

Prologue

The heavy gate groaned shut. Engaging the lock, he pulled the backpack out of his jeep and slung it over his shoulder. It was a rare fall day in the Pacific Northwest, and he planned to take full advantage of the good weather.

He had work to do.

He pulled a “No Trespassing” sign from the pack and propped it against the fence. With a few sure strokes of a hammer, he nailed it to the post. The dull blows echoed in the quiet woods.

Branches and fallen leaves popped and crackled beneath his feet as he worked his way methodically along the ridge, checking the barbed wire fence for gaps. The cinnamon smell of the turning leaves was a sure sign that hunting season would soon begin, and he couldn't afford to have strangers stumbling onto his property.

He nailed the last sign to the post.

There. That should keep the bastards out.

He turned and started down a rugged trail carved into the steep hillside. A couple hundred feet below, the valley floor glimmered like an emerald in the late day sun. Three cabins stood in the clearing beside the Tolt River. A half-dozen more were scattered along the upper ridge overlooking Lake Langois.

The place had been a youth camp once, before the tragic drowning of a teenaged girl had destroyed the camp's reputation. Afterwards, the camp had closed and the cabins had fallen into disrepair.

It was a shame really. He had fond memories of the place. So while his father spent the summer basking in an alcoholic haze, he'd spent time exploring the woods, far away from his father's violent mood swings. By any measure, it was a win-win.

Dappled sunlight shone through the thick canopy of branches overhead. He loved days like this. Alone in the woods, he felt at peace with the world.

A scream rent the air, shattering the stillness of the afternoon.

It was shrill. Human.

Crows fled the safety of the trees, a torrent of black wings flooding the blue sky. Heart racing, he started to run. The uneven ground slid beneath his boots. Branches slapped at his face, and he ran faster, driven on by her panicked cries.

The valley floor was muddy after the long weeks of rain. The spongy earth slowed his pace as he raced toward the river.

Another scream. Louder.

"Help me. Oh God. Please."

It was coming from the cabin farthest from the water's edge.

His boots pounded up the wooden steps. Hinges squawked in protest as he crashed through the door.

The stench hit him hard—stale sweat and human waste. His stomach churned.

At first, he could see nothing, his eyes blinded in the dim light. Then her slender form materialized out of the darkness—a small slip of a girl, barely more than a hundred pounds. She was standing near the center of the room. Her hands bound behind her back. A soiled University of Washington t-shirt hanging from her skinny frame. Pink panties. And nothing else.

The relief on her face froze the instant she spotted him. A small sob escaped her lips. She stepped back, retreating into the shadows.

As if she could hide.

“Now, Kim,” he said. “What was the rule?”

Her jaw worked, but no sound emerged. She took another pitiful step back, her wide eyes brimming with fear.

“What was the rule?”

His voice boomed in the small cabin. She flinched like a beaten dog.

“No calling out,” she mumbled.

“I can’t hear you? What’s the rule?”

“No calling out.”

“No calling out,” he repeated, smiling thinly. “That’s right. You leave me no choice.”

“Please,” she said, voice trembling, tears leaking from her eyes. “I’ll do better, I promise. I promise...”

He stepped toward her, his tread echoing on the bare plank floor. She shrank back, trembling, and stumbled over the bucket. Hands flailing wide, she crashed to the floor.

He stopped. His six-foot frame loomed above her. She averted her gaze, looking anywhere but at him.

This will not do.

He hunkered down and gripped her narrow chin, painfully forcing her gaze to meet his.

“Please,” she whispered, knowing it was useless.

Her mouth trembled.

“Aw, princess,” he said, running his thumb slowly across her swollen bottom lip.

“I’m afraid it’s too late for that.”

He reached down and unbuckled his belt.

Chapter 1

There was something seriously fucked up about turning a mortuary into a bar, Drew Matthews thought as he walked through the heavy oak doors of the Chapel. While much of the original architecture of the 1920s building remained intact, the interior displayed the tumors of decades of evolving taste. There were a few recent growths, like the U-shaped bar in the center of the former embalming room. Lit up like a runway at SeaTac International Airport, it guided him in.

The drink menu read like the King James Bible, with parables about sins and martinis. Arm propped against the bar, he ordered the “Bruce Lee,” a fast, tawny drink that howled like a banshee with fists of fury. It was named after the famous Seattle martial artist whose embalming reportedly took place in this very bar.

But there was nothing dead about the place now. Swarming schools of urban hipsters out for their Saturday night fix swelled like dividing cells. So many desperate souls crowding the bar, looking for that elusive thing missing from their lives. Attention. Sex. Connection. Drew felt the pulsing need, so palpable he could almost taste it.

Tension rippled across his shoulders, into the base of his brain. If ever there was a night he felt like getting good and truly shitfaced, this was it. He knew he couldn't give in to the impulse though. Meeting the friends was a rite of passage he must endure for his relationship with Alicia Wright to progress. And he had every intention of taking their relationship to the next level.

He'd already picked out a sparkly new ring.

A hand ran up his back and he turned. Alicia dressed well for her starring role. A fitted white blouse hugged her athletic curves, the plunging neckline low enough to catch a delectable view of her cleavage. A tight black miniskirt rode up on her well-toned thighs. In high-heeled boots, she was almost eye level with Drew. He found the accumulated effect arousing.

Alicia leaned in close. He caught a whiff of her perfume. Dark. Floral. Orchids. Her ruby lips brushed his ear, sending sparks jangling along his taut nerve endings.

“Hey, look who finally decided to show up,” she said in a sexy, throaty murmur.

“Sorry, I had to work a little late. Came straight here.”

“Well, grab your drink and let’s go. Gretchen’s waiting.”

Drew raised a finger and drained his glass in a long swallow. Alicia raised her eyebrows.

“You okay?”

“I’ve got some catching up to do.”

So what if he was a little nervous? Who wouldn’t be? Alicia and her pack of prep-school friends grew up in a different world. While their nannies had dropped them off at private schools and playdates, he’d watched cancer devour his mother while his father fell to pieces. What could they possibly know about being so hungry you stole food or hiding in the woods all night, afraid to come home because your father was a mean drunk? Or being left behind, abandoned by your evil stepmother?

Alicia grasped his hand and tugged him away from the bar. Drew followed her up a narrow staircase to a wide balcony overlooking the main floor. The speakers blared and the upper deck swarmed with life.

He definitely needed another drink.

Alicia threaded her way to the front of the platform, where she stopped. Back to the railing, she looped an arm around the shoulders of a chubby girl.

“Drew, this is Gretchen Lange. We’ve been friends since we were kids.”

“What she means to say is that we’ve been BFFs since third grade,” Gretchen tittered.

Bright blue eyes sparkled in her doughy, white face. A ridiculous mass of strawberry blonde curls bounced and jiggled when she laughed, which was easily and often.

Drew stretched out his hand.

“Gretchen, at last. Alicia’s told me so much about you.”

“Not too much, I hope.”

“She didn’t tell me you were so lovely,” he said.

She wasn’t really. Clad in a skin-tight floral dress, she looked like a gaudy pink hibiscus. Smelled like one too. Up close, her perfume made his eyes water. But he knew the comment would score points with both women, so he said it anyway.

“Shame on you, Alicia, for keeping this one all to yourself.”

“She was afraid I’d embarrass her,” Drew said.

“You? Looking all James Bond? Not likely.”

“James Bond?” Drew asked, his lips stretching into a grin.

“Careful, Gretchen,” Alicia said. “You’ll only feed his ego, which is enormous, by the way.”

Drew’s mouth dropped open in mock incredulity.

“Don’t you believe a word of it,” Drew said, splaying a hand across his chest. “I’m the very embodiment of modesty.”

“Oh, I can see that,” Gretchen cried. “Modest and charming. A killer combination.”

Gretchen wasn’t very bright, but she was fun—kind of like watching a train wreck.

Alicia shook back the dark curtain of her glossy hair and leaned into him. The warm press of her body had him thinking more about the after-party than the festivities at hand, and he wished he could push the fast forward button on the evening. Get to the part where she was his alone.

Glancing around, he spied the waitress on the other side of the platform. Raising his hand, he caught her eye. She hustled over and he ordered another drink—a nod to the serial killer Ted Bundy this time.

Moments later, more of Alicia’s friends arrived. Amid a flurry of hugs and kisses, Alicia made the introductions.

“Tracy, Madison, and Liam,” she said, her bright eyes glittering.

The anorexic spandex twins could have passed for sisters with their long blonde hair and skin-tight dresses. The guy was tall, with a swimmer’s build and a bored, pouty look that said exactly what he thought: They were all beneath him. Ice blue eyes stared at Drew through a fringe of wispy blond bangs in a messy, chin-length cut that easily cost a couple hundred bucks.

Liam’s hand wedged into the small of Alicia’s back, his little finger inches above the curve of her ass. Eyeing Drew with the clinical stare of a scientist assessing his

subject, Liam smiled. The bastard was baiting him. Wondering just how far he could push before Drew lost his shit.

He wanted to plow the prick in the face. Instead, he grasped his ring and twisted it around his finger. The bloodstone ring glimmered red in the light. He remembered his father's fist lashing out, how the ring gashed his cheek. But he was no longer that boy. Now he knew there was more than one way to win a fight.

Drew tore his gaze away from Liam and scanned the upper deck.

Where the fuck is the waitress?

Apparently the universe heard him because just then the beer wench appeared hefting a tray of jewel-colored cocktails. Like a frat boy at a frosh party, Drew inhaled half of his in a single swallow. Vodka burned a fiery path down his throat, and he realized with regret he should have ordered a double.

"Drew, is it? Tell us how you met Alicia," Liam shouted over the throbbing house music.

"We met at the investment firm where she works. I was meeting with my financial advisor when she walked in. She took pity on me when I asked for her number."

Alicia smiled. "Pity had nothing to do with it. He asked me out for dinner, and the rest is history."

"Investments, eh? Tell me about your portfolio," Liam said, swirling an electric blue drink around in his glass with his free hand.

"Why? Do you have some wisdom to share?" Alicia asked.

“Not likely,” Gretchen scoffed. “You see, Drew, Liam here is Seattle royalty. His father founded one of the first successful dot coms and sold before the bubble burst.

Unlike the rest of us working stiffs, he doesn’t worry about petty things like money.”

“I like to dabble in stocks.” Liam shrugged, sipping his drink.

“That’s sweet,” Gretchen quipped with a small, sour look that made Drew smile.

“Don’t you have people to do that for you?” Drew asked.

“Sure, but everyone needs a hobby.”

“A hobby? Now that’s funny,” Gretchen snorted, sloshing her drink onto her dress.

Cheeks flushing red, she glanced around for a napkin. Drew handed his over.

Dabbing at her dress, Gretchen scowled at Liam.

“See what you made me do?”

“Not me, Gretch. You always were a sloppy drunk.”

“Liam!” Alicia said.

“It’s true. Don’t you remember the time we all went to dinner at that place?” Liam said, snapping his fingers like he was trying to recall. “You remember, Alicia, the posh little place in Madison Park.”

“Crush?”

“Yeah, that’s it, Crush. Gretchen got so wasted, the maître d’ hauled her out of there...”

“Escorted her, you mean,” Alicia said.

Liam waved a hand. “Whatever. The whole way out of the restaurant, she’s yelling at him, calling him names...”

“Until she threw up on his shoes,” Alicia blurted, slapping her hand across her mouth like she’d just spilled a secret.

“Sweetheart,” Liam said. He paused and turned his affectionate gaze on Alicia. “You stripped down to your panties and danced in the fountain.”

“That’s right,” Gretchen said, her flaming red face breaking into a smile.

“It was epic,” Liam roared, and the whole group erupted in laughter.

They spent the next half hour reliving highlights from their glory days—like the time Liam and Alicia took his father’s private jet to Paris for the weekend—while Drew stood at the edge of the group and looked on. An outsider. He laughed at the right moments. Feigned interest. And checked his watch. The minutes crawled by.

By eleven-thirty, the party was in full swing, but he was done. Alicia turned to him, as if suddenly recalling his presence.

“Get me another drink?”

It came out sounding more like a command than a request, and Drew bristled. Liam shot him a condescending smile and smoothed his hand over Alicia’s ass.

A hot burst of anger surged through Drew.

“Sure,” he said.

Grabbing Alicia by the hand, he tugged her toward him. His eyes boring deep into hers, he leaned down and kissed her hard. Through the thin fabric of her shirt, he felt her stiffen, resist. So he deepened the kiss. His tongue probed the depths of her mouth.

All conversation stopped. The throbbing beat of the house music pulsed, and Alicia’s face glowed bright red as she pulled away.

Releasing her, Drew winked at Liam on his way by. Last call. He had to get out of here before he did something stupid. But first he needed another drink.

And then what?

Then he'd do the smart thing. He'd go home and cool off. He'd deal with Alicia later.

After all, she wouldn't have any trouble finding a ride home.

Chapter 2

“Give me that,” Brooke Parker said, trying to snatch her ID card out of her roommate, Tess Turner’s, hands. But Tess was too quick. With an impish grin, she held it beyond Brooke’s grasp and squinted at the photo.

“Seriously, this is the worst fake ID I’ve ever seen. Were you drunk?”

“Very funny. Like yours is any better.”

Grabbing Tess’s arm, she managed to wrestle the card from her grip. Tess laughed.

“At least mine looks like me.”

“And you’re passing yourself off as twenty-three?” Brooke said, tucking her ID card back in her wallet.

“Hey, it was good enough to get us in here,” Tess said, sipping her drink. “This was your idea.”

They were both nineteen. Underage. And while Tess wanted to go to an on-campus party, Brooke had convinced her to sneak into the Chapel instead.

“Your boyfriend was right. The guy at the door wasn’t exactly the sharpest tool in the shed.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Brooke said, looking up in time to catch a glimpse of Jesse Morgan holding court. Halfway down the bar, he handed an older woman her drink. There was nothing subtle about the hungry look on the woman’s leathery face as she eyed him, and Brooke frowned.

Assessing the situation in a flash, Tess leaned into her and shouted, “Careful, girls, tanning kills.”

Brooke laughed. She drained the last few remaining drops of alcohol from her glass and winced. At least Jesse wasn’t skimping on the vodka. Three drinks in and already she felt as if she were floating on a soft cloud rather than sitting on a hard barstool.

“Not your boyfriend, eh?” Tess said. “Why not? He’s cute.”

Brooke shrugged. “We’ve got a history. We sort of dated in high school.”

“What do you mean, *sort of dated*?” An eyebrow arched in Tess’s pixie face. She wanted to hear all the juicy details. She always did, but Brooke dropped her gaze to the empty glass and shook her head.

“My mom didn’t like him. Said he was too old for me. After graduation, he moved away and I hadn’t heard a word from him until a few days ago.”

“Okay, so then Prince Charming shows up looking this good, and you’re telling me you’re just friends?” Tess flashed a wicked grin. “I suppose that’s why you’re dressed like *that*. Because you’re *just friends*.”

“What, this old thing?” she said. Brooke glanced down at her sequined tank top, matchstick jeans, and high heels, and both girls laughed.

Brooke watched Jesse shake up the next cocktail and pour it into a chilled martini glass, this time for a curvy brunette. The girl said something and Jesse smiled. Brooke remembered that smile—the dimples carved into his cheeks. And how his eyes, as blue as a tropical sea, could make you feel like you were the only girl on earth. She missed that. She missed him.

Tess propped her chin on her palm, nudging Brooke with her shoulder.

“Earth to Brooke. Maybe you need to give him a reason to notice you.”

“Meaning?”

“Look around. The place is packed with gorgeous guys. Find one to flirt with.”

Tess had a point. There was no shortage of hot guys crowding the bar.

“Most are here with their Barbie-doll girlfriends,” she said.

“Don’t let that stop you. You look hot, girl. You shouldn’t waste it. So if Prince Charming is too busy to notice, find someone else. I’m even willing to play cupid.”

“Wait, you’re going to pick out a guy for me?” Brooke said, wishing she had a full drink in front of her now. “No offense, Tess, but...”

“But what?”

Brooke grinned. “It may surprise you to know that we don’t exactly have the same taste in men.”

“Or women.”

A wicked glint twinkled in her roommate’s eyes, and Brooke shook her head.

“You’re so bad. Okay. You remember the last guy you hooked me up with?”

God. What a disaster that was.

“Yeah, he had that thing about picking his nose,” Tess said.

“I could have dealt with the nose thing, but when the police crashed our date to arrest him on an open bench warrant...”

“Come on, he wasn’t that bad.”

“Tess, he was a felon.”

A sheepish smile spread across her friend's face. "Okay, you got me there, but everyone's allowed an off day."

"Is that what you call it?"

"The next one's a can't-miss, right?"

Brooke laughed and shook her long blonde curls over her shoulders. Tess laughed too. It was getting late, and Brooke swung her gaze back toward Jesse, wishing just once he would glance her way. He didn't though. He was too busy fist-bumping some guy when she heard a man's voice close beside her.

"Hey, beautiful, buy you a drink?"

Brooke glanced around. A stocky guy leaned against the bar, staring straight at her. He had a boxer's face with a crooked nose, like the kind that had been broken more than once. She shied away from the boozy cloud of beer breath wafting her way.

"No thanks. I'm good," she said, turning back toward Tess.

"Anything you want. Sky's the limit. The name's Sully. Charles Sully."

Brooke groaned. Really? Could this night get any worse? She pulled out her phone, pretending to read a text message.

"No thanks," she said again, sounding distracted.

She hoped the dismissal would send the guy packing, but she could still feel him standing beside her.

"You're not one of those stuck-up girls who think they're too good to talk to a nice guy like me, are you?"

She wasn't trying to be a bitch, but he wasn't her type, and there was something about the look in his eyes she didn't like. Brooke searched for something to say, some kind of polite brushoff that wouldn't upset him. Her roommate saved her the trouble.

Tess smacked her hand solidly on top of Brooke's. Quick as lightning, she snatched Brooke's phone off the bar and stuck it directly in Sully's fleshy face. The flash flared, and the phone's camera clicked, recording his ruddy image. Light glinted off the stud in Tess's eyebrow.

Easing forward, Tess eyed Sully with a hard look.

"Back off shit-for-brains, she's with me."

Sully's thick lips parted in a predatory grin. Brooke caught a glimpse of sharp incisors. She inched closer to Tess.

"That's okay, bitch. I'm man enough for both of you."

"I doubt that," Tess said.

"Sorry I'm late," a voice, deep and male, said behind them.

Brooke spun, looking up into his face. Her stomach lurched. Talk about Prince Charming. He was gorgeous. Over six feet tall, he had a lean, muscular build. Straight nose. Angular cheekbones. There was something oddly familiar about him, like maybe she had seen him on campus.

His chocolate brown eyes locked on hers. She searched for something to say, but her mind went blank. As usual, Tess didn't miss a beat.

"It's about time you got here," she said, sounding annoyed.

"Yeah. Sorry about that. Is everything okay?"

He turned his steady gaze on Charles Sully's broad face. Sully stared back. Brooke's stomach tightened another notch as the two men eyed each other like a pair of pit bulls facing off.

"Have we got a problem here?" the newcomer asked.

Jaw clenched, Sully looked away. Pushing off of the bar, he dissolved into the crowd.

Brooke's heart still pounded. She was glad Sully was gone. He may not have scared Tess, but there was something about him that set her nerves on edge.

"Thanks," Brooke breathed.

"Looked like you could use a hand."

"You can say that again. That fuck-wad wouldn't take no for an answer." Tess rolled her eyes.

"I was kind of hoping he'd make a thing of it."

"I'm Tess, by the way, and this is Brooke."

Brooke smiled.

"So, ladies, who do I have to screw to get a drink around here?" he asked, shifting his gaze away from Brooke to the bar.

"Unfortunately, that guy."

Brooke hooked a thumb toward Jesse stationed at the far end of the bar. He grinned and raised his hand to flag down the nearest bartender. She caught a flash of gold and red, and her gaze lingered on his ring. It was old. Unusual. Like a class ring with a dark red stone embedded in a thick gold band.

A strong sense of déjà vu tickled the back of Brooke's brain. She knew him from somewhere. She tried to think, but her brain was still foggy from the last cosmo she'd inhaled. The memory refused to click into place—maddeningly aloof, like a word poised on the tip of her tongue. She shook her head.

Tess hopped off of her barstool.

“Where are you going?” Brooke hissed, grabbing her arm.

“To the ladies' room. Why? Do you want to watch?”

Brooke released her grip and Tess winked. Gone in a flash, she was swallowed up by the crowd. The guy shouted his drink order to a skinny bartender with a neck tattoo and a scruffy hipster beard.

“Want anything?” he asked.

“A cosmo.”

Before he'd shown up, she'd been thinking it was time to go. Now, Brooke didn't see the harm in staying for one more drink.

Her phone buzzed on the bar. She picked it up and read the new text.

Go for it. If you don't, I will.

Tess.

She glanced around, looking for her partner in crime, but the press of bodies made it impossible to see more than a few feet in any direction. Brooke tucked the phone back in her pocket, hoping he hadn't seen the text.

“What did you say your name was?” he asked.

“Brooke Parker.”

She held out her hand. His grip was warm and strong. A shiver of electricity passed through her at his touch. A memory clicked into place, and just like that, she had it. She remembered who he was.

“You’re Andy. I knew I recognized you.”

“What’s that?” he asked, craning his head back toward her.

“Andy, right?”

All at once, his expression changed. His eyes narrowed and she was caught by the intensity of his stare. Brooke blushed. The fact that she embarrassed so easily was infuriating, but she couldn’t look away either. Her gaze focused on the taut line of his mouth. He glanced at the balcony. Then he smiled.

“Brooke Parker. It’s been a long time. Look at you. All grown up.”

His eyes roved over her slowly, appreciatively, triggering another infuriating blush.

“You don’t look so bad yourself, Andy.”

He tipped his head close and whispered in a conspiratorial tone, “I go by Drew now.”

His warm breath tickled her ear, sending shivers down her spine.

“Are you here with your girlfriend?” she asked, half dreading the answer.

“Are you?” he asked, looking amused.

“Tess is my roommate. It looks like she’s abandoned me though.”

“Your stalker hasn’t.” He glanced across the bar.

Sully’s acid glare was fixed on the two of them. Goosebumps prickled Brooke’s arms. Andy—or was it Drew?—placed his hand on her back. The warmth of his touch

burned through the thin tank top, and for a moment she forgot all about her stalker and Jesse. Brooke inched closer to him.

“Mom will be so surprised when I tell her I saw you. Kelly has a music recital tomorrow afternoon. Why don’t you come with me? I mean, if you’re not doing anything. I know Mom would love to see you.”

“Let’s play it by ear,” he said, squeezing her shoulder.

She pulled out her phone, aimed it at him. He raised a hand in front of his face.

“What are you doing?”

Playfully she batted it away and snapped a photo. It wasn’t the best picture. The low light made it a little blurry, but it didn’t matter. She could tweak it later.

“Well, if you’re not going to come to the recital, I need evidence that you actually do exist.”

He stared down into her upturned face and smiled. His warm fingers brushed her skin, unleashing a torrent of butterflies in the pit of her stomach as he drew the Medic Alert dog tags from beneath the neckline of her tank top.

Running his thumb overtop of the Caduceus medical symbol etched into the front face, he frowned. “What’s this?”

Her cheeks burned. She hated this—admitting she had a condition. Waiting for the inevitable look of shock on someone else’s face. Or worse, their pity.

“I’m diabetic.”

She expected a look from him that said she was broken, but his expression didn’t change. Letting go of the dog tags, he let them fall against her chest.

“Well, I don’t know about you, Brooke Parker, but I’ve had enough of this place for one night. Where’s your little friend?”

Brooke shrugged. Tess was doing a good job of making herself scarce.

“I hate to sound all big brother on you,” he said, “but you really shouldn’t stay here alone, not with your stalker lurking close by.”

“Big brother. That’s funny.”

He grinned and cast his gaze across the crowded bar. Brooke didn’t have to follow the trajectory of his stare to know whom he was talking about.

“You can’t leave. You just ordered drinks,” she said.

“And they’re not going to get here anytime this century. I’m out of here.”

“Okay.” The tightness in her muscles signaled a subtle warning that her blood sugars were on the rise. She could use a shot of insulin. “You’re probably right. It’s time to go. Do me a favor and walk me outside?”

“Sure.”

The crowd parted around Andy as he made for the exit. Grabbing her coat and purse from a hook underneath the bar, Brooke followed in his wake. He glanced up toward the balcony. Brooke looked up too, but no one seemed to be looking their way.

They stepped outside into the brisk night. Brooke shivered. The denim jacket that had looked so perfect in her dorm room did little to ward off the chilly night air. She pulled the phone from her pocket and launched an app to summon a ride back to campus.

“Shit,” Drew said, stopping dead in his tracks. “I left something at the bar. You’ll be all right?”

She smiled. “Of course.”

He turned and jogged back inside, leaving her alone on the stairs. Brooke tucked the phone back into her pocket. It was darker out here than she'd expected. The sparse line of streetlights did little to penetrate the inky blackness around her. The one closest to the parking lot was out. Broken glass littered the pavement below. A cold wind ruffled her hair, and she folded her arms across her midriff.

The door opened. There was a bust of laughter and clicking high heels, then nothing but the gentle buzz of cars zipping by. Brooke glanced behind her and took a couple more steps away from the stairs.

It was creepy out here in the dark.

Brooke glanced at her phone, checking the time, wishing her ride would hurry up. It was cold. And she didn't like being out here alone. She glanced back toward the doors, knowing she'd feel a whole lot safer with Drew by her side.

The deep growl of a car engine roared close behind her. Startled, Brooke stepped back. A car squealed out of the parking lot in a flash of green and black. Tires squawked to a halt. Red taillights flared. Her pulse raced.

The car backed up. The window lowered. She recognized his crooked nose.