.

"Hey, daddy," Jordyn said, shutting the door behind her. "I got fudge!"

Jack narrowed his eyes. "Fudge?"

"Yes, goat's milk fudge. I went with Alice and her mom to the Farmer's Market and I bought it. I got some delicious butterscotch, too."

"You went to a Farmer's Market?" Jack asked, his eyebrows high. "Wow. Someone's sure adapting."

Jordyn chuckled, sitting on the couch. She motioned to the TV. "Yeah, says he who's watching a Penn State football game?"

"Can't pick up California game around here," Jack said. "They don't sell University of San Diego shirts around here, either, so I guess I'm trying something new. I guess I've been busy this week with work and everything. I haven't seen much out of you. A little behind on what's been going on with my little girl."

"It's OK, I understand," Jordyn said. "We're still getting used to everything. I haven't seen much of anyone except Ty, really."

"I say we catch up," Jack said. "Soon. How bout I take you to lunch tomorrow? Since you'll be going out with Ty's friend, Cole tonight."

OK, so he knew about her date. "Uhm, yes?"

Jack chuckled. "Good for you. He's a nice guy."

"You're OK with me going out?"

"Of course. I'll have my gun out when he gets here just so he'll know where to keep his hands."

Jordyn panicked when Jack didn't smile. "Daddy."

He smiled. "Ty and Natalie are upstairs. She wants to see you before your date."

"OK," Jordyn said. "And daddy, don't you dare take out your gun."

Jack just smiled and took a sip of his beer when Penn State scored a touchdown.

Chapter 27

Chapter Twenty-Seven

"Jordyn, these are gorgeous," Natalie said about Jordyn's pearl necklace as she pulled it out of her jewelry box. "Do you have any earrings to go with it?"

Ty and Natalie had spent the entire day at her house, but had come back to their house about an hour ago, where Natalie insisted she wanted to hang out with Jordyn a little while before her date with Cole.

Jordyn was happy she had, though. It was like having the big sister she'd never had helping her pick the right outfit, and Natalie had amazing taste in clothes.

Jordyn smiled and nodded. "Yes, they're my favorites."

"You have amazing taste. I love pearls. Here. You should totally wear these."

So Jordyn went with the pearls. That, along with a pair of dark, low-rise jeans, and an off-the shoulder yellow cropped, tunic looking shirt she'd bought from Wet Seal before she left California over a black camisole. She'd left her hair curly, long, and falling down her back, and let Natalie do her make up.

Jordyn wasn't too into make-up, usually she limited it to a dab of lip gloss and eyeliner. But Natalie did her eye shadow to match her yellow shirt and smudged the eyeliner just enough to give her blue eyes that smoky look she'd only seen on makeup commercials. But Natalie did it so perfectly.

"Wow," Jordyn said, impressed by her own face when Natalie was done with it. "You do such an amazing job at makeup."

"I worked at Blush over the summer," Natalie said, puckering her lips, meaning for Jordyn to do the same. She did and Natalie put lip gloss on Jordyn. "I only quit because of cheerleading. After basketball season I plan to go back."

Jordyn had heard of Blush. It was this popular, *expensive*, cosmetic shop over by Winn-Dixie.

"Plus it doesn't hurt that you're a perfect palette for my artwork." She held out a napkin. "Blotch."

"What do you mean?" Jordyn asked once she'd blotched her lips on the napkin.

"Your face. You're very photogenic, Jordyn. You're pretty. You're easy to do makeup on. Doesn't take a lot to make you look good." She smiled. "Cole has good taste."

Jordyn just blushed. "Where do you think he's taking me?"

Natalie shrugged. "No idea. Not a lot to do in Cedarwood. I don't think he'd take you to Mickey's for a first date, but, maybe somewhere in Woodbury. Couldn't say for sure."

Jordyn's phone vibrated on her desk.

"Oh my gosh, he's here."

Natalie chuckled. "Don't be nervous, Jordyn. He likes you. Trust me, OK?"

Jordyn tried to regain her composure, sighing deeply and calmly picking up her phone. "Nervous? Not me. I'm not nervous at all."

"Yeah, well you hide it pretty good," said Natalie with a smirk.

Jordyn just smiled and shoved her phone into her jeans pocket. "Thanks, Natalie. For helping me get ready and everything."

Natalie smiled. "No problem. I don't have a little sister and hanging out with you is pretty fun. So, go out, be safe, and have a great time. Trust me. Cole'll make sure of it."

When Jordyn and Natalie got downstairs, she found Cole, Ty, and Jack sitting in the living room in front of yet another football game, the three of them talking like Cole was there to hang out with Ty, not take Jordyn out.

At least Jack hadn't brought the pistol out. Thank God.

But Cole looked really good. He wore a nice pair of fitted jeans, and a tight red t-shirt with the Under-Armour logo splashed across the front.

He smiled when he saw her, and stood up. "Hey, Jordyn."

"Hi," Jordyn replied.

"You, uh, ready to go?"

"Yes. I'm ready."

Then Jack stood up. "Alright, have fun you two. And Cole, have her back by 11:00."

"Dad?" Jordyn said. "Eleven? It's Saturday."

He looked at Cole, ignoring his daughter. "Cole. Eleven."

Cole smiled and nodded. "Yes, sir. I'll have her back at eleven sharp. I promise."

"Thank you. Now you two go ahead. Have fun."

"Not too much fun, though," Ty warned. Natalie chuckled and playfully hit his shoulder. "Hey, I mean it, Cole. Be careful with my little sister."

Cole smiled. "No worries, man. I'll take good care of her."

Jordyn rolled her eyes. "Let's go."

After Jack reminded him once more about the 11:00 curfew Jordyn had, Cole led her out of the front door.

Jordyn expected to see Cole's Jeep in the driveway, but instead, she saw a white BMW, not brand new, but it was really cool. It was low to the ground, with tinted windows and black rims.

"What's this?" she asked upon seeing it.

"My car," Cole said, unlocking the doors. He walked over and pulled the passenger door open for her.

"Thanks," she said. She slid into the passenger seat, comfortable black leather. The car smelled good, and it was obvious it was kept up, very clean, very new-car-like on the inside. All the interior was black, and there was a Black Ice air freshener hanging from the rear-view mirror.

He came around and got in the driver's seat.

"What happened to your Jeep?" Jordyn asked, thinking that was what he would have picked her up in.

"It's at home," Cole said. "I went mudding on it last night and it's filthy, got no doors and shit right now. This is much more appropriate," he added with a chuckle, cranking the car.

Oh yes, mudding. Ty had told her all about that. He was actually with Cole last night as a bunch of guys brought their trucks and Jeeps, complete with "mudding" tires, and drove through the woods, through piles of mud. Apparently that was fun here. Ty sure seemed to like doing it.

"This is really nice," she commented. "When did you get it?"

"End of last year," he said. "I bought it for a good price because it's not new and it needed a little under-the-hood work. Fixed it up, now it's worth about the same as a brand new BMW after the shit I put under the hood."

"Wow. What did you put under it?"

Cole chuckled as he pulled out on Cliff Road. "Let's just say it goes pretty fast now."

Jordyn smiled and put her head on the headrest. "I like it."

"Glad I drove it, then."

"So, you say you fixed it up? That what you do? You fix up cars and stuff?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I'm pretty good with cars and shit. Helped me save money on this thing. Bill Martin saw it after I had finished-he's the one who sold it to me when it barely ran-liked my work, hired me on to help him fix up cars. I'm taking a few months off until football season is over then I'll start spending my afternoons at the garage again."

Jordyn nodded, really interested in this. When she thought of mechanics, she pictured greasy men with pot bellies in head to toe jump suits. But imagining Cole under the hood of a car was far sexier.

"I see why you and Ty are good friends, then," Jordyn laughed. "He's into cars, too."

"Yeah, and he's done some good work on that Mustang. I'm looking for a few parts for it now."

"That's really cool."

He shook his head. "It's not that cool. How do you like Cedarwood so far?"

"I think it might be growing on me," she admitted with a laugh.

"I figured you would like it," he said as he picked up speed, changing gears on the BMW as he headed down Lake Road in the direction of Woodbury. "So. I have two ideas for you tonight. First idea is I'm going to take you to a movie in Woodbury. Second is plan B in case you don't want to see a movie."

She laughed. "I'd love to see a movie."

"Perfect. What's playing that you want to see?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. What good's playing?"

"We'll see when we get there, I guess," he laughed. "But first, I hope you're hungry, because I'm taking you to eat."

"I'm starving. Where are we eating?"

"Italian. Your brother says it's your favorite."

She smiled and nodded. Who knew Ty would have helped Cole plan the date? "It is my favorite. What good Italian places are there in Woodbury?"

He just smiled, changing gears once more. "Lucky for you Italian's my favorite, too. I'll make sure you love this, Jordyn."

Chapter 28

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Cole had been right. They had dinner at Rimarrio's, a genuine Italian restaurant in Woodbury, and Jordyn had never had pasta like that in her life. He paid for her dinner, then they went to the Megaplex for movie. During the movie, he'd reached over the arm rest, taking her hand, lacing their fingers together. She'd glanced down at their entwined fingers, smiling, then looked up to find him watching her with a smile.

After the movie. They headed back to town. It was after 9:00 by then, and Jordyn was hoping he still had more planned before he took her home.

She'd skyped Shay earlier in the week, right after he'd asked her out. Shay had assured her if he took her home early, that was bad. So Jordyn was hoping he'd keep her out all the way to curfew.

"So, you like ice cream?" he asked when they were back in his car after the movie.

"I love ice cream," she said smiling, hoping he knew she was having a good time, but hoping even more that he was having a good time with her, too. "Dairy Queen around here?"

He smiled and cranked the car, shining blue headlights on the white SUV in front of him. He really had made this car over.

"Dairy Queen?" he asked. "Oh no, Jordyn. I have something so much better than Dairy Queen."

"Welcome to what makes Cedarwood famous," he said once they were back in Cedarwood, on Main Street. He pulled into a diagonal parking spot a couple of store fronts away from Jordyn's dance studio, in front of a small storefront called the *Cedarwood Creamery*. It looked pretty old-fashioned from the outside.

Cole got out and ran around the car to open the door for Jordyn. "This is the best ice cream in the state, no lie," he told her, shutting the door when she was out. "They have every flavor, every topping imaginable. You'll be addicted, I promise."

Jordyn smiled, well, *beamed*, when he took her hand and lead her into the Creamery. It was pretty crowded inside, and apparently the old-fashioned look was all a part of the theme. The booths were red vinyl, like the type of material in an old fifties car seat. The walls were lined off with pictures of fifties singers and actors and an old jukebox near the back was blasting an old Doo-Wop song.

Oh, and it was packed full. Apparently this place really was popular. How had she not heard of it, before?

"What do you like?" he asked her as they got in line.

"I like hot fudge sundaes with sprinkles," she said with a smile, still happy to be holding his hand.

"They have the best hot fudge sundaes," said Cole, squeezing her hand.

Soon it was their turn to order. They stepped to the counter, and waiting to take their orders was a familiar red-head in a red and white striped apron over khaki pants and a white t-shirt.

Leah Turner opened her mouth to take their orders, until she focused on who was standing in front of her with surprise. Then she smiled. "Hi, Cole. Uhm, hey, Jordyn. What can I get you two?"

"Two hot fudge Sundaes," Cole said casually. "One with sprinkles."

He paid, and they went to their table to wait for their ice cream.

"I didn't know Leah worked here," Jordyn said thoughtfully as they sat down. She figured she'd get to go back and tell Ashley, now, what she'd seen at the Creamery Saturday night.

"Yeah, she's worked here awhile," Cole said. "You're not friends with them, I know. Leah's not too bad, though. She's Meredith's sister. It's Ashley who's the bitch, not Leah."

Jordyn nodded. She remembered what Meredith had said about Leah and Shari at Mickey's that first night Jordyn had hung out with them. That Ashley was the one who bossed them around. Jordyn looked up at Leah where she was rushing to take the orders of a still long line. Maybe without Ashley around, she and Shari weren't too awful.

They finished their ice cream, which Jordyn had agreed was literally, the most amazing ice cream she'd ever tasted, then headed out the door.

"I told you you'd love it," he said to her once they were out on the sidewalk.

"I did," she sighed. "It tastes just like homemade ice cream. Have you ever had that?"

Cole nodded. "Oh yes. I have. And yeah, it is, because that's what it is. This place is traditional as it gets. Nothing fancy, just nonstop, homemade ice cream churning in the back."

This town was getting cuter by the second, Jordyn realized as she folded her arms over her chest, shivering. The nights in Cedarwood were starting to get cooler, but Jordyn had a coat in Cole's car.

They were walking toward the BMW when a shiny new pickup truck pulled up next to it and out got Davis and Jenner, friends of Ty's that she recognized from his table at lunch.

"Anderson," Davis said, slapping Cole a high five. "What's up, man."

"Hey, guys," Cole said, immediately taking Jordyn's hand. "What are y'all up to tonight?"

"Been riding around," Jenner said. "Going mudding in a little while. Ty's coming. You should go."

"Nah," Cole said. "I'm kind of busy. You guys know Jordyn Hamilton, right?"

"Oh yeah," Jenner said. "Ty's sister. What's up, little Ty."

"Don't insult me like that," Jordyn said. They laughed.

They talked a little more, then said their goodbyes. Davis and Jenner got back in their truck and sped off, squealing tires.

"Jenner's an idiot," Cole sighed. "He's already wrecked two other trucks. But his rich father keeps buying him more."

"That's a nice truck," Jordyn said. "He's going to drive that in the mud?"

Cole chuckled. "No way. Davis has a truck. He'll drive."

"Is mudding fun?"

Cole laughed. "I like it. I can take you sometime. I think you'll have fun."

Jordyn shrugged. "Maybe. I mean, Ty seems to like it."

Cole nodded. "Oh yeah, your brother is really into it." They got into the car. "So. We still have another hour. I got something I want to show you if you want."

Jordyn smiled. He wanted to keep her out later. She guessed that meant the date was going extremely well so far.

"And don't worry," he told her. "I'll have you back by eleven, I promise."

She nodded in agreement. "Sure. I'd love to."

Anything to make this date last longer. Even if they did only have another hour.

Chapter 29

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Cole drove her down Lake Road, passed the many beaches and recreation sites, until they pulled up into Lookout Point. It was deserted, wooded, and looked pretty abandoned, like no one came here at all.

"Ever since they opened the new marinas and parks along the lake where there's beaches and stuff, no one comes here anymore," Cole said when they got out of the car. "But I think this is the best part of the lake."

Jordyn agreed. This was the first time she'd been to Lookout Point, thought it was close to her house, but her dad had told them all that this was the place back in the day for parking. She told Cole, and he laughed.

"Yeah, it was," he affirmed. "My dad told me the same thing. Apparently, it's still pretty popular for that. Looks like we got lucky tonight. No one's up here doing the dirty to mess up my plans."

She laughed and followed him to an iron picnic table close to the fence that lined the cliff overlooking the lake. It was dark, being that the site was pretty deserted, and there wasn't much upkeep. No street lamps, just the moonlight showing their way. Thank goodness it was a clear night.

"It's so peaceful out here," Jordyn said, noting how quiet it was, barred the sounds of frogs, crickets, a dog barking in the distance. She even heard an owl not too far from them.

"Yeah, it is," Cole said, sitting on the picnic table, his feet on the bench. He took her hand, and pulled her up beside him. "I know you don't think of Cedarwood as much. I don't blame you. I know this has to be a world away from what you're used to in California."

"It's OK," she said, shrugging. "I mean, it's not so bad. Getting better, actually."

"Ty said you were pretty apprehensive about moving. You didn't want to come here, right?"

"Not really," Jordyn chuckled, looking out at the lake water, black, still, calm underneath the moonlight. "But I think I just had a visual of what I thought it was going to be like here, and I didn't want to leave everything I've ever known. My friends. The beach. But this town really does have a lot more to offer than I thought it did."

"Like what?" Cole asked.

"Real people for one thing," she laughed. "I don't know, it's like, people are nicer here. I feel so welcome."

"Well, you are," he said, nudging her.

Their fingers were still entwined. Jordyn looked down at them, smiling. She'd had the most wonderful night, she thought. She was starting to love the way his hand felt against hers. He'd held it pretty much all night.

"So, I've had a lot of fun tonight, Cole," she told him after a couple of minutes of silence. "Thanks."

He smiled. "I had fun, too, Jordyn. I'm glad you said yes."

She grinned sheepishly, biting her bottom lip. "Me, too."

He slid his arm around her shoulder, tugging her closer. She gave in, leaning against him, inhaling his strong male scent, a mixture of some type of detergent, and Axe. He rubbed her arm, then when she turned to look at him, he tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and smiled.

She liked the way he looked at her. His eyes were warm, his mouth turned up in a small, lazy smile, as if he were looking at something with great appreciation. And she liked it. It wasn't awkward, like it was when boys back in California looked at her with lust, their eyes locking on her breasts. Nothing was awkward about the way he watched her.

"You're so beautiful," he told her. He leaned forward, and she just knew he wanted to kiss her, but the first move was sudden, and small enough to give her indication of what he wanted to do.

She chuckled softly. "You can kiss me if you want," she told him.

He smiled, and this time, without hesitation, he leaned all the way forward, and the moment his lips touched hers, she was in heaven.

Jordyn had only kissed 3 boys in her whole life. Her first kiss was on the playground at her elementary school, when she was nine. It was a truth or dare challenge, and at that age, like today, Jordyn didn't back down from a challenge. She kissed her ninth grade study partner, Justin, while working on a science project together, then when they started "going together" they kissed lots more. Her third was Ryan. Ugh. Enough said about *him*. She realized now, with Cole's lips pressed to hers, she realized the fourth boy was the best.

Cole turned his body toward hers, and put his hands on her cheeks, stroking with his thumbs, and instinctively, she put hers on his strong biceps, leaning further into the kiss, opening her mouth when he probed her lips with his tongue.

Jordyn felt herself melting into him, making out right there on the picnic bench at Lookout Point like she'd been kissing boys her entire life. It wasn't so hard when she had a partner who knew what he was doing. Not that she had a lot of experience herself, she realized he was good at this.

They stayed a little longer, kissing under the stars, then at 10:50, they left and he drove her home.

"I wish we had more time," she admitted with a smile, putting her hands in the back pockets of her jeans as they stood on her front porch.

"Yeah, so do I," he said with a smile. "I had fun, Jordyn. I want to see you again, OK?"

"Monday morning at school?" she teased.

He laughed. "Yes. But I was thinking maybe a little more after school, too. If that's OK."

She reached up, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear. "That's more than OK, Cole. I'd love to."

"There are these little downtown movies on Thursday nights in Cedarwood," he continued. "Really cheesy, but a lot of people go. It's something to do, you know? Free, kind of fun. I thought maybe you'd want to go sometime."

"It sounds fun. I'd love to. You're teaching me a lot about Cedarwood. Why stop at the Creamery?"

He laughed. "Yeah, you're right."

They got quiet, and he leaned in, kissing her. She had a feeling she could get used to kissing Cole Anderson. She really liked it. Who knew the date would have gone so well?

She deepened the kiss, letting his tongue slid back into her mouth like he'd kissed her back at Lookout Point.

They heard the sound of an engine rumbling behind them, and regrettably on Jordyn's part, Cole pulled away.

She didn't see her brother's car, but she recognized the sound of the Mustang, and she could see the headlights coming down the driveway.

"Well, I guess that's my cue," he said with a chuckle, sneaking one more kiss. "I'll call you tomorrow, if that's OK."

She smiled. "Yes, that would be great."

He smiled just as Ty's Mustang came into view. "See you, Jordyn."

"See you, Cole," she replied. He started across the yard, meeting Ty halfway as he walked from the Mustang. They shook hands, spoke for a moment, then Cole got in his BMW and drove away.

"Hey, there," Ty said with a smile as he approached her. "Have fun?"

Jordyn smiled and nodded, watching Cole's taillights until they'd disappeared from sight. "Yeah. I really did."

"You going out again?" Ty asked, opening the door and sliding the key into the lock.

"I really, really hope so."

Chapter 30

The last chapter I'm posting for about a week or so. Haven't written further than this, but I'm definitely gonna be working on getting it finished within a month or so :) Thanks for reading!!

Chapter Thirty

Monday, September 10, 2012

Cole did call Sunday. He called and they talked for three hours. They talked for so long, her phone was hot by the end of it and she'd made her ear sore. He'd told her he would meet her before homeroom on Monday, and he did.

He was waiting by her homeroom door just like he'd said when she approached him, smiling when she laid eyes on him.

She had been nervous about seeing him after their date, though she wasn't sure why. She guessed since they'd kissed, and both made it pretty obvious that they liked each other, things felt kind of different, knowing more would be expected when she saw him today.

But she didn't feel nervous when she saw him leaning there against the lockers beside Mrs. Roland's classroom door. She felt excited, her eyes locking on his lips as they curled in a smile. Those lips that she'd kissed so much Saturday night.

"Morning," he said when she walked up.

He wore his letterman jacket over a black t-shirt with his hands in the pockets of his fitted, dark-wash jeans. He looked so great, and it was hard to believe, even gave her a little rush of excitement when she realized he liked her, that he'd chosen *her* to wait outside of homeroom for.

She smiled back, holding her books tighter. "Hi. What's up?" She leaned against the lockers beside him and pretended not to notice the envious looks on the faces of the girls who passed her by.

"Not much," he told her. "You look nice."

She looked down at her outfit. She wore a simple pair of dark jeans and a red Hollister t-shirt under a jacket.

"I do?"

"Of course you do. You always do."

She smiled back. "Smooth, Casanova."
He laughed. "I'm not being *smooth*, I'm being honest. So, I want to see you again."

"You're seeing me right now, aren't you?"

He chuckled. "I want to take you out again."

"I'd like that."

"How about Thursday night? I can take you to that movie I told you about."

She frowned regrettably. "I have dance Thursday."

"What time?"

"6:00 to 8:00."

"Movie starts at 8:30. I can pick you up from dance and take you there."

Jordyn agreed, and that was how she ended up with a second date with Cole Anderson.

After the warning bell, Jordyn went into homeroom and took her seat. She was immediately wacked in the face with a strong scent of nail polish and acetone. Coming from Ashley, who was painting her nails blood red at her desk.

Great, Jordyn thought as she sat down. Just how she wanted to spend homeroom; smelling acetone fumes for twenty minutes.

With Ashley glaring at her the entire time.

Thank God Ashley didn't mention her date with Cole though. She didn't say anything and for that, Jordyn was thankful. She knew she shouldn't let Ashley get to her, but she was still annoying and Jordyn didn't feel like listening to anything. She was sure Leah had said something to her about seeing them at the Creamery, but none of them mentioned it.

Alice did, though.

Jordyn met Alice in the hallway after third period, on the way to the cafeteria for lunch.

"Have you talked to him, yet?" Alice asked immediately.

Jordyn had called Alice yesterday, after she was done talking to Cole, and she'd told her all about the date, not leaving out a single detail.

"He met me before homeroom," Jordyn answered. "I have another date," she offered with a smile.

"Wow! Great. When?"

"Thursday night. He's taking me to the downtown movie. Know anything about that?"

"Yeah, they show classics. Rarely nothing newer than the 90s, but it's pretty fun. They give out free hot cocoa."

"You going Thursday?"

Alice shook her head. "Nah. I've only been a couple of times. Not really my thing. They never show movies I like."

They walked together into the crowded cafeteria, and they were in line when Cole walked up.

"Hey," he said to them both. "Jordyn, look, you should sit with us."

She glanced to the table he normally sat at, where Ty and Natalie were already sitting, and where Ashley and her crew would be soon. Did she really want to eat lunch with Ashley staring at her?

Yes, because she wanted to have lunch with Cole.

That night, after dance, Jordyn had showered, and was sitting Indian-style on her bed with her laptop opened and her English homework in front of her. Her internet tabs were Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Wikipedia, because who could do a research English paperwithout Wikipedia's assistance.

Jordyn kept looking at her phone, which was laying silent on her bed beside her right knee, wondering what Cole was doing and really wanting to text him. But she didn't, because she was way too afraid she'd come off as annoying.

Jordyn was between thinking about Cole and wondering where to start her second body paragraph when a knock came to her closed bedroom door.

"Come in!" she called.

Zara pushed the door open with a smile and stepped inside. "Hi, honey. Working on your homework?"

"Yeah," Jordyn sighed. "English homework."

Zara shut the bedroom door and walkd over to her daughter. "Well, take a break. We need to talk."

"That sounds very ominous, mom," Jordyn said.

"Oh it's not bad. It's just a little talk."

Jordyn narrowed her eyes. No. There was no such thing as just a little talk. The last time her mother had a "little talk" was when they learned they were coming to Cedarwood. Jordyn hoped this wasn't big news.

"I want to talk to you about Cole," Zara said.

Jorydn's eyebrows went up. OK, so this was the direction they were going in. "OK, then, mom. What about him?"

"Well, you're sixteen, and I know for someone your age, dating, that is, there can be pressure."

Jordyn knew exactly where this was going. "Mom, please tell me you're not giving me a sex talk two days after my first date with the guy."

"It's never too early to know the facts, Jordyn," Zara pointed out.

"I know all the facts, though, mom," Jordyn replied. "You gave them to me like, when I was nine."

"Jordyn, this is specific. I'm not telling you what sex *is*. You already know."

Jordyn nodded. She did, of course.

"I just want to know that you're responsible and sensible enough to make the right decisions about sex."

"I only went on one date, mom," Jordyn reminded her again.

"I know. I just want to make sure you know what's important to consider if the opportunity arises to have sex."

Jordyn figured her mother was going to use the phrase "have sex" a bunch in this conversation, so she braced herself for it.

"I know all about safe sex, mom," Jordyn assured Zara. "I know what condoms are, and I would never put my health at risk."

"That's good to know, Jordyn, but I'm not talking about safe sex, I'm talking about no sex."

Jordyn shifted uncomfortably.

"I don't want you to be afraid to be honest with me," Zara continued. "We can talk about anything and everything you want. You can tell me anything."

"I'm a virgin, mom, if that's what you're trying to ask," Jordyn said.

"I hoped so," Zara said, nodding. "That being said, you have something so important, Jordyn. You are lucky to still have it, and you can only give it away once. Don't give it away if there's a chance you're going to want it back someday. The man you choose to give yourself to is going to have something you can never replace. He will always have it, so you make sure he's worth it."

"It is important to me, mom," Jordyn said. "I promise. I won't just give it to anybody. And about Cole? I like him, I really do. But it's too early to think about anything. It's just date to date."

"I'm glad you're thinking right, then. Your heart is important to listen to, but you make sure you always keep your brain handy for the tough decisions. That's what my mother always told me when I was young. You have a good heart, Jordyn. You're a smart girl, too, so I trust you'll make the right choices."

Jordyn nodded.

"And you'll feel free to come to me with anything you need. Anything you want to talk about, I will be happy to listen and tell you anything you ever want to know."

Jordyn nodded again. "I know, mom."

Her cell phone lit up and vibrated from next to her. Her heart warmed, and skipped a beat.

Cole.

"It's Cole," she told her mom, picking the cell phone up. Zara luckily took the hint. She stood up and kissed her daughter's forehead. "Don't forget what we talked about, sweetie. Ever. Goodnight. I love you."

"I love you, too, mom," Jordyn replied with a smile.

Once Zara was gone, the door closed, Jordyn quickly put her phone to her ear. "Hello?"

"Hey, Jordyn."

His voice was heavenly on the other end of her phone. She smiled, closed her eyes and laid back on her back. "Hey, Cole. What's up?"

Chapter 31

Chapter Thirty-One

Thursday, September 20, 2012

Jordyn was pretty sure she'd never imagined herself quite *this* happy in Cedarwood, but here she was, not even two months in, on cloud nine. Of course, she was pretty sure that had something to do with the boy walking her to class and kissing her by her locker every day. It had been nearly two weeks since Jordyn and Cole's first date, and everyone at Cedarwood High knew Jordyn was the girl Cole Anderson was hanging out with.

Yep, things were going pretty great, Jordyn thought. She'd even finally gotten her parents to budge on the driver's license and her dad was taking her to the DMV tomorrow. If she passed on the first try, he was even rewarding her with a car. Not a new one, or anything, but who cared? It was a *car*. No more hitching rides with Ty anymore. Hopefully.

Things were getting better with Ashley, too. She was finally laying off a little bit, although she did still pout a lot at dance class. Like tonight, for example, when Jordyn was put in the front for their Fall Festival choreography and Ashley was put in the second row. Yeah, it was actually to the point, now, where Ashley was running out of things to scowl at Jordyn so she'd stooped to pouting over spots in a Fall Festival dance.

But Jordyn didn't care. What mattered most to Jordyn was that she was walking out of dance to Cole waiting for her in his BMW, with Ashley and her crew close behind to see her dip into the passenger seat.

The second Jordyn was in the car, she looked to Cole, smiling as she leaned over and met his lips in a quick kiss.

"Hi," she said. He'd obviously had a shower, she realized when she saw that his hair was still damp, and he smelled like his sandalwood soap.

Jordyn liked the way he smelled. A mixture of clean, subtle, men's soap and the smell of his deodorant and laundry detergent she'd become so accustomed to smelling over the past two weeks they'd been hanging out.

He smiled. "Hey."

She sat back in her seat, hooking her seatbelt as Cole pulled away from the curb. They'd enjoyed the movie so much last week, they were going again tonight. And after? Who knew?

"So, what time are you going to the DMV tomorrow?" Cole asked her.

"Like, right after school," Jordyn said, reaching up and tucking a sweaty, strand of hair out of her face. "He's picking me up and we're going straight over there, so maybe I can drive to your game tomorrow night."

"Well, you're gonna have a long drive," Cole chuckled. "It's in Abbeville."

"Abbeville?" Jordyn asked. "It's an away game?"

He nodded. "Yeah."

"Oh. Well, where's Abbeville?"

"Oh the other side of Pittsburgh. Like, an hour on the other side of Pittsburgh."

"Oh, well, I guess I *won't* be driving to your game, then," she laughed.

In only two short weeks, Jordyn had gotten really comfortable hanging out with Cole. It was really starting to feel like she'd known him for longer, and she wondered if that meant anything.

Really, she wondered if they were boyfriend and girlfriend now, but she didn't ask. She wished she had some confirmation from him without having to ask. She didn't want to look like the naÃ¯ve girl she was. Was two weeks even long enough to consider themselves in an actual relationship? If not, what were they? Because they sure were acting like a couple.

Even Natalie thought so. Just that afternoon at lunch, she'd asked her what she thought. Natalie had confirmed they were a thing, now.

"I mean, it can't mean anything else," Natalie had said certainly, sticking her fork into her fat-free ranch coated salad. "Trust me, Jordyn. I've known Cole for a long time and you are the very first girl I've *ever* seen him kiss in public."

After the movie, they'd decided they really weren't that hungry, and with an fourty-five minutes left until Jordyn's curfew, they headed up to Lookout Point.

They'd already made out several times in the two weeks since they started hanging out, and Jordyn liked it. *A lot*. But tonight, Cole seemed a little more into it than usual. And when he started to snake his hand up her shirt, she decided that then was the best time to tell him something important about herself.

"Cole, I'm a virgin."

OK, so maybe she shouldn't have blurted it out like that, but she did, it was out, and she was glad.

He shrugged. "I know."

Now she was confused. She raised her eyebrows. "You do? How?"

"I can sort of tell," he said. "Plus Ty told me you never really dated back in San Diego, and after he told me how many hours of dancing and gymnastics training you had a week, I believed him."

Jordyn sighed. Of *course* Ty had told Cole everything he needed to know. Or, really, things he *didn't* need to know.

"I mean, it's Ok," he said. "I promise, it's OK. I'm happy just like this. Anytime you tell me to stop, I swear I will. There won't be any pressure with us, Jordyn. I really like you."

She smiled. "Thanks. I was worried about telling you."

He furrowed his eyebrows and confusion struck his cute face. "Why?"

"Because I know how guys think about virgins. There aren't a lot of us around anymore."

He chuckled. "I know. And the fact that your kind is on the brink of extinction makes you pretty special and I'm happy to have you."

Then he leaned in, kissing her again, this time, keeping his hands in safe territory.

Jordyn was regretful when it was time to go to dance. But before he cranked the Jeep, he told her he had something for her.

Cole reached in the backseat and grabbed his letterman jacket.

"Here," he said with a smile. "I, uh, I've never given this to any girl to wear before. Ever. I want you to wear it."

She was astonished. She'd seen guys giving their girls their prized football letterman jackets on TV before, mostly older movies and TV sitcom. No one did that in Moon Bay Beach, so it was weird doing it here in real life, but she did enjoy the feeling that she was being given something no other girl before her had been.

"So, does this mean, I mean-" She lost her words. She knew what she wanted to ask him, she just wasn't sure exactly how.

"You're my girl, Jordyn Hamilton?" he asked her.

She smiled. "I guess I am, Cole Anderson."

And just like that, Jordyn got her answer. She had a boyfriend.

Chapter 32

Chapter Thirty-Two

Friday, September 21, 2012

The next morning, even though it was out of his way, Cole picked Jordyn up for school. Hopefully, today would be her last day riding to school with *anyone*. If all went well, Jordyn would be a licensed driver by this afternoon, and the proud owner of her very own used car by Monday.

Her fingers were crossed, but it still felt great sitting proudly in the front seat of Cole's Wrangler as he pulled in the senior parking lot next to Ty and Natalie. When Jordyn slid out of the Jeep, tugging her book bag over her shoulder, Natalie turned away from Ty and smiled. "Morning, you two."

Cole stepped up next to Jordyn and slipped his arm around her waist. "Morning, Nat."

Ty rolled his eyes. "Do you two have to show so much PDA? It's kind of disturbing."

Jordyn let out a sardonic laugh. "Puh-lease. Coming from the guy who currently has his hand in his girlfriend's back pocket?"

"Yeah, Ty," Natalie teased, wiggling away from Ty. "That's inappropriate." She winked at Jordyn.

Natalie had been the first to call Jordyn last night after her changed relationship status on Facebook. She was so excited for Jordyn. Ty had seemed pretty noncommittal about it. Funny, since he seemed pretty OK with them talking before.

"I mean, it's not like we *kiss* in front of you, Ty," Jordyn said, smirking.

Ty narrowed his eyes at them. "And shit better stay that way, too."

They all laughed.

"Leave them alone, Ty," Natalie said, tugging his arm. "Come on. Let's go. They don't need us breathing down their backs."

"I'm serious, you two!" Ty called, pointing at them while he followed Natalie into the school.

Jordyn laughed and shook her head. "That's so new. I don't remember Ty being so, uhm, protective before."

Cole shrugged. "I don't think he's serious. Besides. He'll get used to us."

Jordyn smiled. She hoped so, because she was already used to *them*.

Walking into school after being made 'Facebook official' as a couple caught them a lot more stares than normally when their classmates caught them with their fingers laced. Jealous stares from her female peers, mostly. Others were just shocked looks. Maybe they weren't used to Cole having a girlfriend? According to Natalie this was a new leaf for him.

Jordyn was a little disappointed when they stopped in front of her homeroom door. This was the end of their short walk together. But he didn't let go of her hand.

"So," Cole said. "You coming to the game tonight?"

She nodded. "Yeah. I'll be there. Who are you guys playing?"

"Sanderson. I don't want to say easy win, but I mean, it'll probably be an easy win."

Jordyn chuckled. "Well, either way, I'll definitely be there. Hopefully tomorrow, I can go look at some cars if my dad's in a generous enough mood, and if so, I could drop by and pick you up?"

"Sounds like a plan to me." He checked his watch, and sighed. "Alright, babe. Homeroom beckons."

She could have sworn she felt the two feet of air underneath her feet. She was *floating* after all.

Babe? She could have squealed.

He leaned over and kissed her lips, right at the exact moment Ashley happened to be trotting by. Jordyn saw her curl her lip, then head on into the room.

"I'll meet you in the courtyard before first?" he asked. She agreed. They'd been meeting there every day since they started 'talking.'

In homeroom, Jordyn sat at her usual seat. Mrs. Roland wasn't in yet, so she found Ashley, Shari, and Leah crowded together, laughing and giggling. When Jordyn sat down, Ashley smirked at her, then flipped her hair and turned back to Shari and Leah.

Jordyn narrowed her eyes at their suspicious behavior. She took note of Ashley's cheerleader jump suit. Brown and orange, like Natalie's. Ever since she'd been given that, Fridays were annoying. All she could do was talk about it, and Jordyn even swore sometimes she tried to swish her hips a little harder.

"Congrats on the engagement, California."

Jordyn turned around and chuckled at Blake's comment. "Thanks, *Blake*."

Ashley whipped her head around, and stared. As usual.

Jordyn just did her all to ignore it. And it wasn't hard. She was far too happy to let *anything* Ashley said or did get on her nerves. Today, Jordyn was on Cloud Nine, and Ashley and her crew weren't even off the ground.

After lunch, Cole walked Jordyn to gym. He didn't have a fourth period class at all, so he had plenty of time to linger outside the locker rooms with her. It was when he was leaning in to kiss her that Ashley, Shari and Leah passed, gawking.

"See you," Cole said smiling. He was either oblivious, or he was trying not to notice the way Ashley seemed to attract herself to them now that they were dating. She said she didn't care. But it was beginning to get uncomfortable.

Walking into the locker rooms, Jordyn found Ashley stripping of her clothes as she and a small group around her laughed.

"Hey," Ashley laughed. "I'm just repeating what I heard from a *very* reliable source." When she saw Jordyn, she smirked, and cleared her throat loudly. The girls around her turned and stifled more laughter when they saw Jordyn.

"Gross," one of them coughed, causing the others to laugh. Ashley looked at Jordyn, that uncomfortable, hurt girl from lunch gone, and replaced by a nastier girl, the one Jordyn had come to know during the time she'd been here.

They all finished dressing, a few of them making snide glances toward Jordyn, giggling.

What the hell was Ashley saying about her?! Jordyn thought. But as the warning bell rang, and the gawkers filed out behind Ashley, Jordyn didn't worry about it anymore. She just finished tying the laces on her sneakers and filed out right behind.

The plus side of not having any friends in gym class, Jordyn thought, was that during the mile run on the track, she had no one to hold her back while she ran far ahead of the rest of the class, lapping most of them and finishing first.

She leaned against the fence, stretching her muscles out while the rest of the class was still only on their second lap. Soon, though, Blake was approaching. He usually finished about the same time as her, on the rare occasions he actually *came* to class.

"California," he said, walking up. "What's up?"

"Hi, Blake," Jordyn sighed, straightening up and leaning against the fence.

"How did you get so fast?"

"I'm not fast," Jordyn said. "I just like to run."

"You *like* to run?" Blake asked, and Jordyn realized she probably sounded pretty lame admitting that out loud.

Jordyn just shrugged. "I mean, it keeps me in shape. And it feels great, too."

Blake smiled. "I've seen you. Running into town."

She nodded.

"So, congratulations," he told her.

She narrowed her eyes. "On what?"

"Your new social status." Then he waved his hand, smacking his lips together. "Honey, you're Cole's girl, now. Don't you know what that means?"

Jordyn couldn't help but laugh at Blake's overly enthusiastic feminine tone.

"Please," she said. "I'm no one's girl. We're just hanging out."

Blake chuckled and nodded. "Yeah, OK. That's why Ashley and her friends are hating."

"They're what?" Jordyn asked.

"Making up rumors," Blake said. "I heard them earlier. She's just taking shit because she's jealous."

"She's making up rumors about me?" Jordyn asked in astonishment. "What the hell's the saying?"

Blake laughed. "I wouldn't worry about it, California. She's not one of the most-listened to people around here. A few girls will listen to her, but it's no big deal. I got your back if it gets too far."

"Great," she said. "This is all I need."

"You make it sound like you got it bad here, or something," he chuckled. "Relax. You have Natalie on your side. You're straight, California. Don't sweat girls like Ashley. No one else around here does." Then he checked his cell phone, then smiled at her. "Gotta run. See you around."

"See you," Jordyn said. Then she glanced back at Ashley. She, Shari and Leah were walking the track, not running. There regulation shorts were rolled up, and they *prissed* their lack of hips proudly, laughing and giggling.

Jordyn just smirked and walked to the water fountain. Blake was right. They weren't girls that she needed to worry about. She looked at it one way and one way only: if Ashley Moore had nothing better to do than to talk about Jordyn, she obviously had no life of her own. Ashley talking about her only meant she was doing something right.

Chapter 33

Chapter Thirty-Three

Friday, October 5, 2012

Two weeks had passed since the day Jordyn and Cole had become official. After the night at Lookout Point, the actual 'official' didn't have to be questioned anymore. Jordyn was relieved, because she knew where they stood. And of course, she liked it.

According to Natalie, Jordyn had also done something no other girl in school had been able to do the entire four years she'd been at Cedarwood High.

"He calls you his girl," Natalie had told her with a smile one day. "And he gave you his jacket. Never happened before."

Jordyn hadn't responded. She didn't know what she'd done to make Cole do things for her he'd never done before, but she didn't mind. She didn't know him as a player, she knew him as Cole. Her boyfriend.

He'd been her boyfriend, officially for two weeks, now, and everyone in school knew that Jordyn was wearing Cole Anderson's letterman jacket, and since the weather was cooling down more and more every day, Jordyn had taken to wearing it more and more often. She didn't do it to boast, but she wore it enough to remind herself that she was Cole's girl.

Of course, things weren't all happy on the Cedarwood front.

Ashley had been working pretty hard to get her silly rumor mill started and it was going around. Jordyn wasn't sure how much of it was believed, but as long as Cole and her friends knew none of it was true, she didn't bother herself so much with it. She and Alice had, however, picked their very favorites.

One was that Jordyn had had a boob job. Alice had attributed that one to A-cup Ashley being jealous of Jordyn's abundance up top. Another one was that she took steroids-*what the hell?* And of course, Jordyn's personal favorite, she *really* came to Cedarwood to live with her Aunt and uncle-Zara and Jack weren't her real parents-because she'd had a baby at fifteen, got hooked on drugs, and lost custody to her *real* parents.

"You can stop being so protective over me, now," Jordyn had teased Ty after they'd heard it. "You're not even my brother, and cousins don't act like that."

Ty hadn't been so amused. In fact, he and Natalie were pretty pissed off about the whole thing until Jordyn convinced them that it was no big deal. No one was even listening to those ridiculous stories anyway.

Friday morning, one week into October, was chilly in Cedarwood, so Jordyn had pulled on Cole's jacket, happy for yet another excuse to wear it, and headed downstairs, finding her father pouring a cup of coffee, still in his police uniform after pulling third shift last night."

"Morning, sweetie," he said with a smile when he saw his daughter. He kissed her forehead.

"Morning, daddy," Jordyn replied. Soon they were joined by Zara, Ty, and Logan. Ty and Cole had an away game that night, and Zara was busy insisting that she and Jack wouldn't mind making that drive to Berrywood to see the Cougars take on the Bears.

Yes, the Berrywood Bears. No lie, that was the team they were playing.

"Mom, it's almost a two-hour drive to Berrywood from here," Ty was saying. "You guys make all my home games. You don't have to go to the away ones. At least not that far away."

Logan stepped up beside his sister, grabbing the carton of orange juice. "Why does Jordyn have a football letterman jacket but Ty doesn't?" he asked casually.

Jack and Zara laughed.

"It's a wonderful thing, Logan," Zara said. "They both have good girl and boyfriends. Good enough to exchange jackets."

Zara hadn't understood why her son had given Natalie his letterman jacket when he did. Considering she was Swedish, she was pretty good about keeping up with her American teenagers' rituals. The San Diego ones, anyway. Jack was filling in the blanks with the small town rituals and how they differed. Jordyn didn't know the big deal about the Letterman jackets herself, besides what she'd seen in movies. But she knew the night Cole gave her his it meant a lot.

"So," Jordyn said, casually. "I'm going bowling with Alice and the girls tonight in Woodbury. It'll be kind of late when we get back so is it OK if I sleep over at her house?"

She hoped she'd been believable. She was lying about staying at Alice's, and lying to her parents not only made her uncomfortable, it wasn't something she did too often. But she was going over to Cole's tonight after he got back from his game and that would be late enough. He was sticking to his no pressure promise, but Jordyn planned on sleeping over there tonight. Cole didn't know that, yet, though.

"Perfectly fine with me, Jordyn," Zara said. "What time are you leaving?"

"We're leaving straight after school," Jordyn said, motioning toward her duffel bag full of overnight clothes. "Gonna go to the mall or something I think."

"Well, make sure you don't stay up all night," said Zara told her. "Remember you have dance tomorrow."

Actually, Jordyn had completely forgotten she had dance tomorrow. The Harvest Festival was Monday night, and since Miss Maggie had a full show prepared for them, she'd requested a four hour long rehearsal tomorrow to run through everything until it was just right.

"I won't," Jordyn said. "I'll just come back early in the morning and get changed for rehearsal."

So Jordyn had lied to her parents for the very first time in her life. For what? So she could sleep over at her boyfriend's house.

After homeroom, Jordyn met Cole, and he walked her to first period.

"So I'll be at Alice's tonight," she told him as they walked through the crowded hallway. "We're all going to Woodbury to hang out. I guess I'll come over after the game?"

"Yeah," he said. "What time do you need to be home?"

"Uhm, tomorrow morning."

Jordyn still hadn't told Cole she was planning on sleeping over at his house. She knew his parents were going to visit his sister in Philadelphia this weekend, though, and she'd made the decision herself to stay at his house.

"So, you're sleeping at Alice's?"

"That's where my parents think I'm sleeping," she said. "You haven't shown me your house, yet."

He smiled. "So, you lied?"

She laughed. "I feel kind of bad so shut up."

"You want to sleep over at my place?"

She nodded. "If that's alright with you."

"Do I look like I'd complain?"

She laughed. "Perfect. Call me when you're on the way home from the game?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She smiled. "Great."

She didn't know if anything would happen tonight. Anything more than what already had, which had limited itself to heavy making out and a little touching, but she was open to the idea that it would. She didn't think she was ready to go all the way with Cole tonight, but she knew he was probably the one she'd want to go all the way with, when the time came.

She confessed this to the girls that night while they were eating pizza at Mickey's after bowling. Of course, Alice was the one who'd started the conversation. Jordyn had mentioned that she was staying over at Cole's and was sorry to use Alice as an alibi.

"They won't call," Jordyn said, knowing Alice was worried about what she would tell Jordyn's parents. "My parents. I told them I'm sleeping at your house. They'll take that and won't call. They might call my cell if they need me, but that's about it."

That's when Alice lightened up, smiling. "Is this the night?"

"What do you mean?" Jordyn asked, taking a sip from her Diet Coke.

"Are you sleeping with him?"

Jordyn shook her head. "No, I don't think so." She looked around to make sure no one in close range was listening. "We've only made out. Nothing further."

"Wow, he loves you then," Bethany said.

"Yes," Erin said. "That's really uncommon for guys like him. I mean, jocks. Popular *experienced* guys."

Alice smiled. "If you two have been together like, two weeks, already and you've done nothing but kiss, you got that guy whipped."

Jordyn had to laugh. She doubted if that was the case. But she had to wonder. If Cole really was the playboy everyone said he was before he started seeing her, did that mean she had something to do with his changes?

She didn't reply. She just drank from her soda, and hoped that she was part of it.

Chapter 34

Chapter Thirty-Four

Just as he'd said he'd do, Cole called Jordyn when he was leaving school after the football team's bus had returned.

Jordyn felt butterflies as she slipped her phone back in her pocket. She was sitting on Alice's bed, the other three girls glancing at her expectantly.

"Soo, uhm, I gotta go."

Erin beamed. "Aww! Our little Jordyn!!" Dramatically, she locked her arms around Jordyn's neck, pulling her into a tight hug.

Jordyn laughed and pushed Erin away. "Stop. I'm only sleeping over. You guys, I'm sure nothing will even happen."

"What if does?" Bethany asked. "Like, what if it starts going in that direction. What are you gonna do?"

Jordyn just shrugged. She didn't answer. She knew she wouldn't let it go too far. They'd only been dating for two weeks, after all. But in those two weeks, she'd gotten so comfortable with Cole she didn't know exactly *how far* she wanted anything to go tonight.

But she was thinking ahead of herself. They had plans to hang out, watch movies and just be together tonight. They hadn't talked about any big steps, and Jordyn wasn't about to broach the subject. She didn't want to seem desperate, because she absolutely wasn't. But if he went for it, she wasn't sure what she would do. Not yet.

Twenty minutes later, Jordyn was pulling her car-yes, *her* car-into Cole's driveway. He had the porch light on for her, but like she already knew, no one except him was home.

She grabbed her duffel bag from the back seat of her new *old* 1999 Honda Civic, and started across the yard and onto the front porch. She'd barely lifted her finger to ring the doorbell when the door opened and Cole was standing there smiling.

"Come on in," he said with a smile, pushing open the screen door.

She greeted him with a long, lingering kiss, then took a moment to look at her surroundings. She'd never been to Cole's house before, but she liked it. It was pretty small, but it was cozy, friendly, and clean. The place smelled like cinnamon, and there was even a deer head over the fireplace. She knew already that Cole and his dad liked to go hunting.

"I love your house," Jordyn said.

"It's alright," Cole chuckled.

On the wall, Jordyn saw a painted portrait of Cole's family. It was older, Cole was maybe 12. She knew Cole had an older sister, Sara, who was twenty-five, but there was a boy in this family portrait, an older version of Cole.

"Is this you?" she teased, pointing at the young boy.

Cole chuckled. "Yeah. I was twelve. That's Sara, the one my parents are in Philadelphia with, and that's my brother, Josh."

"I didn't know you had a brother," Jordyn commented.

"Yeah, well, I sort of don't anymore. He died two months after this portrait was painted."

Jordyn's heart felt heavy at that admission. "Aw, Cole. I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"It's OK," Cole said. "It took them, my parents, like two years to actually put that portrait up after that."

"What happened, if you don't mind my asking," Jordyn said cautiously.

"Car accident. His senior year. One of his friends was driving, and he was speeding. Three of them died instantly, the other one died later at the hospital."

"Oh my gosh. That is awful. I'm so sorry, Cole."

"It's OK. I mean, we're all OK now. It's still hard sometimes, of course, but ever since then, I don't take anything for granted."

Jordyn thought about it. She took a lot of people in her life for granted. There was no way she'd be able to deal if something like that happened to Ty.

"Enough with the grimness," he said, putting his hands on her shoulders and squeezing. "I'm happy you're here. Come on. I'll go put your stuff in my room."

"OK," Jordyn said, following him down the hall to his bedroom.

Before going in, she expected Cole's room to be a shrine to football, trophies everyway, posters of NFL players. She was wrong. Besides a few trophies and one game football on the dresser, it was a fairly plain bedroom with dark blue wall, a few clothes scattered here and there, and a full-sized, unmade bed.

"Welcome to Casa de Cole," he said, dropping her duffel bag on the floor. "I would have cleaned up a bit for you, but I'm an honest guy. Thought you should see the real me."

Jordyn chuckled, walking around her room. "I have two brothers, remember. A few pair of, uhm, boxers, on the floor, don't bother me."

She walked to his small entertainment center, sifting through his DVDs. She recognized a few titles. He had things like Fast and Furious, a few horror flicks, some classics like Forrest Gump and Sling Blade. Then she spotted the gun case in the corner, where was not one, but *three* shot guns. Like big ones. Big Elmer Fudd style shotguns.

"Whoa," she said, looking at them. Her dad was a cop so she'd seen guns before. Small guns. But these monsters looked like they could blow a hole through the side of this house.

He chuckled. "Maybe I'll take you hunting with me."

She got this visual of herself with a pack of wolves, running after an antelope, or whatever animal they went after, in loincloths, while Cole ran in front of her also in a loincloth. Weird image, but she was from San Diego. No one hunted in San Diego.

"Maybe," she said skeptically. She doubt that she would though. She glanced at an older picture of a kid in a uniform. "Aw, Cole! Is this you?"

Cole chuckled and rolled his eyes. "Yeah. My very first year playing football. I was four."

"Look how cute you were!"

Cole laughed and playfully shoved her shoulder. "Shut up."

"But Cole. You're adorable!"

"Yeah, yeah," he said, walking over and pressing his lips to hers, grabbing her wrists.

Oh, but she loved kissing him. He tasted like Listerine, and he smelled fresh out of the shower.

Once they were on the bed, Cole pulled away, looking down at her as he stroked her hair from in front of her eyes. "Jordyn, I promise. We won't go any further than you want to. OK?"

Jordyn just nodded, and pulled him back to her. Only problem was, she wasn't sure how far she wanted to go.

Chapter 35

****Just wanted to warn you, this scene isborderline PG-13 and R.;) Just so everyone is aware! I did make it as PG-13 as I possibly could, but some things I couldn't take out or it would take away from Jordyn.***

Chapter Thirty-Five

Cole's body was warm as he stretched out next to her on the bed. He was shirtless, leaving plenty of places from Jordyn to press her palm, places for her fingers to stroke while he kissed her. Every time she touched somewhere new, she felt his taut muscles constricting under her fingers.

Making out had become a really fun pastime for Jordyn, but their pastime hadn't really involved a lot of touching until tonight. This was the first time she'd ever been in bed with him, and it was pretty exciting, even if they were on top of the covers, fully clothed.

He was being so patient with her. He was the first guy she'd ever made out with, the first she'd ever been able to call her boyfriend. And she wanted Cole to be the first of other things, too.

Her decision was made. The making out was getting heavier, Cole stroking her hip, but never once moving into forbidden territory. She wasn't quite sure how to signal for him that it was OK to move into that forbidden territory, just that she wanted him to.

"Cole," she said breathlessly, pulling away, her lips brushing his as she spoke.

"What's wrong?" he whispered back.

"Uhm, nothing," she said. "I just, uhm, it's OK if you want to do more tonight."

He raised his eyebrows, studying her for a moment. "Are you sure? I mean, I won't go any further than you want to."

She nodded. "I'm sure. I trust you. I *want* to. I promise."

He just smiled at her and kissed her. "I won't pressure you, OK? When you say stop, we stop."

Jordyn nodded with a smile, then leaned over to kiss him again, her hand behind his head, her fingers running through his soft hair.

Soon, his hands began to wander, touching her shoulder, cupping her cheek. His kisses intensified, and finally, he cupped her breast.

Jordyn felt her breath catch. She'd never been touched intimately, so she thought she would have been more nervous. But this was Cole, and he made her feel so comfortable. And maybe she was a little nervous about what could happen tonight.

She loved the feel of his hand on her, though. Slowly, he unbuttoned her blouse. "OK?" he asked.

She nodded, and once the buttons were undone and her bra was exposed to him, she helped him pull the shirt off.

"You're beautiful, Jordyn," he said as he traced her bra with his finger.

Normally she hated for people to compliment her looks. It made her uncomfortable. But when Cole did it, it made her really feel, well beautiful. Everything he did made her feel special. She had this strange feeling she loved him, but she wasn't ready to jump into that quite yet.

Right now, her main focus was the fact that he was reaching behind her, unhooking her bra.

She shivered as her breasts were bared to him, and when he let out an unmistakable appreciative sigh when he laid his eyes on them. The way he looked at her made her feel a little bashful, but with this being Cole, like everything else, he made this feel right. He made her feel silly for being so self-conscious over her breasts since she first got them.

"Cole," she said, when she finally felt his big, cold hand on her.

"You alright?" he asked, pulling his hand back.

"Very," she said. And he smiled, placing both his hands on her breasts and leaning over to kiss her while he rubbed his thumbs over the tips, teasing and twirling them between his thumb and index finger.

She'd never felt this before, and she liked it, but she wasn't sure how to respond to it. She wasn't sure about anything, except that she wanted this. And she was going to go as far as Cole would take it.

"You like this?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said, nodding.

And suddenly, he bent his neck, and put his *mouth* on her breast. A tingling feeling dropped to the pit of her stomach, tugging on her all over. He was sucking on her now, and she was overcome by this overwhelming need.

He switched to the other breast, and while she watched him, she saw his gaze lock on hers. Meanwhile, she took notice that his hand was toying with the button on her jeans. His hand slid into her underwear, and she didn't protest when he touched her.

She didn't know what to do, but instinctively, her head slung back against the pillow while he slid in and out of her. She had no idea this would feel so good, but it was like nothing she'd ever felt before.

"How does that feel," he asked her, moving back up to kiss her neck, then her lips.

"Mm," she moaned as he kept working his finger, adding another. And then his thumb worked her somewhere else, somewhere she didn't even know worked like that, and she almost bolted off the bed.

"Oh," she sighed. "That feels *wonderful*!"

He chuckled. "It's going to get even better in a couple of minutes."

She didn't see how it could get better, and then it did. Oh, it did. It felt like everything he'd done had been leading to the top of the mountain, the pressure in her womb gradually building, and now she had hit the peak of that mountain and had bolted down at lightning speed.

It was unexplainable.

After it was all over, and she felt limp, she looked at Cole, who smiled down at her. "OK?"

She nodded. "Very OK."

He smiled, then he took her hand, and placed it on his crotch, which she could tell was straining behind his sweatpants. She looked down at it, and saw that he was very hard. She could feel it through the cloth of his pants.

"I'm, uh, not sure what to do," she admitted.

He kissed her. "It's OK. I'll show you. If you want to, that is. It's cool if this is as far as you want to go."

She shook her head, kissing his cheek. "No. I want more, baby."

He tugged his shorts down, boxers and all, and she saw *it*. It was big, too. Well, she *thought* so, anyway. She had nothing to compare it to. She'd never seen one before. Logan's as a toddler and a baby didn't count at all.

But she was sure Cole's was big.

"Wrap your fingers around it," he instructed. So she did. It felt funny. It was *hot*, and she hadn't expected that. And it throbbed, pulsing against her skin.

"Move your hand up and down," he said. "Put a little pressure on it, but not too much. Yeah, just like that, baby. Nice and easy. You're doing great."

He stretched out on his back with his hands behind his head, his chest rising and falling rhythmically as she pumped her hand up and down. "That feels so good, Jordyn. Yeah, baby."

He sat up suddenly, and kissed her lips. She got so wound up in the kiss, she must have stilled her hand because next thing she knew, he had his hand on hers, moving it again.

"Whoa, whoa, stop," he grunted. "I'm about to come."

She chuckled lowly. "Isn't that the point."

"Not if you want to go further," he said seriously.

She thought about it. She bit her bottom lip, and looked down at his hard, erect, and hopeful penis. Did she want it to go further?

When she didn't answer immediately, he shook his head. "You're not ready."

"I didn't say that."

"Jordyn," he said softly. "I know this means a lot to you. I've have sex before, but my first time with you means a lot to me, too, and I don't want anything more to happen until I know *you're* ready for sure. And I know you're not. I promise, baby, when we finally have sex, it's gonna perfect, OK?"

She nodded and smiled. "Thank you."

He looked back at the clock. "But that doesn't mean we can't make the most of the hour we have until it's time for me to take you home."

So, he pushed her back on her back, and popped the button on her jeans. "So, relax, Jordyn." He leaned over, kissing her just below her belly button. "Just relax."

Chapter 36

Chapter Thirty-Six

Monday, October 8, 2012

Monday started off horribly. It was rainy again and Jordyn overslept about 15 minutes. In her haste to get ready and not make herself late, she'd accidentally closed her 400-degree hair straightener on her index finger. As luck would have it, Zara had been walking by her bedroom when it happened and heard Jordyn's declaration of "shit!" sounding loudly.

She'd been grounded for the rest of the week for using a swear word in the house-yeah, her mother *did* have those rules-but she'd fortunately made it to school on time, sliding into her desk, her unfinished hair in a messy bun, her finger bandaged and still hurting, at the last second before the bell.

Ashley didn't stare at her today, thank goodness. Instead, her attention, like everyone else's was focused solely on Mrs. Roland as she announced homecoming.

"Alright, class," she said excitedly, clapping her hands as she leaned against the desk, facing her homeroom. "It's finally that time of year again. Homecoming. So, as usual, seniors are nominating their candidates for king and queen and the ballets will be out Wednesday for everyone to cast their votes."

Homecoming here was a big deal, Jordyn knew. A town that worshipped football like this one did, it had to have homecoming. This year, they were playing the Timberwood Titans, and if they beat them, it would be a homecoming to remember.

At lunch, Jordyn sat with Alice and the girls since Cole had stayed after in his last class to talk to a teacher. There, they told her all about Cedarwood's homecoming.

"OK, so first there's a pep rally," Erin explained. "Then the homecoming parade, followed by the game, then the dance."

"So you guys are going to the dance?" Jordyn asked, taking a bite of her orange slice.

"Absolutely," Bethany said. "That's the best part."

Jordyn nodded. Homecoming rituals weren't foreign to Jordyn. They had the pep rally, the parade and all back in Moon Bay Beach. They had a dance, too. But no one ever went to the dance. Everyone had a party to go to after that.

"You have to go, Jordyn," Alice said. "Cole will more than likely win homecoming king-"

"If your brother doesn't," Erin pointed out.

"Yeah," Alice said. "If Ty doesn't. And if he does, he'll pick his queen."

"And the queen will pick her king," Bethany said. "It's tradition."

"Cole will obviously pick you," Alice continued. "So, you need to be there for him."

Jordyn nodded absently. She had no real desire to go to homecoming, but she knew the girls were right. If Cole won homecoming king, she needed to be there for him. And who knew? Maybe it would be fun.

"Ladies!"

Jordyn glanced up as Blake plopped down at the table with them next to Alice, taking a fry off her plate. "What's up?"

"Nothing," Alice said, smiling at Blake. "Just talking about homecoming and stuff."

"Trying to make sure she goes," said Erin, pointing to Jordyn.

"I told you, I'm going," Jordyn said. But she was more focused on Alice and Blake, and how Alice giggled every time Blake bumped her arm playfully.

This flirting *had* to stop. Those two had to get together.

"So, Blake," Jordyn said. "Any ideas who you're taking to homecoming?"

"There's this one girl I've been kind of thinking about," Blake said, his tone oozing with cockiness. "Don't know if she'd be interested in going with me, though."

"I think you should ask her," Erin said, winking at Jordyn.

"Yeah," Bethany piped in, also catching on. "I mean, you never know until you ask. Right, Alice?"

Alice grunted her response, resting her elbow on the table and placing her chin in her hand.

"I have this unhealthy fear of rejection," Blake sighed dramatically, sitting back against his chair, his arms folded over his chest. "Can't handle it. I like to wait and let the ladies come to me."

"Hope they don't get bored in that long line you got knocking at your door," Bethany said flatly.

"I'm well worth the wait, Beth," Blake said, nodding.

Jordyn looked over, at Alice. She hadn't said a word. Instead, she sat there, zipping and unzipping her light jacket, her eyes never once meeting theirs.

"So, you'd say yes if *she* asked you, then?" Jordyn asked.

"Sure. But I don't think she's gonna ask me. She's too busy playing with her jacket."

Jordyn beamed, watching Alice blush as she slowly looked up at Blake.

"Wow," said Alice. "What a coincidence."

Bethany sighed dramatically. "This has *got* to stop! Alice! Will you *please* go to homecoming with Blake?"

Alice smirked and shrugged. "Well, I mean, if it means *that* much to you." She picked up her juice and took a sip. "Who am I to argue?"

Blake smiled. "You're so nice, Alice." He stood up. "I'll see you three ladies later. My homecoming date, I'll call you tonight."

"What, no gym class?" Jordyn asked Blake as he turned to leave.

Blake placed his hand on his stomach and frowned. "Nah. Not today."

"How are you even passing?" Bethany asked him. "Isn't the only requirement to get an A in gym to actually show up?"

"Got a note," Blake said with a wink. "Told Coach I was pregnant. He told me to take it easy. See you guys."

With that he was gone, and all eyes were on Alice, now.

"I don't like it when people stare at me, you know," she said.

"Well, well, well," Erin said. "You'd think she'd be floating right now. She's liked Blake forever."

"I haven't liked him *that* long," Alice muttered. Then slowly, a smile spread across her face. "That is pretty cool, though, huh? I have a date for homecoming!"

Jordyn nodded, ecstatic for her friend. "Yes. That is really cool, Alice."

Just then, she felt a pair of hands drop onto her shoulder, followed by lips on her cheek.

Jordyn smiled as Cole sat next to her. "Hey, baby."

"Hi," she said back.

"Sorry," he told her. "I got held up talking to Mr. Toms."

"It's OK," Jordyn said. "We were just talking about homecoming."

Cole nodded. "That's cool. I gotta find a date."

Jordyn scoffed and laughed, playfully punching him in the arm. "You're an ass."

Cole put his hand on his chest, feigning hurt. "Well, I was thinking about asking you. But maybe now I've changed my mind."

Jordyn laughed.

"Jordyn's a good choice, Cole," Alice said. "She's a *great* dancer."

"Yeah, you'll see her tonight at the Harvest Festival," Erin added, winking.

Jordyn groaned. "Please. Don't remind me."

"What's up with the Harvest Festival?" Cole asked.

"Wait," Alice said. "Jordyn didn't tell you? Jordyn, why didn't you tell him?"

"I do have a tiny bit of self-respect left," Jordyn said flatly. "I'd like to keep it."

"It's not *that* bad," Erin said.

"What are you all talking about?" asked Cole.

"We're dancing at the Harvest Festival tonight," Jordyn admitted. She hadn't wanted him to know. She was embarrassed enough as it was. Especially after she'd seen the costume Miss Maggie had given them to wear.

"Who, your dance school?"

Jordyn nodded glumly.

"Jordyn, I've never seen you dance before," Cole said. "What time does it start?"

"6:00," Erin volunteered.

"Well, I'll be there," Cole said, grinning at Jordyn. "And I can't wait to see you."

Jordyn just sighed. "Mm, great."

The sky above Cedarwood was a milky white as Jordyn stood with the rest of the Cedarwood Dance School advanced class on a blocked-off Main Street. It was still *cold*, and thank God it had stopped raining, but Jordyn still felt ridiculous in her black tights and orange sequined top.

"Hey, I think you look cute," Cole told her, slipping up next to her with a hot dog and a hot chocolate.

Jordyn responded with a death stare in his direction, but she couldn't hold it for long, not with that goofy smile he gave her as he took a bite of his hot dog.

"Ha. Ha," Jordyn said. "By the way, you have a little mustard. Right there." She reached over and poked his lip.

"Thanks, babe!" he said enthusiastically. "So. What song are you guys dancing to."

"A bunch," Jordyn mumbled.

Cole laughed. "It's just one night, you know. And isn't dancing like, your thing? You couldn't possibly look worse than Ashley Moore."

"I already look bad enough. I'm not even dancing yet."

Erin walked over, in the same black tights and sparkly top, popping on gum. "Hi! Ready for the big show!"

She said 'big show' overly enthusiastically.

Jordyn was somewhat ready. As in, she knew every dance, every move, and was confident with what was expected of her. What she wasn't ready for was looking like a complete loser in front of half the town.

"Ladies!" called Maggie as she walked over. "Ladies, come on! Let's get ready. We go on in five."

Jordyn spotted Ashley sucking in a few breaths. "I'm so nervous," she said to Shari and Leah, who rapidly nodded their heads.

Jordyn rolled her eyes and looked up at Cole. "I gotta go."

"It's a dance competition, Jor. Not your execution."

Erin laughed, grabbing her friend's arm. "You'll love her, Cole. Trust me. Come on, Jordyn."

They made their way to the rest of the girls. They were dancing in front of the Creamery and they already had a crowd circling.

Great.

In the crowd, she spotted her parents, Ty, Logan and Natalie. Cole had wandered over and was standing next to Ty. Zara was smiling from next to Jack, and Jordyn wondered how disappointed she would be. She'd made Jordyn go over her choreography with her this week, and hadn't been so happy about it.

Miss Maggie walked over, ushering them into their places, grabbed the microphone and cheerfully introduced the 2012-2013 advanced dance class. She went over the itinerary. Their first number was a 'jazz' piece to a Rihanna song, then they were ending the show with *This Is Halloween*. Yes, the theme song to the old Tim Burton movie with the skeleton. Miss Maggie had deemed that one 'contemporary.' In it, they would be dancing like zombies, and Jordyn thought it was kind of a cool dance. Eight-year-olds with Miss Victoria could do more advanced choreography than that, but Jordyn's new classmates and declared it as the "toughest one Miss Maggie ever taught." It took three weeks for the rest of them to learn, and halfway through, Jordyn had an impressive turn combo, ten a la seconds and pirouettes.

She wasn't complaining about that, of course. At least she was somewhat on her level. But the outfits? Yeah, they were lame.

"Alright, here we go!" Miss Maggie said into the microphone. Then she walked over to the sound control, and started their music.

Please don't stop the music!

And all Jordyn could think as she was one of the only ones on beat was *kill me now*.

After they finished, they received a wild round of applause from the *huge* audience they'd attracted, but Jordyn was so happy it was over.

She'd ditched the outfit in a nearby bathroom, then for the rest of the night, she, Cole, Ty and Natalie enjoyed walking around the Harvest Festival, playing different little games, snacking on sample goat's milk fudge. Jordyn couldn't believe how much fun this silly little community party was, but it was.

She almost regretted leaving.

Almost.

With a 10:00 curfew, Jordyn didn't have a lot of time to spend with Cole once they'd left the Harvest Festival. Ty and Natalie left on their own to head back to Natalie's house, and Jordyn and Cole drove up to Lookout Point.

They'd decided that their first time together would be perfect, and when Jordyn was ready. But tonight, they were having fun doing everything else. They were both OK holding off, and just being with him was good enough for her, especially when they only had fifteen minutes until she had to be home.

"Those black tights of yours were such a turn-on, you know," he teased her as he reached behind her and unhooked her bra.

She laughed, sliding her fingers through his hair as he kissing her neck and his big hands found her bare breasts. "Yeah, right." She sighed, loving the feel of his now familiar touch on her, and his breath on her neck. "Cole."

He looked up and smiled. "Jordyn."

She grinned, then bit her bottom lip. "Cole, I want to go further."

"Right now? We have like fifteen minutes, babe."

She laughed. "No, not now. Homecoming."

She'd thought about it for a couple of days. She'd known it would really be perfect. And she wanted him to know she was ready.

"Are you sure, baby?" he asked. "I mean, I'll wait as long as you want me, too."

"Do you not want to?" she asked. She didn't mean to sound to desperate, because she wasn't, she just wasn't so sure she knew how to handle this.

"Yes, I *really* want to," he assured her. "I just want you to call all the shots, OK? I want to make 100% you're ready."

He laced his fingers with hers, and she looked down at their hands. "I'm ready, Cole. I want to, and I'm ready."

He smiled, nodded, and leaned in to kiss her lips. And just like that, Jordyn had her perfect night planned.

Chapter 37

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Thursday, October 11, 2012

On Thursday, the ballots were in. Everyone sat in Mrs. Roland's class awaiting to hear the homecoming nominees. Jordyn was so nervous as the ballots were passed out. Then Mrs. Roland stepped to the front of the classroom and proudly went over the homecoming nominees for the senior class, girls first.

"Alright, our nominees for the senior homecoming queen are-"

"Bada-bada-bada-bada-bada-badaâ¦"

The laughed and Mrs. Roland peaked over at her glasses at the sound of the drumroll. Jordyn peaked around at Blake.

"I'm just building the anticipation," Blake said.

Mrs. Roland nodded. "The nominees are Lucy Kyle, Amanda Muller, and Natalie Bishop. Cast your votes."

Jordyn smiled, and immediately scribbled Natalie's name. She could see Ashley out of the corner of her eye, peaking at Jordyn's paper.

Really?

Jordyn sighed, rolling her eyes, and propped her elbow onto the desk, blocking Ashley's view. She heard Ashley scoff.

"Oh my God," she muttered. "It's not a freaking SAT."

"OK, everyone ready for the guys?" asked Mrs. Roland.

Jordyn gripped her pencil, ready scribble Cole's name down when she heard it. She sort of hoped Ty wouldn't get nominated, too, because that meant she would be stuck. But she knew she'd vote for Cole, because he was her boyfriend. And what could make their big night tomorrow night more memorable than having Cole crowned homecoming king with her standing next to him?

"Your nominees for homecoming king are Jenner Parks-"

Of course.

"-Michael Ashbyâ¦"

Who?

"And Cole Anderson."

Jordyn mentally jumped to her feet and danced happily around the classroom. Physically, she tried her hardest to hide her smile, and scribbled her boyfriend's name on the ballot and folded it up.

"Well, well, California," Blake said. Jordyn turned and smiled. "Congratulations. Your boy is on the homecoming court. Guess that's good news for you."

Jordyn smiled. "I'm happy for him, of course."

Ashley sighed loudly, and Jordyn turned to find her smirking and folding her ballot.

"Well, I voted for him, just for you."

Jordyn chuckled. "Thanks, Blake." Then she turned back to the front and gave her ballot with Natalie and Cole's names on it to Mrs. Roland.

At lunch, Natalie asked Jordyn to go with her, Meredith, and Lydia shopping for homecoming dresses, right there in front of Ashley. Jordyn ignored the dropping of Ashley's jaw, and grinned in Natalie's direction.

"Oh, I'd love to!" Jordyn said. "But we have to dress up for homecoming? I thought it was like, casual."

"We're on the homecoming court, Jor. We *have* to dress like prom."

"*We*?" Jordyn asked.

Natalie chuckled. "Uh, yeah." She patted Cole's shoulder. "Your man's a nominee, which means you're on the court, too."

"Oh, wow," Jordyn said. This was news to her. But, that sounded really fun, anyway. "Great."

"Hey, Nat," Ashley piped up. "You are *so* gonna win homecoming queen. We all voted for you."

By *we all*, Ashley had meant her, Shari, and Leah.

Natalie gave a small smile. "Well, I hope I do. Thanks."

"You guys coming to the bonfire tonight, right?" Cole asked.

Jordyn nodded. "I'm definitely gonna be there."

Part of the homecoming tradition, as Jordyn had learned, was the bonfire tonight by the lake. Tomorrow, school was out. The parade was tomorrow morning, carnival on the football field tomorrow afternoon, and then the game tomorrow night, all leading up to the dance.

"Jordyn, you look excited," Ty laughed. "I can't believe it."

Jordyn nodded and shrugged. "Maybe I am. A little bit."

"You're a liar," Natalie laughed. "You're psyched and you know it. And I'm so excited to help you pick a dress. You would look adorable in like, hot pink, baby blue. Something light."

Jordyn just laughed. "OK, Natalie. You're the expert. I trust you guys."

She noticed Ashley staring at her, and, wait. Was that a look of *hurt* on her face? She'd lost her glare, and she wasn't poking her salad so hard today. Instead, she almost looked sad. This time when she met Jordyn's eyes,

she didn't keep staring. Instead, she looked away uncomfortably, then leaned over, whispering something to Leah, who sighed and nodded.

Jordyn narrowed her eyes, but she wouldn't worry about what was going on with Ashley and her friends. She had Cole's hand on her leg under the table, and she was hanging out with Natalie this afternoon. Going dress shopping, no less.

After school, Jordyn met Natalie, Lydia, and Meredith by Natalie's SUV. As she approached, she saw Natalie take a drag from the cigarette she was smoking-Natalie smoked?-and drop the butt on the ground, stepping on it.

"Hey, girl," Natalie said with a smile when she saw Jordyn. "Ready?"

Jordyn smiled and nodded. "Yep."

So she hopped in the back seat of the Tahoe with Meredith while Lydia sat up front with Natalie.

They were going to the mall in Woodbury, Natalie had told Jordyn as they started down Lakeside Road. The bonfire didn't start until 8:00, so they had plenty of time to shop.

"Damn it," Lydia said suddenly, rummaging through her purse. "I must have left my wallet at home. Nat, can you drive me by there really quick?"

Natalie let out an annoyed sigh. "Your *wallet*, Lyd?"

"Yes, Nat," Lydia snapped back, a little snarkier than Jordyn had ever seen her be. "Unless you want us to steal from the stores, I need my wallet."

So Natalie made a sharp turn onto a side road, speeding up until they were at Lydia's house.

So house wasn't the right word, Jordyn realized when Natalie parked in the circular drive. Mansion was far more appropriate. The house was far bigger than Jordyn's, and it was new, brick, and the lake was in the backyard.

Jordyn had seen houses like this, of course, back in California. Houses in gated, beachside communities. Houses like Ryan's. But this one, surrounded by trees in the front, and a lake behind it, was a different kind of mansion than Jordyn was used to. This house definitely didn't belong on the beach in California.

The inside was even more beautiful, Jordyn realized as they stepped into the foyer. It was modern, and very white, from the walls, to the white, leather sofas, and the soft, carpet. Jordyn was almost afraid to step foot inside.

The walls were covered in exquisite artwork. Obviously the mayor and his wife were worldly, she realized, noting several masks, statues, vases, and other foreign-artifacts decorating the room. On one side, up against the staircase, was a beautiful, shiny, Baby Grand piano. On the far wall, above the fireplace was a family portrait of the Mayor, Lydia, and two other females, whom Jordyn took to be Lydia's mother and older sister, by the familiar looks.

The girls followed Lydia to her room, where she quickly found her wallet.

"Hey, give me a minute," Lydia said after tossing her wallet into her purse. Then she went to her dresser, picking up what looked like a locked diary.

"Lydia, you're unbelievable," Natalie scolded as Lydia unlocked the diary, and inside, Jordyn saw that it *wasn't* a diary at all. The inside was cut out and it was like this little hideaway for this tiny vial with this white, sugary substance.

Jordyn narrowed her eyes. Was that, *coke?*

Lydia just rolled her eyes.

Jordyn couldn't believe what she was seeing as Lydia chopped and separated it into a straight line on a piece of glass. She took this tiny straw, stuck it up her nose and leaned over, sniffing.

Jordyn didn't want to sound immature or naÃ¯ve, but she'd never actually seen someone do this in real life. And Lydia? She knew Blake was selling her something, but she was thinking maybe Lydia was smoking weed or something. The girl was freaking sniffing coke right here in front of them.

"When your ass ends up in rehab, I'm not visiting you," Natalie said.

"Natalie, just shut the hell up," Lydia said, straightening and blinking her eyes. She took the remainder of the coke , wiping it up with her index finger, and rubbing it on her gums.

Quickly, she put the vial back in her diary, locked it, and turned to smile at them like nothing ever even happened. "Ready to go."

Chapter 38

Chapter Thirty-Eight

After raiding Macy's, Dillard's, and even Saks Fifth Avenue, Jordyn realized that the Woodbury Mall was *not* as in the sticks as Jordyn was worried it would have been. Better yet? They'd all found the *perfect* dresses for homecoming.

"So, you have to warn Cole he has a have a pink tie," Natalie teased as they walked across the parking lot, all equipped with bags holding their new dresses.

Jordyn really hoped Cole would like her dress. The girls had assured her he would. Natalie had picked Jordyn's dress, but Jordyn had fallen in love with it the second she had seen it in the mirror. It was strapless, and short, falling just above her knee. The bodice was crisscross pleated, the skirt, layered in tiers, lacy, and coated in glitter. But it was the color that Jordyn immediately fell in love with. A bright, bubblegum pink, the dress emphasized her bleach-blond hair and still tanned arms and legs.

"This was a lot of fun," Jordyn said, leaning against the Tahoe, waiting for Natalie to unlock the doors.

She smiled at Jordyn. "Yeah, it was. I love hanging out with you, Jor. You're like the little sister I never had."

Jordyn smiled. She felt the same about Natalie.

"So, you think a lot of people will be at the bonfire?" Jordyn asked as Natalie started down the highway out of Woodbury and back to Cedarwood.

"There usually is," Natalie shrugged. "It's over by 11:00, though, so most of the time people have parties to go to."

Jordyn perked up. "Sounds like fun. Where is it, again?"

"Where Lake Fest was," Meredith said, placing her blue sunglasses over her eyes. "Nat, just drop me off at my car. I'm not going to the bonfire."

"Why not?" Lydia asked.

Meredith just smiled. "Got a date."

Jordyn saw Natalie roll her eyes. She wondered if Meredith's date was the older guy she'd heard about that night at Mickey's.

Natalie drove to school to drop everyone off at their cars, but she instructed Jordyn to meet her at her house to get ready. Jordyn felt kind of cool being the only one invited, because she'd waited until Lydia and Meredith were in their cars before she asked Jordyn.

"Sure," Jordyn replied with a smile before dipping into the front seat of her own car.

At home, Jordyn carried her big shopping bag and her book bag in through the back door, and found her mother at the kitchen table, on her phone, with papers and papers spread out in front of her.

"Emilio that sounds wonderful," Zara was saying. "I'll see you Saturday. Alright, love. Bye."

Jordyn raised her eyebrows at her mother as she placed the bag on the floor. Emilio was her mother's restaurant manager back in San Diego. But what did she mean by seeing him Saturday?

Zara hung up the phone and grinned at Jordyn. "Let me see it!"

Jordyn smiled and reached down for the bag. Jordyn texted her mother earlier, telling her she was going with the girls dress shopping, but she knew Zara had really wanted to take her.

Jordyn pulled the dress from the shopping bag and watched as Zara's eyes widened with pleasure and her jaw dropped. "Oh, Jordyn. Honey, that dress is beautiful. You're going to be gorgeous for that dance tomorrow night."

Jordyn smiled, looking back at the dress. She sure hoped so.

"Try it on!" Zara encouraged.

"I can't," Jordyn said. "I'm in sort of a hurry. I'm going back to Natalie's."

"I thought you were going to the bonfire."

"I am. I'm going with Natalie. I really like hanging out with her. She's like a big sister."

Zara smiled. "She is very nice. I like her."

"She's Ty's best choice. Like, ever."

Zara laughed. "I definitely agree there."

Jordyn lowered the dress back into the bag.

"Make sure you hang that up when you get to your room," Zara said. "So it won't wrinkle."

"I will. Why were you talking to Emilio about seeing him Saturday?"

"I'm flying back to San Diego next weekend. How would you like to go along? You'd miss school Friday and Monday, but I know you miss your friends. And it's been longer than I'd anticipated before getting back."

"Of course!" Jordyn said. "We don't have school Monday, anyway. Hey, maybe I could invite Alice!"

Zara shrugged. "Fine with me."

"Awesome. What are you going back for?"

"I have a couple of investors looking to buy it. I'm seriously thinking about selling. Use the money to open an entire new restaurant in Pittsburgh, maybe I could eventually expand into Philadelphia."

Jordyn got quiet. Sell the restaurant? That restaurant was the only tie they had to San Diego now. With that gone, there was no reason to go back anymore.

"Oh, wow," was all Jordyn could say. "Sounds cool. Look, I'm going to run upstairs hang this up, and grab some warm clothes for the bonfire."

"Alright, sweetie," Zara said with a completely oblivious smile.

Natalie was home alone when Jordyn got there. Her mother worked nights, and there was no father in the picture, Jordyn had learned. Not since she was two. And her house was far more modest than Jordyn had imagined, small and quaint, but cute, with white shingles and blue shutters, white rockers on the porch, flowers landscaped perfectly all over; pansies, Jordyn's favorites.

The inside wasn't quite as quaint as the outside had looked. It looked more like two college roommates lived there than mother and daughter.

Oh, and there was a dog. A *big* dog.

"This is Max," Natalie laughed when Jordyn fell back against the living room wall at the sight of a black lab. "Relax, he wouldn't hurt a fly. Max, sit!"

So just like that, the dog planted his butt on the carpeted floor, tail still wagging and tongue hanging out, so Jordyn could sneak passed him.

Natalie laughed, leading Jordyn down the hall to her bedroom. "You don't like dogs or something?"

Jordyn shrugged. "They're OK, I guess. I've never had one so I don't really have an opinion."

"You sure seemed to have an opinion of Max," Natalie chuckled.

"Well, he's sort of *huge*."

"He's our watch dog. He's such a big baby, though, I don't know what good he would do if someone actually did break in. I keep telling my mom we need a Doberman or something."

Jordyn's eyes widened as she followed Natalie into her room. "Then I would *never* come back over here."

Natalie laughed and sat on her bed. "You're exaggerating. I'd feel safer with a Doberman guarding my house."

"Safe from what?" Jordyn asked. "I've been here for two months and nothing has grazed the front page of the Cedarwood Chronicle except news about a new library in the works and I think there was a huge breaking story about a pig running rampant at the Harvest Festival."

Natalie chuckled. "How do you like Cedarwood so, far, Jordyn? Buying homecoming dresses, wearing the quarterback's letterman jacket. Hell, you're practically running that dance studio now. You still suffering?"

"Oh yes," Jordyn said. "I'm suffering bad. I can't believe you're making me go to this big bonfire tonight to hang out with all my friends. God, this is all so awful."

"Damn right. So, what did your mom say about your dress?"

"She really liked it. I can't wait to get in it tomorrow night."

"You? Miss, anti-tradition?"

"I *do* like getting dressed up. When I was in San Diego competing, I *loved* getting dressed up, getting my make-up and hair done."

"Who doesn't," Natalie chuckled. "What did you bring for the bonfire?"

Jordyn reached for her duffel bag, sitting it on the bed. "Just some jeans, a couple of shirts and a hoodie. And this." She smiled as she held up the newest addition to her wardrobe, a thick, brown Carrhart jacket. Because Jordyn had learned fall nights in Cedarwood were no joke.

"Good," Natalie said. "You're gonna need all that." She stood up and walked to her own closet. "So. You and Cole got any big plans for tomorrow night? After the dance, I mean?"

This was it. Jordyn couldn't hold it in anymore. "Yeah, we do."

Natalie's eyebrows went to her hairline, then she grinned. "OK, spill."

"Well, we've decided that tomorrow is *the* night."

Natalie's jaw dropped, then the crooks of her mouth turned into a sly smile. "Oh my God! Jordyn!"

"Don't tell anyone!"

By anyone, Jordyn hoped Natalie knew that Ty, *especially*, was included in that.

Natalie waved her hand nonchalantly. "Oh, I won't. So, do you and I need to have a talk."

Jordyn looked away, her cheeks reddening.

"Relax," Natalie sighed. "As your big brother's girlfriend, you know, given that you don't have a sister, I feel it's my responsibility to take that role. So. Where are you going?"

She shrugged. "I don't know, yet. Cole hasn't said. We go to Lookout
Point a lot."

Natalie cringed and shook her head. "You don't want your first time to be out at Lookout Point in a car."

Jordyn thought about it. Natalie was right. Cole's parents weren't supposed to be gone anywhere this weekend, and they certainly couldn't come back to Jordyn's house. So where were they supposed to go? She hoped Cole would figure it out, because Jordyn was nervous enough with the responsibility of just showing up.

"Worry about that later," Natalie said. "The most important thing you need to worry about is protection."

Jordyn gulped.

"You know, condoms?"

"Yeah, I knew what you meant."

"Well, have you thought about it?"

"Yeah, I mean, of course we're going to use something. I'm not on birth control or anything."

"Do you have any?"

Jordyn shrugged and shook her head. "No, I thought Cole would take care of that."

"You need a backup," Natalie told her, getting up and walking to her dresser. When she returned, she had four little foil packages in her hand. She gave it to Jordyn. "Put these in your purse. You need to be responsible for you, and make sure you're protected. Don't leave it to the guy."

Nervously, Jordyn took the foils packages, and without a word, she slid them into her purse, looking expectantly at Natalie.

Natalie just smiled, and plopped down next to Jordyn. "OK. Ask me whatever you need to know."

And, boy, did Jordyn have *plenty* to ask.

Chapter 39

Chapter Thirty-Nine

By the time Natalie and Jordyn pulled up at the lake, the bonfire was going strong, smoke drifting from the tall wooden structure into the dark sky. It was after nine already, so the place was actually packed.

"The boys said they're by the dock," Natalie said, checking her cell phone after she found a park. "Come on."

Jordyn wouldn't admit that she was excited out loud, but she was really excited. Her old high school didn't get too into homecoming like Cedarwood did. Not that she would have gone to a bonfire if they'd had one. With dance running late at night or starting early mornings, she didn't really have time for real teenage things. Here in Cedarwood, she was already making memories, and loving every second of it.

"There they are," Jordyn said, spotting Ty and Cole in a sea of football players, all in their letterman jackets-they'd both 'borrowed' theirs back from Jordyn and Natalie for tonight.

Natalie snuck up behind Ty, putting her hands on his shoulders and hoisting herself on his back. He caught her just in time, then turned his head for a kiss.

"Hey, baby," she said, kissing him again.

"Oh my God," Cole said. "Get a room!"

Jordyn chuckled, slipping up next to him, and kissing his cheek. He returned that with a kiss on the lips.

"Yeah, you get a room, Anderson," Jenner laughed.

Ty whipped around. "Hell no."

They all laughed just as Drake's *HYFR* started to play.

"My shit!" Davis shouted, jumping up onto the dock and pulling his date, a senior cheerleader, up with him. She was laughing in that I'm-so-embarrassed-but-boy-do-I-love-this-attention kind of way as they started grinding to the music.

"He's lit up," Cole explained, unnecessarily.

"They have beer here?" Jordyn asked, incredulous. She'd thought the bonfire was a school-sponsored event.

"Hell no," Jenner said. "He has beer at his house. He got drunk before he got here."

"Gonna get us all in trouble," Ty said, shaking his head as he watched Davis and his cheerleader dancing.

Cole squeezed Jordyn's hand, looking down and smiling at her. "You cold?"

She chuckled and shook her head, motioning toward her jacket. "No. I'm OK."

Leaning into him, she inhaled the subtle sandalwood scent of his cologne, mixed nicely with that of his laundry detergent, easy to notice with her nose so close to his chest.

Jordyn clutched her purse. She could feel the condoms burning through it, like somehow, everyone could tell they were there. Or maybe it was just because *she* knew.

Either way, she wished that antsy feeling would go away so she could relax with Cole and her friends around the bonfire. She didn't drink, but if she ever needed a shot, she figured it was right now. And with the way the crisp night hair was whipping against her cheeks, without a doubt leaving them rosily blistered, she needed a warm up.

Cole rubbed the tops of her arms. "You want to go sit by the fire?"

She nodded, her teeth beginning to chatter. So he took her hand, his cotton-glove-covered fingers laced with her numbing, bare ones, then lead her to the fire.

"I can't believe you came out here without gloves," he chuckled as they sat side-by-side on a log, one of many surrounding the fire. He reached into his pockets and pulled out an extra pair of gloves. "I don't know why, but I had this feeling."

She laughed, a little embarrassed at being so predictable, but grateful nonetheless, as she took the gloves. "You're awesome!"

"How about some roasted marshmallows?" Cole asked, standing up.

Jordyn nodded. "That sounds *great*."

She warmed her fingers until Cole returned with the marshmallows and two long roasting forks. He put her marshmallow on the end, then gave her the stick, repeating the same with his own.

Jordyn watched as flames surrounded her marshmallow, turning it darker and darker, until finally the marshmallow was fully engulfed.

Cole laughed. "Babe, your marshmallow is on fire."

Jordyn just grinned. "I like it like that." She blew the marshmallow.

"Oh, I get it. My girl's hardcore."

"You know it. Got a Harley in my backyard."

"I think I love you," he teased.

Jordyn laughed. "I don't blame you." Then she nervously cleared her throat. "Uhm, so I was wondering. After the dance tomorrow night. Where exactly are we going?"

Cole grinned. "Well, I was going to surprise you, but, we're going to my aunt and uncle's cabin. In the mountains."

Jordyn's eyes widened. "We're going all the way to the mountains?!"

Cole raised his eyebrows and nodded toward the horizon behind the lake. "Jor, they're right there."

"Those are mountains? I thought they were just, like, little hills."

"Jordyn, Cedarwood is part of Appalachia."

Jordyn glanced around her. "Really?"

Cole laughed. "The foothills. The mountains are right over there. Wow. You really were, uhm, absent, moving here, weren't you?"

Jordyn nodded. "Good choice of words."

"The cabin is like, *in* the mountains. My dad and uncle go there all the time. It's on this huge lake, much bigger than Lake Cedar, and they fish and hunt, and, well, I have a key. Courtesy of my cousin, Michael. It's like, a 45 minute drive."

"So, we got this all planned out then," she said.

"You don't sound happy about that."

"Oh, no, I am. I am really excited. I told you, Cole. I want you to be my first and tomorrow night is going to be perfect. And a cabin on the lake? What could be better? More memorable."

"I just don't want you to have any doubts. That's all."

A Rihanna song came over the speakers.

Jordyn smiled, and she stood up, grabbing his hand. "I don't. Get up. I kind of want to dance."

Cole dropped Jordyn off right at her curfew. He kissed her goodnight, and handed over his letterman jacket.

"I'll meet you after the parade tomorrow," he told her. "Then we'll hit the carnival."

Jordyn grinned. "Great! I can't wait."

"Me, neither." He kissed her again. "See you tomorrow, baby."

Jordyn climbed out of the car, waving as he headed back down her driveway, then walked into the house.

And from what she could tell, the seventh level of Hell.

Thirteen-year-old boys, everywhere. Sleeping bags spread all across the carpet, snacks of every kind on the coffee table, and some hard core action movie on the TV.

She would have *loved* to have been warned about a slumber party Logan was having.

Fortunately, the boys were too into the car-chase-gun-shooting scene on the big screen TV to notice Jordyn slipping through the living room and into the kitchen. There, she found her father at the table in a sweatshirt, with his glasses perched at the end of his nose, sifting through bills, while Zara was excitedly going on about an something being "the most amazing spot for it."

"Hi," Jordyn said, clutching Cole's jacket.

Zara beamed. "Well, hello there! How was your first bonfire?"

"It was cold. Frigidly, Alaskan cold."

Jack sighed and shook his head. "Boy, kid, you are not gonna survive January."

"I'll have to spring for a few pair of long johns I guess," Jordyn said.

Zara reached over, touching Jordyn's cheek. "Whoo. You are cold."

"Yeah. But it was fun." She smiled, nodding. "It was really fun. I can't wait to get the homecoming festivities started tomorrow."

Zara put her hand on the back of Jack's chair, smiling proudly at her daughter. "Jack, can you believe our little girl?"

Jordyn furrowed her eyebrows in confusion. "What?"

Jack smiled. "I sure can't. It wasn't long ago that Cedarwood was this horrible, horrible thing, and we were taking you away from your life."

"Now you're all excited about homecoming," Zara said. "You even lettered in football."

Jordyn looked down at the jacket. "I worked really hard this season," she deadpanned.

Jack took his glasses off. "I can't believe my little girl is going to homecoming. With the homecoming king nominee. By the way, your mother showed me your dress."

"What do you think?" Jordyn asked.

"I think it's beautiful. And I think that boyfriend of yours is gonna have to plant his butt on my couch tomorrow night when I start cleaning my pistol. You know, just have a *talk.*"

Jordyn's eyes widened and Zara laughed. "He won't take his gun out, Jor. I promise."

"I won't load it," Jack corrected. "But don't you tell Cole that."

Zara sighed and rolled her eyes. "Jordyn, Shay called you. She wants you to call her back."

"Shay?" Jordyn felt horrible. She hadn't called Shay in *two* weeks. She had no idea what was going on. She knew nothing about homecoming, and the most she knew about Cole was that they had gone on a couple dates.

Jordyn sighed and nodded. "I'll go call her."

Jordyn hurried to her room, grabbing her cell phone off her dresser. It had been charging, otherwise she would have had it with her when Shay had called.

Shay answered on the second ring.

"Thank *God* you're alive!" Shay answered. "I thought maybe you'd mauled by a cow!"

Jordyn had to laugh. She was happy to hear Shay's familiar voice, and happier to know Shay didn't seem angry she'd been neglected this week.

"Sorry I missed your call," Jordyn said, plopping down on her bed. "I was-"

"At the bonfire, I know," Shay said. "Well, Miss Hamilton. I can't believe it. Never thought it would happen. You've conformed. You're turning into the girl-next-door. What next?
Overalls? Plaid shirts? Am I gonna get on Facebook one day and you'll have pigtail braids and a piece of straw hanging out of your mouth! Jordyn, you're not drinking moonshine are you?"

Jordyn laid back on her bed, and scrunched her face in confusion. "Shay, do you remember what state I moved to?"

Shay laughed. "I can't believe you went to a bonfire. And your mom says you're going to homecoming?"

Jordyn smiled. "Yeah, I am. I bought a dress and everything. My boyfriend, Cole, he's nominated for-"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Stop right there. Did you just say *boyfriend*?"

"I did. Can you believe it!"

"No, I can't. I can't believe you're going to homecoming, or that you bought a dress. *Or* that you haven't called me for two weeks."

Well, there that was.

Jordyn sighed. "Shay, I am soo sorry. I've just been, well, busy."

"Yeah, with your new snow bunnies. But hey. I'm not mad. Just glad you called me back, you traitor."

Shay's tone was teasing, so Jordyn was relieved. "Of course I called you back. Because, Shay, I have *soo* much to tell you."

Chapter 40

Chapter Forty

Friday, October 12, 2012

Friday morning was chilly, like last night had been at the bonfire. Jordyn had finally filled her closet with Pennsylvania-suitable clothes, and had worn a pair of tight, skinny jeans tucked into a pair of grey Uggs, with and her grey NorthFace jacket zipped all the way to her chin. She even wore a grey scarf and a grey stocking cap, but she was still cold as she stood with her parents and Logan on the sidewalk in front of *Touchdown*.

The homecoming parade would be starting at the post office, traveling down Main Street, turning left onto the wide, residential Cedar Street, and ending at the high school to start the carnival.

"Apple cider, $1!" a vendor called out, pushing a cart down the sidewalk, the third one she'd seen since they got there.

Jordyn shivered. She'd thought last night was cold.

Jordyn looked around. No one else seemed to be as cold as she was. *Could they not see their breath like she could?*

The parade finally started, lead off by a Cedarwood Police car, blue lights flashing, followed by the marching band. The fall sports teams each had their own floats-volleyball team, number one in the conference; boys soccer team, guaranteed to go to state playoffs; tennis, cross country, and girls' swimming, all no-cut sports. But no one got the praise like the float harboring the football team and cheerleaders. Actually, it was a flatbed truck, decked out in orange and brown streamers.

"Oh, there's Ty!" Zara said happily, waving at her son who stood wedged between Davis and another guy. Jordyn chuckled, watching her mother bounce happily up and down, waving at her son. The homecoming parade for Reed High was usually right after school, not nearly this serious, and their parents didn't come. It wasn't a big deal for them to. But here, watching her parents wave so proudly, Ty may as well have been flashing a Super Bowl ring.

After the football float, came the convertibles holding the homecoming court. The first car, Natalie and Cole, both smiling and waving. Jordyn felt all dizzy and elated when Cole looked her way, smiling and winking.

She couldn't *wait* for tonight.

Once the parade was over, Alice, Erin, and Bethany found her, then telling her parents she was heading to the high school for carnival, she separated from them, hopping into Alice's Focus with the rest of the girls.

"How long are we planning to stay at the carnival, exactly?" Jordyn shivered from the backseat beside Erin.

"It ends at 3:00," Alice said. "They've got to clean up and get the field ready for the game."

"Why?" Erin asked. "You sound anxious, Jor."

"She's just in a hurry to get to that dance so her man can be crowned king," Bethany teased.

"Jordyn's most excited about getting Cole out of that gymnasium after the dance," Alice said.

Jordyn chuckled. "While all that's true, mostly, I just want warmth."

"Cole'll warm you up later," Erin said.

Jordyn rolled her eyes, but she laughed anyway. Right now the only thing San Diego had on Cedarwood was about 30 degrees.

At halftime, it had started drizzling, and the Cougars were beating the Titans by two touchdowns, ten yards away from the third. Jordyn, Alice, Erin, and Bethany, were bundled together under a big Steelers blanket-courtesy of Alice-and each had their own mugs of hot chocolate, but it wasn't warding off the cold for Jordyn. Not even with Cole's jacket. Although, as he threw pass after pass, eliciting cheers from the Cougars fans around her, she felt amazing having it on.

If only her California friends could see her now; wearing the quarterback's letterman jacket, bundled up in the freezing cold and drizzling rain, drinking hot chocolate on homecoming. She was even going to the dance with a potential homecoming king. Really, how much more 80's-teen-movie cheesy could she be?

"I bet Ashley's cold," Alice snickered, nudging Jordyn's shoulder. Jordyn glanced down to the track at the cheerleaders. Unlike the rest of the team, who'd all worn their windbreakers and matching wind pants, Ashley wore her skimpy little cheerleading uniform, pasty legs, arms and belly exposed to the cold. Jordyn could practically see icicles growing all over her.

"I think Ashley's an idiot," Jordyn said.

Erin looked over. "Hey. That's not nice. A slut's gotta do what a slut's gotta do."

Jordyn laughed.

"I have a kerosene heater," Bethany volunteered, shivering from the end of their row. "I could have brought it."

Jordyn laughed. She couldn't imagine how silly the four of them would have looked. Although at this point, feeling icicles growing on her own nose, she couldn't say she would have cared.

Her father was right. Jordyn was *not* going to make it through the winter here in Pennsylvania. The fall was already giving her hypothermia. And between the wind, rain, and her California blood, Jordyn was certain she'd have a cold by tomorrow.

But tonight, she was having a blast.

Every pass, every touchdown closer to victory brought the crowd to their feet more and more until finally, the clock ran out, and the Timberwood Titans had been defeated.

"That's right, baby!" an overly excited fan shouted. "This is our house!"

Jordyn and the girls laughed.

"This place is crazy," Alice said. "Let's get out of here and go get ready for the dance."

"Hell, yeah," Erin said. "Let's go."

An hour later, Jordyn was standing walking down the stairs, ready to face her parents for the pre-dance lecture she was certain she would get. And as expected, both her parents were waiting for her when she got there, and before her two-inch stilettos touched the bottom step, a flash practically blinded her.

Jordyn sighed and groaned. "Mom."

Zara lowered the camera, giving her daughter the most innocent look of confusion. "What, Jordyn?"

"It's just a dance," Jordyn said. "Not prom. You don't need to take a hundred pictures."

Zara lifted the camera. "Smile."

Jordyn sighed.

"Jordyn, smile, right now. Humor me, please." So she did. With her hand on the banister, Jordyn primped her leg, and smiled.

"That's great," Zara said. "Oh, you look gorgeous. Your hair! I love it, hon!"

Jordyn reached up and cautiously touched her up-do she'd worked really hard on, but managed to leave looking simple, yet, elegant. Just a mess of curls piled high on top of her head, held up with at least a half a bottle of berry-scented hairspray.

"Jack, isn't she beautiful?" Zara cooed, still smiling at her daughter.

Jack smiled, hugging her. "Yes, she is. You look very pretty, baby girl." Then his face hardened. "Where's the boy?"

Jordyn laughed. She couldn't help it. Up until now, Cole had been *Cole* to her father. She guessed homecoming was Jack's turning point. She glanced around the living room. At least he didn't have his gun out.

Jordyn pulled her phone out of her pink clutch. "It's 9:05. He should be here pretty soon."

"What time is he bringing you home?" Zara asked. Jordyn knew that wasn't an open question. The only acceptable answers were some time before twelve.

"He's not," Jordyn said, a little uncomfortable with how *comfortable* she was getting with lying about what she and Cole were doing. Because she hated lying, but she had no choice right now. "I'm leaving the dance with Alice and the girls and we're sleeping at her house."

"OK, does she have a curfew?"

"We'll be in the house by 12:30," Jordyn tried, which wasn't a lie. She and Cole *should* have been at the cabin around that time. "The dance doesn't end until 12:00, and they don't do the crowning until 11:45. We can't leave before that."

The doorbell rang.

"I got it," Jack said. Jordyn was going to protest, but her dad was already at the door. "Cole. Come on in."

Jordyn smiled when Cole walked in, his hands in the pockets of his tux. Jordyn fell into a crush all over again. Cole looked great in a football uniform. Great in jeans and a nice-fitting t-shirt, but *this*? This was just more than her sixteen-year-old heart could bear.

"Hey, Mr. Hamilton," Cole said, shaking Jack's hand. "Mrs. Hamilton." But when he looked at Jordyn he only smiled, started a flutter and weightlessness in her belly.

Yes. Cole Anderson was giving her butterflies. She would admit it.

"You look gorgeous," he said with a smile, walking over to her.

"Stand by the banister, you two," Zara said. "I need a picture."

After not one, but *five* more pictures, Jordyn and Cole finally escaped the living room and made it onto the front porch.

"Sorry," she chuckled, taking his hand and letting him lead her across the yard to the car.

"About what?" Cole asked. "Your parents are great. Your dad looked at me like he knew what we were planning tonight, though," he added with a little chuckle.

Jordyn shook her head. "No. If he knew, he wouldn't have done a lot of looking. Just be glad he kept his gun hidden."

Cole laughed, pulling the passenger door open for Jordyn. "Why?"

Jordyn smiled. "Guess he just wants to scare you." Then she shut the door.

The dance started at nine, so when Jordyn and Cole got there, the music was already blasting, and their classmates had come out of their shoes and were dancing.

The gym had been decorated in school colors-of course-and a banner over the stage emblazoned with "Cedarwood High School Homecoming 2012." Off to the side was a long table with refreshments and punch.

Immediately Jordyn and Cole made their way to Ty, Jenner, Davis, Meredith, Lydia, and Natalie.

"Jordyn!" Natalie squealed, hugging her as she approached. "You look amazing, babe!"

Ty raised his eyebrows, giving his sister a one over. He took a sip of his punch, then he cleared his throat loudly. "That's a might low neckline, isn't it?"

Jordyn scoffed. "I've worn less clothes dancing. Besides. Dad didn't say a word."

"Ty, she's gorgeous," Natalie said. "Leave your sister alone."

"Can I trade you for Ty?" Jordyn asked, eliciting a laugh from the rest of them. She looked around at the girls, admiring their dresses. Meredith wore a royal-blue skin tight, dress, falling mid-thigh and pleated at the bust, her red hair falling in long, loose curls, while Lydia looked like she was right out of a fairytale. Her dress was white and silver, with spaghetti straps, and tulle overlay with a handkerchief hem, the longest part at her ankles, the shortest at her knees.

Then there was Natalie. Natalie's dress was black and simple. No fancy designs, no rhinestones, nothing, but she still managed to look unbelievable. The dress was halter-top and backless, and she walked in her 4-inch stilettos like it was nothing, without a stumble.

Now Jordyn searched for Alice, but with the crowd piled so tightly in the gym, she couldn't see far in front of her.

Cole took a long swig of punch then turned to Jordyn, hand outstretched and all. "Come on. Let's dance."

So they did. All night.

Jordyn was having so much fun with Cole and her friends, time had become irrelevant, and before she knew it, the music had stopped, and Principal Dickens was walking up on the stage. He grabbed the microphone and looked out of the student body. "Can I have your attention, everyone? It's been a fun night, and it's been an awesome win for the Cougars!" The crowd cheered.

"They're about to announce the King and Queen," Natalie whispered over the principal giving his congratulatory speech. "We have to go up front. Ty, you and Jordyn, too."

Jordyn grabbed Cole's hand and the nominees and their dates all congregated around the stage.

"Now," Dickens finally said. "Time to announce our homecoming king and queen."

The whole place was quiet as Dickens went over the nominees, and finally, opened an envelope holding the winners.

"Your homecoming queen isâ ¦.Natalie Bishop!"

The crowded hooped and hollered and Jordyn pulled her friend into an excited hug. Natalie just smiled, taking Ty's hand and leading him onto the stage. A small tiara was placed on Natalie's head, and roses in her arms.

"Wait right here, you two," Dickens told them. "It's time for the homecoming king. Everyone ready?"

Jordyn squeezed Cole's hand.

Was she really this nervous over some silly homecoming title?

Looking around at the anxious looks on her classmates faces, at Cole, who's hand she was gripping tighter and tighter, Jordyn realized she was.

"And your homecoming king, is Cole Anderson!"

Chapter 41

Chapter Forty-One

It was midnight. The DJ was packing up, and the dance was over. Jordyn had had the time of her life tonight. First, being on stage, everyone clapping as Cole chose her to be his queen, kissing her in front of everyone. Yes, tonight had been wonderful.

And it was about to get better.

Her shoes in one hand, Jordyn and Cole walked out of the gym with the rest of the party-goers. The night air was like ice on her bare skin. Cole saw her shivering, took his tux jacket off, and placed it over her shoulders.

She glanced up at him and smiled. "Thanks."

He leaned over and kissed her. "I had so much fun tonight."

"So did I. Thanks for picking me, Cole."

He chuckled. "Of course I picked you. You looked just too cute in that sexy pink dress."

"That doesn't make since. The dress can't be cute *and* sexy at the same time."

"It can on you."

"Oh, with the lines!" she sighed overly dramatic.

He just laughed and pulled her close. "It's not a line if it's true. So, are you ready for the next part of our big homecoming night?"

Jordyn felt her stomach flip. She'd been thinking about their plans all night. She was nervous and excited all at once, but she hadn't changed her mind. She still wanted to go through with this. She knew she was ready, and this night had already been so perfect.

And then she saw Ashley, Shari, and Leah. She hadn't seen them at the dance all night, but their ride was parked right beside Cole's BMW.

Jordyn kept quiet as she walked between the cars, heading toward the passenger door of the BMW.

"Hey, Jordyn," Ashley called. "Your dress is gorgeous."

Jordyn didn't turn around. "Thanks."

"It would really contrast with purple, don't you think?"

Jordyn turned around, just in time to see Ashley throw whatever purple liquid that was in her glass.

Jordyn didn't have time to move. Next thing she knew, she was sticky, purple, and her dress was ruined.

Ashley laughed hysterically. "Oops! It totally slipped, new girl."

"Yeah, well my fist is about to slip," Jordyn snapped, stomping toward Ashley.

Cole rushed over, catching her and holding her back before she could get to Ashley.

"You bitch!" Jordyn shouted, catching the attention of some students nearby. Ty and Natalie were nearby, and now starting to rush over. "What the hell is your problem!"

"Yeah, Ashley!" Shari snapped. "Why'd you do that?"

"You just ruined that dress!" Leah snapped.

Ashley shifted uncomfortably. "I didn't do it on purpose."

"Yes you did!" Leah snapped. "As usual, you're trying to be cute and funny."

"That was a bitch move, Ash," Shari huffed.

Natalie walked over, and took one look at Jordyn's dress before turning to Ashley. "You're a fucking psycho. Go the hell home. Now."

Ashley genuinely looked hurt. Her little joke hadn't gotten the laughs she'd intended, and now the whole lot of them, including some passersby, were glaring accusingly at her.

Cole sighed, looking down at Jordyn's dress and his jacket. "Really cute, Ashley. Jordyn, come on. Let's go."

He had to pull her away, and he opened the passenger door for her.

Ashley turned on her heel and Jordyn could swear she saw tears in her eyes as she collapsed into the front seat of her car.

Leah and Shari looked sympathetic.

"Sorry, Jordyn," Shari said shamefully. "I didn't think she would do something like that."

"Me, neither," Leah added. Then they both got into the car and sped off.

"That was bullshit," Natalie said, walking over and examining Jordyn's dress.

"Cole you should have let me at her," Jordyn grumbled. "I could have done worse."

"I think she got hers," Ty chuckled. "You got anything else to wear?"

Jordyn nodded. "Yeah. Let's just go."

Ty raised his eyebrows, more so at Cole as he slid his hands in his pockets. "Where you going?"

"I'm sleeping at Alice's," Jordyn said, now lying to her brother. She felt awful, but not quite as awful as she would have felt telling the truth and throwing Cole to the wolves.

"We're leaving, too," Natalie said, taking Ty's hand. "Congratulations, Cole."

"You, too, Nat," Cole said.

Once they were gone, Jordyn turned to Cole, sighing. "So much for the perfect night, huh?"

"Our night's not ruined. We're getting out of here, getting to the cabin, and you'll get out of that dress." He winked at her when he said that, so she had to smile. Cole was right. There night hadn't even started, yet.

The drive to the cabin wasn't long, but between being covered in sticky grape *something* and anxiously thinking about what would come next tonight, it seemed like the BMW was winding up endless, tree-lined roads with no actual destination.

Jordyn hadn't paid much attention to the Appalachian backdrop behind Cedarwood the two months since she'd moved there, but now that they were travelling further up the mountains and deeper into the forest, she was astounded by the beauty that surrounded her. Were they really this close to the perfect vacation spot their entire time of living in Pennsylvania and she didn't even know it?

"This road is usually pretty busy," Cole explained. "There are a lot of campgrounds up here, a lodge further on toward the peak of the mountain. This area gets pounded with snow in the winter, so snowboarding an skiing are both pretty popular around here."

"That's cool," Jordyn said. "I've never actually seen real snow."

"Seriously? You've never seen snow?"

"It doesn't snow in San Diego. I mean, I've competed in dance all over. Chicago, Detroit, New York. Your typical ice cubes. But it never snowed when I was there."

"Well, you are in for it, then," Cole said. "Because you are definitely going to see it here this winter."

He slowed down finally, and turned onto a narrow, secondary road, unlined and really wild looking. As far as Jordyn could see, there were no houses, and the trees were thick.

"When hunting season starts up, me and dad will take a lot of trips up here," Cole said. "Spend the weekend hunting and fishing. You may not believe it, but it's fun up here. I'm going to try to get your brother up here one weekend. Turn him into a true country guy."

"I actually think you won't have much trouble doing that," Jordyn said. "He's already cut his long surfer hair and the other day, he bought Timberland boots. I've never seen him wear a pair of boots."

Cole chuckled. "I'm sorry. That's my fault. He went shopping with me and the guys. I picked them out."

Jordyn smiled. "Aw. Well, that's just adorable."

Cole laughed. "Shut up. We're here."

Jordyn looked out the window, and Cole was slowing down, but she didn't see anything. Just trees.

Suddenly, Cole turned onto this side, dirt road, that was almost invisible by the trees and shrubbery, and he followed it slowly until a small log cabin came into view.

"Wow," Jordyn said. "I thought *my* house was secluded."

Cole laughed. "Secluded is the object when the cabin's up here for hunting and fishing. Come on."

He pushed the door open, and Jordyn did the same.

Cole led her to the porch, holding her hand as she shivered in her short dress. So much was running through her mind. Her nerves were going crazy, her butterflies fluttering. She watched Cole as he fumbled with the lock on the door. She smiled. She knew this was right. *He* was right. She was nervous, but she trusted him.

Cole pushed open the front door, and they faced a dark living room. He flipped a switch on, and suddenly, they were faced with the most simple living room she'd seen. A bearskin rug in the middle of the floor-she'd *never* seen one of those before-white sheets covering what looked like a couch, a chair, and a small TV in the middle of the room.

"It's not much," Cole said, looking around. "But it's just a hunting cabin, so the amenities don't exactly rival the Marriott."

Jordyn just smiled. "I think it's perfect." She looked down at her dress. "I gotta do something with this."

"There's a washer and dryer in the kitchen," Cole suggested.

Jordyn tugged at the material, looking down at the awful stain. "If this thing can be saved, I don't think I'm the one who can do it."

She would have to take it to the dry cleaners as soon as possible, but for now, her best bet was to blotch as much of the stain off as she could.

"I have a few things to do," Cole told her. "The bedroom is right at the end of this hall. Come on whenever you're finished working on the dress."

Jordyn nodded, then grabbed her duffel bag and headed to the kitchen. She stripped of the dress, laying it neatly on the table. She scoured the kitchen and finally found a couple of rags, dabbing the huge stain as much as she could. But her resources were limited, as was her knowledge of stain removal. This was a $200 dress, and she could already see Ashley getting her dry-cleaning bill in the mail.

She gritted her teeth just thinking about it. She couldn't believe the girl had stooped so low. Of all the nights for her to go psycho, this wasn't the one. She just couldn't wait to see her again.

"Wow."

Jordyn turned around and saw Cole standing in the doorway. Immediately, she realized she stood there in only her lacy white underwear and strapless white bra.

"Oh my gosh," she laughed, not bothering to hide her embarrassment.

He chuckled. "You're beautiful, Jordyn."

She chewed her bottom lip, anxiously. He walked over, putting his hands on her bare waist, looking intently at her. "Are you ready?"

She smiled back, and she nodded. "Yes. I'm ready." So he took her hand, and lead her down the hallway to the bedroom, the dress still on the kitchen table.

The lights were off. The only light in the bedroom came from the moonlight shining through the window, and the candles on the dresser and the bedside tables. Jordyn closed her eyes and inhaled. The room smelled like vanilla. Cole had really gone out to make tonight perfect for them.

She wrapped her arms around her body, cold in only her bra and panties. Cole stepped up behind her, kissing her neck and stroking her arms. "Are you OK?"

"I'm cold," she giggled nervously. His big arms draped over her shoulders, holding her close as his lips kept playing on her neck. "I'll warm you up," he whispered. Then with the quickest flick of his fingers, he'd unsnapped her bra, and it was falling to the floor.

Jordyn let out a sigh as she fell back against him, feeling the cotton-polyester shirt against her bare back as his hands cupped her chest, familiar territory for them since that night they'd taken the next big step.

Since that night, they'd spent plenty of time getting familiar with each other's bodies, and sex was the literally the *only* thing they hadn't done, yet. But tonight, the fooling around was different. She knew it would be. Because she knew what they were both expecting tonight, and she knew exactly what it was all leading up to.

She looked around the room. The convenience of this cabin was so perfect, but it made her wonder something; something that kept tugging at her thoughts. Something she wanted to know, but didn't want to ask.

But she had to know. Tonight was going to be-so far-the biggest night in her sixteen years. She didn't want to go into it blind.

"Cole," she said quietly.

"Hmm?"

"I know I'm not your first. But I have to know. Has there been other girls, uhm, here?"

He sighed, dropping his hands, then he pulled her to the bed, urging her to sit. Now that they weren't touching or kissing, she felt exposed, and she folded her arms over her bare chest.

"Jordyn, I'm not going to lie," he said. "I've told other girls that they were the firsts I brought here. But they weren't, and you aren't."

She nodded, a little jealous at the thought of other girls here with him, but warmth traveled through her insides at the idea that he was being honest with her.

"If this sounds corny, I don't care," he continued. "But Jordyn, you're different. You're not like any other girl in Cedarwood. I've never been like this with anybody else. I've never *felt* like this about anyone else. What we do here tonight? It's your call. I really care about you, Jordyn and being with you means so much to me. But being with you at the right time, when you're ready, well, that means more."

"I'm scared," she admitted. "A little bit. But I'm excited, and I want this. Cole, I promise, I'm ready. Besides the obvious mishap tonight, it's been perfect so far. But I want you. And I want you now."

She sighed, realizing she'd been holding her breath. She couldn't believe she'd made that declaration out loud, but if she was about to share her body and something she could never get back with Cole, she figured she could be completely honest with him first.

So he smiled, pushed the covers back, and pulled Jordyn down beside him. They kissed, and Jordyn's nervous, shaky fingers slowly unbuttoned his dress shirt, tossing it to the floor when it was off. He made quick work of getting out of his pants, socks and undershirt, until finally, the only thing that was between them was her skimpy panties, and his boxers.

Suddenly, their hands, their mouths, were ravenous. Touching everywhere, taking turns tasting every inch of each other. Jordyn knew what she was supposed to do. Now.

Then finally, Cole gently, pushed her away. "Jordyn."

He kissed her lips once, then reached over her for his bedside table, opening the drawer. In the light of the candles, she could see exactly what was in his hand. The foil, square package, was familiar, since she had *four* of them in her purse.

Cole sat up, and Jordyn's mouth went dry from both nervousness and admiration as she watched him roll it on his hard erection.

This was it, she thought.

Cole leaned over, kissing her forehead, then her lips. Instinctively, she leaned back, slowly spreading her knees apart as Cole pulled himself on top of her. He hovered, still for a moment as he searched her eyes. Then he touched his forehead to hers. "I promise I'll be easy."

She just nodded, and he kissed her once more. Then slowly, he pushed his hips forward, and there was no turning back.

"Are you OK?" he asked, panting as her face registered the pain. But she nodded, and slower, still, he pushed all the way. She gasped. And just like that, the pain was gone, and Jordyn Hamilton, was no longer a virgin.

Chapter 42

Chapter Forty-Two

Jordyn threw her head back and laughed. "Cole, you're such a liar. You so did not!"

It was just after 2am, and Jordyn and Cole were in the kitchen. Jordyn, wearing Cole's dress shirt and nothing else, sitting on the kitchen counter while he made hot chocolate for the both of them.

"I swear on my *life*, Jordyn," he said, stirring the hot chocolate and giving her the steaming cup.

She took it and raised her eyebrows. "You fell off the boat and got stranded for two hours on an island?"

He raised his right hand. "You got a Bible?"

"How did no one see that you were gone?"

"Most of them were about as drunk as I was. I swam to the little island and waited for someone to see me. They never really got out of my sight the whole time, but I did fall asleep. For a little while, I thought it was going to be like Blue Lagoon. Except I was alone."

"And in the middle of Lake Cedar," Jordyn laughed, taking a sip of her hot chocolate.

Cole smiled and nodded, stepping between her legs, and putting his hands on her hips. "How are you?"

She smiled. "Good."

She was better than good, actually. Their first time together hadn't been bad, but the second time had been better. She was relieved it was over, that she'd finally gone through her first time, but at the same time, she couldn't help but wonder what was next?

But she reminded herself that their perfect night wasn't over. They were sipping hot chocolate now, planning to go to the living room, in a few minutes and bundle up watching a movie.

"Was I, uhm, OK?" she asked.

He just smiled and kissed her, his tongue tasting like cocoa. "You were perfect, Jordyn."

She smiled. "I'm cold. So, how about we get to that movie?" She leaned in to kiss him. "Then we can get to the rest of our night."

"Mm, I can't wait. I can't remember the last time I had such a good homecoming."

Jordyn smiled, hoping like crazy she was partly the reason for that. "Me, too. I'm gonna run to the bathroom, really quick, and I'll, uhm, be right back?"

He nodded, and Jordyn hurried off to the bathroom. There, she stepped in front of the mirror, taking in her reflection. Same facial features, same blue eyes, same blond hair as she had when they left homecoming, but something was different now. It was almost like she had a big stamp reading "I had sex with Cole" on her forehead.

She couldn't believe it, still. She couldn't believe the deed had been done, and she was no longer a virgin. And Cole Anderson had been the one to do it.

She turned around as he walked back into the living room. He'd pulled on a pair of sweatpants, and was stretched out on the couch under a blanket, the DVD menu of the movie they'd chosen on the small, ten-year-old TV screen.

She smiled.

She wasn't sure if it had anything to do with last night, though she was certain it did, but standing there in this room with Cole, with her *boyfriend*, now her lover, knowing everything they'd shared, she realized she was in love with him. She was sure she had been since before last night, but she'd shared something with him, given something to him she'd never shared before. He had something of hers now that he would always have, no matter what. And she was happy he was the one to get it.

"Well, come on," he urged. "I'm freezing over here. I need you to keep me warm."

She laughed and crossed the floor, crawling under the blanket with him.

"So, you're OK with, well, everything?" he asked her.

She smiled up at him. "Yes, I'm OK. I'm more than Ok. You were wonderful."

He smiled and kissed her again. "You were wonderful, too. I promise it'll be better next time."

"Tonight was perfect, Cole. It couldn't have been more perfect. Thank you. For everything. Being patient with me, being so sweet about everything. You've been just, wonderful."

"I love you, Jordyn."

Jordyn's heart skipped a beat. He'd said it. He'd said it, and she could see by the look in his eyes he meant it.

"It's OK, Jordyn," he said when she didn't reply. "You don't have to say it back. I just want you to know how I feel."

"I feel the same way, though," she said. "I mean, I love you, too."

And just like that, they forgot all about the movie. Their clothes were strewn back on the floor, and his lips were on hers.

Right now, the only thing on Jordyn's mind was Cole Anderson, and nothing else in the world mattered.

"Where have you been?"

Jordyn closed the front door behind her, and saw her dad and Ty sitting on the couch with a football game on TV. It was after 1:00 on Saturday, and she'd really meant to be home earlier, but prying herself away from Cole had been harder than usual, especially after the night they'd had.

"I was at Alice's," Jordyn said. "I told you I slept there last night."

"So, I heard you two had an eventful night last night," Jack said. "Cole and Natalie the homecoming king and queen, huh?"

Ty nodded. "Yeah, it was a lot of fun. Until the end."

"Jordyn!"

Suddenly, Zara had appeared in the living room, an angry scowl covering her face. "Where's that dress, Jordyn?"

Jordyn looked at Ty, who shrugged. "I was pissed. I told mom and dad."

Jordyn sighed, and reached into her bag, pulling out the ruined dress.

Zara gasped. "Oh my goodness. That *dress*! What is that girl's mother's name?"

Jordyn shrugged. "I don't know, mom."

"Oh never mind that, I'll find out myself. I'm calling that woman today. *Somebody's* paying for this dress."

"Oh, mom, don't call her mother," Jordyn pleaded.

"Do I need to remind you, Jordyn that the dress was $200."

Jack and Ty perked up.

"$200?" Jack asked.

Jordyn wasn't sure when money had become this huge thing with her parents. Not since the inheritance and move to Pennsylvania. But Ashley wasn't even worth $50, so maybe she should have considered this a big deal. She was more pissed about the embarrassment of it, and the act itself than she was the price of the dress.

"Tyler, do you know this girl?" Zara asked, headstrong and determined as she reached for the cordless phone.

Ty nodded. "Her name is Ashley Moore, and I can find out who her mom is for you."

Jordyn scoffed. "Please, you two. The situation with me and Ashley is bad enough without mom calling her mom. I'm not eleven. This will be all over school Monday."

"I saw it happen, Jor," Ty said. "And if anyone can take care of Ashley, it's mom."

Jordyn knew it, which was exactly why she didn't want Zara calling Ashley's mother.

"Mom, look, I-"

They were interrupted when a knock came to the front door.

"I'll get it," Jordyn sighed. She walked over, yanked open the front door, and was more than surprised to see two familiar faces.

She narrowed her eyes at the sight of Leah and Shari on her porch, solemn faces on the both of them.

"What do you two want?" she asked.

Shari sighed. "Can we talk outside?"

Jordyn followed them out, closing the door behind her. She folded her arms over her chest, shivering at the still crisp air. She looked at the two of them, waiting for their bizarre reason for showing up on her front porch.

Leah and Shari exchanged glances, like they were both waiting for the other to say something first. When neither of them did, Jordyn sighed. "Look, it's cold out here. What is it, Ashley send you with some red wine to pour on me?"

"We came here to apologize to you," Leah said.

"Yeah," Shari said. "Ashley's a bitch. To us, too. And what she did to you last night? That was so uncalled for."

"She was just pissed off," Leah murmured. "She was sick of you taking over, which is stupid."

"Taking over?" Jordyn asked, incredulous. "What am I taking over?"

"Well, for starters, she used to be the best at Miss Maggie's," Shari said. "Then you showed up and you're freaking amazing."

"Then you got Cole," Leah said. "She's had a crush on him for a *long* time."

"Then you got Natalie treating you like you're her little sister," Shari said. "But Natalie never liked her."

"I know," Jordyn said, shrugging.

"Anyway," Shari said. "Uhm, we had no idea she was planning that. And I know it probably doesn't mean anything to you, but she feels bad."

"I appreciate your *misplaced* apology," Jordyn said, her arms still over her chest. "But you two didn't do anything. Why isn't she over here apologizing."

"She's going to stick with 'it was an accident' until the heat is off her," Leah said. "People who saw what she did to you are pretty pissed at her."

"Well, I'm pretty pissed myself," Jordyn said. "But like I said. I appreciate you two coming over here."

They nodded.

"And look," Shari sighed. "Uhm, I'm sorry about everything. Like, since your first day. I'm really sorry."

"So am I," Leah said. "Cole obviously really likes you."

"And you're an amazing dancer, Jordyn," Shari added. "You deserve all the attention you get."

Jordyn smiled. "Thanks. Both of you. It means a lot. But I'm not worried about Ashley. She's a pain in my ass, but she's not important."

They gave her small smiles, waved, then walked off her porch. Jordyn returned to her living room, where she found Zara punching in numbers on the phone.

"Mom found the number," Ty explained.

"No," Jordyn said, shaking her head and hurrying over. "No, mom. You don't have to. I can take care of Ashley."

"I don't want you taking care of someone, Jordyn," Zara said. "Whatever that means, and I don't want to *know* what it means. It's about the dress that I paid for, and will be reimbursed for."

Jordyn gave up. Zara wasn't budging on this one, she knew. So she just shrugged, and started up the stairs. She hadn't talked to Alice since the dance, and she had a lot to tell her; all the way from the incident last night with Ashley, to her night with Cole, and this *weird* visit today; not to mention there was the trip to San Diego she needed to bring up.

"Hey, who was on the porch?" Zara asked.

Jordyn thought about how to answer that, then she smiled and said, "Just a couple of friends." Then she turned on her heel and hurried up the stairs.

Chapter 43

Chapter Forty-Three

Friday, October 19, 2012

Jordyn stood by the SUV early Friday morning. The sun hadn't even come up, yet, but Jordyn and Alice were already awake, helping Zara and Jack pack the SUV for their trip to San Diego. It had been exactly a week since homecoming, and after spending an unusual amount of time with Cole since their big night, she was almost regretful that she was leaving him for four days, even if it was to go back to San Diego.

Right now, though, all Jordyn was feeling was *tired*. She and Alice had stayed up entirely too late the night before, and now the coffee she was drinking wasn't doing a thing about her heavy eyelids. Alice, on the other hand, could have given the Energizer bunny a run for his money.

"I'm so excited," she said, tossing a couple of suitcases into the back of the SUV. "I've never even been on a plane before! And to California?! Oh my gosh, I'm going to take a million pictures!"

Jordyn yawned and walked over. "Alice, you look tired. Have some coffee."

Zara raised her eyebrows. "Maybe you'd be alright if you two hadn't stayed up until 3:00am."

"2:00," Jordyn corrected. "And in a couple of hours that won't matter. We have a five-hour flight ahead of us, and I'm sleeping the whole way. Not to mention, once you calculate the time difference we'll actually *get* there at 9:00 California time. I can catch another couple of hours sleep when we get there." She smiled proudly. "I just did all that on less than three hours of sleep."

"Jordyn, you can't sleep," Alice scoffed. "You'll miss the sights!"

Jordyn's scrunched her face in confusion. "Of what, the clouds?"

Alice chewed her bottom lip, obviously now realizing what she had just said. She shrugged.

Jordyn sighed. "No, you stay away from the coffee."

"Alright!" Jack said from the back of the truck, shutting the door. "All packed. Let's head out."

So they all piled in the SUV, and headed down the long driveway.

Jordyn pulled her phone out, and sent Cole a quick text.

Hey, baby. We're leaving for the airport. I'll text you when we get there.

Alice peaked over at Jordyn's cell phone. "He's awake?"

Jordyn looked down at her text and smiled. "No. But he'll get it when he wakes up."

Zara turned around and smiled at Jordyn. "So, Jordyn, guess who we're having dinner with tonight?"

Jordyn shrugged and yawned, adjusting her pillow. "You got me, mom."

"Victoria."

Jordyn's eyes flew wide open. "We *are*?"

"Yes, isn't that fantastic?"

That wasn't exactly the word Jordyn would have used.

"Yeah," Jordyn said instead. "Sounds awesome." She fluffed her pillow to preference, stuck her iPod ear buds in her ears, then drifted off to sleep.

The plane touched down in San Diego at 10:00 Pacific coast time after a slight delay back in Pittsburgh. Jordyn was already awake when they landed, eager to get her first look at California in two months.

She peaked out the window and smiled. It was just the airport, but the sun was shining bright, the skies were blue and cloudless; Pennsylvania was a world away.

Home sweet home.

A long list of things Jordyn couldn't wait to do ran through her mind as she unhooked her seatbelt, stood up and stretched. She had friends to visit, waves to surf. She wanted to show Alice all her old Moon Bay Beach stomping grounds, of course.

But firstâ ¦

Jordyn glanced down at Alice, sleeping in her seat still. The Energizer bunny had been out cold since before the plane even took off from Pittsburgh.

"Alice, wake up," Jordyn said, shaking her friend. "Hey, wake up."

"We're here?" Alice mumbled, stretching and sitting up.

"Yep," Jordyn said. "You've just time traveled. It's 10:00 again."

Alice smiled. "So. Are we supposed to eat breakfast or lunch?"

Jordyn laughed and grabbed her carry on. "I don't know. I'm just ready to get to the hotel and get this vacation started."

"Jordyn, Emilio will be picking me up from the hotel at noon," Zara told her. "We've got meetings with investors most of the day. You and Alice can take the rental car and head to Moon Bay Beach."

Jordyn gasped. "Oh, we get the rental car? Yes! Can we get Corvette?"

Zara narrowed her eyes, so Jordyn shrugged. "Fine, I mean, just don't get like, a minivan or anything."

Alice giggled and followed them off the plane.

An hour later, they'd rented a Malibu, which Jordyn was content with, and were walking through the doors of the Grand Del Mar Hotel.

"Oh my goodness," Alice said, looking around the huge hotel lobby. "Jordyn, I might not leave this hotel for four days."

"Oh, you are," Jordyn told her. "I've got our whole weekend planned out. I have assimilated into your living, you're going to at least get a *taste* of my life. Well, my pre-Pennsylvania life, anyway."

Alice wasn't listening. She had her camera, taking pictures of every inch of the lobby. She'd had that camera stuck out the window of the car all the way there from the airport, snapping pictures of everything from the palm trees, to the street signs, to the tall buildings around.

"This city is *amazing*," she'd said once she'd finally seen the ocean.

Jordyn couldn't blame her friend. Her home was really amazing, and living in gloomy, rainy, Cedarwood for the two months she'd lived there, she couldn't imagine how a place like this came off to Alice, who'd never been further west than Indiana her entire life.

Jordyn was happy her mother had let her go with them. Of course, timing had really been on their side with that. As it turned out, they were on fall break, something Jordyn's old high school didn't have, so they were out of school until Tuesday. If it wasn't for that and two hours' worth of phone calls between Zara and Mrs. Doherty, Alice would probably be in Cedarwood right now, maybe going to the Farmer's Market tomorrow instead of snapping hundreds of pictures of her newfound paradise.

Zara walked up to the check-in desk, and Alice's attention went to a rack of brochures of San Diego travel guides.

"Ooh," she gasped. "We should go to Sea World. Have you been?"

"I lived ten minutes south of here for my whole life," Jordyn said. "What do you think?"

"We should go," Alice repeated. Then she sighed, wiping her brow. "Wow, it's kind of hot here."

"It's not hot," Jordyn said. "And I told you to take that hoodie off. You don't need that here."

Zara turned around, smiling with two room cards. "Let's go, ladies."

Their room was on the second floor, with a balcony that looked out over the hotel's private golf course. Not that the view mattered, Jordyn thought, dropping her suitcases by the bed she claimed. She would only be sleeping in this room, not enjoying the views. She only had four days, and a lot to squeeze into those four days.

"Get unpacked," Zara told them. "Key to the car is on the dresser, and I'm getting in the shower. Be careful, and do not wreck that car or you're getting a job and paying us back when we get home."

Jordyn looked at Alice and smiled. "If I could get a job in Cedarwood to afford a new Malibu at the age of sixteen I don't think I'd be driving an old Honda right now."

Alice snickered and Zara rolled her eyes, scooping her hair up and walking into the bathroom. "Just be careful."

Jordyn walked over to the dresser and picked up the car key. "We have plenty of time to unpack, later, don't you think?"

Chapter 44

Chapter Forty-Four

After Jordyn showed Alice all her favorite shopping places in San Diego, they hopped in the Malibu and got on the freeway headed to Moon Bay Beach.

It had been entirely too long since she'd seen the Welcome sign to Moon Bay Beach.

Alice stared longingly out the window as they travelled down the main strip of Moon Bay Beach, a wide street that ran parallel to the ocean. They could see glimpses of the beach between the houses as they drove.

Nearly there, Jordyn thought excitedly. Her board shorts and bikini were in the backseat, and her surfboard was at Shay's where she left it. She couldn't wait to get in the water.

"I can see your reluctance to moving to Pennsylvania, now," said Alice. "I can't believe you actually used to *live* here."

Jordyn didn't reply, but she was starting to feel the same way. It was strange how foreign her home seemed to her now. She'd gotten so used to the trees, the country roads and the lack of coastal life in Pennsylvania, in only two short months. She didn't live here *anymore*, and oddly enough, it felt almost as if she didn't belong anymore. That thought was pretty heartbreaking.

"What's first?" Alice asked, not bothering to turn from the window where she was still snapping pictures at everything she saw.

"We're going to my friend, Shay's house to get my surfboards, then we're going down to the beach," said Jordyn said as she spotted a familiar street. "But first, I want you to see something."

She clicked the signal on and turned onto a side street, ending in a cul-de-sac, right in front of her old house.

"Where are we?" Alice asked, unhooking her seatbelt as Jordyn parked by the curb. She followed Jordyn in getting out of the car.

Jordyn yanked her sunglasses off, and walked toward the mailbox, to the For Sale sign sitting in the front yard. She walked over, placing her hand on the sign. "This is my house."

Alice's eyes widened. "Wow. *This* is where you lived? The beach is right in your backyard!"

Jordyn smiled. "Yeah, it is." She couldn't help but feel emotional looking up at her empty house.

"Wow. I can understand how this place was hard to leave."

Jordyn looked down and sighed. A big 'Sold' was blazoned over the For Sale sign. "Someone bought it."

Alice gave a crooked, sympathetic smile. "Well, hey. If it makes a difference, I'm really glad you moved to Cedarwood. It was boring there before you."

Jordyn had to laugh. "It's still boring. What are you talking about?"

"Excuse me, Miss Cole Anderson, but how could *you* be bored?"

Jordyn shrugged with a sheepish grin. "I guess I'm not *that* bored anymore."

Alice smiled.

And suddenly, a shrill, high-pitched scream erupted through the neighborhood. Jordyn turned to see none other than Shay Shapiro running full speed down the sidewalk.

"Jordyn!" she screamed again.

"Shay!" Jordyn shouted back. She didn't care that the neighborhood was probably all looking out their windows right about now to see what all this fuss was. It had been two months since she'd seen her best friend outside of their Skype sessions and she was excited.

They met each other with a tight hug.

"Oh my gosh, I can't believe you're home!" Shay said.

"Me, neither," Jordyn said. "How'd you know I was out here?"

"I didn't. You said you were on your way to my house, then I look out the window and there you are!"

Jordyn furrowed her eyebrows. "Who's window are looking out?"

Shay didn't live in this neighborhood. She lived two streets over. Seeing Jordyn and Alice from there was impossible.

"Oh, uhm-" Shay didn't answer, just pointed to another house on the cul-de-sac.

Jordyn raised her eyebrows. She was pointing at Holly Daniels' house. "Shannon."

"She's really not that awful," Shay said. "She's nice when you get to know her. And hey, don't judge me. You left me!"

Jordyn sighed. "You're right." Then she hugged her friend again. Letting go, she realized Alice was still standing awkwardly behind her. "Oh! Shay, this is my new friend, Alice. From Cedarwood. Alice, this is Shannon Shapiro, but we call her Shay. She'd my very best friend since were eight."

"Nice to meet you," Alice said sweetly.

"Same," Shay replied. Jordyn noted a hint of jealousy as Shay's gaze lingered a little longer on Alice. But she couldn't be mad. She had taken to hanging with Holly Daniels after all. "So, uhm. Four days, huh?"

Jordyn nodded. "Yeah, we leave first thing Monday morning."

Shay sighed, nodding, then a smile spread across her face. "Well, then, we better make the best of every second we have together. What's first?"

"Alice, I promise. These are the best burgers you're going to eat in your life! They don't make them like this in Pennsylvania."

Jordyn laughed as she squirted ketchup on her burger. At least Shay had warmed up to Alice.

The three of them had spent the day on the beach, Jordyn catching her long-overdue waves, and both she and Shay trying, unsuccessfully, to teach Alice how to surf, and now they were taking a break for some lunch at Surf N' Turf.

Even though she was missing Cole, Jordyn could easily peg this for an amazing day. Reunited with her best friend, her closest Cedarwood friend in tow. Not to mention she was *home.*

Alice took a bite of the famous Surf N' Turf burger, her eyebrows raising. "Oh my gosh. This *is* amazing. Jordyn, can we take this place back to Cedarwood?"

Jordyn laughed. "Sorry. It doesn't franchise."

"Mm, this is so good!" Alice said.

"Enough about burgers," Shay said, pushing her plate to the side. "I've been hearing an awful lot about this Cole guy. But not enough. So spill."

Jordyn sighed. "He's great."

Shay rolled her eyes. "Yeah, that's *definitely* not enough. How long have you guys been a thing?"

"Since the middle of September," Jordyn said.

Shay grinned. "So. Have you, you know. Consummated the relationship? I hope not. Not because I don't want you doing that sort of thing, because I'd be proud. But I'd also be pissed if you finally swiped your V-card and I didn't hear about it."

"Well, I wanted to tell you in person, not on the phone."

Shay gasped. "Holy shit. You did! You swiped it, you dirty tramp! When?!"

"Homecoming," Jordyn said. "He took me to his uncle's cabin in the mountains. It was amazing."

"Homecoming?" Shay asked. "That's not a clichÃ© at all."

"*Cedarwood* is a clichÃ©," Jordyn said. Then looked at Alice. "No offense."

Alice was so engulfed in her burger, she wasn't even paying attention to the conversation. "Huh? Oh, no. None taken."

Jordyn smiled, then glancing passed her friend, she saw another familiar face. Apparently Ryan still worked here at Surf N' Turf.

Looking at him now, thinking about what she had waiting for her in Cedarwood, she wondered what it was about him that turned her on to start with. Tall and lanky, he didn't have a muscle anywhere. He wore his hat cocked to the side in that *pimp* way over his shaggy surfer hair, an oversized diamond stud in his left ear, and his board shorts slightly saggy. How did she find this player look attractive before? Cole in his fitted jeans, his boots; all that was far sexier than Ryan. And she was reminded of that every time Ryan bent over to flirt with hot, bikini-clad customer.

"How was it?"

Jordyn's attention was pulled back to Shay. "Huh?"

"The 'event.' How was it?"

"Better after the third time," Jordyn said with a smirk.

Shay squealed. "Oh my gosh!"

Jordyn laughed, looking up. "So, what's with him? Who's his latest?"

Shay turned around, glancing at Ryan, and shrugged. "I don't know. He's been single. He flirts with *everyone*. Rumor has it he slept with Miranda Mott, and he and Holly were hooking up for a while. Basketball starts next month, so you know *someone* will be on his arm."

Jordyn nodded. "I can't believe for a while I wanted it to be me."

Alice turned up her nose. "You like *that* guy?"

Jordyn nodded. "Yep. Ryan. He's the hottie at my old school."

"Wow. You sure moved up in the world, didn't you?"

Shay raised her eyebrows. "So, then what's your Cole look like, Jordyn?"

"Pretty much every girl at Cedarwood High is jealous of her because of him," Alice explained.

Jordyn pulled her phone out and showed Shay her wallpaper. It was of her and Cole at homecoming, just after crowning him king.

"He's a *hottie*!" Shay practically exploded. "Ooh. And I love your dress."

"I did, too," Jordyn said, putting her phone back in her pocket.

Shay raised her eyebrows in question so Jordyn explained.

When she was done, Shay shook her head. "I would have laid her out."

"You would have waited until she was gone and *then* started yelling out all the things you should have said when she was standing there," Jordyn said, citing her friend like a book.

Alice looked between the two of them, smiling. "I'm the same way. Don't feel bad, Shannon."

"Hey," Shay said, her index finger pointing. "It's Shay. If you're Jordyn's friend, you're my friend."

Jordyn grinned, dipping a fry in ketchup. Her trip really couldn't go any better.

"Oh my gosh! Jordyn is that *you*?"

Jordyn closed her eyes and sighed at the voice. Like nails on a chalkboard.

She looked at Shay, who gave a tight smile, then she turned around with the fakest smile she could manage, and faced none other than Holly Daniels.

Well, at least now she knew it couldn't go much worse.

Chapter 45

Chapter Forty-Five

Nothing made dinner with Miss Victoria talking nonstop about Jordyn's future in dance sound tolerable like spending an afternoon with Moon Bay Beach's very own version of Ashley Moore. By the end of it, Jordyn could have strangled Shay for making them hang out. Ryan this, Ryan that. All she talked about was their *horrible* break up.

"It was *horrible*," she'd said. Her acting had been top notch, glancing longingly over at Ryan while she talked about how devastating it was. Jordyn wondered if she was this dramatic over all her hook-ups-gone-wrong. If so, she had to have been in a permanent state of depression.

Now, though, she was onto an all new annoyance. Jordyn and Alice were sitting across from Zara and Miss Victoria at Anchor, a popular seafood restaurant in La Jolla, and while Jordyn was trying her hardest to look interested, she just had no real motivation to take seriously all the 'amazing' opportunities she could get for Jordyn.

"The Philadelphia Dance Center has an opening!" Victoria said excitedly after a few moments of suspenseful silence. "I pulled strings left and right, but Jordyn, I got you an audition!"

Zara's jaw dropped. "Victoria! Oh my goodness, you are unbelievable! Jordyn, this is amazing! Did you hear that?"

Jordyn's jaw had dropped, too. But for a different reason. She cleared her throat. "Philadelphia, huh? A bit of a long commute, isn't it?"

Like a five-hour commute?

"That's the amazing thing about PDC!" Victoria said. "They offer room and board. It's very prestigious, Jordyn. Dancers from all over the country go there. The academics are top ranked, too."

Jordyn's brain was goo. *Philadelphia? Boarding?*

Zara looked euphoric. In fact, Jordyn was sure her mother was two inches off her chair, envisioning Broadway.

Jordyn sighed, defeated. Maybe she shouldn't have waited for so long to tell her mother she wasn't dancing for the rest of her life.

"And that's not all!" Victoria said, her excitement growing.

Oh, there was more?!

Jordyn's grin was so forced at this point, it was painful. Victoria had just broached boarding school for dance here at dinner. What else could she possibly have up her sleeve? Jordyn was afraid to ask.

"My girls are coming to a competition in Pittsburgh Thanksgiving weekend," Victoria said. "And I've got a solo I haven't given out, yet. I can't find the right girl for it, because Jordyn, Zara; this is my masterpiece."

Oh, God. Jordyn could feel butterflies. Not the good kind. It was the kind of dread that came with waiting for something you *knew* would not be god news.

Victoria cleared her throat, lacing her fingers together on the table in front of her, her posture perfect; she looked like she was about to give a speech.

Oh, this was really going to be bad.

"Jordyn, I want you to have it."

Jordyn's eyes widened. "You *what*?"

"Oh, wonderful!" Zara said.

"Yes," Victoria said. "You can dance under my name in the competition. You'll have a solo, and if you like, you can be in the group dance as well. The girls would *love* to have you back."

Jordyn highly doubted that.

"Uhm, how am I supposed to learn it?" Jordyn asked. "I live in Pennsylvania."

"Honey, your mother works wonders, didn't you know?" asked Victoria. "I'm sure I could send a DVD home with you two and she would be more than happy to help you." With that, she yanked a DVD out of her oversized Chanel purse, giving it to an ecstatic Zara.

"Of course I will!" Zara said. "Jordyn isn't this wonderful?"

Not the word Jordyn would have used. "Uhm, can I think about it?"

The mood darkened so fast it was like Jordyn had just confessed to murder. "I'm just really busy."

The corners of Zara's mouth turned up into a slow smile. "Jordyn, if you're worried about Cole, you'll have plenty of time to spend with him. This is a great chance for you."

"Who's, uh, this, Cole?" Victoria asked, trying her best not to sound disapproving but innocently curious. It wasn't working.

"A boy Jordyn's been seeing," Zara said.

"My boyfriend," Jordyn corrected.

"Hmm, a boyfriend? How do you have time for a boyfriend?" Victoria said boyfriend in this tone, like she was asking her how she had time to deal drugs.

Jordyn wasn't sure how to answer the question. How did she *not* have time for a boyfriend.

"I mean, doesn't dance class occupy much of your time?" Victoria asked. "And then you have school, of course."

Ahh, of course. Now Jordyn understood. Victoria was under the impression Jordyn was part of an actual dance company. Boy, was she going to be disappointed.

"Well, it's tough," Jordyn said. "But I manage."

"I hope your priorities are in order," Victoria said, adding a wink for emphasis. She didn't have to say it, but that order was dance, school, then boys. "And I *really* hope you consider doing this solo. The head of PDC is going to be at the competition. This solo would really impress him."

"She'll be doing the solo, Victoria," Zara said. "I'll take this DVD home and we'll work every day until then."

Victoria smiled and nodded. "Excellent. That's my little protÃ©gÃ©."

"Yep," Jordyn said, lifting her drink and taking a sip. But she had nothing else to say.

"Jordyn, I've also arranged a private for you tomorrow," Victoria said. "Come on by the studio and we'll work on your solo. Give you a month to perfect it. I know that's quite a while, but I also know you have other things going on with your dance company back in Pennsylvania, and then there's this, uhm, Cole."

"A private?" Jordyn asked. "Tomorrow?"

"Yes, I've arranged six hours in the studio for us," Victoria said. "Flexibility, technique, then plenty of time for learning your solo."

A whole six hours. Six hours she could have been spending with her friends catching up tomorrow, she was going to be doing the one thing she didn't want to do.

Suddenly, this trip wasn't going anywhere near the way she'd expected it to.

After dinner, they went back to the hotel, Zara talking excitedly about the solo and the wonderful opportunity the Philadelphia Dance Center was for her. Jordyn didn't say anything, just gave noncommittal nods, and "uh-huhs," and "yeahs." As soon as they were in their room, Jordyn grabbed her cell phone and walked onto the balcony for some privacy to call Cole.

"Hello?"

Jordyn sighed. "Hey, babe." His voice was a Godsend after the night she was having. "What are you doing?"

"You won't believe it," he told her. "I took your brother hunting today."

Jordyn plopped down in the chaise, propping her feet up and looking over the golf course. Suddenly, images of Davy Crockett filled her mind. Cole and Ty, decked out in camo, firing these huge guns at innocent little deer.

"I mean, we didn't even see anything," Cole said. "But it was fun."

Jordyn sighed. Oh thank God."

"Actually, Jor, that's the phrase one would use if we *did* get something."

"Cole, that's heartless. Did you never watch Bambi as a child?"

Cole chuckled. "Baby, just wait until a deer tears your car up. You won't feel so sympathetic then. You'll feel vengeful."

"That sounds very personal, Cole," Jordyn said. "Want to share?"

"My first car," Cole laughed. "That's all I'm gonna say. But, I'm gonna get you out there soon. I'll get you all decked out in camo. You'll look so cute."

"Yeah, I wish you all the luck in the world with that."

He laughed. "So how was your day in San Diego?"

Jordyn rolled her eyes and sighed. "You got a few minutes?"

Chapter 46

Chapter Forty-Six

Saturday, October 20, 2012

Jordyn straddled her surfboard, looking out at the horizon. It was just before 6:00 am, the next morning, and she wanted to catch a few waves before her six-hour dance session with Miss Victoria. She'd snuck out of the hotel room, Zara and Alice still sleeping, snatched her surfboard, and taken a bus to Moon Bay Beach.

This was her favorite spot, at her favorite time of the day. Barely twilight, the horizon was a slight pink, shining a purple reflection over the water. Just enough light to surf.

No one else was on the beach this early. This part of the beach rarely got surfers or beachgoers anytime of the day, much less before dawn. That was why Jordyn had loved it so much. When she lived in Moon Bay Beach, she would sneak down here every morning before school, if only just for thirty minutes. The ocean was so much a part of her, it didn't feel right not to touch it just one time a day.

When her parents told her they were moving, she couldn't imagine living away from this. But now, she couldn't believe she'd not only managed in Cedarwood away from the ocean, but she was beginning to thrive. She thought about Cole, about Natalie and her new life. And she missed them.

"I'm not surprised you're out here."

Jordyn turned around, startled when she heard a familiar voice behind her. Shay was paddling up on her own board.

"What are you doing out here?" Jordyn asked, her hand on her chest.

"Are you kidding?" Shay asked. "This place is the best spot in all of Moon Bay Beach for surfing. After you moved, I started coming out here a lot, and it's really an amazing place."

Jordyn smiled. "Yah, it is."

"Yah? Oh my goodness, I thought I'd lost my surfer girl!" Shay leaned over, hugging Jordyn so violently, both their boards tipped over, dunking them into the cool salty water.

"Shay!" Jordyn laughed, splashing her friend with water. She hoisted herself back onto the board, just in time to see a swell, just close enough Jordyn could catch it. She paddled out, whipped her board around, and jumped to her feet, riding the perfect wave all the way out, pulling a few tricks along the way.

Shay was clapping when Jordyn came in. "Looks like you still got it. Pennsylvania hasn't completely sucked the California out of you."

Jordyn smiled. "This is my favorite thing in the world."

Shay stretched out on her board on her stomach. "So tell me the truth, Jordyn. Do you really miss it here?"

"Of course I do. I miss you, I miss *this*. Waking up before dawn in Cedarwood isn't as meaningful as it is here."

"But?" Shay asked. "And don't say there's no but. There's definitely a but."

"But I sort of like Cedarwood, too," Jordyn confessed. "It's so, I don't know, homie. The people are so nice, and of course there's Cole."

"Would you come back if you could?"

Jordyn wasn't sure if she wanted to answer that question. Leaving Cedarwood after she'd gotten so used to her life there was almost at the par of leaving San Diego to start with. Sure, there was Shay here, and the ocean. But in Cedarwood she had Cole, she had Natalie and the girls, Alice, Erin and Bethany. Not to mention she *didn't* eat sleep and breath dance. She'd even found herself looking forward to seeing her very first snow.

"I understand," Shay said. "You couldn't leave Cole, right?"

Jordyn smiled. "I wish more than anything Cedarwood and Moon Bay Beach were closer. Or you and your mom could move to Cedarwood?"

Shay laughed. "Please. That would never happen."

"You should come visit. You could meet Cole."

"We definitely have to get something set up. So what are you up to today."

Jordyn frowned. "A six-hour private with Miss Victoria. I'm learning a solo for a competition they're going to in Pittsburgh. She says it's perfect for me and can't bear to give it to anyone else," she finished with an eye roll.

"You can dance for her while you go to that dance school in Cedarwood?" Shay asked.

Jordyn shrugged. "I mean, yeah. It's not like we compete at Miss Maggie's. She has an audition set up for me at this prestigious school in Philadelphia. I'd live there, so it's basically, I would *live* for dance. My whole life would revolve around it."

"Ouch."

"Yeah."

"Well, what are you going to do about it? Are you going?"

"Hell no. I'm not leaving Cedarwood just after I got used to it. And for more 24/7 dancing? No thanks. I'll have to find a way to tell my mom without ripping her heart out of her chest."

"She's your mom, Jor. She wants you to be happy. I'm sure she'll understand if dance no longer makes you happy."

Jordyn raised her eyebrows. "Me dancing makes my mother happier than anything in the world. Like, literally. You should have seen her face when Miss Victoria brought up that audition. It was like the happiest I've ever seen her."

"Will going to Philadelphia to dance all day make *you* happy?"

Jordyn sighed. *Of course it wouldn't. But that wasn't going to make breaking her mother's heart any easier.*

"Jordyn, watch those feet! Since when do you have sickled feet? Do it again!"

Jordyn inhaled, trying to catch her breath, clutching her sides as Miss Victoria crossed the dance floor to the boom box.

She kept her mouth shut, because even though she wasn't Victoria's student anymore, she wouldn't say anything out of place. Miss Maggie didn't care about sickled feet, and quite frankly Jordyn didn't dare stress over them anymore. Her new life didn't revolve around dance and while being in the studio with Victoria, being back on her level didn't feel *too* horrible, she felt out of place, and not quite motivated.

Victoria sighed. "Jordyn. You're a wonderful performer. Your technique is top notch. You haven't had sickled feet since you were eight. Now, I've spoken with your mother, and while I'm sure the Cedarwood Dance School is well enough for the other girls, you are so much more talented than that. No offense to your teacher, er, Martha, but it's a fact. You belong in Philadelphia, Jordyn. But not with sickled feet. Now, let's run this again."

And like a good little girl, Jordyn nodded and got into place waiting for Miss Victoria to start the music.

She had no complaints about this piece. Miss Victoria wasn't kidding when she said this was her masterpiece. The dance was amazing, and if Jordyn executed it well, it could very well win first place.

Set to Whitney Houston's *I Will Always Love You*, it was a beautiful contemporary number, one of the more difficult ones Victoria had ever given Jordyn. The more she ran it, the happier she got with it. Her favorite part was a side aerial into three a la seconds, into a pliÃ©, and into an illusion turn. If she could keep her feet from sickling and get her lines back up to par, it had potential to be a great performance.

"Good job!" she shouted as Jordyn went into her final turn combo. "Hold it, Jordyn, hold on to it, *aaaaaaaannnnd* hit!" She beamed, clapping. "There's my Jordyn Hamilton! What an excellent run! I am so proud you're going to be competing under my name!"

Jordyn found herself smiling. She felt amazing after that. So she hadn't strayed as far from her comfort zone as she thought she'd gone. After her muscles had gotten back into routine, she was back. But it didn't change how she felt about dancing 24-7.

After talking to Cole about it last night, and Shay this morning, she'd decided she couldn't keep her mother on false hope any longer. Same for Miss Victoria, who was gonna faint when Jordyn confessed to her she wasn't keen on dancing any longer. But she hoped they'd both support her in what she wanted to do for herself.

Of course, Jordyn would play it safe and wait until *after* the competition in Pittsburgh before she broke the news.

"Jordyn, you've done a wonderful job," Victoria said proudly. "I'm regretful our reuinion is over. But your mom has assured me she'd work with you as much as possible until the competition to have you ready. Honey, I'll keep in touch."

Jordyn smiled and nodded. "Thanks, Miss Victoria."

As she packed her dance bag, her old competition team began to file in for rehearsal. Spotting her, most of them rushed over in surprise.

"Jordyn!" her closest dance friend, Alana, said, hugging her. "What are you doing back?"

"Just visiting," Jordyn said simply, hoisting the bag over her shoulder. There was no reason to tell the girls she was dancing a solo at their competition. These girls competed together, and they were a team, but when it came down to it, with solos, they competed against each other, and after leaving the studio, she wasn't sure they'd be too happy with Victoria giving her a solo.

"Jordyn's performing *I Will Always Love You* at the competition in Pittsburgh Thanksgiving weekend," Victoria told the girls proudly.

Or, maybe they would know about it.

Their reactions at first were to stare blankly at Jordyn, then came the fake congratulations. But she knew they were jealous and extremely unhappy, so she said quick goodbyes and rushed out of the studio to find her mother waiting.

"Hi," Zara said with a smile. "How was it?"

"It's a beautiful piece," Jordyn said honestly, following her mother out of the studio.

"I know, I watched the DVD earlier today. I'm excited she gave it to you. If the head of the Philadelphia Dance Center is really going to be at the competition then you have been blessed with this piece to show them. They will truly be impressed. We'll work extra hard when we get back to Cedarwood until you have it down."

"Mom, uhm, I need to tell you something," Jordyn started.

"Anything, sweetie," Zara asked with a smile.

Jordyn took a deep breath. But she couldn't say it. Not yet. So she just shook her head. "Uhm, never mind. It's nothing."

Zara didn't seem bothered, just smiled, and clicked unlocked the car door. She was too elated about the dance and the audition for PDC to notice Jordyn herself, was hardly happy about any of this. So without another word, she climbed into the passenger seat and they headed back to the hotel.

"Girls, are we all packed?"

It was Monday morning, their flight was an hour away, and they had all overslept. Thankfully, Jordyn and Alice had packed up the night before, and they were all ready to go. Zara, on the other hand was running around like a chicken with her head cut off, convinced to her core that they were forgetting something.

"Mom, we've been packed," Jordyn sighed, leaning against the wall beside the door with her suitcase. "We're not missing anything, but if we keep waiting around here, we're gonna miss our flight."

Zara was finally satiated enough-after checking drawers and under furniture-that they could leave and go to the airport.

"Finally," Jordyn said, and Alice giggled.

"I'm surprised you're so ready to go, Jordyn," Zara said as they made their way through the lobby of the hotel after check out. "I expected you to be mopey and dragging when it was time to leave."

Jordyn just shrugged. "I don't know. San Diego just isn't the same anymore. I mean, someone bought the house, dad, Logan and Ty are back in Cedarwood. I don't know. I guess this just isn't home anymore."

"Yeah, I'm kind of feeling the same way," Zara said, putting her arm around her daughter. "Alice, how was your trip? Did you enjoy San Diego?"

"I really did," Alice said. "I really appreciate you guys inviting me."

"Well, I'm glad you came," Jordyn told her. "This trip wouldn't have been nearly as fun without you."

"Well, thanks, Jordyn," Zara said.

The girls laughed, then slid into the Malibu.

As Zara drove through San Diego to the airport, Jordyn took in the palm trees and the paradise-like weather. How was it that two months ago she was sick at the thought of leaving this, but now, she felt like she was leaving it and going home?

She took her cell phone out, and seeing the wallpaper, the picture of herself and Cole at the homecoming crowning, she knew part of the reason. She sat back and smiled, continuing to take in the views the rest of the drive to the airport. Next stop, Cedarwood, and Jordyn could hardly wait.

Chapter 47

Chapter Forty-Seven

Tuesday, October 23, 2012

It was raining when they got back to Cedarwood Monday night-yes, shocker, right?-and still raining Tuesday morning. Jet lag hadn't worn off, yet, so Jordyn was more tired than usual getting ready for school. Between that and the rain, she decided that today was a sweatpants, hoodie, and messy bun kind of day; Jordyn's favorite.

Over the past week, since the homecoming incident, Jordyn got a break from Ashley. She ignored he every day in homeroom, and she didn't eat lunch in with Ty, Natalie and everyone. Jordyn figured since everyone was now giving *her* the uncomfortable, dirty glances after what she did, Ashley was simply laying low until the heat was off of her.

And today, it seemed like that had finally happened.

Sliding into her desk, Jordyn could feel the icy stare she had grown familiar with. But knowing the whole school pretty much hated Ashley for what she'd done lessened whatever intimidation factor this *eyeballing* was supposed to have.

But Jordyn had had enough.

She looked at Ashley, her jaw clenched. "Unless you're staring at me trying to figure out how to pay for the dress you ruined or how to apologize to me for what you did, why do you turn around, because I am sick to death of your beady little eyes stuck to the side of my damn face 24-7. So, please. Leave me alone."

Ashley's jaw dropped. It was like she thought she hadn't done a thing to Jordyn and Jordyn had just lashed out without reason. But she could front all she wanted, Jordyn was done and she was tired of it.

As passive as Ashley seemed to be otherwise, Jordyn expected that she would just turn around, face front, and blush. Well, this time, she didn't.

"Thanks a lot, *Jordyn*, for turning the whole school against me."

The nerve of this girl was palpable.

"I'm sorry, but did you say *I* turned the school against *you*?"

Ashley turned her nose up, folded her arms over her chest.

"Ashley, you seriously need to get a life," Jordyn said. "I moved here. You don't like me? Grow up and get the hell over it. I've never done anything to you, but you've been quite the opposite of welcoming to me since I got here. Which, to be honest, isn't a big deal, because you are so not important to me. Stop wasting your time on me. Your obsession? Yeah, that's kind of weird."

"Excuse me, but obsession?"

"You got another word for it? Because you can't keep my name out of your mouth, Ashley. You always have something to say. You're a class act, you really are. But that's all it is. It's an act. And it's getting old."

It was then that Jordyn realized the class was quiet, and all focused on the argument going on in the front row.

"Way to go, California."

Jordyn and Ashley both turned around together. *When had Blake gotten there?*

Ashley gave and offended scoff. "Blake!"

Blake shrugged. "Hey, she's right. You need to get over yourself, Ashley."

The whole class laughed, and finally, Ashley blushed, sinking into her seat.

"Ashley, I'm not picky with my friends, at all," Jordyn said. "If you had been nice to me, I would have been nice to you. But you started this. Don't forget that."

The classroom door opened and in walked Mrs. Roland, smiling as usual, and completely oblivious to any tension.

"Good morning!" she said with a smile, then leaned against her desk, ready to read the morning announcements.

By lunch, most everyone in Jordyn's immediate circle had heard about the altercation in homeroom. Leah had relayed it to Meredith and the girls, the guys heard it during weightlifting from Blake.

Natalie was elated. "Damn, girl, I know you didn't ask for that shit to get poured on you at homecoming, but it kept Ashley away all week last week. Now you pull this maneuver in front of your entire homeroom, and you've kept her away for another one. You're pretty awesome, Jordyn."

Jordyn laughed. "It wasn't my intention, but it was a nice bonus."

"A very nice bonus," Meredith sighed. "Jordyn, I hope you don't associate my sister with that girl. Leah's not like Ashley. Not at all."

Jordyn thought back on the apology she'd gotten from Shari and Leah after homecoming. "Don't worry. I don't."

"Can we talk about something more pleasant," Natalie said. "Like Jordyn's trip to California I've yet to hear about."

"Yeah, how was it?" Lydia asked.

"Not much more pleasant than Ashley," Jordyn said grouchily. Despite all the good points of the trip, Jordyn summed it all up to dance. More specifically, dancing in Philadelphia. And she explained it all, answering their questioning glances.

This was all she'd thought about since the subject was broached back in San Diego. Her worst nightmare. She'd actually *had* a nightmare the night before, so busy thinking about it before sleep.

Ty and Cole, of course, already knew, but when she was done giving the rest of them details, they were astonished.

"I'm impressed," Lydia said. "You're *that* good?"

Jordyn shrugged.

"Jordyn, you don't want to go," Natalie said. "Talk to your mom. Tell her that you're not as into dance as you used to be. You obviously don't want to dedicate your whole life to it."

"Not to mention I won't let her move to Philadelphia," Cole teased, playfully nudging Jordyn's arm.

"Jordyn, mom will understand," Ty said.

"You didn't see how excited she was," Jordyn said.

"She's excited for *you*. If you would just be honest and tell her this isn't what you want to do, she wouldn't put so much pressure on you."

"I'm going to tell her eventually."

"Before it's too late is my suggestion," Meredith said. "You don't want to wait until the night before you're supposed to audition for this school. I think that would *really* disappoint her. You know, to take it that far."

"I'm going to tell her soon," Jordyn assured them. "Don't worry. I'm not going to Philadelphia. I just got used to Cedarwood. I am not moving again until college."

"Hell no, you're not," Cole said.

They all laughed.

"Well, hey," Natalie said. "You *are* dancing in that competition in Pittsburgh, aren't you?"

Jordyn nodded. "Yes. I'd be crazy to turn that down. It's beautiful."

"Good because I want to see you in your zone," Natalie joked. "We're coming to your competition."

"Can't wait," Lydia said.

Jordyn smiled. Neither could she. She just wished she could skip the conversation she'd eventually have to have with her mother.

Jordyn had prepared herself for a nasty attitude from Ashley at dance that night, so when she got there with Erin and Ashley didn't even look her way, she was surprised. In fact, she ignored Jordyn completely as she stood in her corner with Shari and Leah, stretching.

"Ugh," Jordyn groaned, dropping her bag in the corner. "I don't want to be here tonight."

"Yeah, neither do I," Erin said. "Still jet lagged?"

"Yeah," Jordyn said, pealing her t-shirt and jeans off. She grinned. "And Cole's parents weren't home this afternoon so we had the house to ourselves."

Erin rolled her eyes. "You're filthy."

Jordyn laughed. "Excuse me, but we were apart for four days."

Erin raised her eyebrows. "Wow. Four whole days. You sure are turning into a nympho."

Jordyn scoffed. "Please. We don't do it *that* much."

"It's OK. You're newly devirginized. Enjoy yourself."

"I'm pretty sure devirginized isn't a word."

"I made it up. So are you gonna tell Miss Maggie about the competition?"

"After rehearsal. I hope she doesn't take it the wrong way."

"She won't. In fact, she'll probably come see it. I know I'll be there."

Jordyn smiled. "Thanks. I'm glad."

Miss Maggie walked in and they started stretches and warm ups-tonight, they were warming up to *Physical*, that old song by Olivia Newton-John. As usual, they were going over technique next, then they were going to start on choreographing their big Christmas show-yes, it was October, but apparently, this would be a *big* show.

Tonight, Miss Maggie was teaching coupe turns, and Jordyn-non-offensively-determined quickly this would turn disastrous. Jordyn was a master at coupes, having learned and perfected them at seven. Miss Maggie's girls could barely do pirouettes.

And Jordyn was right. It was a disaster.

"The coupe is a little more difficult than the pirouette," Miss Maggie called out to her disgruntled students. "So don't beat yourself up if you don't get it right away, because a Coupe doesn't happen overnight."

Of course, Miss Maggie had asked Jordyn to demonstrate. Jordyn really wished she would stop doing that. Was she completely oblivious to the fact that most girls saw her as a show off when she did that? This was the best way to turn them all against her. It hadn't happened, yet, but Jordyn wasn't stupid. She knew they got annoyed every time Maggie said "Do it like Jordyn," or "Watch Jordyn! She's so good!"'

But Jordyn did as she was told, and demonstrated five perfect coupes in a row. She could do more, a *lot* more, but there was no need to push it.

"Excellent job!" Miss Maggie clapped. "So beautiful, Jordyn!"

And so then Ashley spoke.

"That looks *soo* easy," she said in a muttered tone.

Next to her, Erin glanced in Ashley's direction, a little more than skepticism on her face, then she looked back at Jordyn and smiled with a thumbs up.

"Ashley!" Maggie said so suddenly, even Jordyn, who was walking toward Erin, jumped in surprise. "You're up. Let's see your take on the 'easy' coupe turn."

Ashley gulped, obviously embarrassed. She'd apparently made the comment thinking Maggie wouldn't hear. But she'd heard, alright.

Ashley attempted, and failed tremendously, to do a coupe, and a little bit of joy welled up in Jordyn's stomach. Not because she was conceited, but because she was happy to see Ashley in her place again. How many more times was this girl going to ask to be humiliated trying to mess with Jordyn?

She scowled at Jordyn as she walked back over to Shari and Leah, as if somehow, her inability to *walk* her *talk* was Jordyn's fault.

In the locker rooms after dance, Ashley, Shari and Leah changed quickly and hurried out, glaring at Jordyn as they did so.

Erin chuckled as she tugged her sweatpants on over her short. "Wow. You sure pissed her off."

Jordyn sighed. "What else is new?"

"Nice coupe, by the way," she said.

Jordyn just chuckled. "Thanks." She hoisted her bag over her shoulder. "I'll see you, later, OK? I'm gonna go talk to Miss Maggie."

"Good luck!"

"Thanks."

Jordyn went back into the studio, glad Miss Maggie was still there. "Hi Miss Maggie?"

She turned around and smiled. "Hello, Jordyn! I must say, sweetie, you did excellent tonight. I'm not surprised, of course, but it was still quite impressive."

"Uhm, thank you. Actually, I was wondering if I could talk to you about something?"

"Anything, honey!"

"Uhm, well, you know I went to California this weekend, and, uhm, my mother and I met up with my old teacher, Victoria. Well, she and my old team are coming to Pittsburgh for a competition Thanksgiving weekend, and she has a solo she wants me to do. Under her name. Is that alright with you?"

"Honey, of course! And wow, that is awesome!"

At this point, Jordyn was sure there was *nothing* you could do to make this woman mad. She was permanently smiling, and permanently happy.

"Really?" Jordyn asked, just to be sure. "You're not mad?"

"No! In fact, I would like to come. Would you give me the time and place?"

Jordyn smiled. Erin was right about that one. "Sure, Miss Maggie. I'd love for you to come. I don't have all the details, yet, but I'll let you know as soon as I do."

And so Jordyn had killed one bird. She could have been happier, or more relieved, but honestly, she had plenty of birds left, and Miss Maggie had been the easiest one.

Chapter 48

Chapter Forty-Eight

Friday, November 9, 2012

November settled in in Cedarwood so suddenly that before Jordyn knew it, Thanksgiving was less than two weeks away. This, of course, meant that her big solo with Miss Victoria was also less than two weeks away, and she didn't know why, but she was getting more and more nervous the closer it got. And *colder*, too.

Jordyn quickly learned that she had judged October far too harshly, because November in Cedarwood was a nightmare. Jordyn knew she was going to *die* in January.

Alice, however, was finding her pretty humorous.

"Jordyn, it's like 45 degrees outside," she'd chuckled early Friday morning when she caught Jordyn's outfit coming into school. "You look like you're going on an Arctic expedition or something."

Jordyn hadn't cared, though. Sure, she may have looked silly in her black bomber, scarf and earmuffs compared to Alice's simple fleece jacket-and Jordyn hadn't even bothered to tell Alice how much she had on underneath the bomber-but at least she was warm.

In homeroom, things had started to change a little. For one thing, Jordyn didn't see Leah and Shari talking to Ashley, nor did she see Ashley glaring at her like she usually did. That had eased off about two weeks ago and while Jordyn *almost*-but not quite-felt bad for Ashley sitting there looking lonely and sad every day, she was so happy to finally get her off her back. Even if it was for just this week.

After homeroom, Jordyn waded through the halls to her first period Chemistry class, where she found Cole leaning against the locker. He smiled when he saw her. "Morning."

"Hi," she replied, leaning forward to touch her lips to his. She saw him simple long-sleeved shirt and frowned. "How are you not freezing?"

He raised his eyebrows in response, then tugged on her puffy coat. "How are *you* not on fire?"

"I've never experienced weather like this. Give me a break."

He laughed. "Well, I'm used to it, so you give me a break."

She sighed dramatically. "Fair enough."

"Well, then, I guess right now isn't the best time to bring up a question I had for you, then," he said teasingly.

She narrowed her eyes. "What question?"

"I was going to ask you to come hang out with me afterschool today."

"Well, yeah. Why wouldn't I want to hang out with you?"

Football season had ended, and since Cole had afternoons free, now, they had plenty more time to spend together. And took every second they could get.

"Because I found this old camo jumpsuit I had when I was like, thirteen, and it would fit you perfectly."

She groaned. "I should have known."

"Come on. Do it once, and you'll love it."

She highly doubted that. "Cole, do you know me at all?"

He laughed. "I think you'll *like* it. Come on. Ty went."

Jordyn folded her arms over her chest. "Ty's a *boy*."

"I know plenty of girls that go hunting."

"Yeah?" she challenged. "Who?"

"Natalie."

"She doesn't."

"She does. Pretty good shot, too."

Jordyn took a moment trying to wrap this around her head. Homecoming queen, head cheerleader, Natalie Bishop went hunting? And she could *shoot*?

Cole grinned. "I got to go. See you at lunch." He kissed her once, then turned the corner, heading to class.

"I wish it would snow," Alice said at lunch. "I'm ready to see some white stuff."

"Same here," Erin agreed.

Jordyn stuck her spoon in her yogurt, listening to her friends talk. She was sitting with Alice and the girls today, since Cole and Ty were skipping lunch to lift weights in the gym. Plus she'd really been missing out on what was going on at their table lately.

"Do we get out of school if it snows?"

Erin, Bethany, and Alice looked at Jordyn like she'd just asked them what planet they were on.

Jordyn just shrugged. "What? I mean, do we?"

Alice shook her head and smiled. "Only if it's like, a blizzard."

"Here, practically everyone has a 4-wheel drive," Bethany said. "The only time we get out of school is if there's ice on the roads. That's when it's too dangerous."

"Otherwise, we're stuck in here," Alice said.

Jordyn had never experienced snow, so she wasn't sure how she would handle it, but she really didn't see herself having an easy way through it. God help her when it was time to start trying to drive in the stuff. She would have a hard enough time walking.

"When enough gets on the ground, Jordyn, we'll take you skiing," Alice said.

"Yeah, you'll have fun," Erin said.

"Busting my ass on the cold hard ground?" Jordyn asked drily. "Doesn't sound fun."

"You're a surfer and a dancer," said Erin. "Aren't you supposed to have perfect balance or something?"

"Not on slippery snow."

"We'll teach you," Alice offered.

"Yeah, I think you'll like it," said Bethany.

Jordyn was sure she wouldn't, but she'd think more about that when the time came.

"So, have you guys ever been hunting?" she asked.

Alice and Erin shook their heads, but Bethany nodded.

"It's fun," she said. "And deer meat is *delicious*."

Jordyn cringed.

"Why?" Alice asked. "You going hunting or something?"

"Cole wants to go. I haven't decided, yet. It sounds hostile."

"It's not hostile," Bethany said. "But it can be boring. Most of the time you'll go out and not see anything."

"But if you do see something, you shoot it, right?"

Bethany nodded. "That would be the point, yes."

"So how is killing an innocent animal *not* hostile?"

"It's called population control," Bethany said. "We have a lot of deer around here. It can be dangerous."

Deer were dangerous? As far as Jordyn was concerned, her deer knowledge stopped at Bambi, and that hardly rung as dangerous.

"If you hit a deer, it can cause a lot of damage," Alice explained. "My mom hit a deer a few years ago and it came through her windshield. She had to go to the hospital."

That didn't make Jordyn OK with actually ending the life of an innocent deer. She certainly wouldn't eat one.

She poked at her food, until Cole settled down next to her, kissing her cheek.

"Hey, babe," he said.

"Hi," Jordyn replied.

"Cole, we're on your side," Alice said as Cole reached over, snatching a fry from Jordyn's plate.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"We're trying to talk Jordyn into going hunting with you," Erin said.

"I go," Bethany shrugged. "I think it's fun."

"I told her that," Cole said.

"OK," Jordyn sighed. "If everyone stops talking about it, I will go. Deal?"

"Deal," Cole said. "And you'll like it."

She shrugged. "Maybe."

"No, Jordyn. I think you will. You underestimate yourself. There's nothing more fun than sitting in the middle of the woods, in the bitter cold, waiting for the kill."

Jordyn forced a grin and nodded. "Yep. Sounds like a real blast."

But who knew. Maybe it really would be fun. Cole had gotten Ty to go, Natalie went, Bethany went. Maybe there was something exhilarating about hunting. Just maybe Jordyn would have a good time.

"Never. Again."

Jordyn lifted one heavy, muddy boot after another, trudging across the backyard after their *two* hours in this tiny little tent in the woods. It had *not* been fun. It had been cold, wet, and boring.

Cole stood on his back porch, watching with amusement as she walked. He laughed as she yanked her camo stocking cap off her head.

"Aw come on, Jor," he said, pulling his boots off. "That was fun and you know it."

"That was the furthest thing from fun," Jordyn retorted.

She'd really gone into the woods with Cole with an open mind. She'd really tried to enjoy it. But who was she kidding? What was fun about sitting in this tiny little tent, a camouflage thing barely big enough for two, in complete silence for two hours? Jordyn couldn't even move. And while she trusted he wouldn't shoot her through her head with that big bow, she was still nervous with it being so close. Oh, and the bow? Not the simple little bow and arrow one would imagine, like from Peter Pan or something. No, this giant mechanical thing was scary looking, and obviously if it was the weapon of choice, it could kill a deer.

"Fine," Cole said. "So I got you to go. I win. You didn't like it, I won't ask you to go again. You win."

"I guess we can look at it that way," Jordyn said shrugging. "I'm not going to get sick am I?"

"Why? I bundled you so tight *I* got hot looking at you."

"It's sort of raining."

"Not in the tent. You'll be fine. And if you get sick, I'll take full responsibility and come to your house with soup and take care of you."

She smiled. "That sounds good to me. I'll hold you to that."

Still on the porch, they got out of their camo jumpers. The things were dirty and a little wet from the moist ground, so Cole explained that his mother would kill him if he brought it inside.

Jordyn was appalled when she found out they didn't wash them after every use.

"You have to leave the outside smell on it so you don't repel the deer," he'd explained.

They hung the suits over the railing, and now standing on the porch in only her jeans and a t-shirt with no shoes, Jordyn shivered. "Let's go inside. It's freezing out here."

"Yes, it is," he said, leading her into the laundry room. "And I know a perfect way to warm you up."

He shut the door behind them, and pushed her against it, pressing his mouth against hers.

"Mm," she moaned against his mouth. "You're right. You *do* know how to warm me up."

He slid his hand under her bottom, and hoisted her off her feet, then carried her down the hall to his room.

An hour later, they found themselves stretched out across Cole's bed, their clothes long-since strewn across the floor. The hunting had really sucked, but it was worth it if it lead up to plenty of alone time before Cole's parents came home from work.

By 6:30, he decided they were pushing for time and needed to get moving before his parents made it home.

"Do you want to stay for dinner?" he asked, yanking his boxers on.

Jordyn sighed, tugging on her underwear then searching for her bra. "I would love to. Except I'm on a strict workout schedule with my mom until my performance. We do yoga, and then she yells at me for the entire two hours I work on my dance."

"That sounds like a lot of fun."

Jordyn nodded. "Yeah, very. She's a real stage mom when we get close to competitions. But it pays off in the end."

"I can't wait to see it pay off," Cole said with a grin as he zipped his pants. Then he walked over and kissed her. "I'll be there in Pittsburgh, cheering you on."

Jordyn laughed. "Thanks for the added pressure."

"I'm not pressure," he told her. "I don't know a damn thing about dancing, so I'm going to cheer for you either way. I just can't wait to see you in your zone, doing your thing."

"Well, I'm glad at least one of us is excited," Jordyn sighed. She checked her phone for the time. "I should go. The excitement is waiting for me at home."

Jack was working the nightshift tonight, so when Jordyn came home, she wasn't surprised that she didn't see his police charger in the driveway. She parked her car, then went inside, anticipating another long night of rehearsing in the basement with her mother.

In the living room, she found Ty and Natalie, cuddled together on the couch in front of the TV.

"Hey," she said to them, shrugging out of her coat. "I thought you guys had a party to go to."

"We do later," Ty said. "Mom is upstairs. She's pissed. Go up there and see what you did."

"What I did?" Jordyn asked, hanging her jacket. "I mean, what did I do? I haven't even been here to do anything."

"She didn't say, she only said to send you up when you got home."

"Great," Jordyn grumbled, then turned and headed up the stairs.

"Good luck!" Natalie called.

"Thanks," Jordyn sighed.

She found her mother in her parents' bedroom, the TV on her favorite reality show, her hair pulled back while she painted her toenails.

"Hi, mom," she said. "I'm home."

Zara looked up. "Did you have fun hunting?"

"No. Not at all."

"Oh. Well, I guess that's just not your thing."

Jordyn shook her head. "Not at all." Her mother sure didn't seem angry.

"OK, now sit down. We need to talk."

So, never mind.

Jordyn sat at the foot of her parents bed, waiting to see what she did. Mentally, she ran through her week's activities. As far as she remembered, she hadn't broken any rules, that she knew of. She'd been a good little dancer this week, so what could her mother possibly be angry about?

Zara cleared her throat. "Jordyn, are you having sex?"

Jordyn's eyes went wide. She had to admit, she really hadn't seen this one coming. "Am I *what*?"

"I asked if you and Cole are having sex, and since I already know the answer, you'd be wise to tell the truth."

Jordyn nibbled her bottom lip. She didn't know how to answer. It could be a trap, and being truthful could only be ratting on herself and getting herself in trouble. After all, Jordyn had been so careful. How could Zara know?

Zara held up a box of condoms, and Jordyn's blood went cold. Nope. No trick.

"Now, I won't tell your father," Zara said, sighing. "But we *are* going to talk. I found these in your room when I was dropping off the laundry."

"I don't know what to say," Jordyn said.

Zara sighed. "When did this happen, Jordyn?"

"Homecoming."

"Well, I'm very disappointed. I thought we talked about this. You gave away something very important to you and you can never get it back."

"But I gave it to someone important, mom," Jordyn insisted. "Cole was the right one. I still think so and I don't regret it. And we were safe and everything."

"I don't doubt that, but Jordyn, you're only sixteen."

"And how old were you?"

"I was nineteen, and it was your father."

"Really?"

Zara nodded. "Yes."

"Well, look. Mom, I'm sorry I disappointed you. But truthfully, I'm not sorry I took that step with Cole. I really care about him, and we've been so much closer since then."

"I understand you feel that way *now*, Jordyn, but I really just wish you would have waited."

Jordyn should have expected this. Of course Zara wasn't going to be happy with her decision. Why would she, after all? She was the mom, and while Jordyn was fully confident with her decision and the choices she'd made with Cole, she knew Zara didn't trust them.

"Well, on Monday I'm making you an appointment with the doctor," Zara said. "Obviously you're not listening to me and you're going to do what you want regardless so if you're going to be having sex, I want to know you're protected."

Jordyn sighed. "Mom, I-"

"We'll talk about this more later, Jordyn," Zara said, getting up. "Let's just go start rehearsing."

Jordyn had no choice but to obey and follow her mother. She didn't know what to expect after this, but she knew for sure, that *now* was not the time to bring up her future in dance.

Chapter 49

This will be the last chapter I upload for awhile. I'm finishing up the book now, with probably 4 or 5 chapters left at the most. I won't upload again until the book is finished, so I hope you enjoy these last two for awhile!!*

Chapter Forty-Nine

Tuesday, November 13, 2012

On Tuesday Jordyn had her doctor's appointment, mandated by Zara after the big condom discovery from Friday night. So as soon school was out, she met Zara at the doctor's office and they went inside.

School was out, and people were getting off of work this time of day, so Jordyn wasn't surprised to see the waiting room pretty busy. She was relieved that her wait time wasn't too long, and soon the nurse was leading her and Zara to the back.

First, Jordyn was getting a physical, and when the nurse began to explain what *that* entailed, Jordyn began to panic.

"The checkup isn't so bad," the nurse reassured her.

Soon after, the doctor came in, and the checkup, wasn't, in fact, *so* bad, although, Jordyn wouldn't want to do *that* every time she came to the doctor.

Once it was all over, and they'd discussed some of Jordyn's personal history, they got to the topic they came for.

"So, Jordyn," the doctor said. "You want to look into birth control, right?"

Jordyn nodded. "Uhm, well, yes."

"Have you thought about anything? As you know, I'm sure, there are many different kinds. There's the ring, the IUD, the pill."

They spent some time going on various type of birth control, until finally, Jordyn and Zara decided it was best to start out on the pill. So the doctor gave her the prescription, and sent them both along their way.

The sky was getting dark by the time they'd walked out of the office. It wasn't just from nightfall coming, either. Ever since daylight saving's time had ended, Cedarwood had a different feel about it; colder, gloomier, darker. Especially when it rained. Today, though, it was sort of gloomy because of the crisp vibes Zara was sending off. She'd been looking extra pissed off all weekend and today was no different.

Before they split ways in the parking lot, Jordyn decided to break the ice. "Mom, please don't be mad at me."

Zara was pulling open the door to her Mercedes. She stopped and sighed. "Oh, Jordyn. I am not mad at you. I'm just a little disappointed, and, well, I guess this whole thing is hard for me to take in. You growing up, and all, I mean."

"Yeah, it's kind of weird on my side, too," Jordyn chuckled. Zara smiled at that. "But if you don't mind, I'd really like to talk to you about this stuff."

Zara nodded. "Honey, there's nothing I'd love more. I mean, this isn't something I'm happy about, but I don't want you to keep secrets from me, OK? Tell me things that are going on. I need to know. If there's anything you want to talk about, you don't have to be afraid. I won't be mad, I promise."

"You won't be mad about, well, *anything*?" Jordyn asked.

"Anything. Always know that I am here for you whenever you need me, sweetheart."

That was good to know. Now Jordyn knew she had plenty to tell her mother tonight. The big secret was out. She wasn't a virgin anymore. She had slept with Cole. Now, she had an opportunity to confess to her mother how she felt about Philadelphia and dance.

She told her mother she would see her at home tonight, and they split up. Jordyn had dance tonight and all the girls were hanging at Alice's until it was time to go.

"Don't forget to tell your friends about dinner Saturday night after the performance," Zara had called after her as she walked to her car.

Yes. Zara was planning this huge dinner thing for Jordyn after the show, and was inviting everyone. She'd rented the community center out and everything. Jordyn was humiliated at the amount of attention they were asking for, but so far, everyone was pretty excited about it.

"So you're going to tell her tonight?" Alice asked later as they all sat in her living room trying to find something to watch on TV.

Jordyn nodded. "Yeah, I think I am. She seems to be in this good, sharing mood, and I think it might go well tonight."

Jordyn had told her friends already about her mother finding the condoms Friday night. She'd also told them about her doctor's appointment today and getting on the pill.

"Oh, and you guys and your families are invited to a big dinner at the Cedarwood Community Center after my performance Saturday night," Jordyn added with a grumble.

"You don't sound too happy," Alice told her.

"Well, it's sort of a celebration, and after I tell my mom I don't want to go to Philadelphia and that I don't want to make a career out of dance, then the word celebration is going to be used very loosely."

"I wouldn't worry about it," Erin said. "Your mom didn't kill you over the condoms. She'll take this much better."

Jordyn raised her eyebrows. "You haven't met my mom, have you?"

"I still think it'll go better than you think," Erin said. "And I'm excited about the big show, and the big dinner." She smiled.

Jordyn chuckled. "Yeah, well, we'll see about that. Once I get passed breaking this news to my mom, I'll let you guys know."

After dance, Jordyn went straight home, happy her mother wasn't making her rehearse tonight. She hadn't been home for dinner, so while her mother was sitting at the table on her laptop, going over some numbers for the new Pittsburgh restaurant, Jordyn heated up some leftovers and sat across from Zara.

"So, thanks for taking me today, mom." Jordyn figured that was the best opener.

Zara peeked over the top of her computer. "Well, you're welcome. I don't want you to think, now, that just because you're on the pill, that's an open ticket for you and Cole to go, well, you know."

Jordyn nodded. "I know it's not."

"And we're going to go over plenty of rules later," Zara continued.

Jordyn raised her eyebrows. "Rules?"

"Yes. Open bedroom doors, no being home alone. Things like that."

"I thought those were already rules?"

"Well, now they're being enforced with an iron fist. I won't have you getting pregnant."

Jordyn picked up her glass of water, taking a drink. "I won't get pregnant. I'm on the pill remember." Zara shot her a warning glance, and Jordyn held her hands up in surrender. "Kidding."

"Mhm."

Zara was in a good mood, Jordyn could tell. Now was as good of a time as any to bring up the Philadelphia thing to her mother. The longer she stalled, the harder it would be. The competition was getting closer and closer, and so was that audition.

"Hey, mom."

Zara looked up again, closing her laptop this time. "I see I won't be finishing this right now." She smiled. "What's up, honey."

"Well, I've been thinking about the competition and the audition and everything," Jordyn started. "And, well, I was thinking, what if I don't get into the Philadelphia Dance Center?"

"Oh, honey, don't think like that. I'm sure you'll get in."

"I know, but what if I don't. What if I don't get in, and I'm stuck here at Cedarwood."

"Then, I don't know, Jordyn. I'm not sure what you're trying to ask me, honey. Are you nervous about the audition?"

Jordyn shook her head. "No."

"Then, I'm not sure what's going on."

"I sort of don't want to go to Philadelphia, mom."

"Oh. I see. Is it, the living away from home, or what is it?"

"It's dancing, mom. I don't want to dance 24/7. I don't want to dance as a career. I want to just be sixteen. I want to go out with my friends, and I want to worry about normal teenage things like my friends, my boyfriend, and homework."

Jordyn sighed, sitting back in her chair. There. She'd said it. It was out. And after a few moments, Zara still hadn't said anything.

"Mom?" Jordyn asked. "Are you OK?"

"I'm fine," Zara sighed. "I guess I knew all along. You just aren't as enthusiastic as you used to be. You're just so talented, Jordyn. You could really go so far in dance." She sat back and took a deep breath. "But if dancing isn't what you want then I'll support you all the way. Whatever you want to do."

"I love to dance," Jordyn assured her. "And I don't want to quit completely. I just want dance to be a part of my life, and not my whole life."

Zara finally smiled. "I understand. I guess I was just so wrapped up in you going all the way, I didn't realize you weren't as happy as you used to be. How long have you felt this way?"

Jordyn shrugged. "Awhile, I guess. I think that's why I like Miss Maggie so much. There's no pressure to be perfect there. I still get to dance, but I can live my life my way at the same time, too."

"Why haven't you told me this before, Jordyn?" Zara asked.

"You loved dancing. And you were so happy when I danced. I just didn't want to disappoint you. When we came to Cedarwood, I was actually sort of relieved that I wouldn't be stuck dancing all the time anymore. And then you and Miss Victoria threw this Philadelphia thing on me and it was like I just had to tell you I couldn't do it."

"Then you don't have to."

Jordyn smiled. "Really? I don't?"

Zara shook her head. "Jordyn, you're my only daughter. Do you really think I'd send you five hours away, just so you can be miserable all the time to make *me* happy? Honey, when you're a parent, you'll understand. Whatever makes you happy, I'll do my best to make it happen for you."

Jordyn stood up and walked around the table, hugging her mother. "Thank you, mom. I love you."

"Aw, I love you, too, Jordyn."

Jordyn pulled away. "Now, just one problem."

"What's that?"

"Who's gonna tell Miss Victoria?"

Chapter 50

****I finished up earlier than expected after going on a 2-day writing binge. So here it is! The final 3 chapters of Where Home Really Is!! I hope you enjoy!!!!****

Chapter Fifty

Thursday November 22, 2012

It was Thanksgiving. The competition was two days away, but since Jordyn had confessed how she really felt about Philadelphia and a dance career to her mother, she was getting less and less stressed about it. Today, all Jordyn was concerned about was plowing through as many Thanksgiving dinners as she could manage and pray she'd still be able to fit into her competition outfit this weekend.

She'd started off the day at home with her parents. They'd had an earlier than normal Thanksgiving breakfast. Being a caterer, Zara would be gone most of the day, taking care of others for Thanksgiving. It wasn't the most sacred of holidays for her, anyway, and the family had gotten used to it over the years and adjusted.

After breakfast, Ty headed to Natalie's, Jordyn headed to Cole's, and Logan and Jack were left at home to celebrate their favorite Thanksgiving activity and watch football all day.

Jordyn was excited to be spending Thanksgiving with Cole. First, they were going to his mother's parents for lunch, then they were going to their father's parents for dinner. Both sets of grandparents lived in Cedarwood. Jordyn thought that was so cool.

"Do you see your grandparents often, Jordyn?" Cole's mother had asked her as they pulled out of his driveway en route to the first grandparents' house.

Jordyn shook her head from the back seat of the car next to Cole. "No, ma'am. My dad's parents are both dead, and my mom's parents live in Sweden. I see them maybe once a year."

"Aw, well, that's a shame."

Jordyn learned pretty quickly that the Andersons were close-knit. Cole had a lot of cousins on both sides. She had to admit, she was a little jealous of all this, thinking about her own family that had decided, like every other year, to go their own ways for Thanksgiving.

When Cole introduced Jordyn to his various cousins, aunts, and uncles, their replies were, "Nice to finally meet you."

So they'd heard of her?

This made Jordyn warm. The idea that Cole had mentioned her to his family was great. The more time that went by, the more she found herself closer and closer to the big 'L' word with Cole. But that was silly, she knew. He liked her, told his family about his girlfriend, no big deal. Didn't mean anything extreme, like *love*.

Right?

After dinner, once everyone's Thanksgiving festivities were over, Jordyn and Cole went back to the Hamiltons, since they hadn't seen her family pretty much all day. Zara was finally home, but after a long day

of feeding Cedarwood's finest, she was tired, and Jordyn didn't blame her for choosing a long bubble bath and early to bed rather than hanging out in the living room with her family.

Jack was working third shift, so by 10:00, he'd gone upstairs to get ready for work, and Jordyn, Cole and Logan were commandeering the living room.

"Let's go rent a movie," Logan suggested.

"It's Thanksgiving, you dork," Jordyn muttered, cuddled on the couch with Cole. "Nowhere is open to rent movies from."

"Well, this is boring. What are we supposed to do?"

Jordyn looked up at Cole with a smile, then looked back down to Logan. "Don't you want to go to your room and just watch some movies up there?"

Logan frowned. "Why, so you two can hog up the living room making out? No. I don't think so. If you want to be alone, you can leave."

Jordyn rolled her eyes. "Fine. Come on, Cole. Let's leave."

"And go where?" Cole asked.

Jordyn shrugged. "I don't know. We can go to my room."

"I thought we weren't allowed in your room," he said.

"We aren't allowed to close the door," Jordyn clarified. "Come on."

Cole stood up, and Logan got more comfortable. "Good. See you."

"Later."

They made it to the top of the stairs and just as Jordyn was about to open her door, Cole stopped her.

"Wait," he said.

"What?" she asked him.

"Jordyn, do you realize that in the two months we've dated, I have not yet been in your room?"

Jordyn realized he was right. "Wow. You haven't, have you."

"I think it's because of your dad and Ty."

Jordyn nodded her agreement. "I think so, too."

"Jordyn, I'm nervous," he teased.

She laughed. "You're right. This is monumental. Should I break a champagne glass on my door?"

"No, just turn the doorknob," he said simply.

She laughed and pushed her door open, flipping the switch to light the room up.

Cole stepped in behind her, pushing the door closed.

"Oh, wait," Jordyn said. "Open door, remember."

"Oh, right. Sorry."

He eased further into the room, looking around.

"What do you think of Casa de Jordyn?" she asked him.

He nodded, smiling. "It's so you."

She squinted at him, sitting on her bed, one foot tucked underneath herself. "What do you mean?"

Honestly, Jordyn had never felt like this room was *her*. She felt pretty *homie* in it, now that she was used to it, but she wasn't sure if it would ever really feel like her. Not like her room back in California did, anyway.

"It looks like you," he said. "I can't explain it. It even smells like you."

She laughed. "It *smells* like me? What do I smell like?"

"Good," he sighed. "I love the way you smell. You don't wear perfume like those other girls do. That's good. I hate perfume. It's suffocating. Like old church ladies."

Jordyn laughed. He was right. She hated perfume, too.

"You always smell fresh, though. Clean. Like you just got out of the shower. And whatever that little body mist you wear is."

Jordyn laughed. She knew what he was talking about. She watched him walk over to her dresser, looking at the pictures she had on her mirror. A lot of them were from back in San Diego, but she had a ton of herself here in Cedarwood, with Alice and the girls, at football games, at dance, at the farmer's Market they frequented now. Jordyn noticed how different the girl in the hoodie, jeans and Timberlands looked from the girl in the picture on a sunny California beach. It was like she was a whole different Jordyn.

"I like this one," he said, pointing at the picture that was her favorite, too. It was taken at homecoming of her and Cole, their lips pressed together, herself smiling with her eyes closed for the kiss. Now *that*? That was a whole new Jordyn Hamilton.

And if she wasn't mistaken, it was a happier Jordyn, too.

Cole started going through her DVD collection. "Well, this is disappointing."

"What's disappointing?"

"Your DVD collection. It's pretty girly."

Jordyn scoffed. "Uhm, excuse me. I have all the Die Hard movies, I have everything with Sylvester Stallone, and my horror movie collection is beast."

"OK, OK, I'll give you that. Wow. You do have a lot of Sylvester Stallone. That's kind of weird."

"He's a fantastic human being," Jordyn said seriously.

Cole chuckled and nodded. "OK. I won't question it." He grabbed a DVD from the pile and stuck it in the player.

"What did you choose?" she asked him as he settled on the bed next to her.

"It's a surprise," he said.

"Want popcorn?" she asked.

"No." He reached over and pulled her next to him. "Just you is enough."

She smiled and accepted a kiss on the lips.

"So, how'd you like your first Thanksgiving in Cedarwood?" he asked.

"I loved it," she said. "Meeting your family was great. Usually, Thanksgiving is kind of small for us, like today. It's just me, my dad and Logan and usually we just go find an open restaurant for dinner since my mom's working all day. But having a real home-cooked meal with your family was so, well, Hallmark movie."

He chuckled. "I've never looked at Thanksgiving at my house as a Hallmark movie before."

"You would if you have half a Thanksgiving like I always had. It was great."

"I'm glad you had fun at my family's Hallmark Thanksgiving."

She laughed. "What are you doing tomorrow?"

"Going hunting before you even *dream* of waking up," Cole teased, touching her nose with his index finger. "I'd ask you to come, but-"

Jordyn shook her head. "No. Don't."

He laughed. "What about you?"

"Just sit around, lazily waiting for the big day, I guess."

"Saturday."

"Yep. I'm actually kind of nervous, believe it or not."

"Don't be. You'll do great."

Jordyn looked to the screen as the movie started. She sure hoped so.

Chapter 51

Chapter Fifty-One

Saturday, November 24, 2012

When Jordyn woke up on Saturday morning, the most wonderful thing happened.

"Oh my gosh, it's snowing!" she called from her bedroom.

She felt like a little kid, and she didn't care. It was the first time she'd ever seen snow fall in her life, and already, it was collecting, turning the ground white, the trees, and everything around.

Jordyn got this ridiculous instinct to get dressed in her warmest clothes, find a sled, and just go *play*. She wanted so badly to touch it, to see what it felt like. She'd seen people on TV catching snowflakes with their tongues. She wanted to do that, too.

Then she remembered what she had to do today.

She looked at the clock by her bedside table. It was barely 6:30, and just the beginning to what was sure to be a very long day.

Competition day.

Miss Victoria had arrived in Pittsburgh with her team late yesterday afternoon. After she'd settled her girls into a hotel with their parents, she came to Cedarwood, *borrowed* the Cedarwood Dance School, and went over Jordyn's solo with her, impressed at what she and Zara had accomplished without her help.

So impressed, actually, that she saw fit to give Jordyn *another* solo. A jazz piece, to this Cataracts song called *Top of The World*. Jordyn liked the song, and found out she liked the choreography, but it was difficult, and it was fast. There were turns, *a lot* of turns, and a lot of flips and tricks in this dance. It would have been better with more time, but Victoria had the utmost confidence that Jordyn could learn the dance even within the day until competition.

Jordyn crossed her room, heading straight to her bathroom for a shower. She was comfortable with the dance so far, but hopefully, she could get some time to rehearse it today with Miss Victoria between sets. It was going to be her last show, after all, and Jordyn wanted to go out with a bang.

She stepped into the shower, under the warm running water, massaging her sore muscles. It had been so cold lately, she hadn't run that much, so after the long grueling workout with Miss Victoria, followed by another one with her mother, she could really use an ice pack, not a full day of competition.

Jordyn finished up in the shower, dressed quickly, and hurried downstairs, finding only her mother awake.

"Good, you're ready," Zara said, seeing Jordyn walk into the kitchen. She slid a plate onto the table. "Here you are. Breakfast for champions. Eat up, then we'll get on the road." She turned away, then did a double take, looking back at Jordyn. "Is your hair wet?"

"Well, yeah," Jordyn said. "I was going to fix it when we got there."

Which they both knew translated to "Zara was going to fix it when they got there."

Jordyn poked around at her breakfast, not really in the mood to eat, right now.

"Jordyn, those eggs won't be good cold," Zara warned, sitting down with her own breakfast. "What's wrong. Are you nervous?"

"I'm not sure."

"Come on. It's your first competition in months. According to you it's going to be your last one. You're feeling something. If you're not nervous, what is it?"

Jordyn shrugged. "I don't think I'm nervous. I guess I'm sort of relieved that today actually marks the end of all the stress, but at the same time, I'm a little sad."

She couldn't think of another way to put it. It really was a bittersweet moment. She'd sat at the kitchen table back in California, just her and her mom, countless times since she was two, both of them up before the sun, getting ready for competition. But today was different.

As happy as she had been this entire time she'd been in Cedarwood, living her life, hanging out with friends, having a boyfriend, she'd hoped in the back of her mind that competitive dance was over and she didn't have to stress over it anymore. But now, knowing that today really was the last time she and her mom would leave together for competition, it was kind of sad to think about. Dance had taken up a lot of her life over the years, but it had really made her who she was.

"Having second thoughts about quitting?" Zara asked.

Jordyn sighed, shaking her head. "No. I'm not. I'm just thinking about how much I'm going to miss it."

"Well, if not sure this is what you want, Jordyn, this doesn't have to be the last competition. That audition is still open, honey. Two more weeks."

For a second, just a split second, Jordyn would admit, she thought about it. She considered the audition. And then she thought about Cole. She thought about Alice and the girls. She even thought about Miss Maggie and her dance class. She would miss the dance world, she knew, but if she traded her new life, the one she'd gotten used to and come to love for dance, she wouldn't be happy.

Jordyn shook her head. "No, this is what I want. I'm sure of it, mom."

She smiled, and stuck her fork into the eggs. She was really going to enjoy today, she would make sure of it. Because when it was all over, she was getting her life started.

"Alright, Victoria's in dressing room B," Zara announced as she lead Jordyn down the hallway in the Pittsburgh Performing Arts Center.

Jordyn scanned the doors on either side as they walked, her suitcase full of her usual dance supplies rolling behind them.

"Dressing room B," Jordyn said when she saw it.

"Excellent." Zara stepped up to the door, knocking. When the door opened, Victoria stood on the other side, beaming from ear to ear at the sight of them.

"Ah, Zara! Jordyn! I'm so happy you made it!"

"Of course, Victoria!" Zara replied equally enthusiastic. "We wouldn't miss this!"

Zara anf Victoria had always had a great relationship. This was the main reason Jordyn had decided her mother would be the one to break the news to Miss Victoria that she wasn't dancing competitively anymore. After the competition, of course.

Next thing Jordyn knew, Miss Victoria was wrapping her arms around her in a tight hug. "Jordyn, I can't wait to see what you've done with that jazz piece we learned last night."

She lead them into the dressing room, where Jordyn saw the rest of her old team.

"We worked all night last night, Victoria," Zara told her.

Jordyn yawned, thinking about that late night rehearsal. "Yes. All night."

"Jordyn, hi!"

Instantly, her old friends had surrounded her. Among them, her three closest friends from dance, Alana, Kimmy, and Cassie. The three of them were excitedly chirping at once.

"Oh my gosh, look at you!"

"Jordyn, you've gotten prettier!"

"Did your boobs get bigger?"

Jordyn raised her eyebrows at Cassie's question, and smirked as she folded her arms over her chest. Then they all laughed.

"Jordyn, did you know it was snowing here?" Kimmy asked, flipping her red hair over her shoulder.

Jordyn laughed. "Yes, I saw it, too. Isn't it great?"

They all looked at her wide-eyed.

"It's cold and slippery," Alana said.

Jordyn smiled. "I think it's beautiful. My boyfriend's taking to me up the mountain as soon as enough's on the ground and he's teaching me how to snowboard. I can't wait, it's-"

"Hold up," Alana said. "Did you say, *boyfriend*?"

Jordyn nodded. "Yeah."

"You have time for a boyfriend?" Kimmy asked, incredulous. "Wow. You must be flunking out of school."

Jordyn laughed. "Not exactly."

"How often do you train here?"

Jordyn actually didn't even want to admit it. Five minutes ago she was happy about having a normal teenager's life, quitting dance after this, and not having to train every waking moment of her life. But now, standing here with her elite friends, she almost didn't want to admit that she didn't exactly 'train' at all anymore.

"Ladies!" Miss Victoria called. "I need everyone over here to get ready. Genevieve is going to go over your group number a couple of times. Jordyn, I want you to come with me. We're going to run your solos. My other solos, I'll be back to get you one at a time."

Jordyn nodded. This was it. Competition had started. So she stood up, and followed Miss Victoria right back out of the dressing room.

Everyone came.

From Jordyn's seat in the auditorium, she could see her family. Her dad, Logan, Ty, Natalie and Cole all sat together, flipping through programs. A few rows away, she saw Alice and Bethany sitting with Alice's mom, and surprisingly, Blake. She smiled when she saw Blake and Alice leaning over and whispering to each other. Blake obviously hadn't come today to see Jordyn's performance.

And like she'd said, Miss Maggie was also in the audience, complete with her pack of advanced dancers, including Erin, Shari, Leah, and even Ashley. She balled her hands into fists, noticing the clamminess. She was actually nervous. But in all fairness, this was the first time in her entire career that so many people had actually come to see her dance.

Next to Jordyn, Miss Victoria checked her watch. "OK, we're up after the next duet," she said. "Solos, let's go."

Jordyn stood up, and followed Miss Victoria, Alana, and the two other soloists back stage. Jordyn was up first, so she shrugged out of her jacket, and waited in the wings for her turn. Finally, the performance before hers was over, and it was Jordyn's turn.

"Let me look at you first," Victoria said, spinning her around and examining her costume. For the jazz piece, Victoria had Jordyn wearing next to nothing. The costume was glitzy, silver, and sparkles, a two piece that showed her belly, and covered just a little more than necessary for decency. She knew girls who wore more on the beach, but this was the norm for dance. Her hair was down for this number, something she didn't normally do. It was crimped, with the top half pulled back out of her face and enough hair spray to guarantee minimal movement.

"Break a leg, my little protÃ©gÃ©," Victoria said as the announcer started.

"And now competing in the senior age division under Miss Victoria Joy of the La Jolla Dance Company all the way from San Diego, California, please welcome to the stage miss Jordyn Hamilton!"

She took a deep breath and walked onto stage.

This is it, she thought making it to the middle of the stage, smiling her stage smile from ear to ear. Under the spotlights, the audience looked dark and empty, but she knew the place was packed, and she knew her family and friends were out there.

But she also knew this was her comfort zone. She knew this dance like the back of her hand, and she knew a dance floor. This wasn't her first go round, but it would be her last, so she had to make it good.

And then the music started.

Five, six, seven, eightâ¦

Chapter 52

Chapter Fifty-Two

Miss Victoria stood up, clinking a fork against her wine glass, catching the attention of all the dinner guests. Jordyn was sitting at the end of the table, surrounded by her old dance friends, and her new friends, watching, and waiting to see what Miss Victoria had to say.

"Hello, everyone!" she called out. "I have something to say!"

She was smiling proudly, her makeup spotless. Just twenty minutes ago, Jordyn had caught mascara running down her old dance teacher's cheeks. Of course that was right after Zara had broken the news about her quitting dance to Miss Victoria. Apparently she'd cleaned up and now had on her happy face.

The entire room got quiet, everyone's attention on Miss Victoria.

"I know most of you here don't know me," she started. "I've taught Jordyn Hamilton since she was seven. Now, most of my girls started when they were two and three years old, so at first, I was sure she would be really behind the other girls. After a year, I realized I was wrong. Jordyn truly was a child prodigy in dance. One of the most gifted children I ever had the pleasure to teach, and am honored to have watched her grow up into the beautiful young lady she is today."

Jordyn smiled when Victoria looked at her, already feeling guilty for breaking her heart after all those years of hard work. But she knew she'd made the right decision.

Victoria continued. "As everyone knows, Jordyn's solo took first place overall, and I can't say that I'm surprised, but I'm very proud."

Everyone clapped.

"Jordyn, you have been blessing to teach, and a blessing to coach. I don't know if I'll get another one like you, but I'm glad I had you. Congratulations and good luck in everything you do, Jordyn Hamilton."

"Thanks, Miss Victoria," Jordyn said back.

Once Miss Victoria was seated, dinner continued.

Next to her, Cole was examining her trophy. Next to him, Cassie was examining Cole.

"Nice trophy," he said. "First place."

"Congratulations, Jordyn," said Alana. "Your solo was beautiful."

Jordyn smiled. "Yours was amazing, too, Alana."

"Mine didn't hold a candle to that Whitney Houston number you did."

Alana always put herself down. In reality, her solo had gotten her second place.

"Hey, Jordyn," Kimmy said. "Who's that girl over there staring at you?"

Jordyn followed Kimmy's glance and her eyes landed on Ashley. She sighed. "It never ends."

"Who is she?" Alana asked.

"No one important," Jordyn said, looking back to her food.

"Well, she's coming over."

Jordyn looked up, wondering what Ashley could possibly want, and indeed, she was walking over. But to Jordyn's surprise, Ashley didn't have an ugly scowl on her face.

And she was also alone.

"Jordyn, hi," she said. Or more like squeaked.

Jordyn didn't respond. As rude as she may have looked there, she didn't really care. Ashley had put her through so much and honestly, this was Jordyn's night. If Ashley had anything rude or obnoxious to say now, Jordyn had no problem turning her around, and sending her on her way out.

"Uhm, look, I just wanted to say your performance was really amazing tonight. You're a really good dancer. Congrats for winning first."

Surprise wasn't the word. Speechless was close.

Jordyn looked up. "Uhm, thanks. Thanks a lot."

Ashley nodded, then turned and walked away.

"Whoa," Cole said. "I didn't see that coming."

"You and me both," Jordyn said.

She wondered if this was step one with making peace with Ashley. She wouldn't count on it, but it was nice to hear a sincere word from the girl. Two months late, but it was better than never.

"This night is so weird," Jordyn laughed, playfully laying her head on Cole's shoulder.

"You're telling me," Alana said, shrugging into her jacket and shivering. "Jordyn, I don't know how you can stand it here. It's freezing."

"Well, *I* don't know how you're going to survive without dance," Kimmy chimed in.

Cassie smiled at Cole. "Oh, I think I know."

Cole looked at Jordyn and she laughed.

"You don't miss San Diego at all?" Cassie asked.

"The beach?" Alana asked.

"The dancing?" asked Kimmy.

Jordyn just smiled and took a bite of her mother's deliciously, catered chicken.

"Come on, you at least miss *us*," Alana scoffed.

Jordyn laughed. "Yes, of course, I miss you guys. But, you know, Cedarwood is not so bad at all."

When she said it, Cole squeezed her leg under the table, and she looked up at Alice, Erin, and Bethany. Toward the end of the table, she saw her brother and Natalie. Natalie glanced her way, smiled, and winked.

At that moment, Jordyn was sure she was happy. She knew where home was, and while San Diego would always be a part of her, just like Miss Victoria would, and of course, Shay and all these girls, she knew now she was home. Cedarwood really was home, and she wouldn't trade it for the world.

***

Thanks to everyone who stuck with me through this book! I can't tell you how excited I am to finally be finished!! I'm currently working on my next novel, and I'll be uploading the first couple of chapters soon! I hope you check them out!!!! :)

---Jessica :)

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