



MORE
than
FOREVER

MORE SERIES | BOOK FOUR

JAY MCLEAN

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Published: Jay McLean July 2014

Cover Design: by Ari at Cover it! Designs: <http://www.coveritdesigns.net>

NOTE TO READERS

Please note that More Than Forever (More #4) is part #4 in the More Series and should not be read prior to reading More Than This (More #1), More Than Her (More #2) and More Than Him (More #3).

More Than This

Mikayla

In one night my fairytale ended. Or it may have begun. This is my story of friendship and love, heartbreak and desire, and the strength to show weakness.

Jake

One night I met a girl. A sad and broken girl, but one more beautiful than any other. She laughed through her sadness, while I loved through her heartbreak.

This is our story of a maybe ever after.

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

The feeling of falling.

More Than Her

"For every action there is an equal or opposite reaction."
For every choice you make there are rewards, or there are consequences.

It was my choice to walk away the first time.

And my choice to chase her the second.

But sometimes you don't get a choice,
and all you get are the consequences.

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength,
while loving someone deeply gives you courage."

Unless that someone is Logan Matthews.
Because loving him didn't give me the strength to walk away.

It didn't give me the courage to fight for him.
And when it was over, all it gave me was a broken heart.

More Than Him

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us." -

Marianne Williamson

We live in a world of darkness and shadows,
where monsters hide and aim to ruin.
And they did.
They ruined us and turned our dreams into nightmares.
But now we're back.
And we're fighting.
Not just for us, or for each other, but for our light.

DEDICATION

To my readers and believers. Always.

PROLOGUE

-CAMERON-

Mom says that there's absolutely no pain worse than labor. For sixteen hours, so she says, she went through absolute hell. She jokes that sometimes she wonders if it was worth it. I call bullshit. I say that nothing, absolutely nothing, can feel worse than being hit in the junk with a baseball bat.

Lincoln's eyes are huge as he grimaces. "I'm so sorry, Cam."

I'm folded over myself, too preoccupied with the ache below my stomach. Sometimes, there's a delay with the pain. But not this time. This time it was instant. I try to speak, but nothing comes out. He looks like he wants to cry and I want to assure him that it's all good—but I can't. Liam, Lincoln's twin brother, is laughing. The little punk. I'll be sure to make him do extra shit next practice. "Cam, are you okay?"

I try to straighten, but it just makes the pain worse. "Yeah, bud. I just gotta let it settle."

"I swear I didn't see you behind me." There's panic clear in his voice and for a second I want to tell myself to suck it up and quit being a little bitch, but I can't do that either. The pain's too overwhelming.

Liam's still laughing his ass off.

My eyes narrow at him, and Lincoln must notice because he turns to his brother and pushes him hard enough that he falls to the ground. That makes Liam stop. He gets up and dusts the dirt off his uniform. "We should go, Linc, we're the last ones here."

Lincoln looks around. So do I. Liam's right, everyone's gone.

"I'm just gonna help Cam pack up," Lincoln replies, picking up the team equipment bag and chucking in the helmets and bats sitting by my feet. He looks up at me again, and I can see how truly sorry he is.

Standing to full height, I do my best to ignore the pain. "It's okay, Linc. Seriously, it's passed now." It hasn't, but he doesn't need to know that. He finishes packing anyway, and hands me the bag; it's bigger than he is.

I take it from his hands and look around again. "Your mom or dad late to pick you up?"

"Nah," Liam says, the laughter and amusement now gone. "Lucy's here."

"Lucy?"

"Our sister," Lincoln explains.

They both turn to the bleachers. I follow their gaze.

A lone girl sits on the bottom bench. Something flat, black and rectangular is in her hand, kind of like a tablet I guess. Her eyes are focused on it, while her foot rocks a stroller back and forth.

It strikes me as strange because the girl looks familiar. She's in my class. *She's a sophomore and she has a baby?* Stuff like that doesn't happen in our town and if it did,

I'd know.

Everyone would know.

"Lucy!" Liam shouts.

She doesn't look up.

"Lucy!" Lincoln this time.

Still, her eyes don't lift, but her foot continues to rock the stroller.

"Luce!" Liam yells again.

Nothing.

My eyes narrow before looking down at the boys. "Is your sister... uh... hearing impaired?"

They both let out simultaneous snorts. "No," Lincoln answers, pulling his cap further down his head and looking up at me. His eyes roll as he says, "She's just reading."

She shows up to every game for the next six weeks. Every week she looks sadder, like the life is slowly being sucked out of her.

And you know how I know all this? Because while she's so pre-occupied reading... I'm so pre-occupied reading her.

-LUCY-

Lachlan cried the entire walk home, which meant that I had to carry him with one hand and push the stroller with the other, all while trying to make sure that Lincoln and Liam didn't run out onto the road. Which would be fine, but I accidentally packed red Kool-Aid instead of their sports drinks so they went a little crazy. I'll remember for next time to keep them separated in the fridge.

Lachlan's still crying when Dad comes downstairs and walks into the kitchen. He offers to take him from my hands but I can see in his eyes how tired he is. I tell him that I'm fine, and motion for him to take a seat.

He hasn't been out of their bedroom much lately, which is a sign that things are getting worse. The doctors said that it was normal—that things would get worse before they got better. I wonder for a moment if doctors have a book of cliché sayings they use to try to justify one's health.

A bitter laugh tries to escape but I keep it down while I watch Dad take a seat at the dining table, his hands already covering his face before he's fully seated.

The microwave beeps and I pull out Lachlan's bottle and feed it to him. Silence fills my ears. I try to remember the last time I heard nothing. In a house full of nine people, silence is rare. My mind wonders on that thought for a short moment before Dad's sigh breaks through. "It's gettin' worse, Luce." His deep voice has lost the fight to fake it. "The doctor came for a house call. It's not lookin' good." He uncovers his face and looks up at me now, his eyes red rimmed from either lack of sleep or held back tears, but most likely both.

"How long?" It's two words. Two words that affect my entire life.

"Three months."

Three months.

I stop breathing.

Lachlan cries and starts spurring his formula through his coughs.

Dad stands and takes him from me.

I walk out of the room, and to the bathroom.

And I throw up.

Three months.

When I'm done, I run the tap and wash my mouth out, then stare at myself in the mirror. Gripping the edge of the sink, I suck in a huge breath and let it out. I do it a few more times until color comes back into my face. "Suck it up, Lucy," I whisper. "You're fifteen. Quit acting like a child."

A few minutes pass and I finally find the strength to open the door and walk out.

Dad's waiting with his arms folded over his chest. No Lachlan. "He fell asleep in my arms, I put him down for his nap," he answers my unasked question. "You okay, kid?"

That same bitter laugh from earlier tries to escape. And again, I keep it down. Because even though he referred to me as one, I'm not a kid. Far from it.

"I'm fine," I lie. "The heat from being out at the field just got to me. I'm fine," I repeat.

His head tilts to the side and his eyes narrow, assessing me.

"I'm fine," I lie for the third time. I walk past him and take the stairs to the only room I can stand to be in right now. She's awake, but she's so out of it she may as well not be. I curse myself for hoping she would die already. For hoping that it would take the pain away. Not just for her, but for all of us.

Waiting for someone to die has to be the world's cruellest joke.

"Lucy," she croaks out. "How are you?"

I fake a smile. "Fine."

Four fines. Four lies.

She matches my fake smile with her own and pats the bed next to her. I kick off my shoes, lie down and pull my spare e-reader from under the pillow.

She lets out a shaky breath at the same time I switch it on. I don't even know why I bothered picking it up. I know the story she wants me to read to her. I know it word for word. I've read it to her every day since the day the doctors told her she had cancer. I inhale deeply. "The four March sisters sat in the living room..."

*

My mom fell in love with reading after she read *Little Women*. I fell in love with reading after she read it to me. She said she wanted me to grow up with a house full of sisters. I ended up with six little brothers.

When Mom and Dad tell us their story it's short, but it's sweet. They met college graduation day, somehow never meeting before that. Two weeks later, they were official. Two months later, they were married.

Fate. *It's all about fate, Lucy.* That's what she always told me.

And I believe that.

They gave us all names beginning with L. Because L—it stands for *love*. And love is something we should be reminded of every day.

I swallow the knot already formed in my throat and turn my head to face her. She's fallen asleep. She's probably been like that for over an hour and I hadn't realized. I kiss her on the forehead and say what I normally say right before I leave her room. "I love you. Goodbye." *Always the goodbye*. Because I never know if it'll be the last words I say to her.

Quietly, not wanting to be noticed, I walk to my room and into my bathroom, shutting the door behind me. I lean against it and slide down until my bottom hits the floor.

I cry so hard that I throw up again.

And I don't even care that I do.

Because while Mom is two doors down from me dying, throwing up is the only thing that makes me feel alive.

CHAPTER ONE

-LUCY-

At least the wait is over.

That's the thought that runs through my head during the entire funeral. She's gone, and all I can think about is the relief that I don't have to wake up every day and wonder *when*.

Dad's family is here and they help me take care of the boys. We wipe their tears, hold them when they cry, assure them all that it'll be okay—even when we have no idea that it will be.

No one takes care of me.

No one.

Not even Dad. He can't even take care of himself.

-CAMERON-

If heartbreak had a face, hers would be it.

I watched her during the funeral, just like I watch her now, walking around her house greeting everyone with a fake smile. I know it's fake because her mom's gone, her dad's a mess, and she has six brothers to take care of. Right now, there is no silver lining. No light at the end of the tunnel. No joy in the face of tragedy. Which is why I find it strange that she hasn't shed a single tear. Not one.

Her baby brother throws up all over her and she doesn't even flinch. She simply hands over the baby to a woman and leaves the room. Minutes go by while I wait for her to return, but she doesn't. And a rush of panic washes through me. I don't know why it affects me so much. Why *she* affects me so much. But I have to find her. I have to make sure that she's okay.

Her back is turned as she stands in the laundry room, her shoulders shaking up and down. Then she suddenly straightens, as if she knows that someone's watching. Her hands rise to her face before she slowly turns around.

There's a calmness in her eyes that doesn't seem justified... like a calm before the storm. And then it happens—the storm.

Her face changes and I know the dam is about to break. My heart picks up speed, my palms sweat, and my ears ring—all because I can't stand to watch this happening to her. And even though I can see how hard she tries to hold it in—a single sob escapes her.

I take the steps to get to her. "Lucy," I whisper.

She throws her arms around my neck and pulls me down to her, crying into my chest. She cries so hard that it feels like it's the first time she's ever done it. Maybe it is.

I silently hold her until she's done. There's something about the way she feels in my arms. Like maybe that calmness in her eyes from earlier could be justified.

Maybe I could be her calm.

I *want* to be her calm.

When she's done she takes a step back, wiping her face as she does. Then she smiles, that same fake smile she's given to everyone else. She nods once and brushes past me.

"Lucy," I whisper again, this time to myself.

I try my hardest to read her as she walks away.

I wish I had spoken to her. I wish I had the right words. Even now as I stand at her front door, sweating like a pig from the bike ride after school—I still can't think of anything to say. It's been a few days since the funeral. Today was the first day that she was back at school. Not that I was paying attention or wondering where she was, because I wasn't.

I knock three times, but no one answers. I can hear kids yelling and screaming. One might even be crying. I knock again and the door opens. One of the younger kids looks up at me, his eyebrows bunched, but he doesn't say a word. "Where's Lucy?" I ask him. He opens the door wider and points to the kitchen, then runs away.

If I were a murderer, they'd all be dead.

*

She's standing at the island counter with food everywhere, but that's not what I notice. It's the endless tears falling freely.

She looks up when I walk in, the same expression on her face that her little brother had when he opened the door. "Who are you?"

I ignore the irritation at her not remembering me. Or recognizing me. Or the fact that she barely acknowledges me before wiping her face and continuing whatever she's doing.

The kids come into the kitchen, running circles around the island. They're loud. And annoying. She drops what's in her hands and lays her palms flat on the counter. Her eyes shut tight while she inhales a huge breath.

And I can sense it—*The storm is coming.*

I grab one of the kids by the arm. "Where's your dad?" It's the same kid from the front door. He points upstairs and pulls out of my hold, and then runs away.

"Who are you?" she says again.

"Cameron."

She looks up and I swear it; time stands still while our eyes lock.

Then a kid screams and it breaks whatever the hell just happened between us.

"I just want it to stop," she whispers. I don't know if it's for me or her, but whatever the reason, I want to make it stop.

Bringing my fingers to my mouth, I whistle. Loudly. My gaze never leaving her.

Silence.

Her eyes go wide. "Who are you?" she says for the third time.

"Cameron," I repeat. This time slower, louder. Maybe my first instincts were right, maybe she is hearing impaired.

She shakes her head, the corner of her lips turning down. "No, I mean I know your name's Cameron. But *who* are you? What are you doing in my house?"

Lincoln speaks for me, "He's our coach."

The boys are standing in the kitchen now. I hadn't even noticed when they came in.

I turn back to Lucy and roll up my sleeves. "What do you need help with?"

Her eyes narrow and her lips thin to a line. "I don't know who you are or what you're doing here, but we're *fine*. We don't need your help."

I don't know what reaction I was expecting from her, but that wasn't it. Before I get a chance to respond, a baby's cry interrupts us. She lets out a frustrated grunt before washing her hands and walking away.

"Hi Cam!" Lincoln says, his smile the same as I'd always seen. It's never faltered. I wonder if he fully comprehends the fact that his mom's dead. Gone. *Forever*.

"Hey bud." I try to keep my voice level so he doesn't see how much I pity him right now. "What do you think we can do to help out your sister a little?"

"Just stay out of her way," the oldest kid says. "She doesn't want our help."

I nod. It makes sense now—her reaction to me. I take a look at each of them and try to justify what I'm doing here. But there is no reason—and right now, I don't think it really matters.

I look out the kitchen window and into their endless yard. "You guys got anything we can use for bases? We could go out, hit a few balls, catch a few—"

The boys are out the back door and setting up before I can finish my sentence.

I follow them, not wanting to wait around and have her ask me to leave again. Minutes pass before the back door swings open and she sticks her head out. "You guys have homework," she yells, holding her youngest brother in her arms. The older ones moan but don't argue; they just file back into the house one by one.

"I'm sorry," I tell her. "I didn't know."

"You don't know a lot," she says, slamming the door shut after her.

"She's sad." I look down at Liam, now standing only feet in front of me. "We all are."

"It's okay," I try to console, "You guys are allowed to be sad."

"But she's *really* sad. She gets so sad that it makes her sick."

CHAPTER TWO

-LUCY-

"That guy's staring at you."

I tune Claudia out and hope that she doesn't bring it up again. I don't even know what guy she's referring to but I don't care.

She sighs before asking, "What are you reading?"

Only now do I notice that my e-reader's in my hand, switched on, words displayed... but I'm not reading them. My mind's too occupied by other things. Like the fact that I packed Lincoln a cookie for lunch and not Liam, which ultimately means that when I go to pick them up, one of them will have a black eye. *Great.*

She sighs again and it pulls me from my thoughts. "I have something to tell you," she says, and the tone in her voice has changed. She's not talking boys anymore. It's something more.

My eyes lift to hers as she ties her hair up in a ponytail. She picks up a fallen leaf from the branch above us, examines both sides before scrunching it up in her hand. "We're moving."

"Where?" I hope she doesn't mean far because Claudia's my best friend—my *only* friend.

"New Jersey."

My heart drops.

I do a quick calculation in my head of how far that is in driving distance. Eight hours, give or take. "You can't drive eight hours to school and back."

She smiles sadly. "We leave this weekend, Lucy. I'm sorry. I've known for a month. I should have told you, but you had so much going on with your mom, and your family, I didn't know how to break it to you."

Tears instantly well in my eyes. I pick up my sandwich, just for something else to do, but the sight of it makes my stomach churn.

"It's okay," I tell her. "I'm fine." *What's one more lie, right?* "I have to use the bathroom. I'll see you after class."

"Oh," she says surprised. "Okay."

I stand quickly. Too quickly. My head spins and I feel faint.

And then I do.

Faint, that is.

-CAMERON-

I see her wobble on her feet before she slowly tumbles to the ground. Her knees give out first, then the rest of her. It feels like I should've gotten to her earlier, but seconds of panic took place before my mind kicked into gear. And the rest is a blur.

Her friend's standing over us while I rest her head on my lap.

"What happened?" Logan asks her friend.

"I don't know." She's as panicked as I am, if not worse.

"Is she dehydrated?" Logan picks up what looks like an uneaten sandwich. "Is this hers? Has she eaten?" I don't know why it annoys me that Logan is asking all the right questions and all I can do is stare down at her.

She's breathing, so I guess that's something.

He drops down on his knees on the other side of her and pours water from his bottle into his hand, then he runs it across her forehead and into her hairline.

"Is she alright, mate?" Jake asks. He's new in town and has a weird accent but Logan seems to think he's cool so we keep him around.

Logan does the water thing again, and this time her eyes slowly flutter open.

And I release the breath I was holding.

"It's okay," Logan says to her. "You just passed out." He's in her face now, and I want to punch him for being the first thing she sees when she comes to. I was here first; I was the one watching her when she fell. It should have been me.

She sits up quickly and holds a hand to her head, her eyes slowly moving to everyone around her.

The bell rings but no one makes a move to leave.

"I'm fine," she says quietly.

"I've got a test," her friend says with a grimace. "Are you sure you're okay?"

She nods, but looks down at the ground.

Everyone leaves.

Everyone but me.

"You should get to class," she says.

And then she walks away.

I wait near her locker after school. I know where her locker is because the day after her brothers told me who she was, I started to notice her a lot more. I admit that day wasn't the first time I'd noticed her. I'd seen her around school but we ran in different circles, had different interests. I always thought she was cute, a little thin, but still cute.

She shows up right after the bell, rushes to get her shit, and then hastily leaves.

And then I do something that turns my creep factor full notch; I follow her. I don't follow her because I'm stalking her. I follow her because I want to make sure she gets home safe.

You know something that's really hard to do? Ride your bike and creepily follow someone that's walking. I give it to her, she walks fast, but it's hard to pedal slowly behind someone and not get attention.

She ends up at the elementary school and picks up her brothers. They wait at a bus stop for a few minutes before the bus arrives and they all hop on. I watch them leave. And then I pedal like crazy, taking a shortcut through the woods toward her house.

By the time I get to her driveway, my legs are burning.

And then it dawns on me that I'm standing in the middle of their driveway, which is at least two acres away from anyone else's... and I have absolutely no reason to be here.

Lincoln sees me first. "Hey Cam!" he yells casually.

I panic.

"We know that it's a bye this week... if that's why you're here."

Saved.

"Yeah... that's why I'm here."

He smiles huge before waving. "Bye Cam!"

They all head down her driveway. She sees me, but doesn't even bother to fake a smile. That doesn't bother me, what bothers me is that she has absolutely no hint of recognition in her eyes. I've been to her house. I was at her mom's funeral. I held her when she'd passed out no more than four hours ago and she doesn't even recognize me. I bet she's thinking about Logan. *That asshole.* I should've punched him like I wanted to. "Wait!"

She flinches. *Why does she flinch?*

"Get in the house," she orders the boys.

She watches them all get in before turning to me. "What's your name again?"

I swear to God I want to punch Logan and I don't even know why, but I feel like he's the reason she doesn't remember me. I try to keep my voice level, even though on the inside I want to shake her for not remembering me. "Cameron."

"Right." She nods once. "Cameron." She crosses her arms over her chest. "What do you want?"

"I told you yesterday. I want to help."

Her eyes narrow. Her teeth clench shut. But somehow she manages to get out, "And I told you yesterday that I didn't need your help."

I shrug. I have no clue what the hell else to do. I'm nervous. And she terrifies me.

"Why?" she clips.

"Why?" I ask incredulously.

"Yeah. Why?" She takes a step forward, dropping her arms to her sides. "Are you one of those church people... or are you trying to redeem yourself to make up for some sin you can't shake? What is it, Cameron? Do we look like we need help? Do you think *I* need help?"

"Yes," I say before I can stop myself.

Her shoulders sag and for the first time I see something in her beyond strength, or sadness. Vulnerability. And *fear*. She's afraid.

"Honestly, yes," I repeat, testing the waters. I open my mouth to continue but she cuts in.

"Okay," she sighs. Then turns and walks toward the house. I slowly follow her, knowing too damn well that I have no fucking clue what the hell I'm doing.

The next three days she completely ignores me. She doesn't greet me. Doesn't talk to me. Never says my name. Never acknowledges me. I should be pissed, but I'm not. Because in those three days, I've realized something. I wasn't just there for her anymore; I was there for her brothers too. And regardless of whether she shows it, or whether she wants to admit it, she needs the help.

They all do.

On the fourth day, she does something I never expected. "You're welcome to stay for dinner, I made too much." That's it. That's all she says. And even though she says it in passing, I know the effort it takes for her to offer it.

We sit at her giant dining table while the boys talk among themselves.

She reads, and I read her.

And that's how I spend the next few weeks. Each day, she speaks a few more words to me, and each day I find myself caring more than I should.

I dry the last pot from the sink before she takes it from my hands and places it on the stovetop.

Clearing my throat, I say, "So I wanted to run something by you."

She nods, her gaze never lifting.

"I was wondering if I could bring my Xbox tomorrow... see if it might entertain the boys for a little bit." I curse myself for my nerves coming out in my voice. "It's just that I'm falling behind on my homework and I thought—"

Her eyes dart to me. "You don't have to come every day. No one makes you."

Frustrated, I let out a breath with a grunt and tilt my head back, looking to somewhere else for a patience that I'm lacking. "I don't mind coming here. It was just an idea. I'll just stay up later and do it when I get home." I sigh, too tired to contain the hurt in my voice. "I'll see you tomorrow, Lucy."

I start to walk away but her hand on my forearm stops me. "I'm sorry," she says so quietly I almost don't hear her. "I just don't want you to feel like you have to be here." She tries to smile but fails. "Bring the Xbox. They'll love it."

"Okay." I turn to leave but she stops me again.

"I really am sorry, Cameron." And hearing her say my name without anger or aggravation makes my breath catch. She chews her lip, her eyes wandering back down to the floor. "I don't know why you're here but I don't want to question it. I just want to appreciate it." Her gaze lifts. "Thank you."

"The prodigal son returns," Mom giggles. She's sitting on the couch in the living room with her boyfriend, Mark. He looks away from the TV when I enter the room.

"Hey Mom." I walk over and kiss her on the cheek. It's been a few days since I've seen her. She spends most nights at Mark's house or he's here.

I reach out to shake his hand but he slaps it away. "What? No kiss for me?" He puckers his lips and waits. I try not to laugh, but I can't help it.

"Maybe you're just not pretty enough," Mom mocks.

He wraps an arm around her shoulders. "Lucky you're pretty enough for the both of us," he says, kissing the side of her head.

"That was lame, Marky Mark," I joke.

His eyes narrow at me. Then he smirks. "You know what else is lame?"

"What?" I lift my chin toward him in challenge.

"Your season's batting average." He tries to kick the back of my knee so it gives out but I step back too quickly. He comes to a stand, the smirk still in place. "My grandma hits balls better than you do."

I laugh. "Oh yeah, I bet she loves hitting them balls."

His features drop. "What are you saying about Nanny Tallulah?"

"TALLULAH?" I break out in a fit of laughter.

"You can talk," he shouts over my cackle. "ALADDIN."

Now my face drops. I look over at Mom, so does Mark. "Who names their kid Aladdin?"

Mom sits up and throws a leg out, kicking Mark in the back of his knee. He falls to the ground before he can save himself. Then she quickly turns to me. "Get him, baby."

So I do.

Within seconds we're on the ground wrestling. Neither of us knows shit about wrestling so we're just rolling on the floor play punching each other. "When the hell did you get muscles, kid?"

"I've been working out." I try to kick him in the nuts but he pulls back.

"Too busy lifting weights to work on your batting skills?"

"Screw you," I laugh out.

The doorbell rings and we stop for a second, but only a second before he takes advantage of the distraction and rolls me onto my back. He starts swatting at my head, pinning down my arms at the same time.

"Cameron?"

My heart beats out of my chest. "Shit."

Lucy stands above us with an unsure look on her face. She looks from me to Mark, to me, to Mark, to me...

"Shit," I say again, trying to push Mark off me.

He lets me stand without a fight.

I straighten my clothes and wipe my palms down my shorts.

What is she doing in my living room?

I run a hand through my hair. My ratty hair. My cap must've come off while we were rolling on the floor. "Shit," I whisper, looking around for it.

Mark places it on my head and then stands next to Mom, behind Lucy, with a huge shit-eating grin on his face. I swallow, adjust my cap and finally get the courage to face her. "Hi."

She smiles, that same fake sad smile as always. "Hi."

And then I panic. *Why is she here?* "What happened? Is everything okay with the boys? I'll ride over—" I start for the front door to put on my shoes but she stops me.

"Everything's fine. You just..." She reaches into her pocket and pulls out my phone. "You left this at the house. I thought you might need it."

My shoulders instantly relax. "So everyone's okay?"

She nods, and then looks at the front door. "I better go." Her hand's out, holding my phone.

I take it and lead her to the door, ignoring the look of concern on Mark and Mom's faces. "How did you get here?" I open the door and wait for her to walk through.

"Who's watching the boys?"

"I called my aunt. She's at the house but she can't stay long. I just wanted to make sure you had your phone, in case you needed it... for whatever..."

"I didn't need it," I tell her, "You could have waited."

"Oh." Her gaze drops. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine," I say quickly.

She pulls keys out of her pocket and motions to a minivan in the driveway. "I'll see you later, Cameron."

My eyes move from her keys to the minivan. "You have your license?" It doesn't make sense. *If she drove then why was she catching the bus every day?*

Her head moves slowly from side to side while she looks over my shoulder, probably at my mom. "Just my permit. But my dad taught me to drive when I was twelve. I'm okay."

"Honey," Mom says, standing behind me now. "You drove here without a licensed driver?"

"Yes Ma'am. But I'm a good driver. I promise." Tears start forming in her eyes and I don't know why.

Mom stands next to me. "I don't think I'd feel right letting you drive home alone, hon. I'll come with you. Mark!" she shouts over her shoulder, "You follow with Cameron, okay?"

"Oh no." Lucy shakes her head quickly. "You don't need to do that. I'm fine." Her voice breaks. "I didn't mean to put you out. I'm so sorry."

"Just do what she says," Mark hollers from behind us. "It's quicker this way. Trust me."

Lucy nods once, but refuses to look at either of us. She walks to her car, her head down the entire time. Once she gets to her car, she unlocks it, and gets in the driver's seat.

"We're going to talk about this," Mom says with a tone of finality.

"Sit." Mom points to the couch.

"It's not a big deal."

She sits on the couch opposite and tucks her legs underneath her. "I don't really know what's happening so I can't justify what's a big deal and what isn't." Her face has lost all color. "Wine!" she yells at Mark, "Now! I have a feeling I'm gonna need it." Mark walks in from the kitchen and hands her the bottle. She swigs it without hesitation. "Out with it, Cameron. Just give it to me straight."

"What?" My eyes narrow. "What the heck is wrong with you?"

Her shoulders stiffen and her eyes thin to a glare. "Just tell me."

"Tell you what? Why are you so pissed?"

She grips the bottle of wine tighter as Mark takes a seat next to her, rubbing her shoulders to keep her calm. "Why am I pissed?" she seethes. "Maybe because my fifteen-year-old son is about to tell me that he knocked up a girl and has his own sons with her... *and* he's kept it a secret! When did this happen, Cameron?"