

LOVE ME ONCE, SHAME ON YOU

BY

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Chapter 1~October

“Good things happen when you meet strangers.”

-Yo-Yo Ma

He was running. Running as fast as he could. Willing his legs to work harder. But he found that they weren't working properly. His fastest speed wasn't fast enough. It was as if the energy was being drained out of his body. Every step felt like he was running through knee-deep mud.

He was jogging. No-walking. Then, he couldn't even stand anymore. He was crawling and now, he really was in mud. It had just started to rain and he hadn't even noticed until that moment.

What am I running from?

A pair of jean-clad legs suddenly appeared in front of him. Slowly, he looked up and into the eyes of the newcomer. They were the same green eyes as his own. Almost identical. Except the stranger's were colder. The face that looked down at him was also the same face looking up at it.

"Why are you here?" He screamed at the man who looked exactly like him.

"You know why, Adam." He was sneering down at him. Now, he removed a hand holding an unbelievably sharp pizza cutter from behind his back. It resembled a saw.

The stranger raised the weapon over his head, smiling as he did so. Then, it was rushing down toward the head of the boy looking up at him.

"NOO!"

"No!"

Adam Bennett awoke with a start, screaming. His hand hit something cold and by the time he realized what it was, it was too late. His glass of water crashed to the floor. Adam was sitting at a booth in Jerry's Diner. If the other customers weren't staring when he screamed, they were definitely staring now.

Adam had been having that dream for two years now. He knew who the man holding the pizza cutter was but in his dream, he was always portrayed as a stranger. Maybe because he was too weak to face the truth. Too weak to revisit his dark past. Adam was ashamed. For a brief moment, he thought about telling Lucy, his best friend.

The moment passed as Adam saw Lucy walking toward him with a rag in her hand. She worked as a waitress at the diner-her dad's diner to be exact.

Adam's mind wandered back to his dream.

I'll tell her later...maybe.

Even as he thought this, he knew he'd never tell Lucy about anything that had taken place two years ago.

Lucy Campbell walked back to the kitchen after Adam's outburst. She shook her head and smiled.

He's so clumsy.

The glass that he'd knocked over was plastic so, thankfully, it didn't break. Otherwise, she'd have to clean up the mess. Instead, Lucy had simply wiped up the water and gotten Adam a refill.

Just ten more minutes, Lucy, you can do it, she thought as she pulled her chestnut colored hair off her face.

She had been working a double-shift that Saturday and was getting sick of the syrupy aroma of the diner.

It'll be nice to clock out and breathe in some fresh air.

Lucy had made plans to go see a movie with Adam after work. They always went to movies on Saturdays. She didn't know how, but it had become a tradition.

Lucy checked that the customers beside her were alright and then walked to the next booth. Adam was sitting there. In fact, he'd been sitting there for the past hour. All he'd ordered was a glass of water. That was unusual considering he always ordered a strawberry sundae.

Just in case he'd changed his mind, she asked, "Have room for dessert after all that water?"

Adam grinned up at her and replied, "Nope. Water is pretty filling."

Lucy chuckled. “Okay, as long as I get my tip!”

She never made Adam tip her, but he did anyways. He’d give her a five dollar bill and she would use it to buy the popcorn at the movie theater.

The bell connected to the front door tinkled and Lucy looked up to greet the customer. But before she could even think of a greeting, her breath caught in her throat.

A guy in a tight graphic T-shirt walked in. Lucy could see his abs and pecs almost bursting out of it. And that face. He had a strong jaw and a perfect nose. It was straight with a little bump on it. Lucy smiled a little. She had a bump on her nose, too. The customer turned his head a little and Lucy could see a diagonal white line that stretched from the far corner of his right eye to his right nostril. Except for a few freckles on his left cheekbone, it was the only blemish on his face.

Most people wouldn’t have noticed that much about a person but she had a knack for that kind of stuff.

Lucy mustered a meager “hi” and then, he was looking at her. He had coal black eyes that peeked out from a curtain of light brown hair.

The handsome stranger smiled at her and her knees almost gave out. His teeth were perfectly straight and pearly white.

“Hi.” His deep voice sealed the deal. It was like butter. Lucy was hooked. She watched him head to the counter at the back of the restaurant and Lucy’s hopes sank. Another waitress would take care of him.

No sooner had she thought the words when Maggie, the waitress at the counter and an old family friend, approached her.

“Hey, Luce,” she yawned, apparently exhausted, “I’m gonna go out and have a smoke. Could you take care of that guy over there for me?”

Maggie pointed to the student who'd just come in and Lucy smiled. Maggie always knew what she was thinking.

"Sure, Maggie, no problem."

"Thanks, Hon." Then, she was out the door.

As Lucy approached the counter, she tried to remain calm. Finally, she reached the customer and took a deep breath. "Hi, I'm Lucy. What can I get for you tonight?"

Her voice cracked when she spoke her name. She felt the blood rush to her face and hoped the guy didn't notice either.

He didn't seem to.

"Hi, I'm Shane."

There was that miraculously deep voice again. And then, his hand was in her's.

He's touching me!

Even though Shane was only shaking her hand, Lucy felt like it was more than that. She couldn't explain why. When Shane flashed those beautiful teeth in her direction

again, she couldn't help but sense that she knew this person.

"We've never met, right?"

"I don't think so. I never forget a pretty face."

Lucy giggled. She *actually* giggled! That wasn't like her at all! She wasn't the kind of girl who *giggled* at boys!

She managed to stop herself before it became strange.

She cleared her throat. "So, can I get you something to drink?"

"Coffee's fine, thanks," Shane said with a smile.

Lucy went to get his coffee and when she came back, he had a newspaper clipping in front of him. Two girls were smiling up at her. She recognized them from a news broadcast. They had disappeared a month apart from each other. The second girl, Claire, had been missing for over two months. Both were students at the campus. The incidents definitely scared Lucy and all of the other students. She was even a little paranoid. At night, she would have nightmares about being kidnapped by an enormous, faceless man.

“Kind of morbid reading for a Saturday night, don’t you think?”

Shane looked up from the article. “Yeah, well it’s been on my mind lately. I knew both of them, *know* both of them. They’re good friends of mine.”

“Oh my gosh. I’m so sorry. Do you think they’re all right? Wherever they are?” Lucy asked.

“I hope so. Hailey is a fighter. I mean, she won’t let anyone touch her. But Claire...she doesn’t like conflict. When things get bad...she does whatever she can to make it better...even if that means giving up.”

His Adam’s apple bobbed and his eyes filled with unshed tears.

Way to go, Lucy. You made the poor guy cry.

“I shouldn’t have brought it up. I’m so sorry.”

Shane shook his head and smiled faintly. “Nah, it’s not your fault.”

There was a pause and Lucy realized that she should be doing her job.

She stuttered. “Umm...so c-can I get you anything else?”

“How about a date?”

His smile was back. Evidently, he’d recovered from two minutes ago.

Lucy couldn’t help but smile back. “Okay...When?”

“When do you get off?”

Lucy looked at the clock and turned back to Shane. “In about five minutes.”

“Cool. How about we have that date in five minutes, then?” Shane asked confidently.

Lucy beamed. Her cheeks were beginning to hurt.

“Okay, I’ll be back in five minutes.

“It’s a date.”

“It’s a date.”

Lucy tried not to squeal with excitement as she walked toward her only other customer-Adam.

He saw her wide grin and grinned back. “Glad to see I make you happy.”

“Guess who has a date tonight?”

“Us?”

“Me! Wait, what?”

“Uh...Nothing. I just thought that’s what you were calling our little uh...get-together. Anyway,” he changed the subject, “with who?”

“Don’t look now but it’s tall, dark and handsome over there!” Lucy whispered excitedly.

Adam looked and she slapped him in the arm. “I told you not to look!”

“That guy?”

“Yeah, isn’t he hot?”

Lucy had never used that word before in her life. She was usually the practical one on campus. Now, she couldn’t help herself. Shane seemed to bring out the giggly school-girl in her.

Adam gave her a funny look. "I wouldn't know but doesn't he look familiar?"

"That's what I thought but we've never met. We must've seen him around campus."

"Yeah...maybe," Adam replied, unconvinced.

"Well, anyways, would you mind if we skipped our movie tonight? I kinda told him, we'd go on our date after my shift."

Adam almost choked on his water. "Tonight? You're going out with someone you just met tonight?"

"Yeah, if it's okay with you."

"Listen Luce, this guy could be some psycho serial killer who preys on diner waitresses. I think I should come with you."

"Adam, really? You seriously wanna come with me on my date with someone else?"

Adam paused, then answered, "It's not my favorite thing to do on a Saturday night but I'll do it for you." When he caught Lucy staring at him, he asked, "What?"

"You are *not* coming with me, Adam."

"But Luc--"

"No, Adam. Do you know how awkward that would be?"

"Awkward for you or awkward for me?"

"For everyone!" Lucy burst out.

"Fine," Adam conceded. "You can go on your date *alone* and be murdered by that tall, dark, and handsome creep over there."

"He's not a murderer," Lucy assured him.

"And you know that because...?" Adam countered.

Lucy took a moment to think and found that she didn't know what to say. "I just know, okay?"

Lucy sighed. "Look, I promise to take my phone with me and call you if Shane tries to kill me. Deal?"

"His name's Shane?" Adam asked randomly.

"Yes, why?"

"No reason. It just sounds weird."

Lucy tried to lighten the mood by laughing. It didn't work. "So, do we have a deal?"

Adam sighed. "I'm not happy about it but...yeah. It's a deal." He held out his hand and she took it, beaming at him.

They went their separate ways. Adam went out the door and Lucy went back to Shane.

"Ready to go?" He asked with that sexy grin of his.

Lucy smiled back and secretly hoped it was flirtatious enough. "Yep," she replied, "I just need to clock out and we can go."

She turned to her left where a touch screen computer sat. She fished her employee card out of her apron and swiped it beside the screen in one smooth motion. "One sec." She went around the corner to her right and through a door with a sign stating:

EMPLOYEES ONLY

The room was where all the employees went on their breaks. All that was in there were a small round table and four chairs. There was a door to the right of the table that led into the kitchen. Currently, there was one other person in the room; her father.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Hi, Sweetheart.”

Since she had street clothes on underneath her regulation pink pants and pink and white shirt, she tore them off as fast as she could. When she was done, she was standing in an off-the-shoulder purple top and a pair of dark blue skinny jeans.

“Whoa. What’s your hurry?” Her dad asked curiously, “Got a hot date?”

He flashed a smile that ruffled his red mustache and beard. It was unusual for him to have a beard but he’d claimed he was too lazy to shave it. In reality, Lucy wondered if her mother had developed a thing for lumberjacks.

Lucy hurried over to where her tote bag sat on the table and swung it onto her shoulder. “Actually, yeah I do,” she replied, smiling.

“Ohh!” Jerry, her father, was surprised. Lucy always said she never had time for a boyfriend. “So you have feelings for Adam, now?”

“Adam? No, Dad. It’s this guy, Shane. You probably don’t know him.”

“Oh.” He paused. “So does this Shane fella have a last name?”

Lucy’s eyes went wide. She poked her head out the door and Shane smiled at her. “Shane, what’s your last name?”

Shane gave her a puzzled look. “McCarver. Why?”

“No reason. Be out in a sec.” She smiled and turned back to her father. “It’s McCarver. Why?”

“So I can hunt him down if he breaks your heart.” Jerry finished his glass of iced tea.

Lucy rolled her eyes and forced herself not to think about Derek, her ex-boyfriend. He had hooked up with Lucy’s blond and preppy best friend their senior year

of high school. Luckily, Adam had been there to help her through it. But no matter how hard she'd tried to forget the whole thing, deep down, Lucy still blamed herself at least a little bit.

“Dad, it’s one date. It’s not like I’m already in love with the guy.”

“Maybe not but I can tell that you like him...a lot.” Jerry smiled knowingly.

Lucy lost it. “Is it that obvious? I don’t wanna be too obvious!”

Jerry saw that he’d said the wrong thing and jumped up from his seat. “No, honey, it’s just a-a dad can tell these things about his daughter. Don’t worry. You look great.”

Lucy exhaled a sigh of relief. “Thanks, Dad. Well, I gotta go!”

She was halfway out the door when her dad called her back. “Uh, honey? I think you’re forgetting something.”

She turned back to him and he pointed to her feet. She’d forgotten to change her shoes.

“Oh, crap!” She flung the hideous things off her feet and pulled her black heels out of her bag. In the next second, they were on her feet.

“I owe you one,” Lucy said to her dad as she headed back out the door.

Jerry shouted after her. “Yes, you do!”

Chapter 2 ~ Hummers and Hacky sacks

“Meeting you was fate, becoming your friend was a choice, but falling in love with you

I had no control over.”

- Unknown

Lucy sat in Shane’s Hummer after an amazing night. They had gone to the movie that she and Adam had planned on seeing but they hadn’t made it past the lobby. They got to talking and found that they had a lot in common. They liked the same music, had the same turn-offs (and turn-ons). Lucy would have to get Adam to go see it with her next Friday.

Lucy became curious about Shane’s scar. The moonlight seemed to be focused right on it. “I hope this isn’t too personal, but uh...can I ask you about this scar?”

She raised a hand and lightly traced her first finger over the line. A little too fast and hard, Shane's hand flew up and caught Lucy's. The latter was taken a back and jumped a little.

When he spoke, Shane's voice was cold and distant, "Yeah, I don't think you can ask that."

Lucy gulped. She remembered what Adam had said in the diner. About how she didn't even know the guy. Heck, she hadn't even known his last name until after she'd agreed to go out with him. Why *had* she agreed to go out with him? Where was her head? The girl in the diner that night wasn't who she really was.

There was an eerie silence. Lucy tried to think of something to say. Shane was still holding her hand.

Shane's voice broke the silence. "Because if I told you..." He paused, still serious. Then, there was a smile on his face. "Then, I'd have to kill you."

It took Lucy a minute to realize that Shane was kidding. She laughed nervously. "You're joking."

Shane laughed and shook his hair out of his eyes. "You thought I was serious?"

Lucy laughed freely. "Yeah, I did. Sorry."

Shane smiled that perfect smile of his, teeth and all. "You're sorry? For what?"

Lucy shrugged. "I don't know. For thinking that you're some kind of serial killer or something."

She laughed again and Shane laughed with her. "No, it's natural to worry about something like that," he said, "I mean, you just met me. I don't blame you."

There was another pause but this time it wasn't creepy or awkward. Shane leaned forward and his lips brushed Lucy's. It was sweet. Derek had never kissed her

like that. He'd been more into the sloppy stuff. It wasn't romantic at all now that she thought about it.

Lucy smiled, curling her hand around Shane's. He was definitely different. She liked different.

"So, you had a nice time?" Adam asked Lucy the next day.

They were sitting at the favorite spot on Hillcrest's campus, under a huge oak tree in the middle of the courtyard. Adam was playing with his hacky sack and Lucy sat with her back against the great tree. Lucy had told Adam everything about their date apart from the kissing. What she didn't know was that Adam had seen them in the theater. He had decided to go to the movie without Lucy. He never thought he'd see her there.

"I had an amazing time! Shane's just so..."

"Tall, dark, and handsome?" Adam interjected with a grin.

Lucy slapped him in the shin and he laughed. "Are you mocking me, Adam?"

"I never said that."

"You didn't need to," Lucy replied, "I could tell."

"Sorry." He got serious. "But Lucy lis-" He was interrupted by techno music.

"Oh, that's Shane! I gave him his own ringtone!"

"Already?" Lucy didn't seem to hear him.

She fished out her cell phone from her bag. "Could you excuse me for a second?"

Adam let the hacky sack fall to the ground. Suddenly, he wasn't so interested in it anymore. "Sure. Of course."

What he really wanted to say was, “Doesn’t this guy know the rule? You never call a girl the day after the first date.” But he kept his mouth shut, picked up his hacky sack, and focused on juggling it. A couple of minutes later, Lucy slid her phone shut and jumped up from her place on the grass. She was beaming.

I used to be the only one who could make her that happy. “What’s up?”

“Shane wants to take me out tonight.”

“So soon? Why?”

“He said he felt like we had a connection...a spark.”

Adam tried to act like he was unfazed. “I just might puke.”

Lucy pushed him playfully. She was oblivious to Adam’s change in mood.

“Hey! When you find someone like that, you’ll understand.” She grabbed her bag and started to walk away.

“I’ve already found her,” Adam muttered under his breath.

Apparently, Lucy heard his voice because she turned around. “What?”

Oops.

He stuttered, “Oh. Umm...nothing! I said uh...hope you have fun!”

“Thanks! I have a feeling I will.” She winked at him and waved.

Adam smiled and waved back. Finally, Lucy turned away and he could drop his smile. This was *not* good. Level-headed Lucy falling for a guy like Shane? It was unheard of. Adam didn’t like what this new guy did to Lucy. Suddenly, she was a girl with her head in the clouds. She wasn’t thinking, just doing. When you do that, you can wind up with a broken heart.

Chapter 3~January

“The difference between friendship and love is how much you can hurt each other.”

-Ashleigh Brilliant

Three months later, Adam decided to take the plunge and confront Lucy about Shane. Things were getting out of hand. He had stayed quiet every time Shane had called her “babe” and looked at her like a wolf when it sees a plump, juicy rabbit. He hadn’t said a word when he’d been alone with Shane and he had said he was glad his family was dead or when he’d forced Lucy to ride his motorcycle without a helmet.

But now that she had said something about going on a trip to Shane’s cabin in the secluded woods, Adam had to call her up.

“Listen, Luce,” Adam said, “I need to talk to you about Shane.”

“What about him?” Lucy asked.

“I don’t think he’s the right guy for you.”

“Why? Because he knows how to have fun and I don’t?” She snapped at him.

“No, Lucy that’s not what I meant!”

“Well then, what *did* you mean, Adam?”

“He’s just so weird. Don’t you ever notice how he stares at you? It’s unnatural...creepy.”

“Did you ever stop to consider the fact that maybe he likes me...Maybe even loves me?”

“Luce, the guy’s got issues. Anyone can see that. Just the other day, he said something to me about how he was glad his mother was dead.”

Lucy was skeptical. “He said that to you?”

“Well...not in those exact words. No. But-”

Lucy sighed. “Adam, Shane and I have been going out for three months now. I think I know him better than you do.”

“Maybe you just know one side of him.”

“I gotta go, Adam. Shane’s knocking. We’ll talk later.”

“Lucy don’t go on this trip! It’s a bad idea! I know it is!”

Adam waited for Lucy’s response but there was nothing. Just static. Then, the dial tone sounded and he realized that she had hung up on him.

“I love you, Lucy.”

Three little words to make your heart jump into your throat. Those three little words can change your life forever. Lucy didn’t want her life to change, though. She wanted to stay in this stage of her life forever. She knew how impossible that was but she didn’t like to admit. Sometimes, Lucy would stay up at night worrying about her future.

Was there a way to believe in love again? Could she let herself? Why had she given her heart away so early in her life?

Lucy didn't know how to answer any of these questions. Derek had been her first love. How naive she'd been in high school. She had actually believed that there was such a thing as a fairytale ending.

Lucy and Shane were sitting in his garden outside of his cozy little cabin. They were only there for the weekend but she didn't care. She was living in the moment. Something she had never done before.

As she stared at Shane in the bright afternoon sunshine, a thought flashed through Lucy's ever-working mind. Maybe Shane was the one. Just maybe.

April

"Guess what today is!" Lucy ran up to Shane and hugged him. He swooped her off her feet and twirled in circles.

"Our six month anniversary?"

Lucy wasn't expecting him to remember. "You remembered!" She kissed Shane as if to reward him.

"Of course I did," he replied. "You didn't think I could forget the greatest day of my life, did you?"

Lucy pushed him playfully.

Shane took both of Lucy's hands. "What do you say we go up to the lake again? It's so beautiful in the spring."

Lucy beamed at him. She loved the lake. It was like a paradise that no one knew about except for her and Shane...and Adam but that was only because she'd told him about it.

"I would love to go to the lake with you again."

Shane grinned back at her. "Great. So just pack up your things, about enough for three or four days, and we'll get going. I'll meet you back here. I still have to pack, too."

Lucy was confused. "Wait. You mean we're going today?"

"Yep!" Shane grinned again and then went to a serious tone. "Why? Is that a problem?"

Lucy jumped to reassure him. "No! Not a problem at all! You just surprised me, that's all."

Shane's smile was back. "Good. That was my goal. So whaddaya say, Lucy?"

"I say definitely!"

In the diner across the street, Adam sat with his back to the counter. He was watching the two very closely. He didn't really know why. Or maybe he did.

Adam was still hooked on Lucy. That wasn't the only reason why he was watching the couple, though. He was also watching because of Shane. There was something vaguely familiar about his face. He'd seen it somewhere before.

If only he could remember.

A voice interrupted his thoughts. "She's a lucky girl."

Adam glanced over his shoulder at where the voice had come from. A blond girl that he recognized as a senior was standing there and gazing longingly at Shane. She

had on way too much makeup as always. As a result, she had nickname that everyone knew her by.

The waitress was Dolly Holly because her layers of makeup made her look like a doll.

Adam turned back to his view of the couple outside the diner. Shane was tickling Lucy and she was laughing joyfully. Adam knew the right thing to do was to be happy that she was happy. Still, he couldn't help himself.

“No,” he said to Holly, “He’s the lucky one.”

Lucy stood in front of her closet of neatly hung clothes. She'd been home for an hour and she still hadn't packed anything except for her essentials (chapstick, toothbrush, etc.). Now, she had a half hour to pack everything else. After standing there for another five minutes, Lucy decided to just start pulling things off the rack and throwing them into her suitcase.

As she was reaching for her last outfit, there was a knock on the door.

“Come in.” Lucy hurriedly stashed the last article of clothing in her bag. She didn't want Shane to know how unprepared she was.

She didn't have to worry, though. It was only Adam.

Lucy sighed. “What now, Adam? Do you think that Shane is some alien who's come to suck our brains out?”

“Lucy, just hear me out for one second.” Adam had come into the room and was now standing right in front of her.

Lucy zipped her suitcase shut and then remembered that her bag of toiletries was still sitting on the sink in the bathroom.

She headed back to it. “No. I think you should just go.” She snagged the plastic bag off the counter and started to turn back to the doorway. She ended up running right into Adam. He had been right behind her.

“Move.”

Adam didn’t budge. “Not until you listen to what I have to say.”

It had been a long time since Lucy had been this close to Adam. Now that she was, she could smell his familiar scent of pine and mint. His arms seemed more muscular than usual and his chin was surprisingly unshaven. His breath was hot and sweet as he stared at her, not knowing what to do. His dazzling green eyes scanned her face, trying to read her thoughts. She got a flash of what it would be like to kiss him.

Lucy mentally shook herself. This was *Adam!* This was the boy who never did anything spontaneous or out of the ordinary. This was the boy who had been her friend for two years. And most importantly, this was the boy that she’d *never* had feelings for in those two years.

Lucy managed to get two words out. “Say it.”

“Shane’s a bad seed.”

Lucy rolled her eyes but Adam pushed on. “Look at the facts. He never shows up on time for anything-“

Lucy pushed past him. “He’s always on time for our dates.”

“He was happy his family died-”

Lucy whirled around to glare into his eyes. “He was abused, Adam!”

“He...was?”

Lucy sighed. “Yes, Adam. He was. Are you happy now? Do you find pleasure in the fact that this guy that you hate so much had a horrible childhood?”

“Lucy, how was I supposed to know? I mean, the guy is about as open as an airtight safe!”

Lucy finished stuffing her bag of toiletries into her suitcase, zipped it shut, and sat down on her bed. She motioned for Adam to sit next to her. He did.

When Lucy spoke again, her voice came out calm, quiet, and a little nervous.

“Can I ask you a question?”

Adam’s voice paralleled her voice. “Anything.”

“Why...” She was going to ask something but shook her head and rephrased the question. She chose her words carefully. “Why are you so weird when it comes to talking about Shane?”

Now, it was Adam’s turn to sigh. He rubbed the back of his neck, obviously uncomfortable with the new topic of conversation.

“Am I?” He said just to stall her.

“Uh, yeah, you kind of are.”

“No, I’m not.”

Lucy just gave Adam a look that said, “You can’t fool me.”

Adam knew that he was backed into a corner with no way out so he decided to answer her question. “Okay, maybe a little bit, but that’s only because I’m your best friend and I’m a guy. Guy friends have to be protective of their girlfriends. Um I mean, friends who are girls.”

Lucy persisted. “Adam, is there something you’re not telling me?”

Adam grew nervous. He subconsciously wiped his sweaty palms on his jean-clad legs. “What? No. What would I not tell you?”

There was an awkward pause (awkward for Adam) and then Lucy asked the question she had wanted to ask for a very long time.

“Adam, are you gay?”

That was *definitely* not the question Adam thought she would ask him. It was completely unexpected and for a moment, he didn’t know how to react.

Lucy moved her hand from her lap to Adam’s knee. It would’ve been nice under different circumstances. He couldn’t believe that Lucy, his best friend, could ever think that he was gay.

Lucy went on. “It’s okay if you are. I won’t think any differently of you.”

He jumped up from the bed. “WHAT!?” Adam could finally speak again.

“Luce, do you seriously think I’m gay?”

Lucy narrowed her eyes. “Why? You’re not?”

Adam was hurt that she didn’t know him well enough to determine if he was straight or not. “Of course I’m not! I mean, I have no problem with...homosexuals but that doesn’t mean I *am* one!”

Lucy covered her mouth with both hands and stood up so that Adam wasn’t towering over her as much. She lowered her hands, embarrassed. “Oh, Adam. I’m so sorry. I thought-”

“Yeah, I know what you thought, Lucy.” He turned to leave. “I gotta go.”

“Wait!” Lucy called after him but he was already gone. He had closed the door behind him.

Lucy flopped back onto her bed, arms and legs spread out in a defeated pose. It seemed like as soon as she hit the bed, there was a knock on the door.

Lucy sprang back up on her feet so fast she almost gave herself whiplash. Stars danced in front of her eyes and she felt dizzy. A second later, the moment passed and she was able to run to the door and fling it open. All the while, she was thinking about how happy she was that Adam had decided to come back and hear her out.

When the door opened far enough for Lucy to make out who was there, she discovered that it wasn't Adam.

It was Shane.

He was standing there with his usual carefree grin on his face. One dark green suitcase was propped up-right on the wall behind him.

“Ready to go?”

Lucy was silent. She was speechless and pale and she just wanted to curl up in bed. She didn't feel up to a trip to the cabin which was saying a lot since she was absolutely *in love* with the cabin.

Of course, Shane noticed something wrong with her instantly. His smile and the twinkle in his eyes fell from his face and were replaced with a worried expression. He stepped into Lucy's dorm and put his hands on her shoulders.

“What's wrong, sweetie? Are you sick?”

Lucy slowly shook her head. “I'm fine. It's just...” She trailed off, not wanting to finish her sentence.

Instead, she pulled Shane closer and squeezed him tight. She felt tears in her eyes and a lump of sobs building in her throat. But she didn't want to cry in front of Shane. *Especially*, if it was over another guy. So she held it back.

“Just what?”

They pulled away from each other.

“It’s nothing. I’ll get over it.”

But Adam probably won’t. She finished the sentence in her head.

Shane nodded, accepting her answer. “I saw Adam in the stairwell. He looked pretty mad.”

Lucy decided to fess up, knowing that she was a terrible liar anyway. She looked down at her feet. “We had a fight...sort of. I don’t know what to call it...I guess it was a misunderstanding.”

Lucy paused and looked up into Shane’s deep black eyes. He was too kind to actually ask her to go on with her story but she could tell by his expression that he wanted her to.

The truth was, it was a relief when she started to spill out the words she had been holding back. It was kind of like a therapy session and Shane was the psychiatrist. Lucy kept talking until she was done. She included everything except for her momentary yearn for Adam’s lips on her own. *That was just a moment of insanity*, she said to herself. Her nose had gotten in the way of her heart which confused her brain. She hated the fact that she was a sucker for the scent of pine and mint. She would just have to build up an immunity to it...somehow.

Shane listened intently throughout her entire rant and when she was done, he offered her a little piece of advice. “I think you guys should just create some space between each other. Adam probably just needs some time to cool off. You know? I’m sure he’ll be ready to talk to you in a few days.”

Lucy nodded. “You’re probably right.”

“What better way to get away from things than by going up to the cabin with me?”

It didn't take Lucy long to make a decision. At least the cabin could take her mind off of things...hopefully.

“Okay, let's go.”

Chapter 4 ~ Fooled

“Oh, innocent victims of Cupid,
Remember this terse little verse;
to let a fool kiss you is stupid,
To let a kiss fool you is worse.”

- E. Y. Harburg

What the...?

Why is it so dark in here?

Where am I?

Lucy had waked to a terrible headache and pitch-black everywhere she looked. She was lying on a cold, dirt floor and there was a faint light trickling into the room from above. She looked up. There was an opening in the ceiling more than twenty feet up. Suddenly, the events of last night came flooding back.

Lucy had been at Shane's cabin when he said that he wanted to show her something in the shed outside. He'd blindfolded her and led her outside the cabin. She remembered that Shane was silent as they crossed his yard and she'd thought it was weird. She was used to Shane's carefree tone of voice that he seemed to always have. *He's just really excited about this thing he wants to show me*, Lucy had thought, brushing off a sudden chill.

Suddenly, they stopped and Lucy guessed that they had reached the shed. Shane immediately let go of her hands and a second later, there was a loud CREAK. The silence wore on. Lucy was getting frustrated now. She'd always hated surprises and this time wasn't any different.

"Shane?" She'd called nervously.

No answer.

"Shane?"

Still nothing. He must've slipped inside the shed.

"Shane, if you don't say something, I'm leaving," Lucy had said, giving it one last try.

When another few seconds had ticked by and there was still no reply, she had heaved an exasperated sigh and had started to turn back to the house, removing her blindfold.

"Bye, Shane," she'd called out.

A second later, a voice had called out, "Wait, Lucy. I'm sorry. That was stupid of me. Will you follow me now?"

Lucy had eyed him suspiciously. "No more tricks?"

Shane shook his head, grinning wide, "No more tricks."

Somehow, Lucy didn't believe him but his looks and smile were a lethal combination. She couldn't help but smile back and forgive him.

"Okay," Lucy said, "Show me."

Shane nodded to the shed. "Follow me."

This time, Shane waited for Lucy to get to the shed door. He'd said, "After you," and Lucy had cautiously crept into the shed.

At first, it was dark but then Shane pulled on a string hanging in front of him and light flooded the room.

The shed was bigger than it appeared to be from the outside. It was completely empty except for an old well. It was the largest well that Lucy had ever seen and was in the shape of a square, which was weird. The stones surrounding the well looked fairly new. Above the well, wires that ran into the ground suspended a large metal sheet. A makeshift dumbwaiter.

He must have built this himself, Lucy realized. She was confused, though. She asked aloud, "But what's it for?"

A snakelike voice answered her and she jumped when hearing it. "You'll find out soon," it had said.

Now, she was really confused. "What?"

Lucy had turned to see a shovel coming down on her head. She never even had time to scream.

"Was that really just last night?" Lucy wondered aloud, rubbing her throbbing head.

An unexpected voice made her jump. “Yes, it was,” it said, “Although, time doesn’t matter down here.”

Lucy’s eyes were gradually adjusting to the darkness and she could now make out a figure sitting against a wall to her right.

“Down here?” Lucy asked. “What do you mean ‘down here’?”

“You’re in the well you saw when you came into the shed,” the voice replied.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Hailey,” said the voice, “and this is Claire.”

Lucy looked around her and saw that there was indeed another person in the room.

Another voice joined the two and Lucy guessed that it was Claire’s. It was light and airy, the opposite of Hailey’s withdrawn monotone.

“Hello, you must be Lucy,” Claire said politely.

Lucy was taken aback. “How do you know my name?”

It was Hailey who answered her. “He tells us things before he goes out everyday. Things he’s going to do...how he’ll do them...”

Lucy couldn’t keep up. “He?”

“My love,” Claire replied, “My one and only. The man I’m destined to be with.”

Lucy looked at Hailey with an expression that said, “Is she alright?”

In the darkness, Hailey couldn’t have possibly seen the expression but she took Lucy’s silence to mean that she was confused.

Hailey explained, “You’ll have to excuse Claire. She has a classic case of Stockholm syndrome. She’s in love with her captor...Plus, I think he knocked a screw loose when he hit her on the head however many months ago.”

“My screws are in tight, thank you very much!” Claire shouted at her.

Lucy ignored her. “Let me guess, psychology major?”

Hailey sighed. “Yep. But it doesn’t matter now. He’s got us down here forever, now...trapped like rats...”

“Okay, you guys keep saying ‘he’ this and ‘he’ that. But who is ‘he’?” Lucy asked, frustrated.

Hailey replied, “The guy who brought you here...The guy who made you fall passionately in love with him...who made us *all* fall in love with him...Shane McCarver.”

“Shane?” Lucy was shocked. “No, he wouldn’t do this to us. I know him!”

“You *thought* you knew him,” Hailey corrected her. “We all thought we knew him but apparently, we were wrong,” She made a gesture with her arms to prove her point. “Look where trusting that jerk got us!”

“He’s not a jerk!” Claire piped up.

“Shut up, Claire!” Hailey shouted back.

Lucy began pacing frantically. “You guys have been here for at least six months now! Does that mean *I’m* going to be here for that long? I can’t take this! I’m gonna go nuts in here!” She tilted her head up to look at the square opening. “Hey, Shane! Get me out of here, you jerk! I swear I’ll-”

Hailey interrupted her. “Lucy! Calm down! It’s no use.”

Finally, Lucy gave in to her throbbing headache and sank back onto her spot at the center of the room.

Several minutes later, Hailey said, “You wouldn’t happen to know where this cabin is located, would you?”

Lucy shook her head. “He blindfolded me both times he brought me down here.”

“*Both* times? What do you mean ‘both times?’”

“Shane brought me here twice. Once for our three month anniversary and now for our six month.”

“Wow. He never did that for me.”

“Or me,” Claire piped up sadly.

There was another quiet moment.

Lucy said aloud, “I guess Adam was the safer bet.” She smiled bitterly, realizing how much she’d probably hurt that poor guy.

“*Adam? Adam Bennett?*” Hailey asked, curiously.

“Yeah,” Lucy replied, “Why?”

Hailey laughed unexpectedly. It was certainly different than her usual tone. “Of course! You’re Adam’s Lucy! I should’ve known!”

For what felt like the tenth time that day, Lucy was confused, “Wait. What are you talking about?”

Hailey got herself back together and explained, “Sorry, I was just shocked. It’s a small world. Adam was in my English class. He sat next to me and occasionally we’d get to talking. He was writing a story about you. Did you know that?”

Lucy was taken aback for a second time. “About *me*? Why me?”

Hailey laughed again. “You really don’t know how much he’s hung up on you, do you?”

She put her head in her hands. “I am such a jerk!”

Tears sprang to her eyes. Why couldn't she have said no to Shane that night at the diner? Why did she have to stand up the one guy who truly cared about her? The tears were rolling down Lucy's cheeks now. She couldn't hold them back.

Suddenly, Hailey and Claire were at her side with their arms around her. It was strange how terrifying situations could bring people together. Lucy had only just met Hailey and Claire but she felt like they were already her best friends.

"Whatever you did, I'm sure it's not as bad as you think it is," Claire reassured her.

Lucy laughed humorously, "Oh, it's pretty bad."

Hailey smiled a little. In the faint light of the well's opening, Lucy could finally see part of what she looked like. She was dark-skinned and her hair puffed out in curls. Her monotone voice definitely didn't match her face.

Hailey said, "Well, just know that nothing could be worse than what this monster is doing to us."

Lucy waited for Claire to defend her "love" but instead, she was looking up at the opening of the well and smiling lazily. Lucy noticed that Claire had blond hair dirtied by the filth of the well. She had brown eyes and a scar on the left side of her neck.

"What is it?" Lucy asked.

"He's coming" was all Claire said. The other two stiffened at her words and went quiet. Sure enough, there was the sound of footsteps as someone made their way to the well. Then, what felt like hours later, there was the sound of machinery and Lucy realized that the sheet she'd seen last night was being lowered into the well.

The question was who (or what) was on it?

The seconds (or maybe minutes) ticked by and the only noises came from the machine and Claire's excited giggles.

Chapter 5~Where's Lucy?

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

- Mark Twain

By the next week, Adam was fed up with the constant pull on his heart caused by Lucy. He'd barely gotten any sleep the night before. Something was definitely wrong with this Shane guy.

Adam decided to head over to Devroe Hall that morning and confront Lucy about it. He just hoped she'd listen to him. And maybe...just maybe, he'd finally tell her of his feelings for her. Adam checked his watch.

8:30AM

It was a Sunday and he doubted that Lucy would even be awake this early but he didn't care.

Who cares if I wake her up? She called me gay. We'd be even.

With that thought in his mind, Adam headed out. He crossed the grassy clearing with the pond he loved to write by and strode past the hung-over freshmen on the benches. It was a three-minute walk from Desmond to Devroe Hall but Adam's determined pace got him there in half the time. He didn't hesitate when he pushed through the front doors and didn't think of anything but his speech to Lucy on the way to her room. He climbed the stairs to the second floor and went right to room 208. All that mattered was that Lucy would hear him out.

Adam didn't pause to gather his thoughts at the door. He knocked on it as soon as he reached it. He was practically bouncing in anticipation.

Adam waited for a minute and, hearing nothing, knocked again. This time harder and sharper.

Come on. Come on. Come on!

Finally he heard someone stirring. Then, a frustrated shout.

"Go away! I'm trying to sleep!"

That was *definitely* not Lucy's voice.

Roommate, thought Adam.

"I'm sorry to bother you," he shouted through the door, "But I need to talk to Lucy."

When there was no response, Adam added, "It's important."

He listened for a reply. There was a soft *thud* and then scuffling before a lock was removed and the door was swung open.

Lucy's roommate, Violet, stood bleary-eyed in the doorway. She didn't look happy. Her jet-black hair covered one eye and, surprisingly, her lip ring was already in. "Ugh, it's you."

Adam had expected to hear this greeting from her. When they'd first met, Violet instantly disliked him. He had no idea why and had never bothered to ask.

He replied, "Good morning to you, too."

Violet put a hand on her hip. "Well?"

"Is Lucy here?"

"No."

She started to close the door on him but Adam was too fast for her. He stuck his foot out and stopped the door.

"She's not?" Adam persisted, "Are you sure?"

Violet made an annoyed sound and retorted, "Not unless she snuck in last night without me knowing and slept under her bed." She rolled her eyes.

Adam peered over her head and saw that Lucy's bed was still made.

Strange.

He sighed and directed his gaze back to Violet. "Okay then do you know when she'll be back?"

"No," Violet replied harshly, "Now get lost."

She muttered something under her breath as she closed the door in his face.

Adam thought about knocking again but decided against it. He'd come back tomorrow.

He hated to wait another day but he could do it. Besides, what other choice did he have? It wasn't like Violet would let him wait for Lucy in their dorm. Adam wasn't sure he'd want to endure that kind of torture anyway.

Reluctantly, he turned away from room 208 and headed back to Desmond Hall. He was two steps from the building when an idea flashed into his head. Adam mentally kicked himself for not thinking of it before. Lucy could be working the early shift at the diner.

Of course! Adam turned around immediately and headed for the diner.

If she's not there, I'll just go back to her dorm and wait for her, whether Violet likes it or not.

Ten minutes later, Adam exited the diner feeling a mixture of disappointment, bewilderment, and finally, fear.

He had walked into the restaurant to find utter chaos. He could barely squeeze past the customers waiting for tables. When he did, they all said things like: “Hey!”, “You can’t do that!”, “Back ‘a da line, bub!” That was said by a college student from Brooklyn.

Adam was about to explain to the enraged and hungry customers that he wasn’t there to eat. Jerry Campbell beat him to it, though. He came out and calmed the rowdy group and then he motioned for Adam to follow him back to the Employee’s Room. When they were through the door, Jerry turned to Adam. “I am going to kill your friend.”

Adam knew whenever Jerry was mad at someone because he referred to them as something other than his relatives or their names. Plus, Jerry’s face was a scarlet red and he wasn’t sporting his usual welcoming smile.

Adam was puzzled. He knew right away that Lucy wasn’t at the diner and probably hadn’t shown up for her shift. Lucy never made her dad mad, at least, not at work.

“She never showed up for her shift! Because of her, the other waitresses have got to suffer for another hour until I can call someone else in to take her place! Unbelievable! So whenever you visit her room, do me a favor and yell at her for me, will you?”

“See, that’s the thing, sir. I went to Lucy’s dorm right before I came here. She wasn’t there. Just Violet.”

Now, Jerry’s face wasn’t as red as a cherry. All the color had drained out of his face and he was as white as a sheet. “You haven’t seen her?”

Adam shook his head. “Not since last Saturday afternoon before her trip with Shane. I haven’t heard from her either.”

Surprisingly, Jerry became even paler. “I haven’t been able to reach her since then. I figured either her phone died on her or she was with Shane. Now, I . . . Adam, call the cops.”

Adam obeyed. He whipped out his phone and dialed the number given to him. Then, he handed his cell to Jerry. The other end answered after three rings and the woman identified herself as Janet.

“Hello, Janet. My name is Jerry Campbell. My daughter is missing. She hasn’t been seen since last Saturday. She went away on a trip with her boyfriend and hasn’t called since.”

Janet spoke up. “Have you talked to the boyfriend, Mr. Campbell?”

“No, I haven’t, but I know my daughter and she wouldn’t just go running off with some...some fella just ‘cause she had a crush on ‘im.”

As he talked, a little bit of color returned to his cheeks. Adam could hear Janet on the other end of the line.

“Sir, I’m sorry but you’ll have to call back in twenty-four hours since there is a possibility that your daughter, Ms. . . .”

“Lucy. Her name is Lucy.”

“There is a possibility that Lucy could have run off with her boyfriend so I would advise you to either call her or this boyfriend of her’s and talk to them about it.”

Now, Mr. Campbell’s face was nothing short of a fully ripened cherry tomato and Adam was beginning to cringe at the thought of what he would say next. Jerry was the nicest man you could ever hope to meet but if you would get in the way of his duty as a parent, you would suffer the consequences. Janet was suffering at the exact moment Adam was thinking this.

“Now listen here, Janet. Two girls are already missing from Hillcrest and now my daughter’s gone missing. I advise you to get someone down to the Hillcrest University’s campus or there will be hell to pay. Got that?”

Janet was flustered. Adam heard the shakiness in her voice and felt sorry for her. “I’ll see what I can do, sir.”

“You do that. Goodbye.” Without waiting for Janet’s reply, Jerry angrily flipped the cell phone closed.

Adam didn’t know what to say so he said the only thing that seemed appropriate. “Are you okay, Mr. Campbell?”

“No, I’m not, son. But thanks for caring.”

Adam nodded, relieved that he didn’t get chewed out, too. “So what should we do?”

Jerry put a hand on his shoulder. “Why don’t you go back to Lucy’s dorm and wait there for her. I’ll call her phone a few more times and go wait for someone down at the campus. I’ll call her mother, too.”

He put his hand over his eyes.

“Sir, are you okay?”

“I will be once I find my Lucy.”

Chapter 6 ~ Shane's Love Letter

"Big Brother is watching."

-1984

The grind of the machinery assaulted Lucy's ears as the metal sheet drew nearer. It descended for what seemed like hours. As Lucy watched it, she racked her brain for a plan. It took a moment for her to realize that the answer was right in front of her face.

"Wait a minute. Why don't we attack Shane and jump on the dumbwaiter?"

She expected Hailey to tell her she was a genius but instead, she shook her head.

"Shane doesn't come down here anymore."

"That's even better! It'll be easier!"

"Already tried it. Didn't work."

Lucy was confused. "Why didn't it work?"

“Say cheese.” Hailey pointed to a spot above her right shoulder. “We’re on candid camera.”

Lucy raised her eyes and saw a flashing red light piercing the never-ending darkness. Her spirits sank once again.

“Say hello to Prisoner Cam,” Hailey’s monotone rang out.

Lucy wanted to ask her more but the metal plank clanged to a stop right in front of her. Now, Hailey was on the opposite side of it and Claire stood to Lucy’s left.

The only items on the dumbwaiter were three glasses of water, a pre-sliced loaf of white bread, and a folded note that was labeled “For Lucy.”

“Aww.” Claire was disappointed to find that Shane wasn’t there.

“Coward,” Hailey spat.

The two snatched up a slice of bread and Hailey pointed to the note.

“I wonder what that’s all about.”

“Only one way to find out,” Lucy replied, taking the note and unfolding it.

“Lovely Lucy” was the greeting. Lucy rolled her eyes. Flattery would get him nowhere at this point. She continued reading.

I think it’s about time I told you about what I avoided before. My scar. This is how I got it. . .

My mother (let’s call her Mary) never loved me. Or at least, when my father left, she stopped. I was three years old then and I guess from then on I served as nothing but a constant reminder of him. I could see it in her eyes. I could feel it in her touch. You see, I looked just like him. I assume that I still do. It was like every time I tried to make her proud of me, it just wasn’t good enough. All I wanted was her love

but she never gave it to me. At least, not freely. She felt like she had to pretend in front of me. Over the years, I had searched for ways to earn her love.

Finally, when I was seventeen years old, I met Jason. He told me of a brilliant plan he had been acting on and encouraged me to join him. Jason had managed to get a beautiful girl to fall in love with him and he loved her back. He wanted to make sure that their love never died like he had seen others' die. So he took her to his secret hiding place and hid her there.

It was very poetic if I do say so myself.

At this point, Lucy rolled her eyes. She knew where this “love letter” was going. Still, she kept reading even though she didn’t want to. It was weird and maddening. Sure enough, the next words of the message were:

So I decided to take our meeting as a sign from the universe or fate or whatever you want to call it. In a few months, this amazing girl finally fell for me the way I had fallen for her. She came with me to an abandoned house not far from my own. It was our special place. And she was mine for the winter. But when spring came, all she did was try to leave me. She didn’t eat or drink and I was getting worried. Then, one day when I took her upstairs where I had set up our own special date night, she tried to leave again. She ran out of the back door when I had turned my back to her. She had told me that she loved me and she still ran away. Like I was some monster. In fact, that was exactly what she called me: a monster. It hurt. It hurt like a stab in the heart.

I couldn’t let Danielle leave me so I did what I had to do. I followed her outside and she turned around and ran a steak knife down my left cheek. A knife! Can you imagine the pain I was in, Luce? I didn’t want to, but I had to take her life. She didn’t love me anymore and it was time to move on. My mother knew what I had done that

night. I don't know how but she knew. I was hoping that she would be proud of me and I expected her to start loving me like she should have loved me all her life. But no, she just looked at me like Danielle had looked at me. I hated that look. I despised that look. So I had to get rid of her, too.

Oops. Silly me. I've been rambling, haven't I? I guess that means I've come to the end of my story. I'll talk to you later. Perhaps, on a date night of our own?

I love you,

Xoxo, Your Shane

Lucy wanted to gag. The tone of the letter was so sickly sweet (the term “sweet” used very loosely) and Lucy couldn't stand it. To get her mind off of things, she began to sing a song she remembered from a happier time. Her mom, dad, and older sister Julie had gotten her addicted to it in the past year. It was kind of old-timey but she liked it.

Blue skies, nothin' but blue skies, baby

Blue skies, nothin' but blue skies for you and me

Lucy repeated the lines for a little, dreaming about blue skies, puffy clouds, and free birds. Eventually, Hailey and Claire caught on to the lyrics and joined in.

Blue skies, nothin' but blue skies, baby

Nothin' but blue skies for you and me

It was a party, a pity party made up of three young women in the same dilemma, though one of them didn't seem to realize it. Their melancholy tone made the song all the more ironic.

Lucy let her thoughts wander as Hailey and Claire began to drift off to sleep and the song faded away. She knew that Shane was watching her right now and wondered if

his little “candid camera” could record audio as well. She had a feeling that it didn’t but just in case, Lucy spoke to her captor for the first time since her capture.

“If you’re serious about this “date night” concept, you better hide the steak knives.”

Lucy smiled bitterly and made sure that she gazed straight at the tiny red speck of light that still persistently penetrated the darkness of the well. Then, she slid down onto the cold floor of the pit, curled up into a ball, and fell asleep. This was not easy to do and was accomplished only after several restless tosses and turns.

The last thing she thought of before she finally found sleep was Adam and how they had fought the last time she had seen him. That wasn’t how Lucy wanted to be remembered.

Remembered.

When someone was remembered it meant that they were dead. Lucy didn’t like the thought of dying in a crumbling, insect-ridden, makeshift well and not being able to apologize to Adam or say goodbye to her family.

Right then and there, Lucy made a promise to herself that she wouldn’t die down in the sorry excuse for a guestroom. She would find a way out if it was the last thing she did.

He turned away from his surveillance monitor, fighting the urge to sneak down into the girls’ room to see Lucy. He wanted so badly to ask her how she liked it here with him, but he knew that he shouldn’t.

To get his mind off the prospect of seeing Lucy face-to-face, he took out a piece of pink paper and began writing. He kept writing until he thought he had included

everything in the letter. Then, he scanned it over, wanting it to be perfect. The entire process took about forty-five minutes. He had carried out this task many times before but now that he was addressing three people, it took more time to write for them.

He hoped they liked it. No. He hoped they loved it. He began to stand up but then caught sight of an ink smudge on the bottom left-hand corner of the page. He couldn't give it to them *dirty*. Now, could he? No. He decided that he could not and would not send the note down when it was ridden with blotches. He sat down again and re-wrote the message. Then, he scanned it over one more time.

Happy with his second message, he laid it out for the next morning and went to bed.

Chapter 7 ~ Back to Devroe

“He who cheats never deserved the satisfaction of winning.”

-Brianna Toth

Adam went straight to Devroe Hall after leaving Jerry’s Diner. He forced himself to create positive endings to this horrible day. His mom had always said that if you were optimistic, good karma would be drawn to you.

Don’t think about mom. It’s in the past now. It’s over.

Every time he played his scenario out in his head, the result was the same. Lucy would open the door to find him there. She would hear him out and then run into his arms and forget about Shane.

That was good.

Adam arrived at room 208 and was just about to knock when Violet opened the door. This time, she was fully dressed and not as bleary-eyed.

Adam was caught off-guard at her sudden appearance and uttered an awkward “hi”.

“Ugh, you again?” She didn’t wait for a reply. “I’m gonna be late. Move out of my way.”

Adam didn’t budge from his place in the hall. “Is Lucy in there?”

Violet rolled her eyes. “What is your obsession with Lucy? Are you stalking her or something?”

Adam ignored her questions and asked one of his own. “When did you see her last?”

Violet sighed, “I don’t know. Saturday morning?”

“This Saturday or last Saturday?”

“Last Saturday! Duh, she was with Shane yesterday so obviously I wouldn’t have seen her.” Violet rolled her eyes.

“Are you sure?”

Violet’s hand was back on her hip. “Yes, I’m sure. Now, could you move?”

Having nothing else to say, Adam moved out of her way. Violet immediately took off down the hall, not bothering to offer a “goodbye” or close the door behind her.

Suddenly, an idea popped into Adam’s head. Without a second thought, he pushed the door open a little more and stepped inside the room. He closed it behind him. It was clear which side of the dorm was Lucy’s and which was Violet’s.

Violet’s side was accentuated in deep purples and blacks. Her walls were covered in posters of heavy metal bands and vampire movies.

Lucy’s side was the complete opposite of Violet’s. Her walls and bedspread were covered in bright pastels. On one wall hung a bulletin board covered with pictures

of her friends and family. On another there was a banner that advertised Lucy's name with bright flowers bordering it.

Adam crossed the room to where Lucy's bulletin board hung. There, right in the center of the collage of photos, was a picture of Shane McCarver. His arm was around Lucy and she was kissing his cheek. The sight sickened Adam.

Selfishly, he flipped the photo over so that he didn't have to look at Shane's face. Adam let himself browse the collection of photos for a few more minutes. He found one of Violet with her hand covering her face (it seemed to be the only photo of her) and even one of himself. Adam was surprised to see it. He hadn't even known the picture existed.

The photo was taken when he didn't think anyone was looking. He was sitting by the pond and dreaming up ideas for his next story. Or that was what he had told Lucy he was doing. In reality, he had been drawing her. Capturing her true beauty from a distance. In the photo, his face was scrunched up the way it always was when he was focused on something and wanted to get it right. His tongue was also out just a tiny bit. Adam smiled, pleased to have a place on Lucy's wall.

He didn't dwell long, though. His eyes wandered back to the overturned picture of Shane. He remembered that he had a mission. Adam looked around for clues as to where Lucy might be.

Finally, Adam saw an opportunity.

Lucy's cell phone.

Oh, crap. She didn't take her phone?

He grabbed it off the desk and flipped it open.

The screen read:

12 new text messages.

3 new voicemails.

Adam hesitated. Did this count as an invasion of privacy? He didn't answer his own question because he knew that it was. But he didn't go through all this to come away with nothing.

Adam quickly went through the unread texts and unanswered voicemails. From the texts, there were two from that jock that was always trying to hook up with Lucy, three from her mom, five from Jerry, and two from Adam himself. The latter had been sent last night in a moment of desperation. The three voicemails were from Lucy's mother (who wanted her daughter to call her), Jerry, and Violet informing her roommate that her "annoying friend" had been creeping around Devroe Hall in search of her.

Adam scanned through the phone and found that the very first missed text was dated last Saturday at 4PM.

That's weird, Adam thought, Why would Lucy leave her phone in her dorm all this time? And more importantly, why isn't she back yet?

Checking the door to make sure that no one was coming, he quickly scrolled through her last read message. It was from Shane saying that he couldn't wait to bring her to their "special place" for a week of their own.

Adam didn't know what that meant but he knew that the person with all the answers was the one who was seen with Lucy right before her disappearance.

Shane McCarver.

Adam hated the thought of having to hold an actual conversation with the guy but if he wanted answers, he figured he didn't really have a choice.

A thought flashed through Adam's head about someone kidnapping Lucy but he brushed it aside. He couldn't consider that situation, not yet. He would talk to Shane first. There could be a rational explanation to this seemingly strange situation.

An hour later, Adam waited by the pond before class. He and Shane were in the same Creative Writing class and the English building was right across from the pond. It was the perfect place to find Shane and question him on the spot.

Adam didn't have to wait long. A minute later, his target was in sight. But Shane wasn't alone. He was with Holly. They sat down on the bench across from Adam on the other side of the pond. Adam stood, ready to start his interrogation, but as he did, Shane and the blond started making out.

Adam was shocked but he also silently scolded himself for not considering the fact that Shane was a player. He should've known. He fought the urge to go over to Shane and break his nose. He lost the battle and walked away with bruised knuckles.

He'd go to the office and tell the cops about what he'd seen. They would have to listen to him.

Chapter 8~Barbies and Eggs

“Those with the greatest awareness have the greatest nightmares.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

Lucy woke to the smell of fresh-cooked bacon and eggs with a hint of sautéed onions and green peppers. There was also the faint aroma of freshly brewed coffee. Her nose was in Heaven. She opened her eyes and stretched. Her bright, sunny, room greeted her. Not her dorm room back at Hillcrest University but her *real* bedroom, her old room back in Ohio.

Lucy smiled to herself.

She was safe at home. The well, Hailey, Claire, and the letter were all in her imagination. And Shane did *not* knock her unconscious. He did *not* throw her into a dirty and musty smelling makeshift well. He did *not* send her a creepy love letter. Lucy sighed in relief and jumped out of bed. She actually *jumped!* She was so happy. Everything was right in the world.

Lucy ran down the hall to her older sister, Julie's room. It was empty. She's probably still at college, Lucy thought to herself. She felt a twinge of sadness. She barely ever got to see Julie anymore. They went to colleges that were so far apart from each other.

Lucy allowed herself one last glance into the old and poorly used room and then skipped off down the rest of the hallway. She turned a corner to her right and found herself at the long marble staircase she remembered so well. She used to slide down the railing when she was a child. She even tried sending her Barbie dolls down before her. She had soon found out that the Barbies couldn't slide down on their own. They would fall to the side and plummet to the floor below which was a good thirty feet drop.

When that would happen, a six-year-old Lucy would run down the stairs and play doctor. She would nurse the dolls back to health and advise them to stop their reckless behavior.

Lucy looked back on those days as she ran her hand over the smooth, shiny black banister. She knew how reckless she had been, now. The drop from the railing to the hard, wooden floor below was a long one.

Lucy glanced down at the carpeted floor and was surprised to find that one of her Barbie dolls was lying there. Lucy picked it up and inspected the little doll further. It was a Hollywood Hair Barbie, her absolute favorite one in her extensive collection.

The doll had long golden hair that went down to her plastic knees. It was braided and tied with an orange hair tie. The outfit consisted of a yellow, orange, purple, blue, and green striped dress that was completed with a gold belt and orange ankle boots. As Lucy gazed at the small piece of her childhood, she felt a wave of nostalgia wash over her.

She hopped down the steps, taking the Hollywood Hair Barbie with her. She didn't know why, but she felt like the doll would slip away from her if she let go of it. It was a strange feeling but Lucy didn't think about it too much.

She turned a corner and entered the kitchen. The smell of breakfast grew even stronger and intoxicating. Her mother stood over a pan of bacon that was sizzling away. Lucy's mom, Helena Campbell, was never dressed before breakfast. She usually wore pajamas and a robe until after she made everything and ate. Now, Helena, her mother, stood in her favorite black heels and gray pantsuit. Her blond hair was tied up into a bun that sat high on her head. She was humming to herself. This was part of her daily routine.

"You look nice, mom," Lucy piped up from the doorway,

Her mom's humming broke off and she looked up in surprise. She covered her heart with one hand and gave a tiny yelp.

"Oh honey. You scared me. I didn't hear you come down. You're like a sneaky little mouse."

Lucy laughed and came through the entryway and sat down at the round, oak table.

"Where's Dad?"

Her mother didn't answer, just resumed her cheerful humming. Lucy turned to her and she turned and smiled back. It was a thin and crooked smile, not showing any teeth. That wasn't her mother's smile at all. Lucy turned back to stare down at the oak table.

She jumped a little when a plate full of eggs, veggies, and bacon clanged in front of her.

“Thanks, Mom.”

Lucy picked up a fork and stuck it into the middle of one of the eggs. Instead of the gooey yellow yolk seeping out of it, there was a cockroach. Lucy jumped out of her chair and let the seat clang to the floor. She turned to her mom to say something but saw that she was staring back at her. She still had that paper-thin smile on her face. Something was wrong.

The aroma of bacon, coffee, eggs, and vegetables was now gone, as if it had never existed. The smell was replaced with a putrid and rancid one. Lucy furled her nose in disgust.

“Mom, what’s that smell?”

As Lucy watched, Helena began to transform into someone else... or *something* else. Lucy couldn’t believe her eyes. Her mother’s body was no longer human. It was a long, dark green, slimy snake. The last feature of her mother to go was her face.

For a second, Helena Campbell’s head bobbed on top of a reptilian body. After the second passed, the head exploded and Lucy was blasted with chunks of what had been her mother’s brain and skull. The head was soon replaced with a snake’s; the eyes were now a glowing red.

Then, at the oddest time, Lucy remembered. She remembered everything.

She remembered that her Hollywood Hair Barbie doll had long been destroyed by the neighbor’s ferocious dog. She remembered that the banister hadn’t been black since she was a little girl. And most of all, she remembered that her sister and father should be *here* at home, worrying about her while she sat trapped in a pit.

This was the nightmare. A horrible, awful, nightmare. Her reality was down in that well, Shane’s well. She had to wake up. She pinched herself and squeezed her eyes

shut. When she opened them, she'd be lying on the cold ground with Hailey and Claire waiting for her to get up. She would tell them of her incredibly creepy dream and her new friends would comfort her.

Slowly, she opened her eyes and immediately jumped back in surprise and fright. Shane was right in front of her, smiling that spine-tingling smile that she had fallen for. Now, she didn't like it at all. She *hated* it.

And those eyes. Those cold, beady, coal-black eyes. They seemed like the eyes of the Devil. The soul behind them had died long ago. Now, a demon had taken its place and Lucy was scared of that demon. She had never been that scared in her entire life.

Shane's expression had more hate in it than Lucy could ever remember seeing. His eyebrows were pointed down in anger and his skin was as white as a full moon.

Then, his eyes changed from black to the evil red eyes that the snake had had. They seemed to glow with how much hate was pent up inside of Shane's body.

His mouth, still stretched in that weird grin, opened wide like he wanted to swallow Lucy whole. Every single tooth grew long and sharp. Now, they weren't a pearly white color, but a sickly yellow. Shane's face grew long to accommodate his new, huge mouth.

All of these changes took place no more than two feet from Lucy's nose. She could smell Shane's disgustingly potent and hot breath. It nestled inside of her nostrils and stuck there. It smelled like a mix of rotten eggs, spoiled milk, and garlic.

Lucy was paralyzed with fear and she was shaking uncontrollably.

Move. Move, Lucy, move.

She repeated those words over and over again in her head so that they became like a chant. But it was no use. All she could do was stand there and wait to be gobbled up by Shane, the monster.

He came toward her. His mouth full of razor-sharp, rotten teeth was open wide.

At this point, Lucy's attempts to run were still futile. No matter how hard she tried, her legs seemed to be stuck to the floor in cement blocks. She looked down at her feet and saw that they really *did* have cement blocks trapping them.

Lucy screamed as the thing in front of her closed the gap. The last thing she remembered was the smell of Monster Shane's disgusting breath.

Chapter 9~Finally, A Plan

“A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week.”

-George S. Patton

Lucy jolted up from her place on the dirt floor in the well. When she recognized her surroundings, she sighed in relief and laid back down. She never thought she'd be happy to be back in this sorry excuse for a home, but she was.

It had been a full week since Lucy had been hit in the head and dumped like trash into a dark and drafty pit. Since then, she had bonded with Hailey and Claire and had gotten used to their daily routine.

At dawn, or so Hailey guessed it was dawn, Shane would send a note down that usually stated what was on his agenda that day. It was usually just college and occasionally a movie but for the past three days, Shane had a new love of his life.

Her name was Holly Alabaster. Lucy and Claire's eyebrows went up when they saw the name written on the paper. It was familiar to them as they had both known

Holly. Hailey, however, had not known this new girl and Lucy had to explain that Holly had been a food server with her for months.

On the surface, Lucy told her two friends that Holly was immune to Shane's charms but deep down, she knew that Holly wasn't so tough. To be frank, Holly slept with anyone as long as she knew them longer than a day.

Holly was doomed. She'd be in the well with them in a couple of months, maybe even in a few *weeks*.

Shane's notes that were sent down always came with the girls' food and water for the day. The food usually consisted of bread and water for breakfast, grilled cheese and milk for lunch, and cold chicken breasts and green beans for dinner. The food in need of refrigeration was brought down in a cooler filled with ice. They never got enough food to fill them up, however. Shane was smart.

In retrospect, the food was probably better than prison slop but it still didn't satisfy any of the girls' stomachs. Lucy could feel herself growing weaker and weaker as the hours and days ticked by.

After the food and note were sent down, Shane left for the day and didn't show up at the well again until the next morning. In the time between his arrivals, the three girls would talk amongst themselves about their interests, ex-boyfriends, family...anything to break the constant and deafening silence that was created by being trapped in a hole, away from civilization.

Many times, Claire would entertain the other two with myths and legends she had heard. Hailey and Lucy loved hearing them and often forgot their current predicament. After the story ended, however, the spell wore off and it was back to reality.

On this particular morning, the food had already been brought down. The metal plank hung there. The cooler seemed to symbolize an endless daily ritual that could not be broken. The sheet was directly under the spotlight of the sun's rays. It was ironic, to say the least. The food was unsatisfying and yet, the sunlight shone down on it as if it was the most delicious thing you would ever taste.

Hailey and Claire stood next to the dumbwaiter, chomping down on their sourdough bread. It made Lucy's stomach churn just looking at it. Before she'd known life in the well, she'd loved sourdough. Now, she didn't think she could push the bread down her throat.

"Bad dream?" Claire's wispy voice asked.

Lucy ran her hand through her dirty and knotted brown hair. "It was horrible!"

Hailey's monotone answered her. "Don't worry. You get used to it. When you're down here long enough, you'll start to have them every night."

Yay, Lucy thought sarcastically. "Can't wait."

Lucy wanted to get her mind off of the subject so she said, "Did you guys sleep well?"

Hailey laughed bitterly. "I slept like a baby. What do you think? I tossed and turned as always."

Claire was in a cheery mood, her usual. "I had a wonderful dream. I was kissing Shane. I was in a wedding dress, he was in a tux. Then, we were running through a meadow of daisies and tulips. It was beautiful."

"Why can't we have dreams like that?" Lucy asked Hailey wistfully.

Hailey always had a psychological answer. "Because you and I aren't Looney Tunes. Claire is in her own little bubble of fantasy where everything is good."

“Call me names all you want but just know that Shane won’t like your attitude.”

“Claire, sweetie, do you really think I care about what that psycho thinks of me?”

Claire ignored her and there was silence.

In the time when no one spoke and Lucy didn’t feel like getting up, she gazed up at the dumbwaiter, knowing that there had to be a way to utilize it without getting caught.

And that’s when she thought of it.

Lucy bolted upright again; her eyes going wide as she stared at the strong cables that held the plank with a firm grip. “Guys?”

They both turned to her.

“What?”

“What is it?”

Lucy pushed herself to her feet and brushed the dirt from the floor off of her hands. She circled the suspended sheet, thinking to herself.

By this time, Hailey and Claire were staring at her like she had gone insane from the lack of fresh air and civilization.

Hailey finally spoke up. “Umm, Lucy? What are you doing?”

Lucy turned to her, an idea forming in her mind. She pointed at the cables, one attached to each corner of the shiny, metal board. She tugged on them, testing them.

They were hard and wouldn’t budge. “These cables are strong, right?”

Her two friends continued to stare at her with the same expressions on their faces. Hailey seemed to be the only one willing to talk at the moment. “Uh-huh...”

Lucy was getting excited; her eyes were wide like a child in a candy shop. “I’m betting all of us together don’t even weight three-hundred pounds. Right?”

Hailey was smart and caught on quickly. “Lucy, we’ve been over this before. There’s a camera right above your head.”

She gestured to it as if Lucy had forgotten about it. “I know but how do we know that Shane’s there right now?”

Hailey didn’t say anything.

“Here’s my proposition. I was a really good rope climber back in high school. I could shimmy up the cable and you guys could get on this sheet and ride it up. It’s perfect.”

Hailey, always the cynic, piped up. “I still don’t think it’s a good idea.”

Lucy wasn’t backing down. “Just humor me, okay? What if this works? What if I get up there and push the button that brings you guys up into the sunshine?”

“What if you fall? Have you thought of that?”

Lucy was quiet. She *hadn’t* thought of that. She shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. What’s a little risk if we can finally get out of this hell-hole?”

“I don’t know...”

Lucy turned to Claire. “Claire, what do you think?”

Claire fiddled with her greasy, dirty blond hair. She didn’t like being put on the spot. “I don’t think you should do it, Lucy.”

“What? Why?”

“Shane won’t like it. Shane loves us. Why would you want to hurt someone who loves us so much?”

Lucy mentally kicked herself. She should’ve known not to ask Claire. Aloud, she said, “Thanks for the help, Claire.” Claire just smiled back at her.

Without another word, Lucy hoisted herself up onto the plank. It wasn’t an easy task considering the dumbwaiter was up to her waist and she lacked energy and strength.

A couple minutes later, she was sitting next to the cooler and had to catch her breath. She was that weak. *I should’ve done this the first day I was down here*, Lucy thought to herself. If only she’d thought of it at the time.

She pushed herself to her feet and rubbed her clammy palms on her jeans. She stretched out her arms and took a deep breath. Then, she let it out and breathed deep again.

Lucy didn’t dare look at her two doubters still staring up at her. She was afraid that she would lose her concentration if she did.

She thought back to her days in high school and tried to tap into her past way of thinking. She closed her eyes, praying that she had the strength to climb to the top.

Next, Lucy opened her eyes and lifted her gaze to the circle of light directly above her. It wasn’t that far, twenty feet at the most. But to Lucy, it felt like her salvation was a million miles away.

She knew that she couldn’t stall any longer so she wrapped one leg around the cable and pulled herself up off of the metal plank, wrapping her other leg around the cable, too.

Immediately, she felt like her arms would give out and she would come crashing to the floor. She forced herself to keep inching up the cable, trying to focus on how nice it would be to feel the sunshine beating down on her skin.

Lucy squeezed her eyes shut with the effort. After another minute or two, she opened her eyes again and looked down. She had only gotten about four feet up the cable.

It wasn't working. Her hands were shaking with the enormous weight she was putting on them and she could barely force her legs to hold on to the cable. Hailey and Claire were still staring up at her, their mouths open like their friend had turned into a chimpanzee.

Lucy shut her eyes again and continued to inch her way up. Most girls would have given up at that point but Lucy was a fighter. She fought the fatigue and the pain in her hands as she pushed herself further.

Then, she began to slip.

Lucy's hands were accumulating sweat and it was getting hard to grasp the cable. Lucy opened her eyes and saw that she had slipped all the way down to her four-foot mark. Her hands burned and she found that she was sweating. She might've been crying, too. She just hadn't noticed before.

Finally, her arms and legs gave out completely and she crashed to the hard, metal slab, knocking the cooler off in the process.

Lucy gasped in pain. Everything hurt. Her arms, her hands, her legs, even her back. She had fallen directly on it. When she tried to sit up, her head throbbed like someone had hit her with a heavy club.

Lucy gritted her teeth in agony. She put her hands up to cradle her aching head. Hailey and Claire rushed to her side, worried about her. They helped her down and no one said, "I told you so." Lucy was grateful for that.

CHAPTER 10 ~ Questions

“Bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in.”

- C.S. Lewis

Adam had been questioned by Sheriff Monaham when he arrived at the Hillcrest Campus Police Office and was eventually cleared of any suspicion. Now, Shane sat in an interrogation room with his hands in cuffs tied to the underside of the metal table in front of him.

The sheriff, Adam, and Jerry stood watching him behind the two-way mirror. Adam was glad that Shane was caught but he wouldn't be satisfied until he found out where Lucy was. A terrible thought flashed through his head. An image of Lucy lying in a ditch somewhere. He shook his head to get rid of it and tried to get back to reality.

Sheriff Monaham was saying that the worst was over and it was all down-hill from there. “We just have to break him, but that shouldn't be hard for me to do.” He

sounded confident. Maybe even a little cocky. But Adam was fine with that as long as the job was done.

Then, the sheriff was in the other room with Shane, letting him know that he was suspicious. “Tell me where Lucy Campbell is.”

“I don’t know.”

“Oh come on, son. You can’t fool me. We’ve got you down as the last person seen with Ms. Campbell and it’s a well-known fact that you and her were going on a little vacation together. So don’t play dumb with me. I know you know where she is.”

Shane was unwavering. “And I’m telling you I don’t.”

Sheriff Monaham put both hands on his hips, sticking his gut out. “Well, you’ll excuse me if I don’t believe that statement, son.”

A flicker of anger showed on Shane’s face. “Stop calling me son.”

“Why, son? Got a problem with me calling you ‘son’, son?”

“Stop it or I’ll-”

“You’ll what? Kidnap me?”

Shane kept a poker face and was silent.

“That’s what you do to people, isn’t it?”

“No.”

The sheriff sat down across from his suspect. He put both hands on the table and clasped them together. He didn’t take his eyes off of Shane.

“Do you miss her, Mr. McCarver?”

Shane flipped his dark hair out of his eyes so he could look straight into his interrogator’s eyes. “Of course I do.”

“Oh, right, why wouldn’t you? She was your girlfriend, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So is that why you were with a Ms...Holly Alabaster yesterday afternoon?”

“What are you implying?”

“I’m implying that you, Mr. McCarver, wouldn’t have been necking with some other girl if you were truly worried about Ms. Campbell – *your girlfriend.*”

For the first time since he’d been arrested, Shane raised his voice. “Who gave you all this information, huh? Did you ever stop to question the messenger?”

“Oh, believe me, Mr. McCarver, we did. But you see, Hillcrest University has a nice little security system that I like to call ‘surveillance cameras’ that just so happened to catch you and Ms. Alabaster in the act.”

There was a pause.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if you abducted those other two girls who’ve gone missing, Mr. McCarver.”

“I want a lawyer.”

“Good, ‘cause you’re going to need one.”

The sheriff got up from the table and left the room. He told the new deputy outside the door to watch the suspect while he was gone. The young man nodded and went into the room.

Sheriff Monaham gestured for Jerry and Adam to follow him and they headed down the hall and into his office.

They were there for only five minutes before another officer came in with a folder. “Excuse me, sir. I think you should see this.”

The sheriff glanced at the tab and became confused. “This says ‘Gabriel McAllen.’”

“I know, but look inside.”

Before Sheriff Monaham could open the folder, however, the new deputy ran up to him. He looked embarrassed and a little confused.

The sheriff looked up. “I thought I told you to watch the suspect.”

The deputy was reluctant to admit what had happened. “I was, sir, but...”

“Well, spit it out.”

“He’s gone, sir.”

Chapter 11~Date Nights

“He can’t see the smile I’m faking and my heart’s not breaking, ‘cause I’m not feeling anything at all.”

-Taylor Swift

Sorry to keep you waiting, my darlings. I had to take care of a few things. Some people in this world just don’t understand true love. But that doesn’t matter now. It’s in the past. So we can move forward and talk about our future.

Speaking of the future, I want you three to join me for a special dinner-date.

The three girls looked at each other. Claire had an excited gleam in her eyes and Hailey made a face.

For the next three nights, I will send down a pair of handcuffs and one of you will ride my dumbwaiter up to the top of your suite. When you arrive, expect your taste buds to be in paradise.

I can't wait to see you all. Until then, I'll try to keep myself busy so the time will go faster. It shouldn't be hard. Holly and I are hanging out all day today. She's a really great girl. I have a feeling she'll be ready to see you soon.

Have a nice day.

Love,

Your Shane

Claire folded the letter up and slid it back into its pink envelope. She had been reading it out loud in her dreamy tone of voice. Lucy knew that Claire was under the impression that she was in some sort of fairytale.

Lucy considered herself a polygamist's prisoner.

When she mentioned this to Hailey, the latter actually laughed at it. She thought the name fit and said that they should start calling themselves by that title. The two didn't tell Claire because they didn't want her to get defensive like she always did when Shane was brought into the conversation.

Presently, the trio of filth-covered girls sat next to each other against the wall. They sat there, sometimes drifting in and out of sleep, until the dumbwaiter began its warble and rose to the top of the well. Claire jumped up in anticipation.

The girls had decided that Claire would be the first to have a "dinner-date" with Shane since she was still in love with him.

The girls could definitely hear someone at the lid of the well. They heard a jingle of metal on metal and Lucy could guess that Shane had placed the handcuffs on the sheet at that moment.

A second later, the screeching and wailing started up again and the metal board descended.

When it reached the end of its journey, a note and pair of shiny, official-looking handcuffs came into view. Lucy and Hailey got up from their places on the ground, curious as to what the note said. They huddled around Claire and peeked over her shoulder. It was shorter than the usual notes.

Put these on. I'll know if you don't. Remember: I'm watching you. ;)

See you soon.

Shane

Claire was quick to put the handcuffs on and tried to hop up onto the board. When she failed, Lucy and Hailey had to help her. After Claire was on and the other two had backed away, the dumbwaiter ascended.

Claire giggled all the way to the top. When she got off of the sheet and the noises had faded, Lucy turned to Hailey.

“Do you think she’s safe?”

“Of course. Shane won’t hurt her as long as she doesn’t try to escape. And we both know that she won’t.”

Lucy nodded.

The girls were silent, lost in thought. Lucy was wishing that Claire would try to help them escape while she was up there. As soon as she thought it, she knew that it would never happen.

Lucy felt bad for Claire whose state of mind was in the wrong place. She also envied her. She wished she could be carefree and naïve if only for a day.

The two didn’t know how long it had been since Claire had left. It felt like five minutes ago. But then, the dumbwaiter whirred to life and minutes later, Claire jumped down from the board, smiling from ear to ear.

Lucy noticed that her friend was cleaner than she had ever seen her before. Her hair shined in the spotlight created by the light at the pit's opening. Her skin was a pale white, not stained with dirt as it had been earlier that day.

Hailey noticed the change, too. "Look at you! You look like a different person!"

"I feel like a different person," Claire replied happily.

Lucy picked up a delicious scent. "Is that peppermint?"

"Oh yeah. Shane had this really nice smelling body wash. He let me take a shower and then he got in with me and-"

Hailey interrupted her and placed her hands over Claire's mouth. "Okay! That's enough of the descriptiveness!"

Hailey lowered her hands and Claire beamed at her.

Lucy was anxious to know the events of the night. "What happened up there?"

"I was only in the cabin for about three hours. I wish it had been longer. When I first met him in the shed, I noticed that he wasn't as clean-shaven as he was before. He had some stubble on his chin and above his lips."

Hailey stepped in, her hands crossed over her tiny waist. "Claire, does it look like we care about what he looks like right now?"

Claire stopped and seemed to be pondering that question for a second. But then, she shook her head and moved on. "Sorry."

Lucy was quick to make up for Hailey's sharpness. "Don't worry about it, Claire."

Claire continued with her story. "Well, when I met Shane, he put shackles on my feet. I told him that it wasn't necessary and that he knew I wouldn't leave him for anything. He insisted and said he was sorry but it was a precautionary measure. Then,

we went into the cabin where he had this beautiful spread laid out just for me. He told me not to tell you guys about it. He wants you to be surprised. First, he told me that I could clean up for dinner and that's when-

Hailey butted in again. "We know. We know."

Claire shot a look at her and went on. "After that, we had dinner...and dessert." Here, she smiled dirtily. "And then he told me that he was sorry but he had to escort me back to my room. He's such a gentleman."

Hailey opened her mouth to add another one of her sarcastic comments but Lucy stopped her with a glare.

Lucy didn't want Hailey to spoil Claire's night. "It sounds like you had a nice time. I'm happy for you."

Claire smiled at her. "Thanks, Lucy. I bet you'll have a nice time, too."

Lucy kept her mouth shut and tried to smile convincingly. She doubted she'd have a good time. She'd rather stay in a hole for the rest of her life.

Later that night when Claire had fallen asleep, Hailey snuck over to Lucy's spot in a corner where she was trying get comfortable.

Hailey pointed to the ground next to Lucy and whispered, "Do you mind? I can't get to sleep."

Lucy shook her head. "Not at all. I can't either."

Hailey sat down quietly. She turned to Lucy and noticed that she was fretting about something. "What's up?"

Lucy turned to her. "Oh nothing. I'm just stuck in a hole with no way out an it's starting to feel like I'm going to die down here."

Hailey shook her head. “No, besides the obvious.”

“Promise not to laugh?”

Hailey stuck out her pinky. Lucy didn’t think Hailey was the kind of girl who still did pinky promises. She linked her pinky with her friend’s anyway.

“I promise,” Hailey replied.

“Okay.” Lucy took a deep breath. “I’m a virgin.” She let the words whoosh out of her while she exhaled.

Fortunately, Hailey didn’t laugh. “Okay…”

Lucy sighed, realizing that she would have to explain further. “What if Shane…you know…?”

Finally, Hailey caught on to what she was saying. “Oh! You mean what if he forces you to have sex with him?”

Lucy blushed a little but Hailey couldn’t see. She was uncomfortable with the topic. Then, she nodded. “Exactly.”

Hailey didn’t have a solution. “I see your problem.”

Lucy put her head in her hands and Hailey patted her back. She was as uncomfortable with comforting people as Lucy was not a minute ago. She said the only thing that she could think of.

“It’ll be okay.”

Hailey hoped that statement was true. She really did.

The next night, it was Hailey’s turn. She had decided to go before Lucy. She told her not to worry about the next night because they were going to get out before then. The way she said it inspired confidence in Lucy.

Hailey had cuffed her hands just as Claire had done, but left a little room to wiggle her hands free at the right moment. The camera couldn't pick that up, she was sure of it.

She had ridden the dumbwaiter up to meet her captor and now, she sat at the top of the pit. She stared out into the darkness, ready to run. A second later, a flashlight blinked on and shined in her direction.

Hailey threw her hands up to shield her eyes. They weren't used to the light. Months of darkness had changed them. She didn't know if they'd ever be the same again.

That was a depressing thought.

A familiar voice came out of the darkness. "Hello, my Hailey. Can you step off of the lift and stay still for a minute?"

Hailey wanted to gag. She was not Shane's Hailey - at least not anymore - and she never would be again. She noticed that the door to the shed stood ajar and knew that she could make a run for it if she could incapacitate Shane for a second or two.

The question was: could she knock him out?

Hailey didn't know but she had to try. And she did. In a flash, she was free of her handcuffs and brought her right fist up to meet Shane's face. Her adrenaline must have aided her because he stumbled to the ground, stunned.

Shane grabbed his nose. "You broke it! You broke my nose! Why would you do that?"

At first, Hailey wasn't going to answer him but then she decided to. "Because I hate you, darling. Is that so hard to grasp?"

She smiled and looked around for something to knock Shane unconscious with.

There, in the corner, was the shovel that he had hit her with all those months ago.

She turned to grab it but Shane took her by surprise while her back was turned. He jumped to his feet and grabbed Hailey's wrist. In one swift movement, he took the shackles off the floor and clamped it around her right ankle.

Before he could do the same to her left, she grabbed the shovel, spun around, and brought the weapon down hard on Shane's head. His angry expression went blank, his eyes closed, and he crumpled to the ground.

Hailey didn't waste one minute. She tore off through the door and into the cabin. She knew exactly where the phone was and hoped that after all these months it was still there.

It was.

As Hailey entered through the back door, she turned to her left and saw the phone sitting on the wooden table where she last saw it.

She snatched it up off of its cradle and dialed 9-1-1. A woman picked up on the other end and asked Hailey to "state her emergency."

"Yes, I'm at-"

There was sharp pinch in her neck and Hailey dropped the phone. It bounced on its cord and swayed back and forth. The woman on the phone was asking if she was still there.

Hailey couldn't answer her because her tongue seemed paralyzed. Her arms felt weak. Then, her legs locked up and she fell to the floor. Her head hit the ground hard.

She saw stars and her vision blurred. The next thing she knew, Shane was standing over her, an empty syringe in his hands. He was wearing a ski mask over his face.

Hailey wondered why he was wearing it. Maybe she was hallucinating, but it seemed like he had changed clothes, too. But that couldn't be right. Her vision was cloudy so she decided that her mind was playing tricks with her.

That was her last thought as she sank into a heavy, drug-induced sleep.

Adam lay in bed, not able to sleep. He couldn't stop thinking about Lucy and blaming himself. Maybe if he had worked harder to convince her that Shane was evil, she would be talking with him right now. Maybe if he had been a man and asked her out when he'd had the chance, none of this would've happened. Maybe she wouldn't have went out with Shane and fallen for his act.

All these maybes were making Adam's head spin and he couldn't help but feel guiltier and guiltier. He scratched at the back of his right hand and that made him remember a time when he and Lucy were sitting with their backs against the great oak tree in the middle of Hillcrest's courtyard. Adam had just done horrible on a test and was in a bad mood because of it.

The flowers were in bloom all around while the sun beat down on them. It was Adam's kind of weather. He was commenting on this when Lucy caught sight of a patch of freckles on the back of his hand. She pulled it towards her so she could get a better look at them.

"What?" Adam had asked.

Lucy had taken out an old purple gel pen and started to connect his freckles. Soon, she made a picture. It was of a cartoonish sun, smiling up at him.

“Now, you can have the sun with you everywhere you go...at least for today.”

Her drawing had put Adam in a better mood and he was sad to see it go when he had to wash it off his hand. He missed that drawing.

Now, he stroked the back of his hand subconsciously. He wanted Lucy back more than ever. He wouldn't stop looking for her. Not ever.

Chapter 12 ~ Last Chance

“My youth is escaping without giving me anything it owes me.”

-Ivy Compton-Burnett

Hailey had been sent down unconscious but breathing. Her friends were worried about her. What had happened up there? Would she wake up soon?

Lucy and Claire had heard the sounds of struggling coming from the opening of the well. Lucy knew that Hailey had tried to fight Shane. She had no doubt about it. It was *Hailey* for Pete’s sake. Of course she would’ve fought.

But she lost in the end. Poor Hailey.

A thought came to Lucy. If Hailey fought Shane, why did he let her live? Lucy was thinking of Shane’s letter describing how he got his scar. He’d killed that girl because she called him a monster and didn’t love him anymore. Had Hailey said those things?

Lucy shook her head, deciding that if she had, she probably wouldn’t be here with them now. A shudder creeped up Lucy’s spine just thinking about it. A half hour

later, Hailey finally stirred. She started to get up but as soon as she was in a sitting position, she grabbed her head and groaned. Lucy and Claire rushed over to her and she recounted her night to them.

“It must not be Shane, then,” Claire said when Hailey mentioned the ski mask.

“Then, who was it?” Lucy wondered aloud.

Hailey shook her head. She didn’t have an answer.

The next night was Lucy’s date night with Shane. The ride to the top wasn’t long enough. She really didn’t want to see her captor. She scrunched up her nose as her handcuffs pinched her skin. She had not loosened her cuffs as Hailey had done. She wanted to be on her best behavior. At least until she saw an opportunity to escape.

Too soon, Lucy reached Shane and he helped her off of the lift. Then, he kissed her and pulled her into a hug. Lucy had to fight her urge to gag.

“I missed you,” Shane said as he led her back to the cabin.

“I missed you, too.”

Shane smiled and opened the door for her. She surveyed her surroundings. It was the same old cabin with wooden floors and walls. Blue drapes hung on the windows and white cupboards lined the walls. A small table with two chairs sat in the middle of the tiny kitchen.

There were a few added touches for the occasion, however. Such as a white tablecloth and two place settings. On the small stove sat a pot of penne, a skillet of sautéed vegetables, and a saucepan of marinara sauce. Her favorite. Shane made sure he pointed that out and then he offered her a shower like the one he’d had with Claire.

Lucy reminded him that she didn't do that kind of stuff but said that she would take one by herself.

Then, Lucy was alone in the cramped, bleach-white bathroom. Her handcuffs were off. She had stayed up for most of the night thinking up a plan and turning it over and over in her mind. Now, it was time to put that plan into action.

Lucy locked the door and turned the shower on. She let it run while she crossed to the window right beside it. It was big enough to squeeze through if she stepped on the toilet. She tried to open the window but it wasn't budging. It was one that slid up when you pushed.

What am I doing wrong?

There was a knock on the door. "You alright in there?"

I'm fine. Almost done. The warm water just feels so good on my skin."

Shane seemed to buy it. "Okay. Well, hurry up, honey. Dinner's waiting."

"Okay, be right there!"

Lucy turned back to the window and saw what she had missed before. A simple white lock that need one turn to unlock the window. She turned it and heard a satisfying click. Then, she pushed the window pane up as far as it would go. There was plenty of room for her to squeeze through and that's exactly what she did. The drop to the ground was only three feet and she landed, unhurt, on a couple of bushes.

Lucy felt like things were going her way until she got to her feet and looked up. Shane was standing right in front of her. He was wearing the ski mask Hailey had described. She knew she was dead meat but ran to the left anyway. She dashed into the woods and immediately tripped over a tree root. She got up but Shane was closing in fast. He was only a foot away when Lucy took off again. She was too weak, however,

and Shane grabbed her easily. He tackled her to the ground, grabbed a rock from the forest floor, and brought it down on her head.

Chapter 13 ~ A Look into the Past

“One travels more usefully when alone, because he reflects more.”

-Thomas Jefferson

It was a cloudy and muggy day when Adam awoke to an empty house. At least, he'd thought it was empty until he went downstairs. What he saw made him think he was still asleep, having a nightmare.

His mother was lying on her back on the linoleum floor of the kitchen. One of her hands was on her heart.

“Mom?” He ran to her and checked her pulse. Nothing.

That's when Adam saw the full picture. His mom's hand was caked with blood. There was even more blood on her shirt and her eyes were staring up at the ceiling, glassy and vacant. Her shirt was a mess of rips from a knife or something else. The wounds were long and everywhere.

She was dead.

Adam completely lost it. He didn't know how long he sat there, crying over his mother's body. Finally, he had the strength to dial 9-1-1 and tell the woman where he was and what had happened.

Then he heard a voice behind him...

Adam's phone rang on the dresser beside him and snapped him out of his flashback. He was thankful for it.

The cops had lost track of Shane McCarver or Gabriel McAllen as he was known now. The name struck a nerve with Adam. It haunted him day and night.

Gabriel McAllen, the Atheist from North Dakota. 6'3'', 185 pounds. Adam knew these statistics because the news replayed them every day, constantly flashing the guy's mug shot on the screen.

Adam couldn't believe he had failed to put a name to that face. If only he had figured it out sooner. Lucy definitely would've listened if he'd told her that "Shane" was really the fugitive who had kidnapped that poor Danielle girl all those years ago.

Adam lay back on his pillow but still couldn't relax. He knew he wouldn't be able to until he found Lucy, whether she was alive or...He couldn't say the word so he didn't.

Adam had spent hours trying to figure out what Lucy's text from Shane meant.

What was their special place?

The answer finally hit him and he realized what an idiot he was. He sat up.

The cabin!

Adam sat in his sedan as he stared at the log cabin in front of him. This was it. It had to be. He'd found the address in Lucy's address book in her dorm room. It would've taken him an hour to get there if he had gone the speed limit but, of course, he didn't. So he'd gotten there in almost half the time.

Adam took out Sheriff Monaham's card and dialed the number printed on it. He told the sheriff exactly where he was and said that he was going to get Lucy and the others. He ignored the protests on the other end and hung up. He gathered his strength and took his gun out of the compartment box on the passenger's side. If he was going to attempt a rescue, he wanted to be prepared.

Taking a few deep breaths, he forced himself out of the car and shut the door behind him. He had walked five feet before he heard a rustling noise behind him. The next thing he knew, someone hit him over the head and took his gun. Adam fell to the ground and was unconscious.

Adam woke to an enormous headache. He was vaguely aware of voices so he kept his eyes shut. One of the voices was definitely Gabriel's. The other one sounded like...but it couldn't be...could it? Adam fought the urge to open his eyes. Instead, he listened to the two voices.

The first was Gabriel's. "...not my fault. It's not like I brought him here!"

"Do you want us to get caught, Gabe? 'Cause it sure seems like you do. The girls we have are smokin' and they're totally in love with us."

"They're in love with *me*."

“No, my friend, I created you. Without me, you’d be some weird loner who doesn’t have a girl to come home to every night. Let alone *three* girls! I gave you the charm and attitude that chicks want.”

“You weren’t there when I picked them up. You don’t know how I charmed them. I could’ve been myself.”

The second voice laughed bitterly. “You wouldn’t do that. You’re too much of a coward. Always hiding behind someone else.”

There was a pause and then Gabriel spoke up. “What are we going to do with him?”

“Shoot him in the leg. See if he wakes up.”

Adam’s heart stopped. *They’re gonna kill me!*

“No.”

“I’ll do it then.”

Adam’s eyes shot open at the same time he heard a gun shot. Pain went up his left leg and he couldn’t help but moan. He tried to focus his eyes but couldn’t. Instead, he scrunched up his nose and closed his eyes tight as if this would remedy the pain. His hands flew to the wound on his leg.

“Well, look who’s awake. Hello, Adam. Long time, no see.” The voice chuckled menacingly. Adam was still in denial. That voice could *not* be who he thought it was. There was absolutely *no way*.

“We got a problem.” That was Gabe.

“We can always count on you to bring the police. Huh, Adam?”

Adam didn't answer even though he could tell the source of the voice was right in front of his face. The next thing he felt was a sharp pinch in his right arm. He opened his eyes and his suspicions were affirmed. And then, everything was black.

Chapter 14 ~ Moving Day

“Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.”

-Sun Tzu

More days passed in the well. The girls couldn't tell just how many but they were uneventful to say the least. One day, something broke the cycle of their endless routine.

A note was sent down without a description of Shane's schedule for the day. In place of it were instructions to put on a pair of handcuffs and a blindfold as soon as they got on the lift. The girls were specifically ordered to do this one at a time. Looking back at the sheet, they saw that there were three pairs of handcuffs and three blindfolds.

Resigned, they obeyed. Each rode up to the top of the well once again. Hailey chose not to wear her blindfold and went up second like she had for the date nights. She saw that Claire was lying on the back seat but she couldn't tell if she was alright. She

also noticed that there was a second person standing beside Shane. He (she assumed it was a he) wore a familiar ski mask.

The unidentified man blindfolded her while mumbling something unintelligible under his breath. Next, Hailey was thrust forward and into a cramped area. She ended up banging her head hard on something. She guessed that she had been stuffed into the trunk of the same car Claire was in. Claire was the one who never fought back so, naturally, she got the special treatment.

Lucy chose to follow the note's instructions so she didn't know there was another man aiding Shane until she joined Hailey and was informed. Lucy had been surprised. She didn't think there could be another person in the world psychotic enough to do this. Apparently, she was wrong.

The girls didn't have a plan so they stayed quiet throughout the trip. Each feared the worst: that they were going to be executed.

When the car stopped and the girls were taken out into the fresh air again, they were immediately lead into another building. A couple of doors slammed and the sliding of locks sounded. Then, each prisoner had the privilege of having their blindfolds removed. The girls promptly surveyed their surroundings.

They were standing against a wall in a fairly spacious, gray room. There was absolutely nothing in it save for a few dusty, wooden chairs stacked in one corner. The floor had a couple of rat droppings on it and Lucy actually saw a rat scurry away into a hole in the wall. The only light in the room was dim and came from the three windows high up on one wall.

None of the girls (not even Hailey) had the courage to ask where they were or even *why* they were there.

The man in the white ski mask clapped his hands together and rasped, “Okay. Now here’s where the fun begins.”

Shane turned to the man. “What are you talking about?”

“Come on, man. You wouldn’t deny me three chicks that are too weak to fight me off, would you? The nuthouse I was in was full of...well, nuts. And guy nuts at that. Not one girl. Not *one*. Can you imagine that?”

He turned toward the three girls who were backed against a wall. Lucy stared into his eyes and thought they looked familiar in a way. Kind of like Adam’s but colder, like something had died behind them.

Then, she realized what this strange man was saying. She moved to run but he caught her and threw her back against the wall.

Seeing this, Shane got angry. He pushed his accomplice with both hands. “Don’t touch her! You’re not gonna touch any of them! They love me, not you!”

The ski mask creep looked back at the girls and moved his head slowly up and down. He was checking them out.

Eww.

“Gimme a few minutes with them. I betcha I can make them love me.”

He raised a hand that held a gun and used the barrel to brush a stray hair away from Lucy’s eye. She was paralyzed with fear.

“Especially this one.”

Shane couldn’t take it anymore. “Hey!”

The creep turned to Shane and received a punch to the face. Blood gushed from his nose and stained the white mask. The guy’s hands flew to his nose and Shane took

the opportunity to tackle him to the ground. They wrestled, each trying to use the gun that was in between them. Finally, a shot rang out. The girls jumped in surprise.

Lucy hoped that Shane had won because she didn't think the other man had the same morals. It was then that she realized they could have made a run for it while their captors were struggling. Now, it was too late.

Fortunately, Shane had managed to shoot his partner in the stomach. He got to his feet and Claire ran to him and hugged him tight. They all watched the mysterious stranger die. The white ski mask changed to a vivid red as he clutched his wound and coughed up blood. He made sickening gurgling sounds as if he was choking on it. Then, his head fell to the ground and there was silence.

Shane turned to Lucy and grabbed her wrist. "Come with me."

He took her out of the door. All she could do was helplessly look back at Hailey and Claire. Shane and Lucy entered another room with an old, wooden school desk and an ancient- looking boiler in one corner. In the middle of the room, Adam lay, unconscious, on the dust-covered ground. His pant leg was covered in blood.

Lucy ran to his side and tried to wake him. She shook his arm. "Adam. Adam, wake up! Please."

When he wouldn't wake, she turned to Shane, tears blurring her vision. "We need to get him to a hospital."

Shane revealed a gun from behind his back. "I have a better idea." He checked to see that it was loaded. "Why don't we put him out of his misery?"

"No!"

"Lucy." He slowly walked over to her so that he was standing right beside her. He squatted down and pushed her hair out of her eyes just as his accomplice had done.

“Lovely Lucy, you know that he’s always stood in our way.” He rose to a standing position and pointed his gun at Adam. “I have to do this...for us.”

In the same moment Shane finished his sentence, there was a shout from the other room.

“Shane! Shane, come here! I need to talk to you!”

Shane looked down at Lucy and holstered his gun. “Be right back.”

Then, he was gone.

Chapter 15 ~ A New Major?

Where there is love, there is pain.

- Spanish proverb

As soon as Shane was out of the room, Lucy ran to where Adam was lying and knelt down beside him. She put a hand on his cheek and his eyes fluttered.

“Adam,” Lucy whispered, checking that Shane was still out of sight. Adam moaned slightly in response.

“Adam, wake up...please.”

Lucy checked over her shoulder again. She knew that Shane could come back at any minute. Finally, Adam’s eyes fluttered open and he gasped in pain and put a hand to his head. Lucy helped him into a sitting position. His eyes met her’s.

“Lucy,” he whispered gently. Adam smiled a little as if the name brought him joy. Lucy smiled back at him. “I guess I should’ve thought this out a little better, huh?”

Lucy laughed. “Yeah you probably should’ve, but you’re amazing for coming here.”

Adam blushed slightly and looked down at the dusty floor. Lucy grabbed his hand and he looked at it dumbly.

“Adam, I’m so sorry for what I did to you. You didn’t deserve it.” It was her turn to look down now. “I wouldn’t blame you if you thought I was a terrible person.”

Adam stroked Lucy’s cheek and when she looked up, there was no anger in his eyes like she’d anticipated. There was only love and forgiveness. Lucy was relieved. How was she ever that stupid? She had passed Adam off as a loyal friend (not to mention a homosexual one) and nothing more.

Now, gazing into his brilliant green eyes, Lucy knew how amazing Adam really was. He had miraculously forgiven her for everything she’d done and had warned her about Shane. On top of everything else, Adam had risked his life to try and save her. What more could a girl want?

“Lucy,” Adam began gently, “You are the kindest person I know. You take in injured birds...literally.”

They chuckled together, remembering a time in their freshman year. Lucy had found a dying baby bird and couldn’t leave it there. So she scooped it up and nursed it back to health. She had bought a book on how to do it, too.

Adam continued, “And you befriend geeks like me.”

Lucy had to laugh at that. “You are *not* a geek, Adam,” she assured him.

“That’s debatable,” Adam said simply. He went on, “And on top of all that, you stuck up for Mary Temple - the girl who tripped and fell face-first into her mashed potatoes.”

Lucy remembered that day. When Mary had tripped and the other students had laughed at her, Lucy had helped her up and yelled at the entire cafeteria. She'd said that they've all tripped before and wouldn't like being laughed at when it happened to them. Lucy never forgot how shocked and grateful Mary had been that day. She had felt accomplished and in the process of standing up for Mary, she had made a new friend. Adam continued, "So if that makes you a terrible person, we're all doomed from the start."

Lucy blushed and looked down again. Then, she looked back into his eyes. "That's what I love about you, Adam. You see the best in people."

The mood turned sour and the two were zapped back to reality when a blood-curdling scream came from the shed. It seemed to go on for minutes before it was choked off.

A door slammed and then there was the sound of heavy footsteps. Lucy squeezed Adam's hand and jumped up just as Shane appeared.

He was holding a knife in his right hand.

It was dripping with blood.

Lucy gasped and put a hand to her mouth. Tears sprang to her eyes and she felt sick. Somehow, she managed to hold back both bile and tears and strengthen her voice as she said, "What did you do to them?"

Shane calmly took out a bleached white handkerchief and began wiping the blood off of the sharp blade. Lucy found herself staring at it.

What had that knife done to Hailey and Claire a minute ago?

She tried to block out the gruesome mental pictures and forced herself to tear her eyes away from the bloody handkerchief and knife.

“Nothing,” Shane explained, “To Hailey.”

Lucy bit back a stream of curse words that she wanted to shout at him and asked, “And Claire?”

Shane was now done with cleaning his weapon and threw the filthy cloth on the ground. Then, he looked up with a sickening glint in his eyes. When she looked at him, Lucy was reminded of a wolf. A wolf with beady black eyes...about to eat its prey. Shane answered, “She wanted me to herself. She talked about getting married and starting a family. But I couldn’t have that. I had to get rid of her...for us...and for Hailey...and for anyone else who wants to join our little threesome.”

Shane laughed. Lucy wanted to wipe his grin off his face more than anything in the world. At that moment, she couldn’t imagine anyone being as monstrous as Shane. Lucy had never felt more hatred for anyone in her whole life.

She sneaked a glance at Adam and she winked. He winked back. Suddenly, Lucy had a plan. It was a risk-a definite risk-but it was all she had up her sleeve. She just hoped it would work.

Mustering up all her courage, Lucy made her facial features go limp. Shane was studying her closely. She couldn’t afford to mess this up.

Come on Luce, she urged herself, It’s just like at the diner. Even when a customer is completely annoying, you have to put on a happy face and force yourself to be nice. Otherwise, you lose a tip. Only now, if you blow it, you’ll lose your life...and Adam’s...and Hailey’s. So no pressure...no pressure at all...”

Shane was still analyzing her. It was clear that he didn’t know what Lucy would do next. It bothered him. She saw him squirm like an ant under a magnifying glass.

Good. Now it’s my turn to have the power.

The voice that came out of her mouth was so calm that it even surprised herself.

She looked Shane right in the eyes and said, “So what do we do with him?”

Lucy gestured to Adam. She could tell that Shane was surprised by her question. He wasn't expecting her to jump right in with his plan. A second later, his surprise was gone and his sadistic and cold stare was back. He believed her act. Lucy couldn't believe how gullible he was. Or maybe she was just a good actress.

Lucy laughed silently to herself. *Maybe I should change my major.* Despite her thoughts, Lucy kept her face blank.

“I don't know,” Shane replied, “You tell me.”

With that, he held his blade out in front of him and flipped it around so that the handle was facing her.

Lucy couldn't believe her good fortune. He was actually giving her his weapon? Was he that trusting? Was he that *stupid*?

Keep it together, Lucy. He's still suspicious.

Careful not to show any emotion, Lucy crossed the room to Shane. On her way, she kicked Adam convincingly. She didn't think she did it that hard but Adam let out a stunned gasp. She hated herself for it but she knew she couldn't show it.

When she got to Shane, she grinned what she hoped was an evil grin. He grinned back at her. Lucy felt another wave of sickness wash over her. She wanted to gag. How had she ever loved this creep? Slowly, she reached for the knife, felt the warm handle, and started to take it. But she couldn't because Shane wouldn't let go. Lucy had to force herself not to scream when Shane said, “Love you.”

It seemed to happen in slow motion. His mouth opened and closed and somewhere in between, words spilled out. It took Lucy a second to realize that he was

still waiting for her reply, still grinning that sick grin. She frantically searched inside of herself for the words she wanted.

Three little words, Lucy. That's all. Just say them.

She felt Adam's eyes on her back. They were studying her, urging her to say those three words. She knew that if she wanted the knife, she had to say them.

Lucy dug deep and spoke them. "Love you, too, Shane," she said cheerfully.

She pulled on the knife again and, thankfully, Shane let go. Lucy just stood there dumbly, staring in disbelief at the knife in her hand.

She did it! She had the knife!

Shane was still staring at her.

What is he doing?

Slowly, he stepped forward and stroked her cheek just as Adam had done not five minutes ago. Lucy was paralyzed with fear. What should she do?

"You're so beautiful, Lucy," Shane whispered as he leaned in close.

Is he trying to kiss me? EWW! I've got to do something!

He was so close that she could smell his sweat. She had to do it fast. Quick and easy. But as Lucy stared down at the knife in her hand, she didn't know if she could do it.

It was now or never.

Chapter 16 ~

“There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand imitations.”

- Francois de La Rouchefoucauld

Lucy chose never. She knew how much Shane deserved it but she couldn't bring herself to knife the guy. She didn't know if she would regret it later, (she hoped she wouldn't) but she flipped the switchblade closed and took a deep breath.

“Shane?” She said sweetly.

“Yeah?”

Lucy finally looked up at Shane, smiled her first true smile since he had walked in, and placed her hands on his shoulders. She was going to enjoy this.

Using all her strength, she brought up one leg and kneed Shane where no man wants to be kneed. He bent over and groaned in pain.

“That's for Claire!” Lucy shouted at him.

While Shane was still bent over, she helped Adam to his feet. She punched him in his bad arm and he groaned.

“Thanks for the help,” she said sarcastically.

Adam chuckled. “Sorry, I just wanted to see if you’d actually kiss him.”

Lucy rolled her eyes and turned to him, her back to Shane.

“You really thought I would kiss him?” She asked curiously.

Adam began, “No but I-”

His face went as pale as if he’d seen a ghost. Lucy realized that he wasn’t looking at her anymore. He was looking behind her-where Shane was.

Lucy was afraid to turn around and look for herself so she asked, “What is it?”

Adam uttered just one word but that one word chilled her to the bone. She would never forget the way he’d said it.

“Gun.”

Slowly, Lucy turned around. There, standing with a gun in his hand, was Shane. Adam stepped forward and pushed Lucy behind him. She clung to him, more scared than she had ever been in her entire life. Shane’s gun was pointed right at Adam’s heart. Shane seemed confident. His hand wasn’t wavering at all.

“Put the gun down, Shane,” Adam said quietly.

He didn’t seem as confident as Shane was. Lucy could tell that his hands were shaking uncontrollably. She slipped her hand into one of them as if that would help.

It didn’t.

Shane ignored Adam as if he’d never said anything. “Why don’t you tell her, Adam? If that’s even your real name.”

“What are you talking about?” Adam asked, suspiciously.

Shane chuckled but his laugh never reached his eyes. “Oh, don’t play dumb with me, nerd boy. You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

Shane walked to his right where a wooden desk was standing. He never let his gun drop and never turned his eyes away from Adam and Lucy.

Adam glanced back at Lucy and squeezed her hand reassuringly. She cast him a questioning look but he just turned back to face Shane. The latter opened a drawer in the desk and pulled out a manila folder. He held it up proudly, like a lawyer presenting evidence in court. Then, he threw it on the ground in front of the pair.

“Take a look, Lucy,” Shane persuaded, “Look and see what kind of skeletons Adam’s been hiding in his closet.”

“Put your gun down first,” Lucy bargained.

For a moment, Shane just stared at her, as if turned on by her quick thinking. Lucy stared right back, not breaking eye contact, until Shane looked away.

He threw his hands up. “Fair enough. Fair enough.”

He walked back over to the desk and put his gun on the edge of it. He looked up at Lucy and gestured to it with a smile to see if she was satisfied. She would not be fooled.

“Now, walk back to where you were.”

Shane, still smiling, moseyed back to his first spot. “Happy?”

Lucy answered him with a stony face. “Ecstatic.”

Shane beamed like she’d just told the funniest joke in the world. Then, he nodded to the folder on the ground. “Go on.”

Cautiously, Lucy stepped out from behind Adam. He grabbed her arm, gentle but firm. “I don’t like this,” Adam said quietly.

“Don’t worry,” Lucy replied.

Then, she kissed him on the cheek. She heard Shane gasp like he’d been kicked in the stomach. She didn’t look at Adam to see his reaction but she knew that Shane didn’t like her gesture.

Without another word, Lucy knelt down and read the tab on the folder. **JASON BENNETT.**

Her eyes narrowed in confusion. “What?”

Adam tried to look over Lucy’s shoulder from where he was standing. “What? What is it?”

Lucy didn’t answer him. She flipped the folder open and gasped at what she saw.

“Lucy! Tell me what you see!” Adam shouted.

But Lucy just shook her head. She couldn’t believe it. Adam’s face stared out at her from a blown up photo. She noticed that there were more pages behind the photo so she turned to them. They were all labeled “JASON BENNETT” on the top of them. Each page had a list of facts. It looked like someone had run a full background check on Jason/Adam.

Lucy read the print on the first page aloud. “Well, *Jason*, it says here that you’ve been accused of kidnapping a Jodi Sanders and keeping her in your basement for three months.”

“No,” Adam replied, “Lucy, that wasn’t me!”

Lucy held up Adam’s photo and said, “It sure looks like you, Adam...*Jason.*”

Shane was walking leisurely back and forth, listening to the conversation.

“Yeah, Adam,” he piped up, “It sure does look like you.”

Adam flashed Shane an angry glare and he beamed back at him. Then, Adam knelt down next to Lucy and tried to take her hand but she pulled it away. Adam looked hurt.

“Listen, Lu,” he explained, pointing to his picture in the folder, “That’s my twin brother, Jason. He did all of that horrible stuff to that girl. Not me.”

Shane butted in. “Really, Adam? Playing the twin card?” He shook his head as if he was disappointed. “That’s really convincing,” he added sarcastically.

Meanwhile, Lucy had gotten up from her place on the floor and was slowly moving away from the other two. Adam turned back to her and stood, too.

“Lucy, Jason...my brother, was committed to a mental institution two years ago when the cops found out what had happened.”

“Mhmm. Sure he was.” Shane was now throwing a stress ball up into the air and catching it while he paced.

Adam turned back to Shane, angry. “Shut up, Gabriel!”

This made Shane stop his stroll and turn to face Adam. There was no grin on his face as he pointed to Adam. He was furious. “Don’t you *ever* call me that again! EVER!”

Adam ignored him and turned back to Lucy who was now backed up against a wall.

He pointed to Shane and asked, “Is this who you want to believe? Some psycho who murdered his mother and kidnapped three girls and threw them in a well?”

“He murdered his mother?” Lucy echoed.

“Yes, he did, Luce,” Adam replied, “Listen, if I’m the frying pan, then he’s the fire.”

“Sounds like Lucy needs to make a little decision,” Shane announced, “Personally, I would never believe this moron, but if you wanna take that risk...” Shane trailed off.

Adam turned back to Lucy. Her eyes were glistening with unshed tears. “Lucy,” he pled, “Please. You know me. I would never do something like this.”

Lucy swallowed the lump in her throat. “Do I? Answer me this, Adam. Assuming you had a twin, why didn’t you tell me? Why did you feel like you needed to hide that from me?”

“Because...because I thought that if I told you about him, you’d ask all these questions. Where he was, what he was doing. And I wouldn’t have been able to lie to you. Eventually, I’d tell you the whole story and you’d probably think I was a freak from some family of monsters. I thought that once you’d found out about Jason, you would avoid me and I didn’t want that...Because life without you...I couldn’t imagine it. So please, Lucy...Just trust me.”

There was a long, stretched out moment of silence and then, Lucy answered Adam with a nod. “I trust you,” she said, reaching out to grab his hand.

He took it and pulled her into a hug. Lucy peered over Adam’s shoulder to glare at Shane.

“You hear that, Shane? I trust him. Because he’s the one who really loves me!” Adam pulled back to look at her. “And I love him,” Lucy finished gently.

They leaned forward to kiss each other but they were interrupted by an enraged scream. They both turned to see Shane. He had grabbed his gun off of the desk and was now pointing it at Adam. Adam pushed Lucy behind him again.

“Here we go again.”

Shane was the angriest Lucy had ever seen him. “Nobody loves Lucy more than me! Look at everything I’ve done for her!”

Adam was unfazed. “Yes, you are truly a gentleman.”

Now, Shane looked at Lucy. “Don’t you know how much I love you, Lucy?”

Lucy shook her head. “You don’t love me, Shane.”

“Yes, I do!” Shane yelled.

Lucy persisted, “No, you don’t. When you love someone, you never want to hurt them or keep them locked up for the rest of their lives. When you really love someone, you want to always be there for them. No matter what. I’ll admit that at one point, I did love you, Shane. But you ruined it for us and you can’t take something like what you did back.”

Now, Shane wasn’t angry anymore. There were tears in his eyes as he started to lower his gun.

“You don’t love me anymore?”

Lucy stood strong. “No, Shane. I don’t.”

There was another pause and then Shane’s features changed. They hardened as if his mind was set on something. He raised his gun again and pointed it at Lucy this time. His stance was determined and unwavering.

Lucy flinched a little. She couldn’t help it. She was out of options. All she could do was stand there beside Adam and wait for Shane to pull the trigger.

“Well then,” Shane said, “I guess this is goodbye.”

That was the last thing he said to Lucy Campbell.

Chapter 17 ~ Bad Memories

“A memory is what is left when something happens and does not completely
unhappen.”

-Edward de Bono

After discovering his mother’s broken body in the kitchen, Adam heard the same voice as the one behind the ski mask. He turned around, already knowing who would be there. It was his twin brother, Jason.

“It has to be this way, Adam.”

“What do you mean?”

It was then that Adam finally saw what Jason held in his hand. A pizza cutter. Dripping with blood. Slowly, Adam made the connection. His eyes went back to his mother’s wounds and then to the unlikely weapon. He repeated this motion. Finally, he

came to the obvious answer. Jason had killed his own mother. *Their* mother. His twin brother had just murdered his own mother.

Jason came forward, swinging the cutter as he went. There was a weird glint in his eyes that Adam had never seen before.

Adam managed to choke out one word. “Why?”

“She knew.” Jason thumped the cutter in his hand, still coming toward his twin.

“Knew what?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, Adam. You know what I’m talking about.”

Adam shook his head. “No, Jason. I don’t. I promise you.”

“I don’t believe you!” Jason’s face grew red and the veins in his neck popped out. “How could you kill Mom, Jason? She loved you.”

“She was going to turn me in. I could see it in her eyes.” He was getting closer. “I had to.” He was only a few steps away, now. “Just like I have to kill you.”

Adam moved just as Jason swung his weapon his way. He ran through the kitchen and out of the back door. He could hear police sirens getting closer by the second. He hoped they came in time to save him.

Jason was right behind him and gaining fast. He’d always been the faster twin. They were in the woods behind their house, now. Adam pumped his legs faster and faster. He felt like they weren’t working properly. He hated that feeling. But there was another feeling that was worse. Adam experienced it next when he tripped and fell face-first in mud. The feeling you get when you’re backed into a corner with nowhere to go.

Quickly, Adam flipped on his back so he could face his attacker. He still couldn’t believe his brother was doing this. His *twin*. Shouldn’t he have sensed a change in Jason? Weren’t twins supposed to share a special bond? Adam guessed not.

He hadn't sensed a thing. Not once in his life could he remember feeling a supernatural connection to his twin. He didn't have time to think anymore because Jason was right on top of him, raising the pizza cutter above his head.

Adam threw his hands up. "Jason, wait!"

Jason paused.

"Please, I'm your brother."

Jason seemed to consider this. For a split-second, the rage and coldness in his eyes were gone. Just as suddenly as they had left, however, they came back.. Jason let out a shout and started to bring down the cutter down with a swift motion.

"No!"

But before it could do it's work, there were two loud reports that echoed throughout the forest. Jason's rage was wiped from his face once again but this time, it contorted in pain. He fell to the ground, letting the weapon drop next to him. He hugged both of his legs to his chest and moaned in pain. Adam could guess that he had been shot in both of his legs. But by who?

He looked beyond Jason and saw two police officers standing there.

Adam was saved and Jason was committed to an asylum. Gabriel disappeared, though. He seemed to have slipped off the face of the earth.

That day, Adam lost his mother and brother. He lived in fear for the next year or so. He was paranoid that Gabriel would come back for him, constantly having dreams about it. He suspected they wouldn't stop until Gabriel was put in jail or killed.

Chapter 18 ~ The End

“When you are in love and you get hurt, it’s like a cut... it will heal, but there will always be a scar.”

-Anonymous

Lucy shut her eyes and waited for the bullet. She heard the gun shot and waited for the pain. And waited...

Finally, Lucy opened her eyes and immediately wished she hadn’t. “Wha...What happened?” She stuttered in shock.

She had just spoken to Shane less than a minute ago and now he was sprawled on the floor with a bullet in his head. Well, Lucy assumed that there was a bullet in his head, as she couldn’t make out a hole that small. What was left of his head was a mess of brain fragments and blood.

So much blood...

The pool of dark liquid seemed to gush across the floor and soak everything in its path.

Adam answered her and she jumped a little. She'd forgotten he was there. "He shot himself," Adam said simply and gently, "It happened so fast, I didn't get a chance to stop him."

He turned Lucy away from the gruesome scene and whispered, "Come here."

He pulled her into a hug. Lucy felt tears running down her face. "It's over," she whispered to herself.

Adam pulled back so he could look at her. "Yeah. It's over."

He started to move closer to her but she put her hand on his lips. He narrowed his eyes in confusion and Lucy made a mental note to make him confused more often. His expression was adorable and a bit funny.

"Not like this. Not here."

She gestured to Gabriel's lifeless corpse, careful not to look at it in the fear that she would completely break down.

Adam nodded, understanding what she meant. "Happy Easter, by the way."

Lucy's eyes widened. "You mean I've been down in that well for three weeks?"

"Don't worry. You haven't missed much. Hillcrest got torn down and the world is run by apes and cyborgs now." Adam shrugged his shoulders. "No big deal."

Lucy laughed and hugged him again. "I've missed your sense of humor, Adam."

"I love you, Lucy."

"I love you, too."

They pulled away from each other and then Lucy gasped and raised a hand to her mouth.

Adam's smile faded. "What? What's wrong?"

"We forgot about Hailey!"