

A photograph of two people embracing. The person on the left is wearing a dark green t-shirt and blue jeans. The person on the right is wearing a light green sweater and dark blue jeans. The text 'MORE than THIS' is overlaid on the image. 'MORE' and 'THIS' are in a bold, black, sans-serif font, while 'than' is in a white, cursive font.

MORE
than
THIS

JAY MCLEAN

Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[More Than This](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)
[Chapter 43](#)
[Chapter 44](#)
[Chapter 45](#)
[Chapter 46](#)
[Chapter 47](#)
[Chapter 48](#)
[Chapter 49](#)
[Chapter 50](#)
[Chapter 51](#)
[Epilogue](#)

To my very own Knight in Shining Armor,
and our two little Princes.

Thank you for making me your Queen,
and giving me my own happily ever after.

More Than This

Prologue

Mikayla

He was right. It made no difference whether it was 6 months or 6 years.

I couldn't undo what had been done. I couldn't change the future. I couldn't even predict it.

It was one night.

One night when everything changed.

It was so much more than just the betrayal.

It was the tragedy.

The deaths.

The Murders.

But it was also that feeling.

That feeling of falling.

Chapter 1

Mikayla

I finish getting ready with 15 minutes to spare. I look in the mirror to make sure everything's in place. I'm nothing special to look at. I'm definitely no Megan, my best friend. I have naturally olive skin from being quarter Filipino on my mom's side, slightly almond shaped eyes from that side too. Everything else is from Dads Irish/Scottish side. My dad's 6 foot, my mom's a tiny 5 foot nothing. Luckily, I'm a good in between.

I'm not naive in thinking that I'm popular based on looks, or extra curricular activity. I'm book smart, but not so much so that I'm socially awkward. I've made the popular list by association. My best friend is the head cheerleader, and my hot boyfriend is captain of our basketball team.

I take one more look in the mirror, I'm good to go.

I open my bedroom door and virtually run into my parents who are standing just outside. They have that look on their face, like whatever they're about to say is imperative and has to be taken seriously. My dad's arm is wrapped around Mom's shoulders. Emily, my 9 year old little sister, is nowhere to be seen. They take a step forward, united, causing me to take a step back.

I'm officially worried.

They keep taking steps forward until I'm forced to sit on the edge of my bed. I look up at my parents. They finally let go of each other and sit on either side of me.

Dad blows a big breath out and shakes his head. "Honey, your mother and I have something we need to tell you."

I look at my mom, she looks away. She's nervous.

Shit.

Dad continues, "We figure since you're graduating in two weeks, and you've been 18 for a few months now... well, I guess we both decided it was about time we tell you something very important."

I'm mentally scanning my brain for what the fuck this could be.

Im adopted.

I knew it. I was always different, less asian looking than I should be, and I don't know where my nose comes from. No one in my family has this nose. Oh, God. Who are my birth parents? And Emily what about her... is she adopted too?

"Mikayla?" Dad interrupts my raging thoughts.

Shit.

I close my eyes, hoping that by doing so, it might take away the sting of what he's about to tell me. "Are you listening to me?"

I nod once, eyes still closed.

"Mikayla..." long pause. "...boys have a penis..."

My eyes dart open. My dad's stifling a laugh, my mom's face is beet red with held in laughter. I'm glaring at them with narrowed eyes, waiting for my pulse rate to decrease.

I would have bet a million fricken dollars they were about to tell me something life altering.

I want to junk punch my own dad.

I know he's behind this shit. This is totally something he would do. My mom, she doesn't have it in her to think of something like this.

As I'm about to stand so I can turn and face them both, Emily comes running into the room with her

life size Justin Bieber card board cut out. She's hiding behind it, cackling to herself. Then she breaks out in song, waving the cut out in front of her.

“And I was like penis, penis, penis, ohhhhh

Like penis, penis, penis, nooooo

Like penis, penis, penis, ohhhhh

I thought you'd always be mine, mine...”

I'm trying so hard to hold in my laughter, in case this is one of those situations where it's funny for us, but inappropriate for a 9 year old girl.

I look to my parents and wait for their reaction.

Mom giggles and Dad breaks out in a weird dance, which I'm pretty sure is supposed to be something resembling 'The Dougie', and starts to belt out... “You know you love me, I know you caaaare...”

I can't help but laugh. I start down the stairs to wait for Megan and James, shaking my head at their craziness. Of course, they all follow, Justin Bieber cut out and all, and keep singing, at the top of their lungs, mom included...

“And I was like penis, penis, penis, ohhhhh

Like penis, penis, penis, nooooo

Like penis, penis, ...”

The front door swings open...

“What the fuhhhhhh...” Megan's words die in the air when she sees Emily (and the Beibs) behind me.

James scratches his head, “Are you guys singing about Penises?... to Justin Bieber?”

They all start laughing and snorting. I love my insane family.

After a good ten minutes of photos, and my dad retelling the humiliation of the shit they just pulled on me, we're out of the house and on our way to Bistro's. It's an Italian restaurant downtown that's famous for loud atmosphere and big tables for large groups. Perfect for pre-prom dinner.

When we get to the restaurant we notice a few other tables with kids our age all dressed up. We don't recognize them, they must go to different schools. The place reeks of new garments, cheap cologne, overpowering perfume, hair product and sexual tension. It's everything prom should be.

We find our table and sit with Andrew and Sean, two of James' friends from his Basketball team, and their girlfriends.

Megan decided to go stag. It wasn't like she hadn't been asked, about a trillion different guys asked her. She said she wanted to keep her options open. She didn't want to go with some guy because he was hot, only to find out he was a dick throughout the night and then have to put out at the end, *her words*.

We make small talk until the waiter comes and takes our order. The place is loud with conversation like you would expect with a bunch of teenagers in the room. Once we've all placed our order, James stands up, “Where's the toilet in this place? I need to take a leak, that champagne from the limo's gone straight through me,” charming as always.

“I'll show you, I need to use the ladies to re-adjust my underwear. It's riding up my ass,” Megan states loudly.

They walk away towards the back of the restaurant, where the restrooms are.

~~I'm in the middle of talking to Andrew about the new gym they're building at the school, when I feel something wet trickle down my back. I'm frozen for a second, then turn to find some dude in a tux looking at me wide eyed, half a glass of beer in his hand. The other half, I'm sure, is down my back.~~

"Shit, babe. I'm sorry," wide eyed douche bag says. Babe? Really? This guy has to be a joke.

"Jesus Christ, Logan. Turn down the asshole a little, would ya?" his friend behind him says. He has an accent, like English or South African or Australian or something.

Logan, I assume, turns around to face him so quickly, his hand holding the remains of his beer slams against accent boy's broad chest. Beer spills on the crispy white shirt under his open tux jacket.

Logan stifles a laugh. Accent boy groans and pushes Logan to the side, heading to the back of the restaurant, towards the restrooms I presume. "Naw, don't be like that, Jakey," Logan coos.

I stand up to go to the restroom to see if this night/dress is worth salvaging. Douchebag Logan blocks my way. He eyes me up and down, and walks a slow circle around me. He comes to a stop in front of me and a small smirk pulls at his lips, "Well, hello there, little lady," he drawls.

I physically push him out of the way and head towards the restroom. I'm wearing a backless dress. It's halter style, all black, it reconnects just above my ass, so close to it that there's no room for underwear just in case. Because of this, I'm hoping, fingers crossed, that the beer has just spilt on my back and not the dress. I'll be able to clean my bare back at least. More than I can say for the kid with the accent.

As I turn into the hallway where the restrooms are, I stop in my tracks. Megan is halfway out the door of the ladies room. She's adjusting her dress slightly, her hair is in shambles and her lipstick is smeared all around her lips. She's giggling and her hands come up slowly, most likely to the face of some random guy she's just hooked up with.

Megan is every guy's walking wet dream. She's your typical tall, leggy, blond haired, blue eyed, sex on legs. And she loves sex, and has sex, *so much sex*.

So, it doesn't surprise me at all that we've been here all of fifteen minutes and she's been doing god knows what, with some random dude, in a public bathroom. What does surprise me though, as I get closer to her, is that it's not some random guy her hands are on, it's James, *my* boyfriend. Her hands are on his face, cleaning the smeared lipstick from around his mouth. My eyes are drawn to his hands which are at the front of his pants. He tucks 'himself' back in and does his fly up.

I feel the vomit creeping up my throat and make a noise trying to keep it down. The noise must be loud enough to distract them. It almost feels like slow motion, they both turn to face me at the same time, their eyes huge, mouths hanging open.

Like they're surprised *I'm intruding* on *their* intimate fucking moment.

Chapter 2

Jake

Fuck, Logan can be an asshole sometimes.

I'm in the bathroom doing everything I can to save this beer stained shirt that's clinging to my body. There's nothing I can do about it, it's dunzo.

I take off my tux jacket and start undoing the buttons of the shirt, hoping the tank I have on underneath will be okay. I'll have to run home and grab a new shirt. Luckily, Mom is always prepared for this kind of stuff and has a spare ready to go.

I can't believe Logan did that, and all to get that girl's attention. I mean, I get it, I noticed her the minute she walked in the door, smiling up at the kid who's hand she was holding. She walked in with another guy, you'd think that was enough of a sign to call the game off. But not for Logan. The minute her boyfriend, or whatever, left her side it was *game on*. I followed him for a laugh, I wasn't supposed to end up here.

I roll my eyes at myself in the mirror. I'm gonna look like an ultra douche walking out in suit pants and a wife beater. Fuck Logan.

I open the door and stop in my tracks when I see her, but it's not the same girl that walked in. Her eyes are brimming with unshed tears and she's fuming. I've only opened the door enough so I can just see her, I haven't stepped into the hallway yet. She's staring daggers into something, or someone. I take a tentative step forward and see her glaring at a couple standing in front of the women's restroom. It's like the couple are frozen in time, the blond girl's hair is messed up and her dress is all twisted, her hands are on the guy's face. I can't see him properly. His back is to me. I can however, see that his hands are adjusting himself. It's obvious this couple just screwed in the bathroom. At least *their* prom will be memorable.

I almost turn to leave when I hear her strained voice. "How long?" she says, her tone flat.

What? The guy turns to face her and it's then I realize who this asshole is. It's her boyfriend, I assume. Well, it's the dick she walked in with.

"How long?" she asks again, a little louder, but still the same even tone.

"Baby..." asshole says reaching out for her.

"Two years," the blond says, at the same time.

Fuck.

I look over at the cute brunette and wait for a reaction.

I feel like I should leave, like what I'm witnessing is too intimate, too personal. But my feet are locked to the floor. I have no idea why, but I can't look away. I can't walk away. I want to punch this asshole square in the face. If for nothing else but causing the pained look on this girl's face. No way anyone deserves to be treated like that, especially this girl. I feel the need to protect her. I don't even know her.

Two fucking years, what the hell?

Asshole steps forward so his back is to the blond. The blond glares at the back of his head.

"Baby..." he says. I ball my fists. "I love *you*, Mikayla."

What?

"WHAT?!" both girls yell.

Asshole and the brunette both turn to the blond, "Shut up, Megan!" they yell in unison.

"Megan," the brunette says, taking a deep breath. "You're my best friend. What the fuck?" Tears start streaming down her face.

Megan looks at her, then at the asshole, "I'm sorry, Mick," she shrugs. But she's not sorry, not even a little. ~~She walks away, brushing past me.~~

I still haven't said a word. I still haven't moved an inch.

Mikayla and this asshole are staring at each other. Neither know I'm standing here like a creeper.

"Jesus, James," Mikayla whispers, her voice shaky now. "I've been with you for four fucking years. And half that time you've been screwing my best friend!" her voice gets louder with every word.

There's silence as he wipes a tear from his face. Why the fuck is *he* crying?

"Why the fuck are *you* crying?" she says forcefully. He flinches. *Exactly Mikayla*, I think to myself.

"For four years I never so much as looked at another guy. I was loyal to you when you weren't even around, when you wouldn't have even known, because that's how much I loved you." She's in his face now, her words clear as day. She's beyond the broken girl she started as, and now she's just plain pissed.

"Were there any others?"

"NO! I swear it."

Silence. The only sound is their heavy breathing.

"Why her?"

"C'mon, Micky. You don't wanna know this shit. Let's just go to prom and have a good time, okay?" He has an accent, Texas, I think.

"Why her?" she asks again.

He sighs, defeated, "The first time was when we had that away game a couple years back, where we stayed overnight to support the cheerleaders at some tournament they were doing the next day."

"The one when my dad was out of town, and my mom and sister were sick so I couldn't go with you?" she asks quietly, looking at the floor.

He nods. "Yeah, that's the one, Micky, it was so stupid. We just... there was alcohol, and she wanted me and I didn't think. Well,... I did, but not with my head."

"And all the times after? God, how many times were there?"

He flinches at the question. Asshole.

"I'm sorry, baby."

"Don't call me that!"

"I'm sorry, Micky," he sighs, "she just... I dunno. She's always wanted me and it was always so easy."

"What?" she asks quietly.

Then fire burns in her eyes.

"WHAT?" she says louder. "You're going to put this on *me*? At what stage did you think that I didn't want you? I gave it up to you whenever you wanted! I never said no to you. EVER! I wasn't easy enough? Because we had to sneak around and wait for parents or brothers and sisters to not be around, or go to hotel rooms, or cars... Because she lived next door and her mom was never home? That's why it was easy? What the fuck, James!"

She takes a deep breath. "Oh my God... did you use protection? I mean, she's been with a lot of guys... A LOT. And that's only the ones I know about... I didn't even consider the ones she didn't... she trails off. "James...?"

"I always used a condom with her, always. I know I'm an asshole, but I knew she got around, and with you... there was never that barrier with us and I didn't want to risk it. Babe, you have to-

"You mean you didn't want to get caught?"

He sighs, "Mikayla, I'm so sorry." Asshole has the decency to sound sincere. "Do you think you'll ever be able to forgive me? I mean, we had plans to go to college together. We planned our future together."

“OH MY GOD...” she gasps, panic written all over her face. “Who was your first, James?”

He flinches, it’s a small movement but we both catch it.

“Our first time at the hotel on my birthday, that wasn’t your first time was it?”

This guy just bought asshole to a whole new level.

“God, you faked it all, and the lies... I must be so fucking stupid!” she cries.

It’s silent for what seems like the longest time. Asshole must sense that nothing he says is going to make this any better.

A sob escapes from her and he begins to move forward to comfort her. I do everything I can to stay still. He manages to hold her while she sobs in his arms. After a minute, she rears back from his hold and pushes him away. “Was I not good enough in bed? Is that what it was? Did I do it wrong?” She sounds so sad now. “If you didn’t want to be with me, you could have just broken up with me, James. You didn’t have to cheat on me, over, and over, and over again. With my *best friend*. You could’ve just told me you didn’t want to be with me anymore, and you could’ve had all the girls in the world. I didn’t have to be like this. God, James...” she looks up at him. “You didn’t have to break my heart,” she whispers.

My chest tightens at her words.

Tears are falling freely down both their faces.

She squares her shoulders and lifts her chin, “You need to go, James. I can’t even stand to look at you right now.”

“Mikayla, please,” he begs.

“Please, James. Just go,” she pleads.

He actually listens, and walks away, brushing past me, as if I don’t even exist. I look back at her.

She’s leaning against the wall, and slowly, her body gives up and she slumps against it, falling to her ass. Her body breaks out in silent sobs. Her arms shielding her head from the outside world.

I’m still standing here like a creeper and she has no idea. I need to do something. I need to comfort her, to make sure she’s going to be okay. Or maybe I should just go out there and kick that guy’s ass.

I clear my throat.

She looks up startled.

“Holy shit, *accent boy*. How much of that did you see?”

Chapter 3

Mikayla

I can't believe *accent boy* has just witnessed that whole thing. I'm so fricken embarrassed by all of it. Mainly because I was the dumb girl that got played for so long.

"So that just happened, huh?" he says, with this deep voice that doesn't belong on a teenage boy. It belongs to a rough middle aged lumberjack... or something. He starts towards me and motions his head to the spot on the floor next to me, I nod once not looking at him.

"So... your boyfriend's an asshole and your best friend's a selfish whore," he states, taking a seat next to me.

I can't help but laugh, "That pretty much covers it." I sniff.

"I'm Jake, by the way." He nudges my side with his elbow. He's looking straight ahead, not at me. He's taken his dress shirt off. The beer obviously ruined it. I don't even know what my dress looks like, I never got the chance to check. I look down at the satin material.

"Mikayla," I say to the dress.

"Yeah, I figured that."

We sit in silence for a few moments, then he clears his throat. It might be a nervous habit, I don't know. He clears it again, causing me to look to my left at his profile. He senses my gaze and turns to look at me.

It's the first time I see him properly and he's extremely handsome, not boyishly, more rugged and manly. Like he could grow 5 inches of facial hair in one night. He smiles at me then quickly looks away.

I was staring. *Shit.*

"So..." he starts, "you're all dressed up and nowhere to go, huh?" Where is that *accent* from?

"Yeah, I guess so. Hey... um, where are you from?" I have to know.

He's confused for a second, "Oh, my accent, huh? Yeah, um, it's Australian, but I'm actually from here. It's a long story."

"Okay."

"So..." he starts again. He rubs his hand through the hair on the back of his head, little curls of dark brown, almost black form at the bottom of his hair line. His hair has a kink in it that can only be caused by wearing a baseball cap anytime he's not sleeping or dressed in formal wear, it's long enough that the ends would curl over the edges of his cap. "You heading to senior prom?" he asks.

"Yeah," I sigh. "I mean, yeah, I was. I don't think I could handle going anymore."

"To yours, or any?"

Huh? What was he saying?

"I don't know yet. I haven't really processed everything, y'know?"

"Okay... well..." he clears his throat again. "I mean, you can come to mine. I have a spare ticket and it would be a shame to waste that amazing dress. You look beautiful, by the way." His eyes dart to mine quickly, then look back down. James didn't even comment on the way I looked. "I swear I'm not a psycho," he continues, "and we have the limo for the whole night so you can just leave when you want, if you hate it I mean, or me, if you hate me," he lets out a single laugh. "God, you must think I'm crazy, and my mate Logan, spilling his beer on you..." He shakes his head, "Shit, I'm sorry, by the way. He's kind of a dick." He hasn't stopped rambling and I let him. "Look, I just don't think you should let bad people dictate what should be a good time. Come hang out with me and my friends... It'll at least take your mind off things for a little bit. I just think that maybe-

“Okay,” I cut him off.

“Huh?”

“Okay,” I say again. I look into his deep blue eyes and he smiles, a panty dropping smile that most girls would swoon over. Too bad I’m not most girls.

“Okay,” he confirms with a nod. “So... I’ll just let the guys know what’s happen-”

“Yo, Jake. What the hell man? You’ve been in here for ages, I was about to-” Logan stops in his tracks when he sees us, how were sitting, and probably the state of my face.

“Give us a minute?” Jake says to Logan.

“Yeah man, sure, of course.” Logan starts backing away from us.

“So... I should probably go tell them what’s up. I mean, they won’t mind you coming along but they’ll probably want to know why. I can lie to them if you want, but I don’t think they’d care either way, so it’s up to you, what you want me to tell them.”

“It’s okay,” I smile at him. “You can tell them the truth. I’m just gonna go freshen up and then I’ll be right out, okay?”

“Sure.” But it comes out more like... shaw. It’s the accent.

Ten minutes in the restroom to freshen up and I’m almost back to normal. I hope ten minutes is enough time for all his friends to ask whatever they need to. I just don’t want to ruin their night, but I don’t want to down play what happened here either. I can’t believe I’m doing this, with a stranger, but right now, I think it’s what I need.

I check my phone, it’s been blowing up with calls and messages from James. None from Megan, no one. Two from my parents and a text from them asking if I’m okay, and that James has called there a few times. I text them back to tell them everything’s fine, and I’ll see them at home later tonight and explain everything then.

I tell them I love them, because I really do, and nothing has made me realize it more than the shit that’s just happened here.

A few seconds later I get a text from Mom,

‘We love you too, sweetheart. Have a good night. Emily is begging for ice cream. We’ll bring you back a big batch of cookies’n’cream. It will be waiting for you in the freezer, wake me if I’m asleep to share it.’

I’m actually really looking forward to it.

I walk out from the back of the restaurant and into the dining area. Jake and his friends are waiting for me at the entrance foyer. They turn towards me as I walk up. They all smile, but I don’t know them well enough to know if it’s genuine.

Jake puts his hand on the small of my back to lead the way. It’s skin on skin contact because of the way my dress is, and I don’t think he expected it. He tenses for a second next to me, before he asks, “Ready?”

I nod my head and smile up at him.

“Well, let’s go then.” he smiles back.

Once were all seated in the limo, Logan's outside having a cigarette, so we wait for him while introductions are being made. I can tell by their builds that all the boys are jocks. The guy opposite me looks familiar, maybe he plays basketball and I've seen him play against our school. I did go to all of James' games. He's introduced to me as Dylan. Dylan does a quick head nod and then returns his eye to the girl sitting on his lap. Obviously a man of many words.

"I'm Heidi," the blond on his lap says. "Don't mind him, he's quiet. Likes to make me feel real special by not looking at other girls for more than a second. It's sweet, but it can be awkward if you don't know him," she shrugs.

"*Him*' is sitting right here, Heids," Dylan says, rolling his eyes.

"It's nice to know there are actually guys like that around," I say flatly, looking out the window.

"Oh shit!" Heidi gasps. "I'm such a fucking idiot." She pounds her palm to her forehead. "I'm sorry Mikayla. I really didn't mean anything by it."

"It's fine." I smile at her. "Honestly."

"I'm Cameron, or just Cam," the guy next to them says. I think Heidi is relieved to move on. "That little lady," he says, pointing to the girl on the other side of Jake where we share a bench seat, "her name's Lucy."

Lucy looks up from what looks to be an e-reader with a timid smile on her face. "Hi, Mikayla. It's nice to meet you," she says quietly, then resumes her reading. I look over at Cameron, he just shrugs. "She's on the last few chapters of some book she's been reading. She can't stay away from it. We're used to it now, we always find her reading at the oddest times. Don't we, babe?" He says the last sentence a little louder to get her attention.

What! These two are dating?

"uh-huh," Lucy says, not looking up from her book.

"I have the biggest dick you've ever seen, don't I, babe?" Cam yells at her, trying to distract her.

The car erupts in laughter, me included. Jake shakes his head next to me.

"Yeah, babe. I know exactly what you said, and I'd deny it if it weren't true, but your right, it's true. It's definitely the biggest I've ever seen," Lucy says with a small smirk, eyes never leaving her book.

"Awwe, I love you, babe. Best. Answer. Ever." He smiles a shit eating grin.

"But... *Babe*," Lucy says, eyes still on the book, "yours is the only one I've ever seen so I have absolutely nothing at all to compare it to, it could be *tiny* and I wouldn't have a clue. Now let me finish my book."

Everyone laughs again and Heidi leans over to give Lucy a high five which she enthusiastically provides.

I smile at Lucy. She's something else. "What are you reading?"

She looks up at me and blushes a little, "um, it's called 'The sea of tranquility', it's by-

"Josh Bennett, right?" I interrupt. She smiles a huge smile, like she's finally found someone she can talk to about this stuff. Inside, I'm kinda feeling the same way, none of my friends read the kind of books I enjoy.

"I've definitely found my new book boyfriend," she swoons, holding her e-reader close to her hear. Cam just shakes his head at her.

"I bet you'll never look at wood the same?" I say faking a dreaminess in my voice. The car is silent for a second and then everyone cracks up, including Lucy. Then it hits me, what I just said.

"NO!" I yell "I mean, because he likes to build things, from wood." I'm animated now, trying to prove my point, and backtrack my words. I start using my hands to explain further. All eyes go to my hand and everyone starts laughing harder. I look down at my hand and almost die of embarrassment. Who would have thought that motioning sanding a chair leg, which made total sense in my head, would look the same as jerking off.

I make a moaning sound of defeat and embarrassment and try to hide my face on Jake's shoulder. He chuckles into my hair and adjusts us so he can put an arm around me. I've known this guy for a minute and I'm already comfortable with him.

The laughing at my expense is still going strong when the door opens and Logan looks inside.

"What's so funny, assholes?" He looks around the group and no one bothers to fill him in. "Fine, don't tell me." He starts to look at the seating arrangement, and though it would make complete sense to sit on the opposite side of me, he squishes in next to me, forcing us all to move along to the point where I'm nearly sitting on Jake's lap.

Lucy, who is still enthralled in her book, works out what's happening and moves to the other side to sit on Cam's lap. I smile at her, she reminds me of me a little.

"Tell me when you get to the last two words," I tell her.

"Almost there," she says, lifting her finger to shush me. Then her eyes go wide and I know she's done. "No shit," she says.

"Shit," I nod my head. "It's my favorite book."

"We should totally be book best friends."

I laugh, "Yeah, sure."

"What the fuck are they talking about?" Logan looks between me and Lucy. No one says anything.

"Hey, uh-hh..." he nudges my leg with his.

"Her names Mikayla, asshole." Jake says, slightly tightening his hold on my shoulders.

"Mikayla," Logan nods, "I owe you an apology about the beer thing... it was an asshole thing to do. I wasn't think-"

"Hey," I cut him off with my hands. "it's fine. Don't worry about it. Actually, I should probably be thanking you. If you hadn't spilt that drink on me I would've never walked in on what I did. I'd probably be at my own prom right now, dancing with my so called 'perfect' boyfriend, clueless to the fact that he and my best friend were fucking for two years behind my back." I try to smile but the anger overcomes me.

There's an awkward silence in the car.

Jake slowly removes his arms from around me, probably because I'm batshit crazy.

Just as I'm about to apologize to them for my instant display of wack job, Lucy pipes up, "You should totally key the dickheads car," she says mid yawn. Everyone turns to her, then slowly to me. I should laugh it off as a passing comment, a little joke between friends.

"Well, I do have his keys. I know his trucks at his house and no-one's home." I can't help the smile that creeps on my face.

I look at Jake and he grins, eyeing me sideways.

"Wait..." Cam breaks the silence, "are you saying you have his car keys, you know where his car is, and no one is around?"

I nod my head slowly, glancing at all of them.

"uh-ohhh" Heidi coos.

"Operation Mayhem!" Dylan declares loudly, as he pulls Heidi off his lap and places her to his side. It's the most I've heard him say.

In two seconds flat the boys have somehow repositioned the girls to one side of the limo while they discuss whatever it is they're discussing on the other side.

"What are they doing?" I ask Heidi, but it's Lucy that answers. "Trust us, it's better you don't know. It's more fun this way."

Chapter 4

Mikayla

“You guys...” I say, trying to catch up to the boys as we walk towards the 24 hour Walmart, “you’re gonna miss your senior prom.”

“No one cares, as long as we’re there at end when they declare little miss Heidi Prom Queen, we’re all good, and that’s hours away,” Logan says as he taps Heidi on the ass. She squeals and hides behind Dylan.

“Touch her again and I’ll break your arms, asshole,” Dylan glares at Logan, who throws his hands up in surrender. Dylan’s one of those guys that doesn’t say much, so when he does, you listen. Now that I see him at full height, he’s huge. Bigger than all the other guys. He seems loyal and protective, willing to give his all to his girl. I can see why Heidi loves that kind of a guy. I would to. I thought I did.

We walk into the store.

“What are we doing here? I mean, what are we getting here?” I ask no one in particular.

“Don’t you worry your pretty little face,” Logan coos while his hand rubs down my back, lower and lower, until his hand is cupping my ass.

“Get your hands off me, before I get Dylan to break your arms.” It’s said as a joke, but I’m serious.

“I don’t think it’s Dylan I have to worry about,” he mutters as Jake gets between us and shoves him to the side.

“Leave her alone you asshole,” he holds his hand out, “come with me?”

I take his hand, “Um, okay. What about the others?” I ask.

I really want to know what their plan is, what this ‘Operation Mayhem’ is. Shit, I hope its nothing permanent, or illegal. I don’t know these guys at all, they could be buying stuff to bomb his truck, or his house. Oh my god, what if they’re going to ki-

“Relax,” Jake laughs. “Shit, Mikayla, we’re not gonna do anything crazy. It’s just a bit of fun, trust me okay?” He must have seen the internal meltdown I was having.

I smile and nod. Because I do. Trust him.

“Now, help me choose please, I don’t know anything about this stuff,” he says, pointing his finger at the air and motioning around us.

“Huh?” I take a look around and see that we’re in the mens formal wear section, “Oh, okay.” I look over at him. He’s still wearing his suit pants and the plain white tank. His broad chest and muscled back defined behind the material.

“What’s wrong with what you’re wearing?” I ask with a raised eyebrow, mocking him.

“Ha Ha” he says flatly, “It would be fine if I wanted to look like Eminem circa 2001.” We both laugh. “I’m thinking black shirt, to go with your dress, and blue tie, the same as the flower at the front.” He starts going through the racks.

I look down at myself. I’d forgotten what I was wearing. My mind is still a little hazy. He pulls out a black dress shirt, tries it on, shrugs it off, rips the tag off, puts the tag in his pocket, shrugs the shirt back on and starts buttoning it up. I look away because it feels too intimate, watching him get dressed. Plus, I think he might be stealing, and I don’t want to be an accomplice, or whatever.

I head over to the ties, two dollar ties galore. I find a blue one that matches the flower of my dress, it’s a little dahlia planted in the middle just under my breasts. “Um, here, this one should do.”

He saunters over to me and smiles, “Perfect.” He grabs the tie from me and then frowns. “Shit, my mom’s gonna be so disappointed.” He laughs once. “I have no idea how to knot a tie,” he says, looking

at the tie in his hand.

“I can totally help you with that.” I grab the tie from his hands and begin to knot it the way mom’s shown me. She said one day I’d meet a man that would appreciate this random skill. Who knew she’d be so right. I start to do up the tie around his collar when I realize how close we are. My heart thumps in my chest, and my brain goes fuzzy. I can feel his breath on the top of my head. I’m surrounded by his cologne, it’s only a small amount, but it’s enough to make my head swim. I close my eyes for a second to calm my nerves. I can feel his eyes on me.

I take a small step back before opening my eyes, and force a smile. “There, now you’re more Eminem circa 2005.” I tap his chest. He laughs as we head to the front of the store.

Everyone else is already waiting. Whatever they bought, is now secured in plastic bags so I can’t tell what it is. Jake walks through the only aisle open and then stops abruptly in front of the cashier, forcing me to bump into him from behind, and lose my balance. He turns quickly and steadies me with his hands on my elbows. Once I’m settled, he pulls two tags out of his pocket and gives them to the cashier. She’s a few years older than we are but she has no shame in eyeing Jake up and down and winking at him.

“I uh, need to pay for these,” Jake says, adjusting his tie and looking past her.

She doesn’t say anything, just keeps eye licking him. He seems uncomfortable.

After the transaction, we make our way back to the group and walk towards the limo.

“Dude,” Logan says, “that chick would’ve totally banged you in the store room.”

“Not everyone’s a pig like you, Logan,” Heidi huffs as we settle back into the Limo.

“I can’t stand girls like that,” Jake shakes his head, “I mean, I’m not saying we are...” He looks over at me quickly then back to face Heidi. “But I mean, what if Mikayla *was* my girl, and we *were* on a date. It’s obvious we were *kind of* together, I mean, we walked up together. I don’t know,” he shrugs. “It just seems disrespectful to Mikayla, you know, I mean, if she *was* my girl.”

I blush and look to the floor. I can sense Heidi staring at me but say nothing.

“Awwwww, Jakey, always the gentleman,” Cam coos.

“Whatever,” Dylan huffs, “let’s cause some Mayhem.”

A bottle of food dye, hundreds of post-its, a death metal c.d, a bag of sugar, 5 garbage bags full of popcorn and one roll of serene warp later, and we’re standing, admiring our masterpiece, laughing to ourselves.

To the outside world, we’re just a group of crazy kids, playing an innocent prank on one of our friends. Even the limo driver has a chuckle to himself.

“How much do I owe you guys? I mean... money... this couldn’t have been cheap... and it’s... I mean, I’m the reason we’re here, right?”

Logan looks to Jake, who clears his throat, “It’s nothing, Mikayla. We have a *Mayhem* fund. We all put in and do stupid shit like this. It just happens that this time it’s not happening to someone we know. These assholes love this shit, don’t even worry about it.”

I look to Logan and he just smiles and nods enthusiastically. I feel Jake bending down to place his mouth near my ear, “All good, Mikayla?” he asks.

I nod once and smile up at him.

And then I make the mistake of looking next door. To the single light that’s on in the bedroom window, with the silhouette of a girl watching us. To the bedroom where my boyfriend, or ex boyfriend, has probably had sex with my ex best friend hundreds of times. I feel a sob coming but I cover my mouth, I know tears will fall the second I close my eyes. Jake notices and follows my eyes

to the girl in the window. Logan must too, because he asks, "Is she going to be a problem?"

I shake my head no, "That's Megan."

"Fuck." I hear Jake mutter under his breath. A sob takes over, and his arms are around me as he envelopes my body with his and I bury my head in his chest. He holds me.

"Umm guys," it's Heidi. I don't look up from Jake's chest, "they're announcing prom king and queen in twenty minutes."

Chapter 5

Mikayla

Megan and I were not at all what you would imagine best friends to be. We were polar opposites in almost every way. She was the head cheerleader with the smokin' hot body, shiny long blond hair and sparkly blue eyes. She played boys, and boys were all for it. Megan knew who she was, and she used to her advantage. People tended not to take her seriously, she played the airhead role to perfection but she was so much more than that, and I was one of the lucky few to see that side of her.

I met her when we were in fifth grade. She had just moved here for her mom's job. I remember sitting in front of her in class while she chatted with everyone around us. All I could hear was her talking about her stationary. Girls love stationary. I was facing the front of the class trying to concentrate on the puzzles we were meant to be doing while she was giggling along, talking to whoever would listen about how she had two of everything. Emergency things she called them, emergency ruler, emergency eraser, emergency sharpener, etc. By that point I had lost focus and turned in my seat to glare at her. She just looked at me and smiled, a full teeth baring smile. I huffed and turned back to face the front fishing through my pencil case for a ruler to mark the margins of my next page, only to find that I didn't have one, I must have left it in the book I was reading during lunch. I raised my hand, "Miss Spencer?" The teacher looked at me from her desk, over the frames of her glasses. "I uh... I don't have my ruler... Can I um... May I please go to my locker to get it?" Before she could answer, there was a light tap on my shoulder. I turned around to see a ruler inches from my face. I looked at Megan questioningly, she just smiled back. "For emergencies," she shrugged.

We became best friends.

The summer before freshman year, we were hanging out eating popsicles on Megan's roof, that led to her bedroom window. We were working on our tans, apparently that's what high school girls did.

"Do you think people will make fun of us because we don't have boyfriends?" she asked out of nowhere.

I hadn't even thought about boys that way, I guess I was a late developer. I shrugged.

"I'm going to have a boyfriend within a month," she declared, more to herself than anyone else.

Then nodded once as if agreeing to it.

"Ok Meg, just don't go dragging me into any of that, I'm happy with the way things are," I said, rolling my eyes at her.

She snickered, "As if I'd even consider it. Do you think I don't know you at all?" she mocked hurt in her voice and held her hand to her heart.

"I just don't want to be one of those girls that has serious relationships through all of high school. It's so not my thing, and when it's over, I don't want to do that whole... 'where are you going to college? Should we go to college together? Who's hopes and dreams are more important?' blah yatta blah."

She looked at me for a second then shook her hand, standing up, she started prancing around the roof dreamily, "Well, Miss '15 going to 50'... I want to fall in love...LOTS... and I want to break

hearts... LOTS, I want to have so many awkward first dates and first kisses at my front door, with lots and LOTS of boys. I want to chase and be chased. I want to hold hands down the hall with some amazingly gorgeous guy and have girls jealous because that guy only has eyes for me. I want to *live* high school. And I want to *love* in high school. And I want to have sex. Oh my god, like... *so much sex!*"

I stared at her, my mouth open in shock. She looked at me and broke out in a fit of laughter. It was a joyous sound that to this day still has me cracking up whenever I hear it. We sat on that roof and giggled like the innocent girls we were for what seemed like hours, but in reality was only minutes. Our laughter broke off when we heard a beeping noise. We both looked over to where the sound was coming from, over to the house next door and the U-haul truck reversing into the driveway.

"Oh, god," Megan sighed, "The house has finally sold. I hope they're not sucky neighbors. I couldn't think of anything worse! Like old people that collect random shit to hoard, and they have to call the fire department to clear the house, only to find like," she looks to the sky as if thinking "...a billion pound woman stuck under a pile of empty snack sized chocolate pudding tubs, and then a crane has to come to lift her body out of the house like on *'Gilbert Grape'*, and they take her to a hospital so they can pump all the fat out of her body. Then 3 years later, some random kid emerges from that house, knocks on our door and asks, 'have you seen my baseball?'"

I look at her for a second, then burst out laughing. Uncontrollable laughter that has the sides of my body aching. I laugh so hard I'm pretty sure colored snot from my popsicle is oozing out of my nose. Holy shit, right? I hear her quietly laughing with me, and then, "Holy shit, Mick... what the hell is that?"

I stop laughing abruptly and follow her eyes to see what the heck she's talking about, and then I see him, and I think, "What the hell is that?"

It's a boy. A boy better than any other boy I've ever seen before. He could be our age but he's built bigger. Like, not an "I work out, I'm a jock" big, but like, I work... lifting heavy shit, kinda big. Farm boy big? I don't know. I've never really thought about boys and big before.

"Let's go introduce ourselves," Megan states, already climbing through the window back into her room.

I sit frozen staring at him, as he slowly makes his way up to the front door, taking in his surroundings, like he hasn't seen the house before. Maybe he hasn't. Dark blond hair hidden under a baseball cap, dark jeans and plain grey shirt. I find myself wondering what color his eyes are, when he looks up suddenly and catches me mid stare. Kill me. Kill me now. I'm sure the blush has crept up to my face and I'm even more sure that he can see it. A slow smile lifts at the corner of his mouth and he raises his right hand in a small wave. I force a smile, which I'm sure looks more like I'm constipated than an actual smile. I start to lift my hand to wave back...

"Mikayla... Come onnnn!!" Meg screams at me like a banshee.

I stand up suddenly and hurl myself through the window, tripping on the eave and falling so unladylike, flat on my ass. "What is *wrong* with you?" She looks at me like I've grown a second head.

"Big boy farm." *WHAT?* Please, Kill. Me. Now.

By the time I've calmed my rapidly beating heart and convinced Megan that I'm not completely insane, I find myself stumbling down her driveway and onto the driveway next door. We're greeted by a lady who looks to be in her late 30's, wearing sweats and unloading boxes from a cherry red truck. She sees us and instantly smiles. "Hi, you young ladies must be our neighbors?" she says, wiping sweat from her brow.

"I am, my name's Megan," she reaches out to shake the ladies hand. "This is my best friend Mikayla," she nudges me.

"Uh. Hi, I'm... um Mikayla," I say, shaking her hand. My eyes are cast downwards. I don't want to

look too much at the ladies face. She's more than likely the mother of the boy whom I've just been eye licking.

"Well, you girls are just the prettiest picture," she drawls in a thick Texan accent. "I'm Sam," she faces the house, "Henry! Boys!"

Im still looking at the concrete of the driveway when I hear the front screen door open and close a couple times.

"Yeah, Ma?" says a male voice. I jerk my head up and see him, like, really see him. Brown, like the color of syrup, his eyes. He recognizes me and stands in front of me with a smile.

"Honey, this is Megan, she's our neighbor." He takes his cap off and shakes Megan's hand, never taking his eyes off me. "And this is her best friend Mikayla." We shake hands, and I swear, sparks fly and my hand tingles with a sensation that roots me to the floor, something I have never felt before.

"Girls, this is my son James, I have another one somewhere, much younger. I'm sure you'll see him soon."

"Nice to meet you." James finally lets go of my hand and I weep internally.

Megan's looking at me like she's watching the third head ooze from the second head I've just grown. Luckily, she saves the day by actually talking to this James kid. I'm still trying to get over the physical shocks that have just sparked my body into life. They talk about school and sports and why they moved here, what there is to do in our small town, and everything else small talk might consist of.

From this, I get that he's a freshman and will be going to our school. Great. I'll be a struck dumb and mute for the next four years.

I hear my name, but I don't know what was said.

Megan nudges my side, I look up at her, her eyebrows raised and head jerking towards James. I slowly look over to him. "Huh?" Im so fricken eloquent I can't even handle it.

He clears his throat, "It was nice meeting you Mikayla, I have to get back to helping unpack. Hopefully I'll see you around school or something." He says it more like a question than a statement.

Before I get to answer a kid comes barreling toward us, he can't be more than 8 years old. He runs straight to Meg and me so fast I don't think he can stop in time. Both Meg and I put our hands out to stop him from crashing into us, but his legs save him and he stops mere inches from us. He glares at Megan, then at me. Seconds which feel like minutes pass, neither saying anything. Then he smiles, "Hey, have you seen my baseball?"

We can't help it. We laugh.

2 weeks later, James and I are dating.

"You okay there, Miss Mikayla?" Heidi asks from across the limo.

I must've zoned out.

"Yeah..." I huff. "I just... I can't believe I didn't see it coming," I say, as I pick imaginary lint of my dress.

"No one suspects the people they love of douchebaggery," Heidi looks at me sympathetically.

"Or slutbaggery," Lucy adds.

Chapter 6

Jake

We get to prom within seconds of the announcement. Heidi goes from the girl we know to the girl everyone expects her to be. She prances on stage, smiles and says a few words. Prom King is Doug, the quarterback. Of course he is.

They pose for photos but it's awkward as hell because Doug knows Dylan's watching and you don't fuck with Dylan. Doesn't matter that physically, they'd be a decent match up. There's only one thing Dylan loves more than basketball and that's his girl. And there's a huge difference between basketball and Heidi. We'd give him shit if he weren't so serious about her. He's not the hearts and flowers kind of guy, but he's the heart and soul kind, and fuck if every girl would rather that than flowers.

We're all watching the stage when I see Casey sauntering towards me, I panic and step closer to Mikayla. It's a dick move but I didn't know I was doing it until it was done. Mikayla looks up at me, eyebrows drawn in and I guess she must sense my panic because she follows my eyes to Casey and I think she understands. She wraps her tiny little arms around my waist and her side presses against mine, her head getting comfortable in the crook of my arm as I put my arm around her shoulders.

"Hey, Jake," Casey coos inches away from us. "Who's your little friend? I haven't seen this one around before."

I flinch at her words and I feel Mikayla tense next to me, but only for a second before she recovers herself.

"Casey, this is Mikayla." Mikayla laughs once, "Baby, you don't have to be so formal." She reaches a hand out to Casey. "Jake calls me Kayla. Do you go to school here, Lacey?"

"It's Casey."

"Oh." Mikayla nods once, smiling at Casey. Then she looks up at me. Big brown eyes like Bambi. She rubs her hands up and down my chest. "I'm thirsty, babe. Let's get a drink then head to the hotel," she says loud enough for Casey to hear. Then she gets on her toes and whispers in my ear, "I'm not wearing any underwear." I don't know if Casey can hear her, but I know she can see my eyes widen in surprise. What she can't see is my dick twitch at the thought.

Fuck, I'm such a guy.

I look down at her, and she's smirking back at me.

"Well, have a good night," Casey interrupts, and then backs away.

Heidi comes back from the stage, "Was that Casey? What did she do to you this time?" she asks, watching Casey walk back into the dance floor. She turns to us and motions her finger between us, "And what the fuck is going on here?"

Then we realize we're still locked in each others arms and we both abruptly let go. I'm a bit more hesitant than she is though, and I can't help but try to look down the back of her dress, to her ass, to see if she really isn't wearing any underwear.

I'm an asshole.

"Let's go, I'm bored," Cam says as Logan comes back to the group with disheveled hair and his tu all out of sorts.

"I'm ready," Logan says, as we all stare at him. "What? I just gave some band geek a night they'll never forget."

We're all in the limo and driving through some heavy woods. I can tell Mikayla is getting worried because her eyes keep darting out the window, then to her phone.

I nudge her, "Don't worry, I told you, I'm not a psycho, I'm not going to kill you. We can drop the guys off and you can take the limo home if you want."

"It's okay," she smiles. "I'd rather be here than anywhere else."

Mikayla

The limo stops at a clearing in the middle of nowhere and we all file out. There's an old truck that surely doesn't run anymore, and a bonfire. Logan and Dylan start lighting the fire and Cam and Jake jump into the bed of the truck and pull down a couple chairs and a cooler full of beers. They start passing the beers around while the girls set up the chairs.

Cam and Lucy take up the seating on the bed of the truck and there are three chairs around the fire. Dylan's on one with Heidi on his lap, Logan in the other. Jake is holding the back of the left over chair, "Here, take a seat, I'll stand."

"Sorry," Heidi holds up her beer, "we weren't expecting extra, not that you haven't been a great surprise though."

I face Jake. "It's fine, I'll stand, it's your chair, your bonfire, you-"

"I gotta place for you right here, sweetheart," Logan says from behind me, patting his lap. I scrunch my nose at him. Lucy notices and laughs. Logan is a good looking kid, don't get me wrong. If I was any other girl I'd be swooning over him. But the fact he spilt beer on me, was an ass, and then most likely just screwed some innocent girl at their prom and left her there, well, it kinda downplays his swoon-worth.

Before I know it, an arm is wrapped around my waist and my ass lands on Jake's lap with both my legs to one side. My side is to his front. "I think she'd rather not." His accent makes it sound like 'I think she'd ruhthuh not'.

I admit to myself, accents turn me on. James had a sexy accent, it was a nice Texan drawl, not too 'dirty', it was perfect. I used to love how he'd dip his cap forward a little and say, 'yes ma-am' when asked him to do things. It was cute, and sexy, and he knew it turned me on, so he used it as often as possible. Fuck James, I really did love him.

Before I can react, two hands are wiping away tears I hadn't realized were falling. Jake placing his hands on either side of my face, looking into my eyes. He must see so much sadness, and hurt, and anger, and regret, and all I see in his, are comfort and understanding. He nods his head once and uses his hand to pull my head to his lips, he gives me one short, sweet kiss to my temple, and it's everything I need to make the world keep spinning around me.

Chatter goes on around us and I realize I've totally spaced out.

"I can't wait to hit the bars around UNC," one of the boys says. I don't know which one.

"Huh?" I look up. "Who's going to UNC?"

Cam laughs, "We all are. Why? Are you?"

"Yeah, I am," I say wide-eyed. "What? All of you are?"

Cam eyes Jake for a second then back to me, "Yeah, your boy Jake there's got a full ride, athletic scholarship," he smiles like a proud dad, "he'll probably be starting pitcher as a freshman."

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