

Skully

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This is a story I decided to turn it into a manga because it would be so much better as one. I will be putting my character's pictures on my page as soon as possible. But, the story

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1. Figure of Darkness

First Chapter

I remember that day when I made my first mistake ever on my school record so clearly. I never meant for it to look the way it did but, as they say, wrong place at the wrong time.

I remember walking into the bathroom at the beginning of the new school year. That was the start of my mistake.

I saw two girls; I didn't know or care what their names were. The only way I knew them was by their piercings and tattoos. The taller girl had each of her ears pierced all around, a piercing in her chin, and a bridge piercing. Her hair was black and fell to the middle of her back while her bangs fell a little further than her jaw. The other girl was a couple inches shorter than her friend and she had blond hair that laid on her shoulders and was tipped with a black shine. She too had piercings. There were two hoops through her ear lobes while the rest of her ears were circled in loose rings and in the corner of her bottom lip was a ring as well. Both of them had a tattoo, each different, but placed on the exact same spot. The tall girl had a black butterfly and the other girl had a black blooming rose, each on their hip.

When I walked in, they looked at me with criticizing eyes. I quickly glanced at them then, brushed aside their glares and walked over to the mirror above the sink. I messed with my hair, put on some lip gloss, fixed my eye make-up&

I don't know if it's such a good idea, the blond haired girl said to her friend reluctantly.

Oh, come on.

I finished brushing up and began to walk to the door, clutching my purse to my shoulder when&

Hey! Miss Goody-Goody! the black haired girl said harshly.

I closed my eyes and turned, facing them.

You know, I have a name?

Yeah, sure. Like I care.

Then I noticed the piece of paper she gripped in her hand. Across the top of it was typed: HISTORY EXAM ANSWERS.

How did they get a hold of that?

You wanna take a look-see at the answers for tomorrow's exam? It's the first day of school. Show Mister & whatever his name is, what a great student you are by getting a one hundred on the SECOND day of school.

The offer was tempting. I had always been the best in class and, here was my chance to really prove that. But, I knew it was a bad idea.

No, I-

Come on, you know you want to. She walked closer to me, holding the paper out in front of her. Besides, what the teacher doesn't know won't hurt him, right? This whole thing will stay between the three of us.

I wanted it so bad I could taste it. It hurt me to think I was going to reject! I couldn't! I had to!

I reluctantly took the paper. I kept telling myself, It won't hurt. I'm just gonna see how many questions there are. I'm not going to look at the answers.

I looked at it, my mind racing with possible situations that might arise from looking at this paper. Even though this was just a piece of paper, it was the most essential part of my year. Just as I looked at the paper, my worst nightmare came true.

Miss Adams.

Please don't be real. Please don't be real. Please don't &
There stood my algebra teacher Mrs. Parker. She looked at me over the rim of her spectacles with absolute hatred. That was it. BUSTED! Of course, it got worse.

We came in and saw her sneaking a look at the answers and we confronted her! the tall black haired girl said.

Is this true Michelle?

My stomach began to turn and knot with nervousness. But, deep down inside of me was the sensation of power. I had gotten the guts to look at this and that alone gave me a slight grin. I did have evil within but, now was not the time to be saying these things! What was I doing?

Now, here I am, grounded for only a couple more months. I was grounded from the beginning of the school year and until the year ends which is only two months. I was living in a hell hole, my mother the devil, me her victim.

So, what are you going to do during spring break Michelle?

Leah leaned over her desk, resting her chin on my shoulder. I held in my hands the book I had been trying to finish for the past week.

Staying here. I have to pay up my phone bill by watching the twins while Mom's gone on her business trip, I said, not even looking up from the last page.

Oh & wait! I thought we had plans to go to San Diego?

That was the plan, I said as I turned and looked at Leah. But, my mother-figure thinks me spending ten minutes extra on the phone is too much. She's driving me crazy! Without Dad around she's out of control.

Crap! Leah sulked. I was hoping to spend spring break with you.

Well, I mean, you invited a whole other mess of people to go with you. It won't make a drastic difference if one person doesn't show.

Everyone else won't care but, it'll make a huge difference to me because you and I go everywhere together.

Oh, come on now. You can't tell me that once you get to partying and some hot guy lays eyes on you that you'll miss me. I know once you hit the beach and clubs, home will be somewhere entirely different for you.

Tommy! Mr. Smith yelled from his desk. Cut it out! Grow up or I'll be forced to come over there and give you what-for.

Ooh, I'm so scared, Tommy said, shrinking back into his seat, mocking the teacher.

I just watched him in dismay while everyone else found him hysterical.

He's ridiculous!

When everyone looked away from him and I had my nose back in my book, a small paper wad was flicked onto my desk. I carefully unwrapped it and read the small, sloppy handwriting: What's a pretty girl like you staying home for?

I looked at Tommy, who had his head craned back, looking at me with his dark eyes. When he saw me looking at him, he winked at me flirtatiously.

Get a life Tommy! I said, flicking the small ball onto the floor.

Well, I might just have to drop by your house for a quickie before we have to leave for Cali tomorrow. He grinned, his pearly white teeth showing through his crooked smile.

You're a perv!

Tommy Lewis was the guy everyone wanted to be friends with. He was a jock and he was gorgeous. But, he thought a little highly of himself. He thought every girl liked him and wanted to go out with him. He had been crushing on me ever since the first day in sixth grade. But, it just wouldn't register with him that I had no interest in him what-so-ever.

He was ideal in looks: his blond bangs swept across his forehead, making his black eyes sparkle as they watched the world up-close-and-personal. He would be a girl's dream guy if he was more mature. But, he always had the football coach breathing down his neck because he never took anything seriously. Football was his trademark but, it wasn't something he appreciated. He only did it for attention.

Oh, come on Michelle, he said in a sensuous tone. You can't tell me you don't find a head turner like me attractive. He ran his masculine hand through his bangs, side sweeping them.

You are an arrogant, vain jerk, you know that right?

His grin faded and he turned away, beginning to mutter under his breath, And you're a-

Christopher, take off the hood, Mr. Smith yelled to at the dark shadow in the back corner of the room.

All eyes turned to the shadow. It sat slouched over the desk, a hood hiding its mysterious face. It raised its head and removed the hood. Tumbling out from underneath the hood was shiny black hair. The black bangs fell over his left eye, his right eye still visible. Pierced through his right eyebrow was a ring. The ring for some reason made his stunning crystal blue eyes stand out. Hanging from his neck was a thin silver chain with a skull hanging from it. In both his ears he had at least five earrings. The first earrings in each ear were small skull studs, then, wrapping around the rest of each of his ears was a string of small rings.

I always found this mysterious school reject quite intriguing. I loved to watch the way he observed everyone and everything with solemn eyes.

I watched him remove the hood with anxiousness. He saw me watching him and just kept his eyes on me with a weird expression. I quickly turned away and looked at the floor in shock.

What a freak! Tommy scoffed.

You're telling me, Leah said back.

I made no reply but, just grinned and asked myself, I wonder what he's doing for spring break?

2. Text of unfamiliarity

Second Chapter

Leah turned the steering wheel and let the car glide around the corner. Her red Mustang turned onto a street called Henderson. Rows of beautiful houses on each side of the boulevard were the first thing that met your attention.

Thanks for the ride Leah.

No prob. Just let me know as soon as you re not grounded.

I will. I can t wait to get my car back!

After completing the sentence, my phone began to quiver and quietly hum. I pushed myself up off the leather seat and reached into my back pocket, removing her small, delicate phone.

Oh, great! It s a text from Tommy! I exclaimed, turning to Leah.

The guy s crazy about you, M.

Gee, couldn t tell, I said sarcastically.

I flipped open my phone and read the text:

Can I come over 4 a
real good-bye b4 I
have to leave 2morrow?

U know u want me!

What a jerk!

What d he say?

Put hormones and desperation together and you ll figure it out.

Leah cringed but, then turned and grinned at me saying, Oh, I know deep down inside every girl, even you, wants a part of him. You ve got to give it to him: he s one FINE brother!

Leah& bite me!

Okay, whatever.

There was a silence but then I interjected saying, Slow down Leah! My house is right here!

She slammed on the breaks. Sorry.

The car eased slowly into the paved driveway and parked in front of a big two story house. The outside was covered with white siding all around. There were stepping stones leading from the driveway to four small steps onto the porch. Towering pillars held up the next level of the house.

When Leah had come to a complete stop behind the baby blue BMW convertible, I began to swing the car door open.

We ll have fun in San Diego. I ll see you in two weeks. I stepped out of the Mustang and closed the door.

Bye, M, Leah replied sadly through the open window. Love ya, babe!

Ditto, I said back.

I waved as the red Mustang slowly and cautiously backed out of the driveway. Once Leah had driven a block away, I turned and sighed sadly as I looked at the BMW.

These two weeks are going to be an absolute nightmare, I muttered to myself.

I made my way lightly across each stone then walked up each step to the maroon door.

Mommy! M s home, Kameryn yelled.

I rolled my eyes, awaiting the worst.

The other twin, Kirin, walked through the living room doorway. She moved her lips,

mouthing the words, Mom's not happy. She pointed to her small wrist which had wrapped around it a watch. With that gesture, I knew I was in for a rude awakening.

Kameryn jumped to her sister's side. When they stood there together, you could see a huge resemblance. Their faces were shaped and chiseled the same way, the tint of brown in each strand of their hair was the same, the way they stood and held themselves was also similar. The only way you could tell a difference between them was their personalities. Kameryn was loud, slap-happy, could be a little ditsy, and not exactly what you'd call polite. But, that wasn't the same for Kirin. She was much more mature. Although she was a little reserved, she was smart and thought before she spoke.

She's in one of her moods, Kameryn whispered quietly.

Oh, that's just great!

M, please come here to the kitchen, our mother yelled.

Kirin and Kameryn frowned at me, then walked back to the living room to resume their games.

I walked to the stairs and set down my books on the first step. Then, I walked through the next doorway, across from the living room.

Mom stood slouched over the sink. She was breathing deeply. Without even looking at her, I could tell she was heated about God knows what.

Yes? I asked flatly.

Do you know what time it is?

A quarter 'til five.

Mmmhmm. And what time did I say I wanted you to get home? She continued, waiting for no response, Four thirty is what I said.

Oh! Big deal Mom! I got home fifteen minutes late, so?

So? What do you mean So? I said four thirty! She turned her back to the sink and looked at me. When I say four thirty I mean it!

Calm down mom.

No! Why don't you listen to me anymore?

Don't you play the pity party on me! I haven't broken anymore of your stupid rules! I didn't miss anything by being fifteen minutes late!

You're still questioning MY authority! mom yelled back.

What authority? Ever since dad died you take everything out on everyone else! Why don't YOU listen? Why can't you figure out that this is all so hard on us too?

My throat began to cramp as the urge to cry became worse. I quieted my tone and said, We all miss him.

Mom's eyes became cloudy. She stroked my cheek and whispered, You look just like him.

A tear ran down each of our cheeks.

Please& Mom choked and turned her back to me, facing the sink. Please& go to your room.

Mom, I-

Go!

I stood for a moment, helplessly watching my mother sob in her hands. Then, I walked out of the kitchen, tears pouring out of my eyes as well. Without picking up my books, I ran up the stairs, my feet pounding on each step.

Michelle? Kameryn yelled. Michelle!

Are you okay? Kirin asked worriedly.

When I reached the landing, I ran to the door in the far corner of the hallway. I opened the door and ran into my room, then slammed it shut and collapsed onto my bed. The comforter soaked my fresh tears as they fell from my face.

My curly brown hair spilled over my shoulders and onto my purple comforter. My rich brown

eyes looked at the ceiling for help and support.

I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand when I heard my phone hum and felt it quiver in my back pocket. I popped the cell phone open and read the text aloud, Do you know who I am? I studied the number for a couple of seconds, scrambling to recall whose number it was. But, I didn't remember any of my friends who had that number.

Do you know who I am?

A couple seconds later, a picture that had been taken of me from afar came on the screen. I looked at it in surprise, then pressed in, Do you know who you are?

After a couple seconds, no picture came back in reply but only the text, If I told you& let's just say you wouldn't be happy. Goodbye& M.

I waited for a couple seconds, and then knew they wouldn't be texting back. I closed my phone and laid it beside me on the bed.

Okay& that was weird.

3. Christopher Carlyle

Fourth Chapter

It's already the second day of spring break and I'm already beginning to tire of Brooklyn. Everyone thinks of New York as an exciting place to be. But, in all truth, it's just as boring as any other state.

Of course, it was pretty exciting having to take a twenty minute ride to the city, then taking a ten minute subway ride to get to the library. But, now that I'm here, I'm tired of looking up research on the French Revolution.

Really, this report isn't due until three weeks. But, it's taken me a whole school year to build up the trust of my History teacher and I'm not about to let spring break get in the way of that.

As I scanned over book spines, trying to devote my full attention to this report, I noticed a dark shape in the corner of the library. Christopher Carlyle, one of the most notorious school rejects. But, it was odd how only I seemed to understand him. It was odd that I was probably the only one who didn't judge him by being in the library, which in no way was his scene.

He raised his hand and slightly twitched his fingers, his own sultry way of saying hello to me. It gave me a strange sensation of delight but I was reluctant to show it. I didn't say hello. I didn't even smile. I only continued thumbing through books and cradling them delicately in the nook of my arm.

For the next five minutes, I continued this pattern, only to prove to him that I had no interest in him. But, soon, I had books gathered that had nothing to do with The French Revolution. Three of them were just random subjects such as mythology, science, and even flowers!

After gathering enough of some of the most ridiculous topics, I sat at the nearest, smallest, most desolate table. I gently set down my books, put down my backpack in the chair beside me, and flopped down in the comfy chair in front of my pile of books.

I gave a sigh of hopelessness.

What am I doing? I've got nothing to show this guy.

Before beginning this endless research, I quickly glanced out of the corner of my eye. I looked at the shadowy corner of the library where HE had been standing. But, I saw no tall mysterious shadow. Only & nothing.

I closed my eyes and sighed again. Then I realized I was & disappointed.

I pulled my backpack up out of the chair and set it on my lap. I took out my three ring binder and a ball point pen, then set the entirely too heavy backpack on the floor. I divided up my books, setting aside the important books and separated the unnecessary books from among them.

Soon after I had cracked open my first French Revolution book I heard the soft pat of combat boots against the tile on the floor. I darted a look across the table and saw Christopher pull out the chair directly in front of me.

I didn't pay anymore attention to him but did my best to concentrate on this burden. But, all I could do was smell cigarette smoke on his clothes and feel his eyes stare right through me.

Before I could react, he pulled a book off the top of my research books and one off the top of my random stack. He held the two close together, observing the two very different covers.

You know, he said quietly, I know Mr. Darren can be @\$\$ about reports but, he held the book on flowers in front of my face, aren't you being a little far-fetched?

I was beginning to get irritated. I didn't look at him but continued to jot down information from the books.

Realizing I wasn't exceptionally happy by his intrusion, he fell back into his chair, lazily sitting there. He took out his phone and pressed buttons, making a light sound with each button he pressed.

Then, he stopped. I picked up the next book, paying no attention to him. But, as I did so, he set the phone down on the table and passed it over to me. I reluctantly reached out and took the phone before he could snatch it up again.

On the screen of the open phone were the words, Do you know who I am?

My eyes grew wide as I looked at it stupidly. I knew then that this no one had sent me the text from the other night!

I slowly looked up at him, my eyes wide with surprise. He already had his ghostly blue eyes set on me and for the next couple of seconds; we just looked at each other dumbly.

He then sighed, picked up his phone and closed it. He pushed his chair out and rose to a height of 6'2".

Once he was standing, he dropped the phone into the pocket of his baggy pants.

I have to show you something.

Surprisingly, he didn't have a real deep voice. It was more soft and sweet. But, with every word, he had a mysterious tone, making everything he said more sexy and delightful.

I just looked at the table, still stunned. I was shocked even more when he lightly put his palm over my hand and said, You're going to want to see this.

I gazed into his eyes and understood what they were saying. Somehow I could tell just from his eyes that he was scared but, he was telling me not to worry, I could trust him.

Without any question, I left my books on the oak table and put my binder and pen back in my bag. After zipping my backpack up, I slung it over my shoulder and stood next to Christopher.

I felt so inferior standing up beside him. He was like a towering tree while I was only the growing sapling! He was taller than Tommy by quite a few inches, but, he wasn't so tall that he was gangly.

We didn't exchange words. We only walked out of the library, followed by a couple pairs of scrutinizing eyes.

What's going on? I asked Christopher as soon as we stepped through the double doors, leading to the crowded streets of New York City.

He said nothing in answer to my question. He stepped briskly off each step to another.

Answer me! I yelled as we reached the second to last landing. I stepped in front of him, blocking his next move to the sidewalk.

He didn't look at me but, just watched the pavement. I can't explain. I just really need your help& okay?

He really did look scared. His bottom lip slightly quivered and his eyes held even more fear.

Alright. I'll help as much as possible.

His lips curled at the corners, transforming his mouth from a frown to the cutest crooked grin I'd ever seen.

Thank you. Now, follow me.

Again, Christopher took the lead down the steps while I tried to trail as close as possible without stepping on his heels. We weaved through people, crossed the street, darted around more people, and then reached the garage on Bleaker.

A couple minutes later, we came to his vehicle. I expected it to be an old broken down car. But, to my surprise, it was a nice, newly painted and polished black Ford.

This is yours? I asked astonished as I stood in front of it and observed.

Why do you sound so surprised?

I just-

He raised his eyebrows and had a cute, mischievous expression. Yes& this is MY truck. But, let me clear a spot for you to sit.

He opened up the passenger door and pushed things around.

I watched him as he silently cleared a spot for me to sit. As he did so, there was a soft tinkling of his earrings as they touched each other when his head moved.

He wasn't the buffest guy I knew but, he wouldn't be as attractive if he was. He had a nice lean body and a well proportioned and chiseled face. His jaw was strong, his cheeks somewhat hollow. His eyes were big and luscious, the tint of pale blue making him even more tempting.

Do you find me strange?

Christopher stood upright, resting his arm across the roof of the truck and peeked over the door.

Why do you ask? You're always watching me. But, you know what I don't get? Why don't you talk about me behind my back like all of your other friends?

Well, I& I& th-th-think& I stuttered.

Just get in the truck.

Christopher sat at the wheel, softly tapping his fingertips to the beat of the music. His long fingers rested on the steering wheel, each twitching with delight as the deep, dry voice of the metal singer blared from the radio.

I looked outside at the setting sun. The bright orange and pink that streaked and swirled through clouds gave a kind of comfort to my restless heart.

It was obvious the poor guy was anxious by the way his hands shook.

Where exactly are we going? I asked with as much confidence as possible.

I already told you! You'll understand everything once we get there!

You're really starting to freak me out, Chris.

He sighed and put his head in the palm of his left hand. I'm sorry. Just don't ask anymore questions 'til we get there. You'll have to see for yourself.

Five minutes seemed to drag on as we drove down the highway, which wasn't as busy as usual.

So why aren't you in San Diego with your friends?

I looked at him. How did-

I'm more observant than you think.

Maybe a little too observant, I muttered as I looked away.

He slightly chuckled. So? Come on! Dish it out, he said playfully.

Well, I'm I guess what you'd call grounded.

YOU? Grounded? How's that possible? I didn't even know that word was in your vocabulary.

Yeah, well, my mom thinks spending an extra ten minutes on the phone too much.

That's all?

Yup! You know, sometimes I just wish& Wait. Why am I telling you all this? I barely know you.

Well, babbling a little bit is virtually painless. Besides, it can't be bad enough that you can't tell me. We all wish our parents would go to hell some point in our lives.

Yeah, but& still! I don't know you that well and I'm already talking about my feelings.

Well, hey! What can I say? You could call me a conversational wizard.

He looked over at me. A cute grin played on his lips as he gave me a sly wink. It startled me at first but, then I smiled and said, Yeah, I guess you are.

He looked back at the highway and turned onto a very small gravel road. There was only one abandoned house on the road. The roof of the small shack was caved, a couple windows busted, graffiti strewn all over one side of it. But, to my surprise, there was a nice looking Corvette parked outside with a guy leaning on the roof of it, a girl sitting on the trunk, and

another girl standing with a cigarette to her lips.

Well, here we are, Chris said as he made an abrupt stop beside the blood red Corvette.

There you are! I heard one of the girls say as I slid out of the truck.

Where s the help? the guy asked.

Michelle! Come here! Christopher yelled to me like I was a dog.

I slowly slinked around the truck. When I looked up sheepishly, the smiles had faded from their faces and turned into scowls.

Okay, said the girl with the cigarette, I thought you said you were bringing help, not trouble. She dropped the smoldering cigarette and stomped on it.

I knew this girl. And I recognized the other girl too! These were the two girls that had gotten me into all that trouble at the beginning of the year. And, of course, they had changed one bit.

Guys, this is Michelle. Michelle, that s Ashton, he said pointing to the guy.

Sup? Ashton nodded his head up.

That s Meg sitting there on there on the trunk.

Meg had the unique blond black tipped hair.

And that s my sis, Candace.

There was a definite family resemblance. Her hair was as black as Christopher s, her eyes the same stunning blue. But, she didn t look at me as kindly as Chris did.

Hey man, Ashton said. You got any weed?

Dude, cut it out. You know I quit that stuff months ago.

Ashton gave a small grumble. Of course! Leave it to you to get a clean conscience when you re in need of the necessities.

Chill out, Chippy, Meg said.

Chippy?

My thoughts were interrupted when Meg said, So, what s little Ms. Preppy doing here? Her tone was filled with hatred. Why is she of all people here?

She can really help us.

That may be so. But, how do we know she won t rat out on us? Meg asked, eyeing me with disgust.

Right! For all we know, she may just tag along to get the dirt, Ashton said as he walked closer to me.

This Ashton was a couple inches shorter than Chris and almost as good looking as him. He had light brown hair, which was highlighted with a dark red tint, obviously professionally done. His eyes were a deep, metallic brown, swirled with a couple other shades of brown. They were eerie and looked almost electric. In the middle of his bottom lip was a ring and through the middle of nose, between his nostrils was another ring, too.

In my defense, I said strongly in reply to his last comment, I m not that kind of person.

That s what you say, he muttered under his breath.

Back off man! Christopher said angrily.

Enough you two! Meg interjected.

Well, Candace said quickly, breaking up the argument, you came to see the main event. You ready? She stepped in front of me.

I nodded yes. Although, I had no clue what I was saying yes to.

Be my guest. She pointed the open front door that was barely hanging by its hinges.

I looked back at Christopher. He didn t have to say a word. I knew just from his eyes that he was saying, Go on. I ll be right behind you.

I grinned, still uneasy. But, I finally got the guts to move I put one foot in front of the other, with Chris a step behind me.

What does he think he s doing? Ashton sighed.

I don't know. I don't even know how we're related.

I stepped onto the porch and gagged. An awful stench had just made itself known. I tried to peek around the door frame to see what I was about to witness.

You're going to have to go inside. Don't worry. I'm right here.

I gulped, and then sighed. I closed my eyes and stepped through the open door. I reluctantly opened my eyes again and gasped, covering my mouth with my hand.

The first thing I noticed about the dead man lying on the floor was that his eyes were wide open. These eyes had once begged for mercy but, now they held no expression. Only death. They were pale and lifeless, each a cold gray.

Flies swarmed around the body and buzzed with delight at the taste of the young man's blood, which was crusted around his throat. Beneath all the dry blood was a deep slash, slicing halfway through his neck.

Now you know, Christopher said sadly.

My stomach heaved. I couldn't hold it in. I ran past Christopher and out of the house, and weaved quickly around Candace. I remembered the ditch across the road and ran to it.

Watch out! She's gonna barf! Ashton yelled.

I dashed across the road, almost not making it. I got down on my hands and knees, craned my neck over the edge of the ditch and held my aching stomach.

I threw up for the next minute, losing every ounce of my strength.

You okay? Christopher asked. He placed his hand softly on my shoulder.

I spit, trying to get rid of the taste of vomit.

Why'd you choose me? You should've gone to the police.

You've got the brains. I know you'll come up with some better options than going to the slammer. First, we'll get nailed for trespassing on private property. Second, the four of us are known for making trouble around town. The instant we go to the cops, they'll be foaming at the mouth, thinking we're the ones that killed the guy.

Yes, but, I'm not the one you want. I could think of quite a few well-respected lawyers you could go to who are better than me.

Those dogs are no better than the black suits! Look, I'm sorry we got you involved. You said you'd help as much as possible. We really need it, all we can get; not criticism.

I could feel the pressure rising, and it was pushing on the walls of my emotions.

We knew this guy well, Michelle. A couple hours before we found him, he had called me and asked us to meet him out here. That was two days ago, too long. Now, we have to get this straightened out before people start pointing fingers.

How could I say no?

I've seen stuff like this on TV and read about it in books. I just never expected it to really be like this. I always thought I would seize the day. I guess I was wrong.

I was so ashamed.

We all want to be the heroes. Just turns out to be a harder job than we expect. He laid his hand on my shoulder again. I know you can do this.

I turned my head and looked at him with a weak grin.

You know, you're a lot sweeter than you look.

I may look like a hard-headed punk, but, it's in my nature to be kind and considerate.

4. The Unspeakable

Fifth Chapter

All five of us now stood around the body. I had gotten over the smell of the rotting flesh and was now finding this sight intriguing.

Where s all the blood? Meg asked.

There was no pool of blood around the lifeless body. The only blood present was around his neck and down the front of his shirt.

He wasn t killed here, I said.

The sun had set and the only light we had was cast from the moon. It was a morbid picture, the way the moon shown across the body. The guy looked ghostly. His eyes were now so pale, each almost completely white.

Well, what are we going to do? Just leave him here to rot more? I asked.

I say we do! Ashton demanded.

He s our friend. He deserves a grave, Chris said.

Wait! Shh! Candace put her index finger to her lips. Do you guys hear that?

We all froze in our stances and listened carefully. Then, there were red and blue flashing lights.

Cops! we all exclaimed at once.

There was the sound of a door being slammed shut and crunching gravel.

I m outta here! Ashton yelled. Ashton, Meg and Candace ran to the back door without hesitation.

Come on Michelle! Chris tugged on my arm. But, I couldn t move. All I could do was stare at the bright light shining in my face.

The officer was getting closer and closer, and all I could do was stand over the dead body.

I d heard the expression Dear caught in the headlights and I was living that moment. I knew the second the officer saw me over the body, it d be to the jail house for me. But, no matter how much I yearned to move, my legs would be stubborn. My body was turning on me. The only thing I could sense was Christopher s fear and anger as he gripped my arm tightly.

I m sorry, I whispered to him.

He stopped his vigorous shaking and stared at me.

Before he could reply, the officer was standing in front of us. He had his flashlight pointed on my cold expressionless face and Christopher s scared, confused one.

The officer had his lips pursed, his eyes wide with disbelief. But, then he just chuckled and said in an arrogant manor, Looks like I ll be getting that promotion after all!

I didn t blink or change my face. I felt Chris loosen his fingers and straighten up more while he took a long hard gulp. Don t tell me a girl like you did this?

I said nothing but, lifted my chin, trying to show pride and content, not fear. I promised Chris that I d help them. This was just part of the job of being the hero I d always wanted to be.

Alright, the officer said as he pulled out handcuffs, you re coming with me.

No, wait sir! Don t take her, Chris pleaded. He was now standing straight, towering over the stocky cop.

Boy, you better be glad I ain t takin you in either for bein on private property. She s got nothing to do with this!

Christopher stepped in front of me to protect me from the stubborn officer.

Back off kid!

I had no chance to react before Christopher pushed me into the far corner of the room and

tackled the cop. He had him pinned to the floor for a split second but, then he lost his footing. The cop took the advantage and pulled Chris hands behind his head and threw him roughly against the wall opposite of me. Chris grunted and squirmed, trying to free his hands.

You messed with the wrong cop kid!

At that moment, I observed the room for something& anything! Then I saw it. There was a pile of old two-by-fours, each with a rusty nail sticking out at both ends of the board. I cautiously picked one up, trying to avoid the nails.

From this day forward, you ll remember Terri Parker Newman, the cop who-

I didn t let him rant on. I swung the nail right through his scalp. He collapsed to the floor, right beside the first victim.

The adrenalin was rushing, the excitement and intensity building in the atmosphere.

Michelle! Don t! I heard Chris yell.

I ignored him and just watched the officer s eyes roll lazily back into his cranium.

I wasn t thinking. I just loved this feeling of power and evil I didn t even know existed within me.

I kneeled down to the officer s side, a smirk on my lips and my eyes squinted to small slits. I grabbed him by his shirt collar, lifting his face closer to mine. He gurgled and spit up blood. The red liquid dripped from his chin and onto my hand that held tightly to his shirt. But, I didn t care. I just listened closely to the sound of death coming from the back of his throat.

No, no, you ve got it all wrong. From this night forward, echoing through your ears in death will be the name& I pulled him closer and in a deep, very unfamiliar voice, I whispered, & Michelle Alice Adams.

I dropped him to the floor. And with one final swing, I ended a man s life. So effortlessly and carelessly&

5. "Burn It"

Sixth Chapter

What have I done? I whimpered. I just& killed. What am I going to do? I m so scared. I did the unthinkable!

Christopher s soft hand caressed my arm as he washed away the fresh blood. The water from the pump in the middle of the yard of the old house was quite warm, making it even more soothing as he lovingly rubbed at my arm.

So, you really did do it? Ashton asked as he watched me with a perplexed expression. He stood beside Candace and Meg, who were sitting in the grass while Chris was kneeled down to me on the ground. Ashton chuckled deeply. You really did hit the jackpot Rings!

Shut up Chip! Chris whispered, anger soaking his tone. You guys better be glad our sorry butts aren t in that cop car right now, on our way to jail. Michelle did us all a favor and we should respect her for what a brave move she made. That was pretty ballsy.

I had my head tilted to the earth, watching the dirt absorb my tears of anguish. He brought my head upwards and ran his thumb under my eye, swiping a falling tear away from my cheek.

Don t cry. I thank you for what you did. His lips slightly curled into a reassuring grin, giving me a boost of comfort and self-esteem. Then, he looked over his shoulder at the three behind him. And you three better be happy that I m not kicking your sorry asses to some God-forsaken place. What were you guys thinking leaving us behind? I heard him grumble and mutter under his breath in anger.

He pushed the pump s handle down. The water stopped running over my arm and dripped into the soil. Chris took his black shirt and rubbed it over my wet arm, drying it off. He then stood and faced the others while I still sat, pouring tear drops onto the barren ground.

Now, he said with command in his voice, Luke deserves to be buried. I say we all-

No! Candace said as she tapped her cigarette. He s your dead friend. Not ours! Chris squinted his eyes.

How can you say that? He was a friend to all of us. I don t understand how you can just sit there and say he had no part in your life. Especially since he was your ex!

I saw Candace s lip slightly quiver and saw a glimmer in the corner of her eye. She bent her head in her hands and all I heard was a soft whimper.

Chris expression softened and he moved closer to his sister. He bent to the ground and embraced her in a caring hug. She buried her face in his shirt and whined. After a minute, he pulled away and looked into her blurry eyes.

I m sorry. I didn t mean to hurt you. But, none of us can deny the role he played in our lives. He was our best friend. We can t just leave him out here. He deserves more respect even after all the crap he put us through.

He stood again and walked back over to my side again.

Let s think of something to do. He held his chin in the nook between his thumb and index finger, deep in concentration.

We burn it.

His eyes grew wide as he turned his head and looked at me questioningly. Ashton, Meg, and Candace also watched me intently.

What? Chris asked.

We bury your friend, drive the cop car through the house, and burn all the evidence.

Who was I? This other side of me was taking over again. I was looking at them with an evil grin

on my face and my eyes were burning. My tears didn't grace the dry ground any longer. Running through all of me in that instant was pure evil.

Everyone stood silent. Ashton was staring at me with lust, Candace and Meg were looking at each other and Christopher held his chin in his hand again.

Okay. Let's do it! His eyes were sparkling with pride, as if he came up with the idea himself.

Hit it Ash! Meg yelled.

The car's engine revved and there was a loud crashing. We coughed and wheezed as the blinding dust settled slowly on the ground.

Once all was still, Chris yelled, You okay Ash?

All our eyes were on the car. The roof of the old shack had caved in on the cruiser while the front wall of the house had collapsed to the ground.

Everything was silent. Finally, we heard loud coughing and saw Ashton's shape move in the driver's seat.

The car door opened and he set his foot down on the ground. Then, he stuck out his hand, his thumb up giving us the thumbs up sign.

I'm good, he said weakly and then continued to cough.

He pushed himself out of the seat and stood among the rubble. Once he was stable, he shook his head and rubbed out as much dust as he could. Then he came over and joined us.

Okay, now that that's taken care of& how are we going to torch it? Meg asked.

Well, I have my lighter. We could just use that. Chris pulled out a small lighter from the back pocket of his baggy pants.

That isn't going to cut it. We're going to have to use something to feed the flame.

I know! Candace's eyes lit up as she spoke. I have a hose and a bucket in the trunk of the car!

She walked over to the Corvette and popped the trunk open with her car key. She rummaged through various things and set a tall white bucket and a water hose on the ground.

Why do you have this stuff? I asked.

Well, the way I see it, you never know when you'll be running low on gas and you find a perfect car with a full tank.

She picked up the supplies and went over to the cruiser. After she had brushed away light debris, she called me over.

Why don't you come help me?

I shyly stepped over the torn wall and went to her side.

She already had the cap off the tank and situated the bucket in a good position. I just sat watching her. I had no clue what I was supposed to do. Then, I realized what gang I had gotten myself involved with.

All I need you to do, Candace said, is to put that end of the hose down in the tank and let me do the rest.

I reluctantly took the water hose and slowly fed it into the gas tank until it wouldn't go in any further.

Without another word, Candace put her lips to the cold metal on the other end of the hose. She sucked and then laid that end of the hose in the bucket.

The smell of gasoline filled the air as it steadily fell into the bucket.

As we stood still and watched the bucket slowly but surely fill I heard Candace whisper,

You have no idea what you've gotten yourself into.

I looked at her in shock. But, she just examined the layout of the plot of land. I then saw her eyes flicker to the patch of fresh dirt which had laying beneath it the body of the guy she once loved.

What do you mean?

She wiped away a tear and looked at me.

Look at what you've done because of us. And, Luke was changed because of this gang. Never once in my twelve years of knowing him had I seen him as such a monster.

We stood quiet for a while.

So, you guys were close, huh?

Yeah. Chris and I had known him since the first day we moved here. We were your average punks but, Luke was a quiet, sensitive kid. And the more he would hang out with us, the more he would transform. How are we going to tell his parents? He was only nineteen and headed for a great future! They always blamed us for the havoc he caused and now they're going to blame us for this!

She clenched her jaw and let a tear trickle down her cheek.

I didn't know what to say. All I could do was just stare blankly at the bucket.

I think the buckets full, I said flatly.

She rubbed her nose and eyes and picked up the bucket.

Toss it on the car.

I had the bucket in my arms before I could stop her.

Uhh&

Just throw the gas on the roof of the car.

Okay&

I got a good grip on the bucket and tossed the potent liquid over the car. It was now covered, the gasoline dripping off the sides.

Very nice, Candace said approvingly. Hey Rings!

Chris walked over to us, lighter in hand.

Do the honors.

He flicked the lighter which emitted a bright flame. I felt his eyes move over to me.

You may want to stand back Michelle.

He tenderly pushed me back, Candace following. After we had stood back quite a few feet, he lightly grazed the car with the flame. Once the car was engulfed, the red and orange flames licking at every flammable thing, he ran back, pulling us with him.

The five of us stood, watching the house burn to a crisp. All of us stood in awe.

Let's go, Christopher said.

He had to pull me away from the sight of it all. I was so intrigued but dumb with fright.

What's wrong? he asked. He lifted my chin and looked into my eyes.

I have to go back& for my sisters.

Kirin! Kameryn! Open the door! I banged hard on the door and repeated the words again.

I heard a loud banging and the sound of their small feet pat on the hardwood floor.

The door swung open and there before me stood the twins, each with terror on their faces.

Michelle! they both yelled. They flung their arms around my waist, holding on so hard I could barely breathe.

Where have you been? Kameryn commanded.

We've been worried sick, Kirin whimpered.

I know. I'm sorry. But, right now there's no time to explain. Each of you go pack some clothes. You're going over to your Aunt Kimmy's.

Why? We don't wanna go! We wanna go with you! Kameryn looked up at me, her eyes blurry with tears.

I have to go for a while.

How long?

I don't know. Now go pack! Hurry! We have to leave in five minutes.

They ran up the stairs and to their bedrooms.

My mind was racing, my heart leaping out of my chest as I picked up the house phone. I turned my back to the TV, which was set to the nine o'clock news. I quickly dialed the number quickly and waited impatiently for that friendly voice.

Hello?

Kim. It's Michelle. Look, I need a favor.

She was silent for a second then asked, What have you gotten yourself into Michelle?

I hesitated then answered.

Uhh& nothing.

I should believe you?

Yes!

She sighed.

Okay. What do you need?

I need you to watch the girls until mom gets back into town.

No. They're not my responsibility. You're the one that should be watching the girls.

I rubbed my forehead in concentration.

I know. But, I have to go to San Diego. My friend is there and she's the only one who can-

I paused, realizing what I was about to say.

Who can what?

Never mind. Can you please watch the girls? This is urgent!

Oh, alright.

Thanks. We'll be over soon. Bye.

I hung up and turned to face the television but didn't even look up to watch it. I pressed in another familiar number.

Pick up!

Hello!

Hey Lea-

This is Leah. Apparently, I'm busy right now. But, if you'd leave a message, I'd be more than happy to get back with you as soon as possible. Ciao!

Great! I muttered and cursed. Come on girls!

I bit my nails in anticipation as I watched the television.

Now for tonight's top story. It was reported that Officer Terri Newman is missing. It is believed he is injured by the footage The New York Police received from his car camera. We have been given permission to release it.

I felt my jaw drop as my eyes grew wide.

No!

The screen had the full image of the bulky cop walking inside the shack and disappearing into the darkness of the house. Then, a minute later, there was Chris and I walking out of the house.

Dear God! NO!

Chris had his arm wrapped around my shoulders, his head bent while his eyes scanned the ground. Thankfully, you couldn't distinguish any of his facial features.

But, my face was in full view. I had fear and desperation written all over it. I was staring forward, blankly into space. You could see a thin line of blood run from the back of my hand to my elbow.

If you see these suspects, please call the police. Your name and number will remain anonymous. You

will also receive a two hundred check for your help in this case. The number is&

Oh my god, I whispered.

Michelle, we're ready.

I heard the girls jump down each step. I quickly reached for the remote and turned off the news.

Michelle? Are you okay? Kirin asked.

I shivered and turned but didn't meet their eyes.

Yeah. Come on. Let's go!

I snatched both their bags out of their hands and headed for the front door. We stepped out into the night and I locked the door.

Who's that?

Kameryn and Kirin watched Christopher's black Ford with curiosity.

A friend of mine. We'll be going with him.

We jumped across each stepping stone and once we reached the truck, I swung the back door open and shoved the bags in, the girls following shortly afterward. I crawled into the front seat and heard the girls whisper about the stranger in the driver's seat.

Seat belts, I said as I snapped mine into place.

Where to?

Christopher put a cigarette to his lips, just about to light it.

Not around the girls.

I reached for it and pulled it away from his lips. Suddenly, his hand grabbed my wrist and held it tightly, looking at the cigarette with envy. But, seeing the fear and anger in my eyes, he slowly let go of my wrist and just looked at me. I had to turn away, tempted to grab him and

Parker Square.

What? Christopher asked kindly and turned to look at the girls.

I looked back and saw Kirin's jaw drop and Kameryn's eyes watch him with craving. When Kirin opened her mouth to speak, she stuttered, so overwhelmed by his good looks.

Par-Park-Parker Square.

He turned and looked at me with a prideful grin.

After he had backed out of the driveway, I looked back at them again. The girls were looking at each other with astonishment. Then they turned to me and gave me copious smiles.

Here we are, Christopher said as he pulled into the driveway of the small, cozy house.

When we came to a complete stop, I turned and looked back at the girls. They were fidgeting nervously, each holding each other's hands.

I'm not going up there with you.

Why not? Kameryn whined.

Because we have to go. I'll come back as soon as possible. I love you guys.

I leaned back and embraced them. Once they got done sobbing, they bid me farewell and climbed out of the truck. We watched them go up on the porch and knock on the solid oak door.

When the door opened, Chris swiftly pulled out and peeled onto the road.

You know we were on the news.

I kept my eyes on the road while he looked at me with an astonished expression.

Oh no! Could you see our faces?

Well, fortunately your head was bent. Me on the other hand

He rubbed his head. I forgot that the feedback from the camera runs to the police station. Even though the tape is destroyed, the images go to the cops. He continued to push hard on his forehead and curse.

What are we going to do?

He bit on his knuckle, obviously thinking of a plan. He reached into his baggy pants and pulled out his cell phone and dialed a number.

Hey sis. We've got a problem.

He explained the situation and I could hear her screaming and curse loudly.

I need you to run to the store and grab some stuff. Buy some black hair dye and a package of small hoops. You have black nail polish and a pointy stick, right? Pointy stick? I wondered to myself. We'll meet you at the house after a while. Bye. He closed the phone and slipped it back into his pocket. I think I missed something. I'll tell you this much: You won't be the same person. That was a big clue, considering I had already changed a lot.

6. Transition

Seventh Chapter

I had no clue exactly where we were going. I felt as if Chris was my bodyguard and I just followed where ever there was safety.

We drove down a road, passing huge houses. I estimated the houses to be about the size of my neighborhood s houses, maybe even larger.

Christopher made a couple more turns and passed a few more houses.

Does he live here?

He finally turned into a street, leading nowhere but to a colossal house. The iron gate swung open to a lengthy driveway that led to what I like to call a mansion .

You live here?

Yeah. Am I not good enough to live here?

His mouth was a thin straight line but his eyes were glowing with mischief as he turned his head looked at me.

No, no. It s not that. It s just that I ve seen guys like you before and never once did expect them to live this& extravagantly.

I guess you learn something new everyday.

He drove up to the house and parked beside five cars.

How many cars do you have?

We have six, not including my mom s car, dad s, Candace s, and mine.

Are your parents home?

I wouldn t be bringing you here if they were. They re in Europe right now. Won t be back for three weeks.

Chris led me to the front door, which a beautiful crystal glass door. He slid his house key into the lock and flicked his wrist. The door opened and the first thing you saw was the grand staircase and the heavy chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

He flipped on the light and the chandelier glistened. I couldn t take my eyes off it. It was so gorgeous the way it shown so proudly.

What do your parents do?

My dad works on Wall Street and my mom is a very well-known wedding planner. We barely see either of them. They want nothing to do with either of us when it comes to their careers.

I m sorry, I sadly uttered as I watched him skitter around the room.

Ehh& don t be. Both of us prefer not seeing them. They re both stuck-up tight-asses that hate us. Come on. Let me take you upstairs.

He glided up the stair case while I stumbled nervously behind him. At one point I almost tripped and fell but he quickly grabbed my hand.

Need help?

His face held a caring expression, his hand warm on mine. I couldn t pull away. He was so breathtaking I just couldn t move.

Come on.

He kept his fingers intertwined with mine as he guided me along each step.

Once we reached the landing, he didn t let go. He led me down the long hallway to a door at the end.

Here s Candace s room.

He opened the door and walked in. My eyes grew full with the sight of the massive room. On

the opposite wall of the door, there was an office desk with a laptop open. Beside the desk was a bulky black stereo with a stack of CDs neatly placed one on top of the other beside it. By the door was a walk-in closet, the walls lined with blacks, different shades of red, green, and grey. There were also wracks of different shoes, each with some kind of skull detailing. Then, there was her amazing bed! It was a king size with silk sheets and a soft black and red comforter. The walls were painted in a dark grey, with posters of different bands plastered all over them.

What a room!

My room is about the same size. I would show it to you, but, it s pretty messy. You haven t even seen her bathroom yet.

She has her own bathroom?

He walked over to another white door and opened it.

Take a look.

I walked in and was floored by the size of it. There was a long mirror that stretched across the wall above the counters. Her sink was silver stainless steel and her toilet was porcelain. In the corner opposite of the toilet was a shower large enough to fit three people in it.

Wow!

Then, I saw the huge Jacuzzi. There were granite steps that led up to the edge of it so you could manage to get in and out easily.

Nice, huh? Chris asked.

Oh, yeah. Do you have a bathroom like this?

Yes but, mine s slightly bigger and more spacious.

I walked out of the bathroom and back into the bedroom.

I m impressed, I said sweetly as I plopped myself down on the bed.

Preps aren t the only one s that make good livings.

He traipsed over to the bed and sat down softly beside me.

You calling me a Prep?

Two days ago I would have but, not now. What you did ranks up with us.

When he said that, it only brought back the memory of what I did and it made me gulp.

Michelle, this wasn t your fault.

Yes it was, I whispered. I could ve controlled myself.

Any one of us could ve done it. It was my fault because I got you caught up in this crap! I m the guilty one.

He inched his hand closer to mine and wrapped it around my fingers.

Don t blame yourself. And don t you dare cry.

Well, hello.

Chris looked away from my eyes. He got a shocked expression on his face as he watched doorway.

Candace!

I looked back as well and saw her standing there with her hand on her hip and a plastic sack in the other.

Please don t make out on my bed, she said in an irritated tone.

I felt my cheeks grow hot with embarrassment as Chris got up and looked at me with affection.

Okay, okay Rings, Meg said as she came up behind Candace. You guys can continue this later. Right now we need to get down to business.

We reluctantly looked away from each other and he left the room.

How d I know this was gonna happen? Candace shook her head.

Well, let s get started, Meg said. She walked over to the bed and dumped the contents of the bag beside me. Where s your pointy stick, Smokey?

Hold on.

Candace walked into her bathroom and opened some drawers.

What is a pointy stick?

She turned off the light and walked back over to Meg.

Good thing you work at a tattoo parlor Rose.

Candace handed a small object to Meg and she observed it skeptically.

This I'll do.

She laid it down among the hair dye and small hoops.

That's just great!

I held the small ear piercer. The pin was pointy and sharp and quite sterile, Thank God!

Come on!

Meg pulled me up off the bed and dragged me to the bathroom where Candace had already started warm water in the tub. Before I could hesitate, she dunked my head underneath the stream of hot water coming from the faucet.

After they had soaked my hair, they wrapped it up in a towel and stood me in front of the bathroom counter. Candace quickly took the towel off and began the process of coloring my hair. Meg soon joined to speed things along. After the fifteen minutes it took to put the dye through my hair, they piled all of my locks on top of my head and let the treatment set for thirty minutes.

While we were waiting impatiently in their room, I asked, So, you guys have nicknames for each other?

Yeah, Candace answered as she gnawed on a pen. I need a smoke!

Well, go smoke! Meg spat as she slowly twirled herself around in the desk chair.

No! I'm trying to quit.

Whatever.

Can you tell me your nicknames so I can get used to them? I asked sweetly.

Candace looked up from the floor and Meg stopped twirling. Then, they just both looked at each other.

Okay& ummm, I'm Smokey, Candace said with her hand on her chest, because I smoke a lot. Chris is Rings because of his ears.

I'm Rose because of my tattoo, Meg said.

And Ashton's Chippy because of his attitude problem.

I see, I said. What's my nickname going to be?

Meg looked at Candace then back at me and said quietly, We still haven't figured that out yet.

Oh.

But, Chris and Ash are supposed to be discussing that.

You see, Candace pushed herself forward, Rings is the leader of this gang. But, we all make decisions. It's not like he's the alpha male.

Okay, this is all beginning to make sense now.

Both the girls smiled, their eyes softening to calmness.

You know, you're not so bad Michelle, Meg said cheerfully.

Why do you say that?

Well, we expected you to be the stuck-up girl. But, you're pretty cool. Although, Chris never doubted you.

That comment made me straighten up and I felt a tingle of relief and satisfaction.

Really?

Candace grinned.

Are you kidding? Every day I could tell he was thinking about you. And if he wasn't thinking about you he was telling something funny that you said to that Thomas bastard.

I felt my cheeks burn as they turned into a bright red.

Time to rinse out your hair.

Meg looked at her watch.

What time is it? Candace asked.

Quarter after eleven.

We'll be up all night.

Candace sighed then stood and went to the bathroom again. I heard the water run and she yelled, Come on. Let's get this over with.

My head was again dunked underneath the warm water. I felt their hands caringly caress my hair as they rinsed and cleaned it. After that was completed, they rang it out and stood me in front of the sink again.

Can I see what I look like?

No, not until we're done, they both said as one of them tied a rag around my eyes.

I heard shuffling and mumbling between the two of them and then felt the heat of a blow dryer against my scalp. I would shift my weight every now and then to keep my legs from going to sleep while they tugged and pulled at my long hair.

I was sat down on the bed, the rag no longer over my eyes, although, I still didn't know what I looked like.

So far so good, Candace said, looking at me approvingly.

Now for the tricky part.

Meg got the ear peircer and came back and faced me.

Is this going to hurt?

Maybe. How well do you tolerate pain?

I shrugged.

I guess we'll just have to see.

She sat to my side and slid the peircer an inch above my first peircing.

Got the package open and ready? she asked Candace.

Yup.

Okay. You ready M?

I cut my eyes over at her.

What do you think?

I'll take that as a yes. I'm going to count back from three. Three, two, one...

A sharp pain went through me as the small pin shot straight through my ear. I let out a small cry and gritted my teeth and closed my eyes tightly.

I need a ring.

I kept my eyes closed as I felt Meg push the earring through my ear and clasp it shut.

I didn't open my eyes once as she continued halfway up each ear, an inch between each new peircing.

You can open your eyes now.

I cracked them open and saw both the girls standing before me. I brought my fingertips to my ears and felt the weight of each earring. I guess my eyes grew wide with disbelief because they both turned to each other like they had done something wrong.

You okay?

I giggled and then let out a loud laugh. They turned and looked at each other with What? written on their faces. I continued to laugh.

I'm one of you now! I'm no longer Michelle& which is something completely new to me.

I gripped my stomach and fell back onto the bed.

Oh, my God. She's lost it, I heard Meg whisper.

7. Skully

Eighth Chapter

I looked at myself in the mirror with pride.

What do you think? Meg asked.

I ran my fingers through my pitch black hair, which made my skin a beautiful ivory color. When they had blow dried my hair, they had managed to get it straightened without a straightener. It now hung a little further than the middle of my back. My ears were lined in silver rings that dangled loosely from the middle of my ears.

I look& I look like&

You look like a babe, Candace said. She wrapped her arms around my shoulders and also observed me in the mirror.

Yeah! Definitely to Rings liking, Meg purred.

Just as I felt a smile creep onto my lips Candace yelled, Rings! Chippy! We re done!

The bedroom door opened and both the guys walked in. I slowly turned and faced them.

Ashton s lips formed in the shape of an O and Chris eyes widened. Ashton let out a light, flirtatious whistle.

Damn Rings! Why do you get first call on everything?

I looked at Chris, expecting an answer. His eyes didn t move from my face. I saw him gulp and carefully lick his lips.

Bro!

Huh?

He looked away from me and stared at his sister. What?

What do you think? Did we do a good job?

A good job? Ashton said as he came closer to me. He rolled his tongue making a sensuous purring sound as his eyes scanned me slowly up and down. That s what I call a HOT job.

No way, pretty boy. I pressed my index finger to his chest and pushed him away. You just keep your distance.

We ll see about that. He kissed the air and watched me with passion.

Chris was again transfixed on me. He walked around me, examining the work done on me. I felt his hand run softly but unnoticeably run down the tip of my hair on my back.

Nice job, he said.

I saw a twinkle of mischief in his eye when he came around and faced me.

Have you guys decided on a name?

Candace placed a hand on her hip, waiting for an answer.

Yes. How bout Skully? Chris still didn t look away.

Why Skully?

We re taking her to get a tattoo tomorrow, most preferably a skull, he turned around and looked at them. Therefore, Skully fits.

A tattoo?

Oh boy. This is getting too far.

To make you an official Dead Gang member, you need a tattoo, Meg brought out. Candace and I both have tattoos on our hips. Then both Candace and Meg lifted the backs of their shirts and slightly pulling down there pants, showing their tattoos. I remembered the first day I saw them, I don t think I ll ever forget that day. I remembered that Candace had the black butterfly and Meg had the black blooming rose, which were still lying on their hips.

I have a tattoo on my shoulder, Ash said as he lifted his sleeve, revealing a slithering snake.

Chris then said, And I have an X between my shoulder blades.

So, tomorrow, I'll be getting a tattoo? Put where at?

That's for you to choose, Chris said with his adorable crooked grin. Think about it.

Oh, I will.

You do that baby, Ashton whispered as he continued to look at me.

Shut up Chip! Candace spat. Rose, you and Skully are about the same size. Tomorrow we'll run by your house and get a couple of your things.

Meg shrugged approvingly. Well, it's three. I could run over there real quick and go get some things. My parents like to say they're light sleepers but, you can bang pans and they won't even wake up.

Okay, cool. I'll come with you, said Candace. Do you want to come to Skully?

I shook my head, still a little caught off by my new name. No. I'm going to stay here and get some rest.

Okay. Just make yourself comfortable. We'll be back in an hour or so.

They walked out of the room, Smokey shaking her car keys.

Chip, could you wait in my room. I need to talk to M alone. Chris' rings slightly clanked across each other, making a soft tinkling as he turned his head to look at Ashton.

Ashton dropped his jaw and grumbled.

Just go man!

He turned on his heel and stamped toward the bedroom door and slammed it shut.

Do you really like it? I asked as I twirled a straight lock of my hair around my fingertip and looked at the hard wood floor.

I heard him gulp and whisper, Umm&

I felt like a little child as I continued to twirl the lock and put my knees in shyness.

I stopped my girlish behavior and stood straight. So, tomorrow's a big day?

He nodded his head yes. I'm sorry. I might get kinda nervous. I'm just not one for long road trips.

Do you want to stay here?

No. You're going to need all the help you can get. Tomorrow we'll get your tattoo and head out.

I cringed at the thought of a tattoo.

Don't worry. Rose does tattoos for a living. She'll know what she's doing.

I still felt uneasy.

Where do you want her to put it?

I'm still not sure.

How about on your neck?

He walked up behind me and lifted my now long black hair and ran his fingertip across the back of my neck. His soft touch made me shiver slightly.

Back here would be a good spot, he whispered.

He let go of my hair and faced me again.

Well, then on the back of my neck it is. I smiled.

I became disappointed when he walked to the door.

Don't go!

Ash, get your @\$@ out of the hallway into my room! he scolded.

You're a- I heard Ash begin to yell.

Knock it off! I'll be there in a minute.

Chris slammed the door in Ash's face and got a glow of mischief in his eyes.

That retard, he chuckled. I joined in his chuckling.

Get some rest okay. We'll be leaving at six to get your tattoo.

Goodnight, I managed to say to him before he left.

Goodnight& Skully.
He winked and left, leaving me flustered and cheery.

8. Official

Ninth Chapter

Wake up Michelle!

I cracked my eyes open.

What time is it? I asked Candace, who had stopped shaking me awake.

Five thirty.

I thought we were leaving at six.

Change of plans. Rings, Rose, and Chippy are all ready in the cars. We got to go. Cops are already looking for you.

She stood up and threw a pair of black jeans, black high-top shoes, and a red and black screen t-shirt.

Strip the Prep clothes and put that on.

I did as I was told. The clothes fit me perfectly.

Come on! Let s go! Let s go! You re riding with Meg and me.

We ran out of the house and I pushed myself into Candace s Corvette and we were off.

On my way to school, I often passed this small tattoo parlor. I never really did pay any attention to it. Only now did I realize the name of it was Ink Point.

I took a deep breath saying to myself, It ll all be alright. Meg knows what she s doing. It won t hurt& will it?

You coming Skully?

Meg was already out of the car and unlocking the door while Candace popped her head back in and looked at me with an assuring expression.

I nodded, feeling my throat tighten with anxiousness.

It s okay. The faster we get it done, the sooner we can leave town.

I slowly pushed myself up and out of the car and walked through the open door of the parlor.

Ash, Chris, Candace, and I stood in the small room while Meg set herself down in a chair and got the needed supplies.

Don t be scared, Chris said.

I looked up into his eyes. The dim fluorescent lights from inside the shop shown on his face, making him look evil with the way his eyes glowed as he looked at me lovingly.

Come on over Skull, Meg said in her soft tone.

I slowly walked over to the chair and seated myself. She then looked up at Rings as I gulped and asked, The neck, right?

Out of the corner of my eye I could see him nod.

She pulled my hair away from my neck and wiped the area with a clean, soapy rag and turned the needle on.

Close your eyes and relax, she whispered softly.

I did as I was told and after a couple seconds, felt the point of the needle go into my skin. I gritted my teeth and dealt with the dull pain.

Never once in my life did I believe I was ever going to have he guts to do this.

Okay! All done. You can open your eyes now.

I looked around and saw Chris sitting there in front of me.

You did it. He gave me a grin of satisfaction.

I laid my hand on my neck where the tattoo was and felt a fabric patch over the spot.

It's to keep it from getting swollen and soar, Meg explained without looking up from taking her gloves off.

My hand subtly shook on the arm of the chair.

I did it, I told myself. I'm one of them now.

Let's go! If we're going to get there in three days we gotta go. Candace waved her hand frantically and Meg ran to the door and turned off the lights.

For today, you're going to ride with Chippy and me, Rings looked at me and said.

Okay.

I slowly walked to the door, Chippy only a step behind.

We'll have fun, he whispered. I then felt his hand graze my behind and I jumped in shock. I didn't look back or react much more. I didn't want to make a scene.

The sun was beginning to peek up and shine its pink and orange rays across the soft and calm sky. As I walked to the truck, I looked up at the serene sight.

Chippy, why don't you sit in the back?

Fine!

Ashton crawled in the back quite clumsily and huffed. I looked over at Chris and he rolled his eyes when Ashton slammed the door and sat in the back pouting.

That kid, Chris whispered. Let's meet in Ohio! he yelled to the girls. They both nodded and seated themselves in the Corvette.

How are we going to get to Ohio in a short time? I asked once in the truck.

We know shortcuts all the way to San Diego. This isn't the first time we've made a trip like this. Chris pulled the seatbelt over his chest and put it into place. I did the same and heard the soft click.

We ready?

Yeah.

We pulled out of the desolate lot and followed the girls on our three day journey.

9. On the Road

Tenth Chapter

The car seat was back, with me laid back against it, giving Rings and Chippy the impression I was sleeping. It had been thirty minutes and I couldn't settle my fretful heart. It had been long enough and they believed I was sound asleep, giving them the opportune time to talk about me and the things they were planning.

Chip, can you hand me that pillow back there? Rings whispered.

There was no acknowledgment from Chip. I heard him throw the pillow in Rings' face and a muffled grumble from him. Then, Chris' strong hand lifted my head softly and fixed the pillow under it. When he laid my head back down, I tried not to smile from content and blush from surprise.

God! She's gorgeous! I heard Ash exclaim.

Don't talk about her like that, Chris said as he took away his hand from my face.

But, it's true.

Yes, it's true but that's not the point! She is in our hands for us to take care of her. We shouldn't gawk at her.

You may not but, I will.

Don't you have a girlfriend Ash? Chris asked.

Hilary? Heck no!

Then why is she always going on about you two going out?

She's a desperate freak! She's hot but she's a freak!

Right. Okay, whatever. But, you're not going to take advantage of Michelle. She's weak right now and I know you're not stupid. You'll try to make a move when you know she's liable to give in.

No! Not me. There was a devilry tone to Ash's deep voice. I'd never do that.

I wanted to pop my head up and slap him across the face but, I wanted to hear what else Chris had to say.

I heard Ash yelp and Chris gave a harsh Shhh! and whispered through his clinched teeth, I swear, if you hurt her you will rue the day that you ever met me.

Dude! Dude, I get it! He cried again in pain. Now let go of my ear! Ouch!

Am I clear?

I already said I get it! Let go dang it!

I heard Ash sigh with relief and fall back into his seat again.

Serves you right!

There was silence for a while then I felt Ash pull himself forward and press the button on the stereo. Loud metal music blasted and the last thing I heard before I drifted off into a peaceful rest was Chris' affectionate words, Keep the music down so she doesn't wake up. It's going to be a hard and long three days for her.

I awoke to a shining sun. I covered my eyes and when they had adjusted to the brightness I saw Chris' hand tapping to the music. He was mellow as he watched the highway intently.

Good afternoon, he said succulently.

I looked at my watch.

It's already four? How long was I sleeping?

Since seven thirty this morning.

I yawned and stretched. There was a snort from the backseat and then a soft sigh. I turned and

saw Ashton, sprawled out across the leather seat. I giggled and pulled out my phone and flipped it open.

That's a good shot, I said looking at the screen.

What?

I put the phone up to Chris' face where he could see the picture of Ash.

That guy is such a big kid, he said with a chuckle.

How far are we from Ohio?

Only four hours. We're going to go to a cheap motel that we go to all the time.

I let out a sigh and also watched the road and soon found myself also tapping my foot to the sound of the music.

This is good music, I told him.

I love this band. I have a whole stash of other music like this.

He hummed to the music. His soft humming was deep, following the tune and hitting every note right. The sound of his deep rhythm was soothing and even more comforting. When the chorus played he began to sing along, his voice smoothly running out of his throat. I wanted to melt it was so bewitching.

You have a nice voice, I stuttered quietly.

He smiled and said, Naw. Can you sing?

A little but, I don't often.

Oh really? Show me what you got.

No.

Don't be nervous. It's just me. The kid back there is asleep so, belt it.

Not right now. Maybe later.

He shrugged. Darn! I wanted to hear a beautiful note, he playfully pouted. I understand. He cupped his hand over mine and said, It's okay to be scared.

You know I am.

What I mean is you don't have to hide it. You can still be strong and show fear. I know you're afraid, we all know. So, why hide it? But don't you cry because I'll cry with you.

I didn't say anything and just sat there and looked at his undefiled face.

Why do you have to be so great? I turned away.

I don't know. It's just who I am.

Sure it's just who you are. We both looked back and saw Chip rub his eyes and then sit up and stretch.

I was hoping you were dead, Chris said when he turned back.

It's hard to kill me. He pushed himself forward and looked at me. Right baby, he said with a smirk.

I huffed and looked away and saw Chris out of the corner of my eye give him a dangerous warning glance and made a kind of growl under his breath. Ash's smirk faded and he slowly pulled himself back, knowing the danger of Chris' wrath.

Thanks Rings, I thanked him quietly.

We continued down the busy highway, Ashton in the back snapping and tapping his feet to the sound of the music. I watched the road, ignoring everyone and everything.

What am I going to do? I'm on the run from the law and my family is now part of it. I'm so scared.

What if I get caught and put on trial. I know I'll never be able to take the pressure. I won't be taken back into my family and& and& Wait, now, calm yourself Michelle. You don't

know that that'll ever happen. You may run for a while and then they'll forget all about this and leave me alone. Perhaps, I'll never have to change again. Perhaps& There were too many

perhaps, and I knew what was coming for me. I had it coming all along.

While I was lost in my thought I noticed that we turned into an exit.

I thought we were going to Ohio?

We are. This is just one of the short cuts.

I watched in wonder as we drove down a devoid gravel road. Things got rough when he immediately turned onto the gravel road, filled with pot holes and a couple of fallen limbs from near trees. After five minutes we made it back to the highway.

Only two more hours, Rings said casually. So, sit back and relax.

10. "De-boosting!"

Eleventh Chapter

We pulled up beside the Corvette and saw the red glow of Smokey's cigarette. Meg had the back door open, her legs hanging out of the backseat while she waited patiently in rest. When Smokey saw us pull up she said, "Rose!" and whistled. "Wake up. They're here." She stomped on the newly lit cigarette as if she had a grudge against it because it tempted her.

Meg sat up and blinked. Her hair was frizzy from the leather of the Corvette seats.

I was hoping to get a longer nap, she struggled to say through a large yawn, seeming to make her face disappear.

I fell out of the truck with a graceful jump, clutching my hair clipper between my lips. As I walked around to stand with the others, I languidly and sloppily twisted my hair and opened the clipper, fastening it securely to my scalp.

I caught the words that came from Candace's mouth, "We heard the news on the way down here that they've already got cops out all over New York looking for you. I imagine that they have your family under investigation."

I felt my stomach turn and knot.

"Give me one of those," I said pointing at Candace's package of cigarettes.

"No Skully. I know it's hypocritical for me to say this, but, it's not good for you and you shouldn't start the habit."

"Just this once. Give me one. Please!" I pleaded.

"There's never a 'just this once' Michelle," she said quietly.

"Does that count for murder too?"

Tears filled my eyes at that the thought that I might see another human's blood at my own will. I sunk to the ground and felt the tears fall through the crevices of my fingers.

I couldn't tell whether or not I was dreaming or if it was real, but, I felt myself being pulled up off the dusty lot and heard Chris' sweet voice.

"Are you checked in yet? Have we got rooms?"

"Yes. Here's your key."

I buried my head in the nook of Chris' neck, smelling the scent of his cologne as more tears fell from my face.

"Stop crying you baby! Get a grip! But, no matter how many times I told myself that, it didn't do any good."

"Take the key Ash. One of you girls, could you open the door to your room so I could lay her down in bed."

He began to walk forward up the steps to the second story of the motel. His muscles became tense because of the weight of my body, but I never heard a grunt or sigh of weariness as we continued to walk to the room. I peeked over his shoulder and saw Candace, jingling the key in her hand. In the other hand that was shaking, I saw the cigarette package which was crumpled and abused.

We came to a stop in front of the door with the numbers 54 on it. The shoulder of Christopher's shirt was soggy from my tears but he didn't seem to care.

Candace unlocked the door and opened it to a small room with two full size beds and a bathroom. It was a suitable room but, not the best. Candace didn't come in. She left the door open and walked back down to the rest of the group while Chris gently placed me on the comfy bed. He then sat to my side with a box of Kleenex in his hand. He pulled out a tissue and

handed it to me and I took it and dabbed my eyes.

I m sorry Chris, I said once I was through blowing my nose.

It s okay. We re going to make up a new plan. We re all here for you so, don t lose hope.

I reached back and pulled took down the clippie and tossed my hair about.

Can I take off the bandage yet?

Here. He pulled me up and turned my back to him, and tossed my hair over my right shoulder. I felt him peel away the tape and the bandage. I think you can.

How s it looking?

Look s good.

We heard a soft knock on the door frame and there was Meg. Hey, we re going to go get something to eat. You guys want anything?

Where are you going to go get something? I asked.

Some place with burgers.

Just get me a cheeseburger and some soda. I don t care what kind.

Okay. How about you Chris? Want anything?

Umm& just get me-

The usual right?

Yeah, he said with a grin.

We ll be back soon. Ashton s in your room Chris.

Alright.

When Meg had left I got up and stood in the doorway and looked out at the blue sky over the lush green field across from the motel.

It s so nice today.

Yeah.

He came up behind me and looked out as well. There was a cool breeze that blew my hair and soothed my mind.

Well, I m gonna go check on the kid. I felt a soft draft from his slim body as he moved past me and out the door. See you soon.

Bye.

He opened the door next to the girls room and then turned and said, You re doin good Michelle. He smiled and went into the room.

Hey! I heard Chippy yell. There was Thunk and a bang. Ow! That s my bed you bas-

Oh shut up man! Chris said with a tone of playfulness in his voice.

There was more banging and a, Dude! Cut it out! from Chris.

I covered my mouth and giggled. After things had settled down in the other room, I closed the door and went back to my bed and laid down to rest.

Hey Skully?

There was a couple light taps on my door only five minutes after I had laid down.

What Chip? I asked irritably.

Rings wants to talk to you. Come on over to our room.

I got up and pulled my hair up again then went and opened the door to Ashton.

What does he want to talk to me about?

I don t know! He just told me to come get you.

I wasn t sure whether or not to trust him since he had that silly shimmer in his eye and a smug expression.

He just wants you to wait for him in our room. He went to go get some ice. He should be back soon.

Alright.

I closed our door, keeping it unlocked. Ashton followed behind me and we walked into their room. Once in their room he jumped onto the bed by the window. I sat at the foot of the other bed and crossed my legs.

There was an awkward silence between the two of us. Ashton had one leg up on the bed while the other fell lazily to the floor. I could feel his eyes burning into my head as he laid there.

What? I turned and asked him. Why are you looking at me?

You're just so hot! He didn't refrain or stutter. He sat up and

What are you doing?

Getting comfortable.

He pulled his shirt off over his head then laid back down on the bed. The slithering snake on his arm was now visible. How's your tattoo? he asked when he saw me staring at his.

It's a little soar but, the bandage is off.

That's cool. Turn so I can see it.

I turned my body where he could see the skull completely.

Looks good.

Thanks.

Right after Chip complemented my tattoo, I heard the knob turn on the bathroom door and a light poured out.

Hey, Ash.

Out walked Chris, his eyes closed, only a towel wrapped around his hips, another towel in his other hand. His black hair was messy after he took the towel in his hand and did his best to dry it.

Oh, my god!

His eyes were on the floor as he walked to the suitcase beside the door.

I have an idea, he said, thinking Ashton was the only one in the room.

My eyes grew wide as he dropped the towel from around his waist and unzipped the suitcase.

OH, MY GOD!

He grabbed his clothes and turned to lay them on his bed, his eyes now up to see me there with an astounded look on my face.

His cheeks flushed and I looked away from the sight. I put my hand up over my eyes.

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't see anything!

Ashton fell back onto his bed and burst in laughter. Chris' cheeks were no longer red from embarrassment but now anger.

ASHTON! He covered his front and ran back to his towel and picked it up and covered himself again.

What man? Ashton said through his laughing. That was freakin' funny!

I better go. I stood up, avoiding Chris' frantic expression, and ran out the door. I heard Chris yell and Ashton continue to laugh hysterically.

I'm going to kill you!

No you're not. You should thank me!

Thank you?! What is your problem man?

What the hell isn't my problem? I gave you a head start in your romancing! God knows you need a boost!

You idiot! That's no way to give me a boost! If anything, that's de-boosting!

There's no such word, Ashton said sternly.

Oh, shut up!

All of us gathered around the Corvette to get our orders of food. Chris and I stood far apart, an

unpleasant silence between us.

Okay, here's your burger Chip. Candace handed him the burger and the drink. Without thanks, Ashton took them both and greedily bit into the burger and gulped down his soda.

Hey Skully. Could you hand Chris his bag?

I slowly took the bag and handed it quickly back over to Chris, without any words. Chris didn't say anything either.

What is up with you two? You've been like this ever since we got back. Candace questioned.

I sipped on my soda, looking back and forth between Meg and Candace who didn't understand what was going on. Ashton looked up from his burger and gave us each a smirk.

Nothing, Chris said coldly while he watched Ashton with disgust.

Meg handed me my food and I began to walk with the group back upstairs. Before I could put my foot on the first step, I felt Chris' long, slim fingers wrap around my wrist and pull me back.

I need to talk to you.

About what? There's nothing to talk about.

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On behalf of Ash, I'm apologizing.

You don't need to. I didn't see a thing.

Yeah right! Could you kid yourself anymore?

Uh-huh, sure.

Okay, maybe I saw a little bit of something.

Just promise me we can get over this and we can be friends still.

Alright. Let's just not talk about it anymore.

Agreed.

11. Leah

Twelfth Chapter

We all got up early the next and got back on the road to avoid our being recognized by the owners or residents of the motel.

Tonight, we'll have to find a place where we can't be seen. Then we'll just have to sleep in our cars, Chris had decided.

Is that the only way to avoid the cops? There are no relatives or anything? I wondered.

It's the only way to keep you from facing the judge. My guess is that within a couple months when they can't track you, they'll give up and leave you alone.

I hated going around like a nomad, and it had only been two days since we had left New York. We were now headed for Illinois which should take us a full twenty-four hours, not including breakfast, lunch, dinner, and sleeping breaks.

I was riding with Chris again. This time just the two of us, just so Ashton wouldn't cause anymore trouble between us.

I'm going to call Leah.

I opened my phone and dialed her number. I cursed when I was, again, tricked by her voice message.

I guess you couldn't get a hold of her.

I grunted and rested my elbow on the door, my head held by my hand.

Where are you Leah?

To release the tension in the atmosphere, Chris popped in a new CD and played it. He began to hum once more and I fell in love with his voice once again while he drove down the busy interstate of Indiana.

It was dark out as we neared eighteen hours of being on the road. I was full from our recent stop four hours ago. I ran my hand over my stomach and groaned.

You okay?

Yeah.

You sure?

If I say yes will you stop asking me?

Chris grinned and replied, I promise.

Yes. I'm fine.

He reached over into the cup holder and took his phone. He quickly dialed a number.

Where are you guys at? Okay. We're on 2040 and it looks like there's an empty lot out here surrounded by trees. You guys want to stop here? See you soon. Bye.

He made a sharp turn followed by honks and yells and from other people. I fell forward, almost hitting my head on the dashboard.

Sorry. I didn't mean to turn that fast.

I pulled my hair back from my face and settled back down in the seat.

He pulled into the lot and turned off his headlights.

Do we just wait? I looked around, seeing only the depleted ground and the swaying trees in the breeze.

Yup.

Silence. Only silence. I couldn't even think of a thing to say to him, which was unusual.

I m going to try calling Leah again.

I dialed the number and heard the phone ring on the other line.

Helllooo!

Leah!

Michelle? I haven t heard from you in a while.

I ve been calling you for the past couple of days and haven t been able to get a hold of you.

It s been pretty hectic here. The parties are crazy, they guys are insanely hot! So, what s up?

So many things I can t begin to tell you over the phone.

I heard a deep voice in the background and Leah giggled. Stop, she said flirtatiously.

Who s there with you?

Oh, nobody. Stop. That tickles! She giggled more.

Okay, I m not even going to ask. Look, I m on my way there to San Diego. I have to talk to you in person.

Are you driving?

Yes.

That s like a& long drive!

I know, but, I have my options. I should be there in two days.

Yay! How d you get out of your probation ?

Again, it s a long story. Anyway, I ll see you in a couple days.

Bye babe!

Bye Lea. I closed the phone and sighed with relief.

So, you finally got a hold of her, huh?

Sure did.

Chris leaned against the window and ran his hand through his hair making it messy and fall across his face.

There they are, I said when I saw the bright red Corvette pull up closely beside us.

We both slid out of the truck and Chris said, What s our plan for tomorrow?

It was just Smokey standing outside of the car while Chip was already situating himself in the front seat and Rose put a pillow underneath her head and got comfortable in the back seat.

We will get a head start tomorrow. It would be best if you guys hang back a couple hours tomorrow morning just in case the cops find our trail. You guys will take the shortcut and meet back with us in Missouri. Sound good?

Perfect, Chris said happily. He looked over at me and me at him.

Well, see you in Missouri. Smokey waved and flashed a small grin, closely resembling Chris .

See ya, I waved back and so did Rings.

Both of us climbed back into the truck.

You can have the back seat. Chris eyes dazzled with bright pale blue as he looked at me, a smile also dancing in his eyes.

Are you sure?

Yeah. Here s my pillow. He handed the soft down pillow over to me and I grinned in thanks.

I climbed somewhat clumsily into the backseat, and put the pillow against the window and made myself comfortable.

Goodnight, he said with another sigh and crossed his arms over his chest.

Goodnight, I said quietly.

I heard the leather squeak slightly as he turned his head back and looked at me. I had my eyes closed but could feel his eyes watching me. Once I had the impression his head was turned, I opened one eye and saw him doze off into sleep. He looked so peaceful and so charming laying there, like my guardian. I grinned slightly then also fell off into sleep.

12. Pushed Over the Edge

Thirteenth Chapter

I awoke to the sight of an empty driver's seat and bright sun. I looked around the outside of the car and saw Chris walking back to the car. He had his phone in his hand and he was zipping up the front of his pants.

He opened his door and I apparently startled him when I greeted him with a drowsy, "Good morning."

"Oh, you scared me. I didn't expect you to be awake."

I got up into the front seat again.

"Were you calling Smokey?"

He nodded his head yes. "That and I had to pee." He smiled.

"Okay, thanks for the info," I said with sarcasm.

"Anytime," he chuckled as he put the car into gear and drove forward and out of the lot.

"How far ahead of us are they?"

"About three hours."

"It's going to be a long day."

He said nothing but only nodded in return. And the journey begins.

It had been a dull three hours of driving already and I soon became very bored with the sight of pavement and white and yellow lines. I didn't have slightest idea where we were. All I cared about was making it to Leah in time before I was caught.

"What do you plan on telling her?" Chris asked in his mysterious tone.

"I don't know. I just need her help and support right now."

"Are you sure that she'll accept you now that you're one of us?"

I looked at him in shock. At first I thought it was the stupidest question! But, then I considered how through all our years of being best friends, Leah always detested these people like they were rabid dogs. And now that I was officially one of them she— It made my stomach cramp with uneasiness at the thought of it all. I couldn't say anything in answer to his question.

"Let's just hope we're not going to her for no good reason."

We soon came to an old wooden bridge. It was held up over a fast moving river held up by tall wooden posts. There were wood guard rails, supposedly to keep you from crashing and falling into the water.

We each took a deep breath and Chris slowly eased onto the bridge.

All was fine until we got halfway across. There was a hard push against the back of the truck and Chris slammed on his breaks. I turned quickly and saw that there was a truck a little bigger than Chris' shoving against us.

"Unbuckle your seat belt now!" Chris yelled over the sound of his screeching tires.

I fumbled with the button and finally released the belt and did the same for Chris, knowing he couldn't react to all of it.

When I looked up, I saw that we were being pushed closer and closer to the edge of the bridge. Chris pushed the break harder, causing even more rubber to burn. I felt the intensity of it all and sweat dripped from under my arms.

"We're going to die! We're going to die!" the voice in my head screamed.

The nose of our truck pushed through the guard rails and now hung over the fast waters that ate the wooden planks that fell in.

Open your door and get ready to jump!

I cracked open my door like he told me to do, my sweaty palm holding tightly to the door handle. The truck began to dip down, getting closer and closer to the raging water.

With one last push from the truck behind us we plummeted down.

Jump now! Chris yelled.

I fell and felt the unwelcoming bite of the cold river water. I tried to swim against the current but to no avail.

I screamed over the rushing water for Chris but only heard sloshing and gushing around me.

Ahhh! I screamed when I was pushed against a boulder in the water, my leg trapped between two sharp rocks. I struggled to set myself free as my fresh blood was being carried down stream.

I made one last cry of pain, then gurgled and let the water take me over.

This is it. This is where I end.

When I felt all hope escape, a hand wrapped around my wedged leg and with ease, pulled it loose. I was then lifted to the surface and gagged and choked at the air meeting my lungs.

Chris? I managed to ask weakly.

I m here. Don t let go.

We soon met solid ground. Chris set me down and ripped the bloodied pant leg. I heard him curse and I lifted my head and saw I had a huge gash on my leg that cut deep into my skin.

I looked over at Chris. His hair was wet and sticking to his face, his eyes burning with wonderment. I could tell he was beginning to panic, but then calmed himself. He pulled his wet shirt off over his head and ripped off a large piece of the black fabric.

I bit my lip in some discomfort as he quickly, neatly, and tightly bandaged my leg.

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out his phone and said with a grin to try and give me some cheer, Thank goodness its waterproof. He opened and called his sister only to tell her that I was hurt and she needed to come pick us up.

I pushed myself up and sat uncomfortably. Chris was taking his torn shirt and wadded it, pondering what to do with it. I couldn t help but stare at him. Without a shirt on he was& No words can explain. This was the second time I d seen him with no shirt on and it still never ceased to amaze me how amazingly hot this guy was.

He stood and walked to the land s edge. He had his back turned towards me, the X tattoo rippling with each movement his shoulders made as he rang his shirt out over the water.

Thanks.

He stopped and turned back to look at me when I spoke. The rings in his ears sparkled from the sunlight, making his face seem to glow.

For what?

What else?

He smiled. You mean for saving you?

Yes.

I looked away and wrapped my arms around myself, trying to prevent shivering. But, it did no good. It only made my teeth chatter more.

Suddenly, Chris had his arm wrapped around my waist and pulled me close to him. I felt his damp skin against my cheek and his warm chest against my cold body. He wrapped his other arm around me and pulled me even closer.

Is that better?

He gently rocked me from side to side and I let out a faint sigh of content.

Good. And& you re welcome. His comment was followed by his soft humming of that song from our first day on the road.

His sweet voice chanted the chorus. Just hold me and tell me it ll be alright. Change me and

make me new. Clear my mind so I can feel right. Love me and hold me tight. Then he held my fingertips up to his soft lips and concluded with a new line that he added. Oh, I love you and I will hold you tight. He kissed the tips of my fingers and looked into my eyes that held astonishment. Do you love me too?

I didn't answer with words but pressed my lips against his. I ran my hands through his black smooth and wet hair. I pulled away and leaned my head against his. His chest moved up and down fast as he tried to catch his breath.

Does that answer your question? I asked as I gazed into his eyes.

The corners of her mouth curled and he chuckled deeply. Then he pushed back my hair and said, Yes. It does. And you've just made me very happy. He pulled into his arms again and kissed me more and held me.

13. So Real

Fourteenth Chapter

His hand softly drifted through my hair as my head laid on his chest. My head moved with the rhythm of his breathing. Up, down. Up, down. Up, down.

So, are we going to tell them right away? I looked up at Chris, his eyes watching every cloud that passed by overhead.

No, this will be our little secret for a while. It's bad enough this has happened in the middle of a runaway. We don't need more on our plate.

It made sense. I just hated the thought of more secrecy. First, I was keeping secrets from the law. Now I was holding back another secret from the people I see everyday. Dare I say friends?

Ouch!

Take your time. There's no rush, Chris said. He held tightly to my one arm that was wrapped around his neck.

I limped slowly across each uneasy rock along the bank of the river. The sun was beginning to set, the air becoming light and cooler. The water glistened with an array of colors from the setting sun.

I need to sit Chris.

My cut leg was beginning to throb, my other beginning to buckle and get weak from the weight of my body. I fell to the ground before Chris could even try to set me down.

Michelle! Are you okay? He kneeled down beside me and observed my leg. It's beginning to swell. He put the tattered fabric around my leg again and cursed.

I don't think I can walk anymore. I'm so tired.

He frowned and looked back over at me. Without another word, he picked me up in his arms and whispered in my ear, I guess I'll have to carry you.

No. I& I don't want you to&

Go to sleep. You've had a long day.

I grinned and giggled childishly. I seemed to slur my words in sleepiness. You're so sweet.

My eyelids drooped and before falling into a calming rest in the arms of the man I love, I took my thumb and index finger and pinched his cheek. And you're so cute too!

Not as cute as you. He looked down into my eyes. Now, sleep beautiful. With his index finger on one of my eyelids and his middle finger resting delicately on the other he slowly pulled them down over my eyes. He softly kissed my forehead and began to walk again.

Peaceful, beautiful darkness met me with only the image of Chris' face and his smile for me to dream about. And that's just what I did. I dreamed of my beloved Rings and his loving smile and caring touch.

I heard Chris' enchanting voice say, I love you. Then, there was pleading. Screaming. Groaning. Moaning.

No longer did his charming smile greet my mind but only the sight of blood. Blood everywhere. Then him sprawled out across the floor in his own blood.. Candace, Meg, and Ashton were only inches away from him, lifeless on the floor.

It all seemed so real! The way my love feebly raised his head and grinned weakly at me and tried to speak but coughed and spat up more blood. He screamed when the black shadow that

stood over him kicked him hard in his stomach where three stab wounds had been inflicted. Why was I just sitting there? I had to move but only felt the pain of being pinned to the wall by the shadow s knife.

That familiar voice came from the mouth of the figure that twisted the long blade into my stomach.

I loved you when you were normal. But, now& I looked up at the ceiling and felt the goo from my own body run down my chin. You re one of them! the voice yelled at me.

I jolted awake from the nightmare and found that my head was resting on Rose s lap, my feet draped across Rings lap.

She s awake! Meg exclaimed.

It was now completely dark outside. The only light was from the stereo and that was barely enough to illuminate all their faces.

How are you doin Skully? Candace asked affectionately.

My leg hurts like hell! How long have I been out?

About six hours. Chris pulled off my shoes and socks.

We were beginning to get worried. Meg leaned over my face and looked at me.

I attempted a weak smile then felt Chris warm hands against my cold feet. His fingers traced letters on the bottom of them. I tried to decipher what he was saying.

I-W-A-S-W-O-R-R-I-E-D

I was worried.

A smile crept onto my lips. Then he said something else.

D-O-N-T-S-C-A-R-E-M-E-L-I-K-E-T-H-A-T-A-G-A-I-N-I-L-O-V-E-Y-O-U

Don t scare me like that again. I love you.

To let him know I got the message, I wiggled my toes. He began to rub my feet once more with tenderness in each stroke.

Well, this is just great! Meg began. We can t take her to the emergency room. They ll recognize her and take her in without hesitation.

But, we don t really have a choice. Her leg could easily get infected.

I felt Chris grip tighten on my foot when his sister stated the obvious.

I m not giving in, I said.

Michelle, Chris pleaded.

No. I can t go back. There has to be some way to keep my leg from getting infected.

I heard Ashton rub his head and sigh. Then he said, I know what we can do.

He s actually good for something? Other than being a smart-

Well, spit it out! Chris sounded irritated but Ash shot him a warning glance then he reluctantly spoke.

Since they have no clue who I am, tell me what to get and I ll run into the store and get what we need.

They all shrugged and Chris said, Sounds good.

14. "Stupid Idiot!"

Fifteenth Chapter

We found a small community store in our destination. Missouri. We had written all the things we needed on a small piece of paper for Ashton. Before we could consult him one last time, he opened the car door and ran into the store.

I hope he has money, Candace said, gripping the steering wheel.

A couple minutes later, I heard yelling inside the store and Ashton ran out. But, he had something extra. There was a black ski mask over his face and a gun!

Oh no!

He jumped into the car and screamed, Go!

Before Candace sped out of the parking lot, a man ran out the door, shaking his fist in the air.

Once on the road Chris got up in Ash's face. Dammit Ash! What have you done?

I realized I didn't have any money. So, I got everything and ran! He pulled the mask off his head to reveal a panic-stricken face.

shoot! Meg and Candace both said under their breath.

Nice Chip! Chris bit his thumb nail, trying to hold back his anger. You just made it so much easier to hide from the cops!

What was I supposed to do?

Come back and get some cash you idiot!

Well, I panicked!

Ya think! Candace pushed him.

You don't think before you do something! You never have! Chris yelled.

Look who's talking! Ash said as he looked at him. If you hadn't gotten Skully into this mess none of this would've happened! Talk about thinking before doing. I only volunteered to do this crap just to save our sorry butts! And it's all because of her! He pointed his finger at me and glared.

Chris grabbed his finger and twisted it, causing Chip to cry out in pain.

Don't you dare talk about her like that! I am not taking any of your crap just because you had to go and be stupid. It isn't my fault and it sure as hell ain't her fault! None of us got YOU into this mess. You could've backed off. But, you're just asking for a fight! Well, buddy! I'll give you one! Pull over now Smokes!

Bro, this isn't smart.

I said pull over!

Smokey pursed her lips, knowing she was defeated. She pulled off to the side of a field and Chris got out and stomped over to the Ash's door. Before Ash could push him away Chris had grabbed him by his shirt collar and tugged him out of the car and yelled back to his sister, Fix Skully up while I take care of this punk!

I laid there in shock.

Chris! I yelled before I heard a fist hit a face. Don't do it! Please! We don't need someone else hurt, okay? What he did was stupid but, we'll figure something out.

I heard a soft whimper from Ashton as he was set free from Chris' grasp.

Candace, could you get me a towel? Chris calmly asked when he came around to Candace. She got out of the car and opened the trunk and got a towel. Once he had the towel in his hand, he seated himself again at my feet and placed my leg delicately over his, the towel cushioning me from discomfort.

I need everything that Ash got.

Meg stroked my hair, trying to calm me of the pain I might have to bear.

It ll be okay Meg.

Candace snatched the things from Ashton s hands and came to Chris side and stood behind his back while he sat and doctored my wound. Chris pointed to the floorboard and Candace followed the direction of his finger and dropped the peroxide, gauze, bandaging tape, and antibiotic ointment on the floor. He reached down and grabbed the large bottle of peroxide.

This may burn a little, Chris whispered without looking up from the gash.

I felt him pour the sour liquid over my wound and felt it tingle and burn inside the wound. It more tickled than burned. He let the peroxide settle in the wound then dabbed what remained of it away with another towel. Once done with that, he took the ointment and put a bit on the tip of his finger and gently rubbed it on my leg. After taking bit by bit of the ointment, he had my leg treated. He picked up the gauze and gauze tape next and wrapped almost the whole roll of gauze around my leg then taped it down so it would stay in place.

There you go. He grinned with pride at his work then looked up at me.

I smiled back then said, Well, what are we waiting for? We still have a long way to go!