

Like Breathing

By Evilevergreen

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[Complete] Danny Phantom had only been forced to kill once, and it was with great remorse, but as Valerie came into his view, laying so still, he knew he would kill again, and that this time it would be as easy as breathing. [Sequel to Heartbeat]

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1 - Aftermath

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Summary: Ghost hunting for someone like Valerie, who had done it for so long, was like second nature, it was almost like breathing. So what do you do, when someone comes into your life and takes your breath away? (Sequel to Heartbeat)

Chapter One: Aftermath

"I love you, Valerie," Danny smiled sweetly down at her, his blue eyes sparkling in the moonlight as they danced to the soft music playing in their living room.

"I love you too, Danny," she responded, her smile just as bright.

His expression slightly faltered. "Through anything?" he whispered.

"Through it all," she promised before tilting her head up and sealing it with a kiss.

"Valerie, sweetie, time to go," the young girl, twenty-two years of age, thoughts were broken as she heard her father's voice. He was carrying the last box they had packed up. She was moving out of the apartment she had once shared with her ex-boyfriend Danny Fenton.

"Okay, dad, I'm coming," she told him as she took one last look at the place she had once called home. She sighed silently as she placed her hand on her stomach. There were so many memories here, some good, some bad, and one she longed to forget. . .

Valerie closed the door behind her and locked it for the final time before going downstairs and giving the key to the owner. The owner was a sweet, little old lady, who had always been kind to her. "I'm going to miss you two kids around here. You were the happiest couple I had ever seen," the owner told her as Valerie placed the key in her hand.

"Thank you, Miss Alice." Valerie dropped her gaze, not really knowing why.

"Good luck, honey," Miss Alice told her with an encouraging smile.

Valerie thanked her again before heading out the door to meet up with her father. She climbed into the passenger side of the truck that they had rented for the day and road in silence as they made their way across town to the small house that he now owned.

At the end of the day, Valerie sat down on her bed in her new room and looked out the window. Her shoulders slumped over as she realized she had no idea what she was going to do. She was in her last year of college and was struggling through her major in Business; she was holding down a job at Sears,

in one of the departments on the top floor, and on top of that, she was pregnant with a child she couldn't afford and as of recently, didn't want.

She had found out when she had gone to the doctor's office, a few days after breaking up with Danny, that she had already entered into her second trimester and that it was too late to terminate the pregnancy. She went back to her apartment that night and cried until she fell asleep.

Valerie sighed as her hand went to play with the necklace around her neck. On the chain held an engagement ring that Danny had given to her after finding out about the baby. He told her that it was a family heirloom that had belonged to his great great grandmother.

“Come on now,” he had begun, after discovering the surprised look on her face as he slipped it on her finger. “Did you really think I wasn't going to marry you after I knocked you up?” he had asked her playfully.

She smiled at the memory, but it soon faded away as she took off the piece of jewelry, telling herself that she would mail it to him in the morning. She knew she had no right to keep it, being the one that broke things off. Only if he had told her sooner that he was the Phantom. . . Valerie shook her head, she knew it wouldn't have made a difference. She knew their breakup would have just been sooner.

“Valerie,” came her father's voice from the doorway. “It's time for dinner.” Valerie only nodded her head to indicate that she had heard him. Damon frowned as he looked at the back of his saddened daughter. He then walked into the room and sat down beside her. “Sweetie,” he began softly. “You've been mighty quiet all day. Don't you think you'd feel a lot better, if you told me what happened?” he asked. “Why you and Danny broke up.” But she said nothing. “Just talk to me, Valerie,” he pleaded.

“I'm pregnant,” she got straight to the point as she turned her head and looked her father in his eyes for the first time that day. “About fifteen weeks.”

Damon's eyes widened for a moment in surprise of the news. He sat silently as Valerie continued to look at him, waiting for him to say anything. “And Danny knew this?” he finally asked. Valerie nodded as she lowered her head and closed her eyes. Damon grew angry. “He left you pregnant?” he asked, thinking that didn't sound like the Fenton boy.

“No,” she whispered. “I kicked him out.”

“Why?” Damon needed to know.

“Because he's- and what I do- it just can't. . .” she trailed off. “It's complicated.”

Damon reached out and rubbed her back. “It's going to be alright. You can tell me in your own time. Plus, you know, I'll help however I can. You and the bab-”

“I'm not keeping the baby!” she spat angrily, suddenly standing up. “I refused to watch it grow up to be like him!”

Damon looked at her curiously as he stood up slowly. “What do you mean by that?” he asked her, his

brow furrowed. "What did Danny do?"

"Nothing," she responded quickly, inwardly cursing at herself for saying too much all ready. "I didn't mean anything by it." She then tried putting on a smile, knowing her father would see right through it. "You said dinner was done right? Well, we don't want it to get cold." She then walked passed her father who looked at her with a worried expression on his face.

OoOoO

After dinner and a very intense conversation with her father, which included adoption and a father's right, Valerie found herself in her room. She had upset her father, by telling him that she didn't wish for Danny's name to be on the birth certificate. She didn't want the child to be able to find Danny if he or she wanted to find their birth parents when they came of age. She knew as soon as she had said it, she had said the wrong thing.

Valerie's mother died when she was a year old. Her father's name wasn't originally on her birth certificate, due to a mistake by the hospital. The mistake went unnoticed until her mother's deaths. Her mother's family never approved of Damon, because he never seemed to be there for his small family, and so they fought for custody of Valerie, using the fact that he was never named as her father on the certificate as a foundation.

It also worked against Damon that Valerie was living with her grandparents, because they wouldn't allow him the blood test that he wanted. And he wasn't able to get a blood test until four years later when a judge ordered it. Damon Gray had fought tooth and nail for his daughter and had lost years with her he could never get back, and though he had no idea about Valerie and Danny's situation, it was a struggle he would never wish on any decent man.

Back in her room, Valerie stood before her vanity mirror. She closed her eyes and when she opened them she donned her Ghosthunter 2.0 suit. It had been years since she had worn it, the stress it caused on her body when she was younger was more than she could take. She imagined she wasn't strong enough for it, for back in the tenth grade it had nearly killed her when it overheat after a gruesome fight with Skulker. Though she had loved the suit and all the new weapons that came with it, she didn't want to take the change of overheating again. So she had called Vlad Masters telling him she had wanted a new suit, he had welcomed his prodigy back with open arms and sent her a new suit by the next morning with the improvements she had requested.

She had seen the way the Phantom. . . Valerie sighed. She had seen the way *Danny* had taken out her last suit and knew the material had to be stronger to withstand his most powerful blast. Valerie looked back down at her suit and then back at her reflection. She had once said, she would give this up for him, it was why she didn't put up much of a fight when he had asked her to get rid of her gear. She wouldn't have said it then, but she thought she would finally be able to settle down, raise a family, *be normal*, but that just didn't look to be in her future.

Valerie then shook her head as she realized she still wasn't ready for this suit and so changed back to her normal clothes before picking up the phone and dialing ten numbers. "Hello, Mr. Masters?" she spoke softly.

"Aw," he sounded pleased. "If it isn't the young Miss Valerie Gray. What can I do for you this

evening?" he asked her.

"Um," she began nervously. She felt a bit stupid. "I'm calling for a new suit."

"What happened to your last one?" he asked.

"Danny hide it from me," she explained.

"How is dear Daniel?"

"I wouldn't know. We broke up." Valerie sat down. "Mr. Masters, brace yourself," she warned him. "But Danny is the Phantom."

"No, not Daniel," he said in that way that always made her think he was mocking her. . . but that was ridiculous.

"Yes," she confirmed. "He's a- a," she tried to remember the word he used. "A halfa," she said the word as if it were foul tasting within her mouth. "He told me, showed me himself."

"And how do you feel about this," he placed his words carefully.

"I *feel* like kicking his @\$\$, " she told him.

"You'll have your new suit and jet sled by the morning," he informed her.

"No," she said quickly before he could hang up the phone. "It doesn't have to be that quickly," she told him.

"Then when would you like it?" he asked curiously.

"In about seven months. . . after my baby is due," she explained softly.

There was a moment's pause from his end. "I understand."

"Thank you, Mr. Masters."

"No, no dear child. Call me Uncle Vlad."

"Thank you. . . Uncle Vlad."

To Be Continued. . .

2 - Chapter Two

Chapter Two:

Danny took a sip of his canned soda as he sat in his old bedroom within the home he had grown up in. He was sitting at his desk trying to multi-task as was typing out a paper, about himself, of all things, for his speech class, plus doing his Statistics III work. They were the only courses he attended on campus at Amity Park State University. In fact, each semester he always took his math classes on campus.

His other courses he took on-line because of the convenience. He tried taking his speech class on-line as well, but it wasn't offered, for obvious reasons. Besides, between ghost hunting, his job at local car shop, and his Air Force Reserve responsibility - because there was no way he wasn't going to be an astronaut - he needed convenience in his life.

"Danny!" Maddie suddenly yelled out, which startled Danny, causing him to spill soda all over his keyboard. "Are you busy?"

Danny looked around for something to clean the soda up with. "Kinda!" he yelled back. His shoulders drop as he found nothing for the mess and took off his shirt to wipe down the board and the desk. He groaned picking up his wet Statistics book. "What is it?" he called back to his mother.

"I'm going out for a little while," she announced. "Make sure you bring in the mail for me, alright?"

"Sure, mom," he responded as he stood up, taking his soaking shirt and book to the bathroom down the hall. Once there, he laid his book on the sink counter and tossed the shirt into the hamper. He then found his mom's hairdryer and went to work drying the wet pages. He sighed. "Just my luck," he said to himself.

Twenty minutes later, Danny was back in his room with a clean shirt, trying to deal with stained pages and a keyboard whose "T" key, "S" key, and "N" key all became got stuck whenever he pressed down upon them. It was going to be a long day.

A few hours later, Danny found himself in the kitchen getting something to eat. When he had finished he started to head back to his room and while at the base of the stairs heard someone outside the front door. He opened the door to find the mail carrier on his way back down the porch steps, trying to hurry back up to his vehicle because of the cold weather. So Danny opened the mail box and carried the handful of envelopes inside. He flipped through them as he walked up to his mother's office to set them down.

"Bill, bill, junk, bill," Danny separated them on the desk. "Ooh, jury duty." He smiled as he knew his dad would be more than please to share his knowledge of ghost with anyone who would listen. But not even a moment later, his smile faded as a small packet, in one of those yellow envelopes, was revealed to him. "Valerie," he whispered, dropping the other items in his hand to the floor.

It had been a couple of weeks since he had seen her, and he had been desperately trying to keep his mind off of her. He was deluding himself into thinking that maybe she would finally understand and forgive him, if he just gave her a little time. So Danny ripped it open immediately and looked inside to find a letter. It read:

Danny,

I don't have much to say, so I'll keep this short. I hope you don't think this has been easy for me. I'm confused and torn between loving and hating you at the same time. You don't know how badly I want to forgive you, forget what you are, but I can't. You've lied to me, and not once, but twice tried to kill me-

"That was an accident!" he yelled at the letter. "I was trying to protect you!"

"Danny?" he gasped as he heard his mother's voice behind him. "Dear, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," he told her quickly as he stuffed his letter in his pocket before picking up the remaining mail off the floor. He put them on the desk. "I'll be in my room," he said softly as he walked past his mother. Maddie looked at him as he walked down the hall. She was afraid for him. She knew his break up with Valerie had been a painful ordeal for him, but he refused to talk about what had happened. And she was afraid how that kind of bottled up emotion would express itself.

Danny closed and locked his door behind him before pulling out his letter, as he did so, something else fell out of the yellow packet. He looked at it curiously, shaking his head in disbelief as he fell to one knee and picked it up. It was the engagement ring he had given her. She had given it back.

Danny sat down and leaned against the door, drawing his knee in before resting his elbow upon it, running his fingers through his dark hair. He stared at the ring in his other hand. He had had no intentions of marrying Valerie so early into their relationship, but with a baby on the way, he wanted to do the honorable thing.

He tilted his head back towards the door, he was at a loss. When Valerie had told him she was pregnant, there was nothing he wanted more. He had even imagined a little boy with Valerie's eyes, but now, he cursed the little boy he had thought of, and all the unhappiness it brought into his already imperfect life.

Danny closed his eyes, disgusted with himself for almost hating his unborn child. He wondered what kind of man that made him? How selfish could he be to think such a terrible thought, when he knew everything laid on him? He was the one who had thought he could hide his other self forever. He was the one who had thought, that somehow – somehow – that she would love him enough to see past her own hatred. Although, he knew he had only told her the truth because he felt forced to.

He looked back at the ring. He had been so wrong about so many things, because he had done the one thing he had never wanted to do when it came to Valerie, he had hurt her.

Danny stood up, stuffing the ring into his pocket before grabbing his coat out the closet. He left his room and traveled towards the front door. "I'm going to Tuck's," he called to his mother and was out the door.

OoOoO

Valerie pulled her winter coat tighter around her body as she walked the grounds of Amity Park State University. Her last class of the day had just let out and though they were only a week into the new semester her Literature 101 teacher, Dr. Monet had already given them an assignment to work on. They had been instructed to pick up a certain book in the library and prepare to discuss the first chapter for the next class meeting.

Valerie picked up her pace as she looked down at her watch. She had to hurry, for she had to be at work in less than an hour. Once in the library, Valerie didn't take the time to remove her coat, not believing that the task would take more than a few minutes. She then made her way upstairs to the second floor. She passed rows of books, scanning the markers on the sides until she found where she needed to be.

She preceded to walk down the aisle slowly, not wanting to over look the book. She nodded her head and smiled politely as she passed other students within the aisle. Spotting the orange covered book, Valerie smiled and reached out for it. "Oh, excuse me." Came a voice, whose hand had ran into Valerie's while trying to obtain the book. "Let me guess," he continued. "You take Dr. Monet?"

"Yeah," she responded, not being able to help the smile that came to her face, for saying the man that stood before her was cute, would have been the understatement of the year.

"Here," he said gently, holding the desired item towards Valerie.

"Thank you," she responded just as soft, taking it from him before looking at where the book had been. "It seems to be the last copy. Are you sure you want to give it up?" she asked him.

"Don't worry about it," he told her, taking off his glasses and cleaning one of the lenses with the bottom of his shirt. As he did this, his light green eyes looked into Valerie's. "I can find another copy. Besides, it looks like you're in a hurry," he said, indicating that she was the only one inside still sporting her winter gear.

"Thanks, again," she said.

He shook his head before replacing his glasses. "Honestly, it's no big deal." He waved the matter off, turning around and walking away. "See you around, Valerie," he said before reaching the end of the aisle and disappearing around the corner.

It wasn't until Valerie was waiting in the check out line that she realized the guy had said her name without her giving it to him. She frowned as she tried to remember if she had a class with him where he could have heard it, but she was sure that today was the first time she had seen him on campus. Valerie finally shrugged the matter off, it wasn't really that big of a deal, she decided as she made her way out the library and headed to work.

OoOoO

Valerie worked at a check out counter in the power tool section at Sears. She had been there a few hours and was counting down the last hour until she was able to get off her feet and go home. Things were going fine, until she saw a familiar face in the crowd walking towards her. She groaned in irritation.

"We need to talk," Danny demanded.

"I'm working," she told him, turning back to the next customer in line. "Would you like to apply for a Sears cards," she asked her customer. "You'll get ten percent off your purchase." The man politely declined her offer.

"You couldn't break it off with me in person?" Danny asked, ignoring the fact she was still on the job.

"What do you think that was three weeks ago?" she asked. "Here's your receipt, sir, have a nice night," she said with a smile to the customer. "Next please."

"You sent the ring through the Goddamn mail, Valerie."

"Well, I was going to pawn it," she lied just to upset him. "But that relic you call an engagement ring, I'm sure it isn't worth very much." She pulled the security sensor off some clothes, that were placed on the counter, quite angrily. She then struggled to make a convincing smile. "Will you be using your Sears card, Ma'am?" she asked her new customer.

"Will you just look at me!" he yelled through clenched teeth. "You know you don't want this. You know I still love you!"

Valerie turned to him quickly. "Go home, Danny," she hissed. "Don't make me call security on you."

Danny rose both eyebrows, surprised at her statement. "What's wrong?" he began in a whisper. "Afraid to fight your own battles now. . . knowing what I can do to you?"

Valerie scoffed and shook her head. "That's great, Danny. Tell me you love me *and then* threaten me, in front of several witnesses no less. You're really using that noggin of yours today, aren't you?" She went back to her task of ringing up store items. "But if that's your passive-aggressive, roundabout way of asking me if I went through with the procedure or not," she paused and Danny anxiously found himself waiting for the answer. "If you really must know, I didn't." There was the slightest smile on his face as he looked at her. "But only because it was too late."

Danny continued to watch her as she worked. "I just want us to be a normal family, Val," he told her one of his greatest wishes.

"Well, that's hard to do," she handed the customer her receipt, "when you're a freak." She never saw Danny's reaction, but waited for one of two things to happen when she knew she had provoked him. The first would be for him to yell at her at the top of his lungs, which was what he normally did when they fought. The second was rare, where he would do the complete opposite and just close himself off. Then, to her surprise, the next thing Valerie heard were Danny's footsteps as he walked away.

She turned her head in enough time to see him get on the down escalator to leave the store. "Next please," Valerie said to the next person in line as she tried to focus back on work, but then something caught her eye, and her chest sunk at the sight. Valerie reached for the engagement ring Danny had placed on the counter. She couldn't just leave it there, so she stuck it in her pocket. "Hi, will you be

using your Sears Card today, Sir?" she tried to smile, but suddenly found it an impossible task.

To Be Continued. . .

3 - Behind Green Eyes

Chapter Three: Behind Green Eyes

She didn't recognize me, I could see in her eyes, not even a spark of remembrance, but that's okay, it was to be expected. I mean, it's been a few years since I left Amity Park and I no longer look like the person I used to be back in high school. But fortunately this is no longer high school anymore, because she did something she never would have dared to back then. . . she smiled at me and it was a beautiful smile. It lit up her entire face, making the cold winter day feel as warm as the clearest summer night. And I knew right there – at that very moment – I would do *anything* to see it again.

I know she started getting serious with that Fenton guy after I left. From my sources, I heard that they had been strong for many years, that is until recently. That's when I decided to come back home. My father thought I was out of my mind to want to transfer during my senior year of college, but I had given up on her once before, and it will be a cold day in hell if I ever let that happen again.

I went to her work the other night, trying to set up a chance meeting – so to speak – after our library encounter, but Fenton showed up. From where I was standing, they were arguing, but I could tell by the expression on his face he was trying to get her back – I wonder what that fool did to lose her – but it doesn't matter because his loss is my gain, because she didn't want to hear a word he was saying. He should have known better anyway, a woman of her caliber, of her class, her beauty, deserves better. . . she deserves me.

It makes my stomach churn, to think of those two together. I try not to, because I only end up making myself angry, but I can't help but to wonder, how many times she must have allowed him to hug her, to kiss her, to touch her in a way only a lover should know? I wanted to be her first, I wanted to be her last, and her only. I know now I can never be her first, I've come to grips with that. . . finally, but I can still be and *will be* her last and only.

Then it will be these arms that hold her tightly, these lips to kiss her tenderly, and this body to gently lay her down and pleasure her in a way that will completely erase Fenton from her mind. All I have to do is make sure I play my cards right and then she will be mine. Just like it should have been from the beginning. Then she will no longer run from me, no longer hide from me like she used to. Instead, she will seek me out and I will let her find me. And then my dear sweet Valerie Gray, you will smile that smile for me forever.

Then no one will come in between the love we will share. . . not even you, because I'll never let you go.

Never.

To be continued. . .

4 - One Wish

Chapter Four: One Wish

Tucker breathed heavily as he closed his eyes and laid his head on Sam's chest. Sam smiled happily as she twirled one of his dreadlocks around finger. She had convinced him it would be a good look on him and so he said he would give it a try. That was three years ago. His dreads now passes a little below his shoulders. He normally kept his hair in a ponytail, but doing times like these, when they made love, he wore it down, because he knew how much she liked to tug on them.

"We got to stop meeting like this," Tucker spoke, making no attempt to move.

"Just a little longer," Sam pleaded as she looked at the clock. It was going on two o'clock and Tucker had to be back at work before his lunch break was over.

"You know I can't," he began, finally opening his eyes and getting out of bed. Sam sat up with him. "The mainframe of one of our biggest clients has been giving them trouble. I told Glenn I would start on it as soon as I got back from lunch."

Sam pouted as he kissed her before heading to the bathroom within the hotel they had rented for the hour. She loved it when they did things like this – spur of the moment things, just because they could.

If you had told Sam, several years ago, that she would be in love with Tucker Foley, she would have laughed in your face and told you, you were crazy. Because back then, she had only had eyes for Danny Fenton. It had taken him awhile to get over the small thing he had had with Valerie in the ninth grade, but after all that, his eyes were finally opened and he was able to see what was already in front of him.

Sam had waited for so long for Danny to finally see her, that when when he did, she took not one moment for granted. She can still remember the first time they had made love, back in their junior year, he had cried. Sam thought it was because he was happy, but later on found out the truth. Earlier that day she learned that he had had an encounter with Valerie in ghost hunter mode along with a ghost calling himself Cyclone. While trying to attack Cyclone, who was going after Valerie, he accidentally hit her, causing her jet sled to spiral out of control. Danny tried with everything he had, but couldn't reach her before she hit the ground.

After that first night with Sam, Danny devoted himself to Valerie's side as she recovered in the hospital. Sam didn't even try to ask him to go home and rest, because she knew he would have never done it.

Tucker had came to visit Sam one night to see how she was doing. As they sat and talked, Sam realized, Tucker had always been by her side. When her parents divorced, Tucker was there. When her grandmother died, Tucker went to the funeral with her and held her hand before allowing her to cry on his shoulder where he whispered to her that everything was going to be all right. She even remember back in the ninth grade when he asked her to the dance. She had wanted to go so badly, but was too prideful in her ways to admit it. She had been so grateful, but never thanked him. In fact, she had ended

her night with Danny out on the dance floor.

So as they sat at her house, him once again allowing her to pour out her soul as she cried on his shoulder, something odd struck her. She remember slowing pulling away as Tucker reached up to wipe away her tears. As he did so, Sam couldn't help but look into his eyes. He had such beautiful green eyes, she had thought, as she took his glasses off his face.

Tucker looked at her curiously with the gesture and asked what she was doing. She told him, she was thanking him before she leaned in and brushed her lips against his. Tucker had immediately pulled away, telling her she was upset and that she didn't want this. So she told him what she did want. She told him, she wanted to be happy. She wished to be happy. She then leaned in again, Tucker jumped slightly, but didn't pull away.

Sam had never meant for it to go beyond some kiss she shared with one of her best friends, but as Danny's ghost hunting seem to take a priory in his life, she and Tucker often found themselves left to their own devices more than they used to be. Sam couldn't tell you when or how exactly their affair started, but the feeling Tucker gave her was something she decided she wasn't willing to let go. So one night, she gathered her strength and confessed that she loved him. Tucker had been upset and conflicted. He didn't want to do this to Danny as he too realized he was in love.

Telling Danny, during their first year of college, that she was in love with someone else had been one of the hardest things she had ever done. It completely took Danny by surprise, he had never seen it coming. Sam then broke down as he asked her who and she told him Tucker. She knew he was truly hurt when he said nothing and walked out of her home. But their friendship had always been strong, and amazingly enough, it had survived. Things were difficult as first, of course, but as time went on, and things fell into a rhythm, it was as if it had always been her and Tucker. . . but then again, maybe on some level, it had always been them.

Sam smiled to herself at the thought. "Alright, where did you hide my keys?" Tucker asked as he stepped out of the bathroom, from his shower, wearing only a towel.

"Tucker?" she began as she beckon him to the bed.

He sat down beside her and lightly touched the skin on her shoulder before slipping his fingers behind her neck and bringing her towards him, stealing a kiss. "Yeah?" he finally responded.

"Marry me," she whispered.

Tucker's head jerked back as his expression read of shock. "What?"

"Marry me," she repeated.

Tucker's eyes soften. "Samantha Foley. It has a nice ring to it." Sam laughed, knowing that meant yes as she pushed him to lay down on the bed before climbing on top of him. "Come on, Sam," he whined, trying to hold back his smile. "I told you, I have to go to work."

"Please, you're engaged to a Manson, now," she began, running her hands along his strong chest as

she slowly began to grind against him. "You don't have to work another day in you life, if you don't want to."

Tucker, tilting his head back as he closed his eyes, let out a breath in pleasure. He then took a hold of Sam and brought her down to him before rolling her over. "That's very tempting and so is this," he kissed her passionately, "but if I don't get back, Glenn will have my hide and a company could be out millions, if files are corrupted," he explained.

Sam huffed as she rolled her eyes. "Fine," she told him before letting him go and allowing him to get dressed.

Tucker's technology skills had helped him gain a career before he was even done with school. Anxious to do what he loved, he pushed himself and finished college in two and a half years. He had his own place and much to Sam's dismay, drove a gas-guzzling SUV.

Tucker finished dressing as he fixed his neck tie. "Are you coming over tonight?" he asked with his back to her.

"Can't," her shoulders slumped. "I have to attend some banquet with my parents," she told him.

Tucker laughed. "I thought divorce people divorced so they didn't have to do things together anymore?"

"Yeah, I don't think they get that," she said as he walked over to her, leaned over, and kissed her forehead.

"Call me afterwards. No matter how late." He then held out his hand. "Keys." Sam scoffed as she reached under her pillow and handed him his keys. She was always trying to stall him. "Love you," he told her sweetly.

"Yeah, yeah, get out of my face," she said in mock indifference, causing Tucker to laugh before finally leaving back for work.

OoOoO

Valerie sat at table within the library on the third floor in one of it's study rooms. She groaned as she rested her head in her hand as she turned the page of her orange covered book with the other. "You're a falling leaf, from the highest tree, soaring in the wind. With the purest eyes, heeding to your call, wish upon these lips. Can you see the breath, you have gladly stole, hope I still do send. Fall no more I pray, trust in what you know, reach for fingertips," Valerie read the line again out loud. The assignment has seem simple enough: Write what each stanza is trying to convey.

"I have no idea what this crap means," she whined as she allowed her head to fall on the table.

"It's about unrequited love," answered a voice.

Valerie gasped loudly in her surprise as her head snapped back up. She frowned as she recognized the redhead from the other day. "It's not nice to sneak up on people," she said, a little disturbed she wasn't able to sense anyone come in.

"I'm sorry," he said sincerely. "I didn't mean to frighten you." He took a sit next to her.

"I wasn't frighten," she straighted out the hem of her shirt. "Just startled." She then looked back at him. "So um were you able to find a copy?" she asked indicating her book.

"Yes," he said simply. He then reached into his bag and pulled it out along with his worksheet and a pencil.

"What are you doing?" she asked point blank.

"Studying," he answered, opening his book.

"With me?" She cocked an eyebrow.

"Nah, Valerie," he tilted his head in her direction, making his glasses slide down his nose, "with the other dozen or so people in the room."

Valerie rested her arms on the table and leaned on them a bit. "You're not in any of my classes-" she was interrupted.

"You've been checking up on me. I'm flattered," he smiled.

Valerie couldn't help but smile back. "Don't be. I just want to know how you know my name."

The red head's smile faded. "You really don't recognize me, huh?" he asked pushing his glasses back up.

"Sorry," Valerie found herself saying, his expression looking as if it called for one.

"It's alright. I have Dr. Monet right after you. He likes to call you back after your class it seems."

Valerie groaned as she slumped in her seat. "I know. He always calls on me to answer the one question I don't know from the homework. I swear, I must look like an idiot to the rest of the class."

The guy next to her laugh. "I'm sure you're far from an idiot. Come on," he brought her book closer to her, "I'll help you."

"That's very nice of you, uh. . . I have *no* idea what your name is," she confessed.

"Nathan," he told her.

"Nathan," she whispered to herself so she would remember it. She then laughed lightly. "I used to know a Nathan back in high school."

"Really?" his lips barely moved as he asked and slightly straightened up.

“Yeah,” she confirmed as she looked down at the stanza again. “Found myself being nice one day, and I guess I said or did something that made his day, because everyday after that, until he moved, he used to follow me around asking-”

“Will you go to the prom with me?” Nathan finished her statement.

Valerie then turned to him. “Cooper? Nathan Cooper?” She sat back a little looking at this man before her. “No way,” she whispered.

“Yeah,” he nodded. “Hi.” He gave an awkward little wave.

“No way,” she repeated, still in disbelief. “Uh- welcome back,” was all she could think to say. “I suppose.”

“Relax, Valerie,” he told her. “Trust me, I'm not some hormonal fourteen year old boy anymore. I'm not going to be chasing you around, if that's what you're worried about-”

“That's good to hear,” she said softly.

“- or masturbating to the pictures I have of you, or-”

“What?” Valerie cut him off as her brow furrowed at the last statement.

“Nothing,” he said quickly, trying to hold his expression, but couldn't as he started laughing. “I'm joking,” he told her.

Valerie relaxed and shook her head as she began to laugh too. “Oh, so you got jokes now?”

Nathan shrugged. “A few,” he answered. He then cleared his throat before turning to his own book. “So you were on stanza three?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” she picked her pencil back up and started writing, “I think you said something about unrequited love.”

“Yeah,” he confirmed gently before they proceeded to help each other with their work.

To Be Continued. . .

5 - Popcorn Trouble

Chapter Five: Popcorn Trouble

Valerie waited anxiously in her Literature class as Dr. Monet called his students one by one to collect their first test grade. She hadn't been doing well on the quizzes and needed a good score to balance it out. Her leg shook up and down under the table as her fake nails tapped rhythmically on top of it. She then heard a snap like sound and groaned as she realized she broke a nail. When Valerie had first started ghost hunting, she never had time to get her nails done like she used to and now that she finally had the time she was breaking them off. It was the second nail that day. She whined to herself as she wondered how much it would cause to have them fixed.

"Gray, Valerie," her instructor called and she wasted no time slinging her bookbag over her shoulder and walking to the front of the class to receive her grade.

As she made her way to him, she said a silent pray, which consisted of, *Big Bucks, Big Bucks, Big Bucks, No Whammies!* She shook her head from side to side and concluded she had to stop watching the Game Show Network.

Finally she reached Dr. Monet, with his emotionless like stare that he had. Valerie held her breath as he passed her the single sheet of paper. A small smile then crept onto the fifty year old man's face. "I'm impressed, Miss Gray," he told her honestly.

Valerie reached for the paper and blinked at her grade, a ninety-six. She clung the paper to her chest like it was her own life as she looked at her instructor. "I love you," she told him.

He laughed as he put his hand on her shoulder. "I'm sure you do, but it was your own effort that got you the grade." He then released her. "Now get out," he told her and reached for the next paper in his bundle. "Green, Alfred."

Valerie left the room quietly, but stayed in the hall near the classroom as she waited to tell Nathan what she had made. It had been a little over two weeks since they had started studying together in the library. He literally would allow her to leave, until it appear that she knew everything they had that day. Valerie knew she knew the material, but she was one of those people whose mind often went blank when the test was actually in front of them. "Nathan!" she called and waved as she spotted him among the crowd of people who where either going or leaving class.

"Well, don't leave me hanging," he told her as he reached her and pointed to the piece of paper in her hand. "How did you do?" he asked, though by the huge grin on her face he already knew she had gotten the grade she wanted, but he didn't want to ruin her moment.

"I made an "A", she squealed excitedly before she threw an arm around his neck to hug him. Nathan laughed at her happy mood. "Thank you," she told him softly.

“No problem,” replied as she pulled away. “So,” he clapped his hands together and rubbed together, “how about tonight, in celebration, we uh catch a movie, maybe do a little dinner?” he asked her.

“Ooh,” the smile fell from Valerie's face. “Well actually, because you had mentioned not having a study session after the test, I told my boss to put me on work schedule tonight.” She looked at him apologetically.

Nathan shook his head waved it off. “It's alright, no big deal.” He then looked at the clock the hall. “I should head inside. Catch you Monday though?” he asked as he started walking backwards towards the classroom. Valerie nodded her head before saying goodbye.

Nathan frowned once his back was too her and he was inside Dr. Monet's Literature class. He told himself to stay calm and that he couldn't rush things. She would be his, there was no doubt about it, he just had to be patient. “Yo, Nate!” he heard a voice behind him as he sat down. He looked over and saw Valerie in the doorway of the class.

“I get off at nine,” she stated with a smile. “How about we forget the dinner, but catch a late show?” she asked. Nathan only looked at her and blinked, he never expected that of her. “Uh- Nathan?” she looked a little confused.

His classmate next to him shook his head as he leaned over. “The girl is hella fine,” he whispered to him. “Just say yes,” he told him.

“Yeah,” Nathan finally spoke, leaning on his desk. “Pick you up at work?”

“Uh, no, I got my car today,” she confirmed before giving him a small wave goodbye and leaving before Dr. Monet called her out.

OoOoO

The night air was cool as Valerie parked her car under one of the street lights in the parking lot of the movie theater. After putting her keys in her purse she rose her hand and brought down her visor to check her hair, though she didn't know why considering she was going to put on her hood as soon as she stepped out the car. She then checked her watch, it was it was almost half pass the hour she noted as she placed her hand on the handle and opened the door, but only had one foot out before crying softly, “Ow,” as her free hand went immediately to her stomach.

Valerie frowned as she thought why it could be hurting. She shook her head as she tried to convince her it wasn't because of the chill dogs she had had for breakfast, or the extra cheese pizza for lunch, or the two root beer floats she had after that. Her hand then went to her mouth as she let out a large belch. She looked around, a bit a embarrassed, but when she saw no one else around she laughed at herself and finally got out the car, muttering something about “stupid cravings”.

As Valerie walked through the parking lot towards the theater and a waiting Nathan, she couldn't help the smile that came to her face. Already she was glad she had changed her mind about going out tonight, that and she knew it would get her dad off her back. It bothered him that she didn't hang out with her friends anymore and other than school and work she was at home all the time.

At the mention of her *friends*, Valerie had thought of several people. First there was Star, who she had always been cool with, even after her dip in popularity back in high school, but she had moved out of state along with her boyfriend Kwan, who had gotten a football scholarship at some school Valerie couldn't remember. Next on Valerie's short list was Sam and Tucker, but she wasn't really sure if she could qualify them as *her* friends, they came with Danny, a packet deal, she knew when she lost, she lost them too.

Valerie shook herself from her thoughts as she saw Nathan smiling at her from the over sized sidewalk. "Thought maybe you were going to stand me up," he told her as she finally reached him.

"Yeah, I kind of got hung up at work," she explained as they waited in line to purchase their tickets. "So what do you want to see?" she asked as she looked at the movie listing above the ticket booth.

"Hmm," he thought it over as he too looked at the listing. A wicked smile then invaded his features as he looked down at Valerie. "Up for a good scare?" he asked in a eerily deep, but playful voice.

A huge grin then spread across her face. "I don't scare easily," she informed him.

"Oh really?" Nathan cocked an eyebrow curiously as he took a step closer to her, his voice still the same, but no longer was his face evident of a smile. "I'll have to remember that for the future."

Valerie put her hand on his chest and let out a small laugh. "Yeah, you do that," she responded before they finally came to the front the line, paid for their ticket and head inside.

Nathan bought a thing of popcorn for them, well Valerie bought a couple of sodas before they went to go find a seat, hoping it wouldn't be too packed, considering they had gotten there a little late. "I said, my bad," whispered Valerie to the complaining Nathan, who was saying something about how the previews were the best part of the movie as they had just missed them. They were able to settle in the very back row as the beginning credits began.

About half an hour into the movie, Valerie had both of her hands covering her eyes. "Is it over yet," her voice shook slightly as she asked.

Nathan chuckled as he mocked her. "I don't scare that easily." Valerie turned to him before smacking his leg. "Ow!" he cried out, causing several people to turn in their direction and shh them. "What?" he looked at them curiously. "I'm being abused back here," he told them.

"Don't tell them that!" She smacked him again.

"See?" He pointed her out, forcing her to grab his hand and bring it back down.

"Just be quiet," some dude said out in the crowd before everyone turned back to the movie.

"Don't embarrass me," she told him softly.

"I'm not," he replied. "It's dark, no one can see you." He grabbed a hand full of popcorn. "Watch," he said before eating a few kernels and then throwing the rest at the guy who had told them to be quiet,

who was sitting a few rows up. Valerie gasped in horror as the guy turned around, she then looked to Nathan who was looking at the screen as if he hadn't done anything. His eyes then slid over to Valerie and winked at her as the guy turned back around.

"You're going to get us kicked out of here," she tried to sound serious, but couldn't.

Nathan took her wrist and put her hand in the popcorn bucket. "Well, then if we do, we're going down together," he told her. "Go ahead, I dare you," he encouraged her.

"No," she took her hand out the bucket. "It's childish."

"What's wrong?" He played on. "Chicken? Scared maybe?"

"Of course not. I just don't want to," she stated.

Nathan stared at her for a moment. He then sighed as he leaned back in his seat. "Fine," he told her and went back to watching the movie.

"Good." She nodded her head and she too went back to watching the movie, but every time she went for popcorn Nathan smiled at her.

"You know you want to."

"No, I don't."

"Don't deny yourself, Valerie," he continued. "I can see it in your eyes."

"Shut up!" she whispered harshly.

"Come on," he begged.

She huffed loudly. "Will it get you to sit still?" she asked him and he nodded his head. "Fine." She grabbed a handful of popcorn and tossed it at the same guy, who turned around swiftly with a "What the hell?" look on his face. Valerie didn't have much of a poker face like Nathan and so had to pretend she was coughing to cover up her laughter.

A moment later, a bright light was shined into her face. "Hi, excuse me," came the voice of an usher. "I'm sorry, but that kind of behavior is not permitted here. I'm going to have to ask you to leave," she told her.

Valerie turned to Nathan as she stood. "See I told you, you were going to get us kicked out."

"Us?" he looked at her curiously as he slouched in his seat and placed the bucket in his lap before taking a sip of soda.

Valerie then grabbed him by the collar and yanked him out of his chair. "Get your @\$@ up," she told him.

"I was playing!" he told her grabbing his coat before the two were ushered out the door. Valerie frowned as she zipped up her coat. "You're not angry," Nathan told her.

"You don't know what I am."

"You had fun," he said, zipping up his own coat as he saw Valerie purse her lips together. "Go ahead and admit it."

Valerie thought it over. "Okay, maybe a little," she confessed as Nathan offered to walk her to her car.

"I knew it." He took in his small victory. "I'll make it up to you. I'll buy it when it comes out on DVD and we can finish watching it." He then tilted his head. "Well, in your case, I guess you'd be seeing it for the first time."

Valerie looked to him. "And what is that suppose to mean?" she asked.

"You know exactly what it means, Miss I-can't-stand-the-sight-of-blood."

Valerie blushed slightly. "Well, there was a lot of it," she tried to defend herself. "That's me," she pointed out her car. They walked over to it and when she got in she rolled down her window. Nathan then bent over and rested his arms on the window sill.

"This was fun," he told her softly. "We should do this again sometime." He then bobbed his head from side to side a little with a smile. "And maybe even see the end of the movie."

"So not my fault," she said as she looked for her keys.

"Hey, who got caught?" he asked.

"*Hey, who was-*" Valerie cut herself off as she looked to her beeping watch, that not only alerted her at the top of the hour, but when a ghost was near by. She looked around the seemingly empty parking lot with her hand fingering her ecto-ray gun in her purse, which she carried at all times, just in case.

Nathan looked at Valerie oddly, not able to explain why she was looking at everything, but him. "Val-" he began, but was cut off as Valerie crushed her lips against his. Whatever question he was going to ask was lost as he wasted no time returning her kiss.

Danny took a sharp intake of air as his eyes grew twice their size before he froze in midair. The ghost he had been chasing half across town took it as his opportunity to escape and was gone in an instant. Danny's shock soon turned into anger as his bright green eyes burned intensely.

He couldn't believe it, she was out dating, as if she wasn't pregnant with *his* child. He wanted to go down there and rip that dude off of her, but he had to control his angry. It wasn't like he and Valerie were together anymore, he didn't have the right to be angry, he tried to tell himself. He had just thought she would have at least waited longer than a month before she started seeing someone else. *Was it really that easy for her to get over me?* he thought, finally forcing his eyes to leave the couple, before he

turned around and sadly flew home.

To Be Continued. . .

6 - A Good Note

Chapter Six: A Good Note

Valerie opened one eye as she continued to kiss Nathan, looking around for Danny. What the hell she had been thinking, she really couldn't tell you. She just wanted to hurt him and she didn't care how. So she did the first thing that came to mind, but as her eye closed again, when she saw no sign of Danny, she wondered why she hadn't pulled away from Nathan yet. Finally, coming back to her senses, she slowly broke the kiss.

Nathan's eyes didn't open as he hung his head and exhale softly, willing his lips to never forget the warmth or feel of hers against his. He then rose his head as the corners of his mouth curled up. "Alright, forget the movie," he began. "Whenever you just want to make out for the hell of it, count me in." He then gave her two thumbs up, which caused Valerie to throw her head back and laugh at him, glad that he hadn't made the moment awkward.

"It's getting late," he then told her, all playfulness aside as he reached in and took her cheek. "I'll see you Monday, alright?" He then leaned in and placed a small, light kiss on her lips. "Be safe," he said before he straightened up and began walking to his own car. Nathan stuck his hands in his pockets as he whistled a little happy tune. Considering the way she had used to treat him, things were actually going better than he had anticipated, but he had no complains.

After Nathan left her sight, Valerie found herself licking her lips as she finally found her keys and began her drive home. When she realized she was still grinning she had to force herself to remember whom she had just kissed. "Nathan Cooper," she said to herself. "This is the guy, who wouldn't give you a moment's peace during high school. The guy who "accidentally" followed you into the girls room. The guy who found out your locker number and stole your pictures," she reminded herself before sighing heavily. "He's also the guy who has been helping you through your Lit. class. The guy who has been nothing, but sweet to you. Who has been funny, and great company. And a guy who is surprisingly, a really good kiss." She could feel the heat rush to her face at the thought.

Before long, Valerie was parking her car in the driveway of her home. She unlocked the front and seeing that the light was on called out to her father. As she hung her keys up on the wall, she realized that it was still a bit early, but he should be home pretty soon. She kicked her shoes off before putting them into the closet, along with her coat, and walking into the living room where she saw her mail on the table. Just as she was flipping through, what were mostly bills, she heard the doorbell ring. Checking the clock on the wall as she strolled back over to the door and wondered if somehow her father had forgotten his house key. "Who is it?" she called a few steps from reaching the door.

"Danny," he replied.

Valerie groaned, she was so looking forward to actually ending the day on a good note. "Go home, Danny, I'm tired, and I don't want to deal with you today."

Danny had told himself, after seeing Valerie at the movie theater, that he was going home, but somehow he had ended up across the street from her house as he waited for her to come back. "I know you saw me in the parking lot," he told her. "You're not fooling anybody."

"Never said I was trying to," she replied, crossing her arms and leaning on the door.

There was a moment of silence before Danny spoke again. "Who is he?" he asked, almost afraid to know.

"No one you should concern yourself with," she told him.

"Valerie, come on, this isn't-" he stopped. "This is stupid! Will you at least open the door and look at me?"

"No. I want you to go away and leave me alone!" she said angrily.

"I can't leave you alone!" he yelled. "Not when you refuse to act like nothing more than a stubborn dog!"

Valerie's mouth fell as she heard the words leave his mouth. She turned around and opened the door. "What the hell did you just call me!"

Danny groaned as his face cringed and he ran his fingers through his dark hair. He then once again looked at her. "Is that what I have to do?" he asked. "Do I have to stoop that low, just to get you to open a door? To get you to listen to me?" He pressed his lips together for a moment. "Can't you see that this is why I lied to you? That this is why I kept, who I am, secret from you, for all this time?" he asked. "I mean, you refuse to see anything beyond your own ways. You always think that you're right. That you're the victim. That you're the only one who has been done wrong."

He just wanted to make her understand. "Well, I'm hurting too, okay? This has not been easy for me, not in the least." A tear rolled down his cheek. "I miss you, like crazy. And all I want are for things to go back to the way they used to be." He exhaled and then whispered, "I love you." He reached out for her and took her hand. Valerie only lowered her head and closed her eyes. "And no matter who or what I am. . . that hasn't changed. Come on, Val, just tell me you love me too," he begged of her. "Please."

Valerie rose her head before shaking it from side to side, her voice was shaky as she whispered, "I can't." She then pulled away, and went back inside. Danny followed her and closed the door behind him as he watched Valerie go towards the stairs. "Just go home, Danny!" she yelled, but it was nowhere near forceful.

"Why? Why can't you just love me like you used to?" He ran up behind her.

Valerie was three steps up, so Danny had to look up as she spoke with her back to him. "Because- because I hated Phantom," she began softly, her hand on the railing, gripping it tightly. "I hated him with everything that I had, but I loved you," she told him.

"Loved?" he asked painfully about the past tense of the word.

"Danny, I'm so confused. How do I get over the fact," she turned around to face him, "that it was *you* that I hated? I mean, I look at you now, but you're not my Danny anymore--"

"But I am!"

"No," she shook her head. "You're not. Because when I look into your eyes, when I hear your voice, all I see and hear is Phantom. The ghost boy who had plagued me. So tell me, Danny, how do I get over the fact, that the one I hated the most in this life, is the same person I slept next to every night?" She took two steps forward and took his hand and brought it to her cheek. She then looked into his eyes. "How do I get over the fact, that these hands, that could caress me so tenderly," she closed her eyes to better feel his touch, "could turn around," she slid his hand down, so his fingers could feel the scar that ran in between her breast, "and put me in a hospital, fighting for my life?"

"That was an accident," he told her. "I swear to God, that was an accident. You have to believe me."

"I don't know what to believe or what to think," she told him truthfully as she lowered his hand and let it go, tears running freely down her face. "Because I thought he- *you* hated me too."

"I could never hate you," he reassured her. "Never."

Valerie shook her head. "Go home, Danny, just go home," she told him as she went to turn around and head upstairs.

"No!" he yelled, grabbing her wrist and pulling her back down, which caused her to shriek loudly as she completely missed a step. "Not until you tell me you understand. That you know that I never meant to hurt you."

"Ow! Let go of me!" she shrugged against his hold as she tried to pry his fingers from her, which only caused him to grab her other wrist to make her stop. Valerie was a strong person, so Danny had to keep his grip firm to keep her at bay.

"Val, just--" But Danny never got to finish his statement as he gasped loudly.

Valerie's eyes then grew wide. "Daddy!"

"Take your hands off my daughter," Damon commanded, not looking very pleased as he seemed to have appear out of nowhere, but in actuality had come in from the back door located in the kitchen. "Now."

Danny's expression was blank as he looked to Valerie and her tear stained face and then down at both of his hands, only imagining what this could have looked like to Damon as he walked in and heard their yelling. Danny slightly lowered his head. "I'm sorry," he told her as he finally let go. "I didn't mean--" he just took a step back. "I'll just go home." He then turned around as Damon watched him head out the front door and close it softly behind him.

Damon then turned to Valerie, who was sitting on the steps with her hand covering her eyes.

“Sweetie?” He lowered himself in front of her.

“I'm okay,” she told him as she wiped away her tears. “I'm fine, really.”

“You are nowhere near fine,” he told her. He then asked softly, “I need to know, is that what you meant when you told me you didn't want to watch your baby grow up to be like Danny?”

At the question, Valerie immediately snapped into attention. “How much did you hear?” she inquired, wondering if he knew that Danny was the Phantom.

“Enough to make me wonder,” he began as he examined his daughter's tender looking wrists, “if all the bruises you received from hunting ghosts, were actually from that alone.”

Valerie frowned as she snatched back her arms from her father. “I can take care of myself, dad. I've been taking Martial Art classes since I was five. And if I did find myself in a abusive relationship, do you honestly think I would have stuck around long enough to get pregnant?” she asked.

Damon shrugged, placing his words carefully as not to sound as if he was judging her. “Maybe if one thought their child was in danger of the same treatment-”

“Dad!” she stared at him incredulously for a moment. “Okay, Danny can be short tempered – I'll give you that. Intense at times – Yes,” she reasoned. “But trust me, he as never-” she found herself not able to finish her statement, as she realized that in someway she would be lying.

His daughter had also had a hard time lying to him, he didn't know why, but had always been grateful for the fact, and so took her silence as an admission. “We're going to the police station tomorrow and filing for a restraining order against Danny,” Damon told her, standing up.

“What? No! That's not what I want,” she told him looking up at him. “Daddy, please, don't make me.”

“Fine. If you can look me straight in the eye and tell me he's never put his hands on you,” he bargained with her. Valerie opened her mouth to speak, but then her hand clutched the top of her shirt and she found herself unable too and lowered her head.

Damon sighed sadly, as he lowered himself back to her, wondering why he had never seen it before. Wondering why he had allowed that boy to come anywhere near his precious child. He then put his arms around her to give her a hug. “It's going to be alright now,” he said as he tired to comfort her.

She hugged him back, but sighed as she said, “No, it's not.” So much for ending the day on a good note.

To Be Continued. . .

7 - Division Line

Chapter Seven: Division Line

It was a week later, Saturday afternoon, when Valerie received a call from Nathan, asking if she was busy for the day. She told him she had to a bit a grocery shopping to do and he volunteered to tag along, but grocery shopping seemed to be the last thing they were doing as Valerie pushed her cart in the opposite direction of Nathan while laughing at him.

“Stop laughing,” he told her, as he concentrated on the three oranges he was *trying* to juggle. “I told you, I got– ow!” Valerie laughed even harder as she turned her head around just in time to see a orange clunk him in the head.

“Just give it up and get me a thing of oranges like I asked you too,” she said before continuing down the aisle.

Nathan's shoulders slumped. “Yes, dear,” he said mockingly before he returned the oranges in his hand back to the bin before picking up the one that fell on the floor. He rubbed the back of his head as he picked up a bundle of oranges in the next bin and caught up with Valerie to put them in the cart.

“What are you doing?” Valerie asked with a smile as Nathan came up behind her and placed his hands on top of hers, trapping her between his body and the cart.

“Tell me, you got work tonight?” he asked, knowing full well she had every other Saturday off, as he had learned her work schedule during the week.

“No,” she informed him as she leaned to one side and looked up at him. “Why, got something in mind?”

“Well, we never got to that dinner last week,” he began as he placed one of his hands on her stomach to pull her closer against him, not caring who was around as he showed his affection, resting his forehead against her.

Valerie chuckled nervously as she took his hand and placed it back on the bar handle. “If we're not careful, people may start to think we're dating.”

The redhead frowned as he drew back, his brow furrowed. “And what's wrong with that?” he asked her.

“Nothing,” she shrugged, “I guess. It's just that- urge!” she stopped as their cart ran into another.

“Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't look- Valerie?” asked the voice pushing the other cart.

Valerie sighed as she looked to the dark haired woman. “Hello, Sam,” she greeted the woman softly.

There was then an uncomfortable silence that fell between the two young women and Nathan, feeling the tension, simply picked up Valerie's shopping list out of the front basket and disappeared down the aisle and around the corner. "How are you?" Valerie asked.

"I'm good. Real good," she answered. "And yourself?"

"I've been getting by," she said lowering her head and avoiding eye contact.

"So um, who's the guy with you?" Sam casually pointed down the row of food.

"A friend," Valerie said simply, knowing anything she told Sam would immediately go back to Danny and she didn't want him to know who Nathan was.

Sam actually looked surprised at the answer, she had always figured Valerie didn't have many of those. Sam then looked the other woman over curiously. "How far along are you now?" she wondered, thinking that Valerie should have been showing by now. The only thing that seem different about her was that it looked as if she put on a few pounds since the last time they saw each other.

"Today marks the twenty-first week," Valerie began as she rested her hand on her stomach. "The doctor says it's not abnormal to not be showing this far along," she said, as if reading Sam's mind. "But considering who the father is, I'm surprised things aren't weirder."

Sam scoffed. "Danny is not weird," she defended her friend.

Oh, God, so much for the pleasantries, Valerie thought. "Stop twisting my words, Manson. That's not what I said and you know it."

"But it's what you meant." She narrowed her eyes. "You know what? I don't know why Danny ever trusted you. I always knew you were going to do nothing, but hurt him." Sam went to push her cart passed Valerie. "Sometimes I hate always being right."

"Where do you think you're going?" Valerie asked as she reached out and grabbed the cart, stopping the other woman. "You are nothing more than a hypocrite, Manson. Danny lied to me, I broke up with him, simple. But *you*, you cheated on him, with his best friend. Then you turn around and you talk to me about trust?" She shook her head. "You don't even know the meaning of the word."

"It was different between me and Danny. He was never in love with me," Sam informed her bitterly and then looked at the black woman disgustingly. "It's always been you, *a/ways*. While I may have put a dint in his heart, it was you that shattered it to pieces before you grounded it to mere dust," she told her angrily. "He's been fighting for you, so hard, and all he gets for his troubles is a restraining order? Delivered to him at his job?" Sam looked at Valerie as if she weren't even human. "You don't know how I wish he had fought that hard for me."

"Aw, what's wrong, Sam," Valerie fringed sympathy. "Tucker ain't doing it for you anymore?"

"For your information," Sam showed Valerie her left hand, which carried an engagement ring she and Tucker picked out a few days earlier. "Tucker and I are getting married and I couldn't be happier." She

then added, "We were going to invite you, you know play nice, but when we found out about the restraining order," she shrugged, "well, we could only invite one of you and trust me, it wasn't a difficult choice."

"Please, I always knew you and Tucker weren't really my friends. That you were just putting up with me for Danny's sake," Valerie began and as she heard Sam say "Damn right" under her breath, a small piece of her just wanted to die, *Is there really no one on my side?* she thought sadly. "Well then, I guess you don't have that problem anymore," she finally let go of Sam's cart, "so have a happy life. . . but not really." Valerie then pushed her cart down the aisle and went in search of Nathan.

She found him a few rows down as she made her way towards him. "Okay," he called out as he saw her. "The list just says "Salsa". So does that mean regular salsa or do you like salsa con queso? And if so, am I looking for mild, medium, or hot?"

Valerie reached out for the salsa in his hand and put it back down on the shelf. "Forget the damn salsa." She then said softly, "I just want to go, okay?"

Nathan looked at her curiously. "Why, is something wrong?" he asked, but she unconvincingly shook her head no. "Alright, come on," he told her gently and turned her around towards the exit. "Let's get out of this place," he told her. He then grabbed both of their coats, which had been hanging off the side of the cart before they abandoned it in the middle of the aisle. Before leaving, Nathan took a look behind him and spotted Sam, who looked as if she had only been in the store a few minutes, a smirk then came to his lips.

While they were outside, in the parking lot, Valerie didn't feel up to driving and so she gave her keys over to Nathan before they got in the car and he drove back to her place, where his own vehicle was waiting.

Inside her home, Valerie told Nathan to make himself comfortable in the living room. She then headed upstairs to her room and closed the door behind her before she sat on her bed, allowing herself to fall back on to it. She sighed and laid there a few minutes before getting back up and going to her closet. On the shelf was a photo album that she pulled out and headed back over to the bed. She yawned as she laid on her side before she opened the album and looked at her photos. The majority of them were pictures of her, Danny, Tucker, and Sam, back when they were happy, back when she called them friends. But as she remembered Sam's words back at the grocery store, she realized, that it had always been an act for her and mostly Tucker as well. She really had no one on her side.

Nathan was downstairs, sitting on the couch as he flipped through channels. He stopped as he came across an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and began to watch. It wasn't until the episode was nearly over that he realized that Valerie had been upstairs for a long time. He began to wonder if everything was alright and so got up and headed slowly towards the stairs.

"Val," he called quietly as he reached the top of the stairs. It was the first time he had been inside her home and he wasn't sure where anything was located. He gently opened a few doors and discovered the linen closet, a den, a workout room, and her father's bedroom, he committed all to memory. There were then three more doors left unopened and luckily, on his next try, he opened the door to find a sleeping Valerie.

Nathan moved with the sheath of a cat as he made his way closer to her. Her back was to him as he peered over and saw the photo album lying next to her. He frowned as he saw pictures of Danny holding her, kissing her, and how happy she looked allowing him to do so. Without thinking, Nathan angrily snatched the book off the bed, not noticing Valerie's hand had been resting on the other page.

Nathan's eyes widen from a moment as he saw Valerie shift in her sleep, but when he saw no sign of her waking up, he once again relaxed. He closed the album and placed in on the night stand, not noticing the pregnancy magazines he covered as he kept his eyes on the sleeping Valerie.

Nathan than made his way around the bed and slowly sat down where the album had been. He smiled gently as he brushed Valerie's long, curly black hair from her face. The tips of his fingers than traced a light pattern on the dark skin of her cheeks as he watched her carefully. He licked his lips as he became braver and allowed his hand to rest on her shoulder before sliding it down her arm and taking her hand.

He brought her hand up to his mouth and kissed each one of her knuckles gently before turning it over and kissing her palm. He then allow his eyes to close as he pressed her palm against his cheek. He held it there as he promised himself again, he would make her forget Danny and that he would be the only one who occupied her thoughts.

Valerie frowned as she heard a beeping sound go off, it was her watch. With her eyes still closed, she stuck her hand under her pillow and pulled out her ecto-ray gun. She bolted up as her eyes came open and pointed her gun. She blinked as realized she was alone in the room. She then looked to her watch, it was almost half pass the hour. "shoot," she whispered to herself as she saw it had been about two hours since she had left the store. She put down her weapon long enough to turn off the beeping, but as soon as she did, it began to beep again and so her hand went back to the gun. There was definitely something in here with her.

She looked around her room suspiciously, but nothing seemed out of place. "Danny?" she called gently, wondering if he had gone invisible and was watching her as she slept. She shuddered, thinking it was a creepy thought. She knew the second her father had mentioned a restraining order that it had been a bad idea, but she couldn't talk her father out of making her file a report. Because she knew, if Danny was in ghost form as he violated the order, there was no way she could prove he had come near her, especially if he were invisible, which made Valerie kind of paranoid.

"Danny?" she called out again, but got nothing. "Ow!" she called loudly as she dropped her gun and both of her hands went to her stomach. She sighed as she realized her baby was kicking and was probably in their ghost form, which caused her watch to go off. Valerie shuttered again at the *thing* inside of her. She found it strange that how, at this very moment, that the baby that grew inside of her had no heartbeat and didn't even qualify as being alive.

She closed her eyes as she heard heated words inside her head. "*Will you hunt down your own child! Because he or she will be a ghost too! Will you hunt down someone you're suppose to love and protect!*" He had been so angry, but how could he not be? He had been so excited and she had too, until-

"Valerie?" she looked up when she heard her name. "Is everything alright? I thought I heard you

scream.”

“Uh- I'm fine, Nathan,” she said as he broke her from her thoughts and she hid her weapon back under her pillow before going to answer the door. She looked at her watch as she once again turned it off. She then went to open the door. “I am so sorry,” she told him. “I only meant to be up here a minute. I guess I fell asleep while looking. . .” Valerie turned around to point out her photo album, but it wasn't on the bed, instead it rested on her nightstand. “Huh, that's strange,” she whispered to herself, as she didn't remember moving it.

Hearing her talk to herself, Nathan looked over her head to see what she was looking at, he cringed as he realized he forgot to leave things the way he had found them. . . he was slipping. He than made a curious face as Valerie turned back to him. “What's strange?” he asked her.

“Nothing, it's just I thought. . . Nothing,” she waved the matter off and took a hold of Nathan's arms as she closed the bedroom door behind them. “Come on, lets go downstairs. I was thinking, since grocery shopping was a bust, if you were up for ordering some Chinese food? I know this place that makes a killer Moo Goo Gai Pan.”

“A moo moo, you hit a guy with a pan? What?” He looked at her all confused.

She giggled. “Don't tell me you've never had Moo Goo Gai Pan,” she asked of him. Valerie than reached out towards his face. Nathan looked at her curiously as she did so. “What's this?” She wiped a black smudge off the side of his nose.

Nathan's eyes widen as he saw her hand draw away, her thumb and index finger smeared in black. “Nothing,” he said quickly and grabbed her hand and wipe it off with the inside of his shirt before she got a closer look at it. He then hurried down the hallway towards the stairs. “So what's in this "cow hit a man with a pan"?” he asked, before she could say anything about his strange reaction.

It was a little over an hour later and Valerie and Nathan were sitting on the floor in the living room at the coffee table, enjoying their dinner. Valerie groaned. “I can't believe you like this show. It's so boring,” she complained.

“Hey, don't dis the Star Trek. This is an awesome show, whether you want to admit it or not,” Nathan defended.

“Yeah, whatever,” she replied as she picked up the soy sauce and pour more on her food.

“You're going to drown your cow,” he told her.

She looked up at him with narrowed eyes. “For the last time, there is no cow in Moo Goo Gai Pan. It's chicken. You know, buck-buck, chicken?” She went back to drowning her food. “Chicken, Goddammit,” she said to herself.

“Then if it's chicken, then why is the first word the sound that a cow makes? Huh? I mean, come on, you hear "Moo" and you think milk, you think ground beef, you think *steak*.” Nathan inwardly smiled as he watched Valerie's eye twitch as she finally emptied her glass bottle of soy sauce. He never knew

how much fun it was pissing her off. The look on her face, he thought, was priceless. "You think grass eatin", dairy farmin" co- Ow!" His hand went to his forehead. "Did you just hit me with that bottle!"

Valerie's response was clucking once like a questioning chicken as she kept an innocent seeming expression on her face as she looked at Nathan. He groaned as he thought, "*Note to self: Avoid pissing off while around throwable objects.*" He then went to take his hand away from his forehead, as he did he hear Valerie gasp. "Oh, I am so sorry," she said sincerely before she crawled over to him. His brow creased as he saw the blood running down his palm. Valerie sat in front of him, on her knees, as she examine his head. "Ooh, that"s a nasty a cut," she said after sucking in air between clenched teeth.

Nathan only smiled at her and placed his hand on her waist. "Want to kiss my boo-boo and make it better?"

Valerie returned his smile as she took his wrist and removed his hand. Although he had told her, that day in the library, that he wasn't interested in her anymore, ever since she had kissed him, she couldn't get him to keep his hands off of her. Valerie was careful not to encourage him, but neither did she reprimand him for his actions either.

"Strange prescription for a pre-med student to give, don't you think?" Nathan only shrugged. "Come on, I'll clean it up and stick a band-aid on it," she told him as she stood up, still holding his wrist and had him follow her back upstairs to the bathroom, which happened to be the very last door at the end of the hall.

Nathan sat on the counter as Valerie rambled through the medicine cabinet. The redhead flinched as she wiped his cut with an alcohol soaked cotton ball. "Hold still you big baby." He only smiled at her teasing as she put a butterfly band-aid on his forehead. Then, to Nathan's surprise, Valerie took his face in both of her hands and stood on the tip of her toes as she lowered his head and placed a simple kiss upon his forehead. "Doctor"s orders, you know," she said with a smile. "So are you happy now?" she asked in a whisper.

"No," was his response as he slid his hand around her back and pulled her closer and kissed her lips.

Valerie pulled away as her hands came to rest on his chest. "Nathan," she said gently. "You got to stop," she told him.

"Why?" he asked her. "I like you. . . a lot, that"s never been a secret. And I know you like me, if you didn't, I don't think you would let me hang around you as often as you do."

"I -I do like you," she finally admitted out loud, "but my life recently has been kind of complicated. I don't have time for-"

"It doesn't matter," he interrupted her. "I'll take whatever you can spare," he admitted. "I- I just want to be there for you." He smiled. "I just want to be with you."

Valerie looked into the light green eyes of the boy that sat before her. She allowed her fingers to grip tightly around the fabric of his clothing as she lowed her head and closed her eyes to think. Could see allow someone else into her life so soon after Danny, knowing that she wasn't really over him? And if

so, should she tell him about the child she was carrying, knowing that in another mouth or so that she wouldn't be able to hide the truth anyway? Should she-

"Valerie," Nathan called gently as he placed his fingers under her chin and lifted her downward face back towards him. "I know what you're doing," he began. "You're over analyzing the situation, aren't you?" he asked her, but received no reply. "Well don't, because sometimes," he lowered his face to hers as he gracefully slid off the counter, "you just have to allow yourself to feel," was his advice as for the second, in that early evening, he claimed her lips with his own.

Valerie, tantalized by Nathan's adoring kisses, had forgotten what she had been thinking about, and so permitted herself to take heed of his words as she wrapped her arms around his neck and allowed him to lead her out the bathroom and down the hall towards her bedroom.

He closed the door behind them and was taken by surprise as Valerie broke the kiss and slammed him up against the door. The look on his face caused a giggle to escape Valerie's throat. Her hands, at first, worked gradually on the buttons of his shirt as Nathan's hands wasted no time, unfastening and unzipping her khaki pants. He was just about to hook his thumbs on the rim on them to pull them down, when suddenly he could no longer reach them. Valerie was slowly lowering herself down his body.

Nathan looked down as he watched her lick one of his buttons before her teeth surrounded it and she bit it off. She then looked up at him and spit the button out, hitting him in the face. He cursed under his breath as he thought, *Damn her aim.*

Valerie then said to him, after biting off the remaining two buttons and holding one in her hand, "See these? These are a no-no. I don't like them. Don't wear them. They take too long." Nathan only nodded in agreement, as she rose back up, her hands combing up his legs as she did so. She then pulled him a little from the door as her fingers mapped out the path of his hard abs and broad chest before coming to his shoulders and pushing the offending fabric down his arms and off to land on the floor.

Nathan then took Valerie's face in his hands as he kissed her again, this time with her leading them towards the bed as she now worked on the belt that held up his jeans. They continued to strip the other of their clothing until they were all laying in a pool around their feet. Now completely bare before him, as the sun outside her window began to set, Valerie started to feel a rush of embarrassment. "Nathan-

"No," he said softly as he had seen her dark cheeks blush. "You're beautiful," he told her as he gently laid her down and he rested beside her. His eyes never left hers as he ran his fingers through her hair. "It's a day I committed ever in mind." Valerie looked to him curiously at the words. "The day you blessed me with your smile and grace, And I knew again our paths would one day intertwine, If only in my dreams to know your embrace."

Valerie smiled as she realized he was reciting a poem for her. "A patient man, I find myself not, Yet I stood aside, let you live your days, But still my heart, it seems you caught, And so I live only to await your praise."

Valerie's hand than found his arm and slide down its length to meet his. "Happy I, to see birth of dream, Able to feel your fingers seek out mine." Their fingers laced at his words and he kissed her hand. "Able to see your eyes gleam, Finally able to know this body, oh so divine."

Nathan leaned down and rested his forehead against her, something he liked to do often. "To have you lie beside me," he closed his eyes, "I would turn my back on all mankind, If only for the chance to call you my sweet Valerie, And have today be a day, I commit ever in mind." As the last of his poem passed through her ears, Valerie too closed her eyes before feeling his gentle loving kiss. And she gave herself to Nathan that night as he to her before each fell asleep in the other's arms.

Valerie yawned as her eyes opened to the full moon outside her window, she smiled as she looked down and discovered Nathan's arms protectively around her waist. She then looked up at her alarm clock before she gasped in horror. She double checked the time on her watch, but each said the same thing, it was twenty minutes to eleven pm. "Nathan!" she turned around and shook the boy, he only groaned and pulled her tighter to him. "Nathan, you got to get up." Panic lined her words as she spoke, causing Nathan to open his eyes. "You can't be here when my dad comes homes. Get out!" She pushed him out the bed and he landed roughly on the floor.

"Ow, my @\$!" he yelled out.

"I'm sorry," she leaned over her bed and gave him a quick kiss, "but you gotta go."

"I'm going. I'm going," he told her as he searched for his clothes only using the light of the moon. Valerie got up and went to her closet to put on her housecoat and left out the bedroom door. Nathan was still putting on his belt as he came downstairs to see that Valerie had cleaned up their mess from dinner.

She handed him his coat and shoes before pushing him out the door. "Call me!" she told him before she closed the door in his face.

Nathan shook his head with a smile as he put on his shoes and coat while still on her porch. As he started down the stairs, towards his car, he pulled out his cell phone and dialed a number. "Hey, Mike," he greeted the person on the other end. "Yeah, sorry to call so late, but I was just wondering, do you still work at that place where they copy keys?" he asked as he pulled out the set of keys Valerie had handed to him earlier that day. "You do? Cool. So do you think you could do me a favor and meet me there?" he asked his friend. "Thanks. I'll see you in a few minutes." Nathan tossed up Valerie's keys and caught them triumphantly as he whistled a little happy tune before getting in his car and driving away.

To Be Continued. . .

8 - Karma

Chapter Eight: Karma

Sam, was sitting in her mother's home, rolling her eyes as she sat across from the red headed woman and wedding planner as they discussed plans for Sam's big day. She gave a tired little sigh as she wished she had listen to Tucker and ran away to Las Vegas to get hitched without telling their folks. "What do you think of this, Samantha?" Sam's mother turned a book full of bridesmaids to her. She then pointed out a set of sleek lavender colored gowns.

"Oh," Sam was actually surprised at her mother's choice. "It's beautiful." Her mother smiled brightly, it wasn't often that the two of them agreed on something fashion wise. "But you know what would make it gorgeous?" she asked.

"What dear?" her mother inquired.

"If it was a different color," Sam stated as she pulled out a black marker and ran it across one of the dresses. "There we go. Perfect."

Her mother's smiled quickly faded as she snatched back the book. "Honestly, Samantha, it's a wedding, not a funeral." Sam groaned at the statement, as her mother turned back to the wedding planner, once again going back to ignoring Sam.

After about half an hour, Sam was at the point where she just wanted to bang her head against the table and make the torture stop, just then a little knock was heard at the back door, located in the kitchen where the three women were sitting, Tucker then came through and took a seat next to Sam. "Sorry, I'm late," he told them before he smiled at her sweetly and rested his hand on her thigh before giving it a squeeze as Sam's mother asked what day they wanted set for the day.

"Well," Tucker began, giving it some thought, "we were thinking about a late June wedding for this year, but considering the current circumstances, I think we should push everything back a year." He then turned to Sam, making sure she still agreed with what they had talked about earlier.

"See mother, you'll have a whole year to make my wedding, you I don't want," Sam put on a fake smile.

"Oh, goodie," she lightly clapped excitedly.

Tucker cover his hand over his mouth as he said under his breath for only his fiancée to hear. "Should have gone to Vegas when we had the chance."

"Quit it," Sam told him as she lowered his hand.

"Now, about this guest list," Sam's mother brought out a tablet, it had over three hundreds names on it.

"I'm sure you'll both agree that few people *must* be taken off of it." She scanned the paper before saying, "Well, at least one. The Fenton boy."

"No-"

"Fine-"

Sam's head snapped towards Tucker at his reply. "What? What do you mean 'fine'?"

Tucker folded his hands in front of him as he looked down at them and told her seriously, "I won't have him at our wedding."

"Tucker, you can't be serious," Sam began softly. "He's our best friend."

"Who is under investigation for attempted murder." He turned to her. "*Your* attempted murder," he stressed. "In case you didn't remember."

Sam had been out grocery shopping, not less than a month ago. It had started out as a normal trip until she had ran into Valerie and her new *friend*. They had a few words before she saw Valerie and her friend leave. Sam had made a strange face as she could have sworn that the man with Valerie had smiled at her, but only shrugged the matter off. Leaving the store about two hours later, Sam had packed her things into her car before getting in and driving off.

The brakes on her car had been making a funny sound when she pressed down on it and so a few days prior she had taken it to the auto shop where Danny was employed. As he worked on it she spoke to him about her engagement to Tucker how excited they were. Danny seemed happy for them. Sam was actually there when he was served with the restraining order from Valerie. Danny's boss, seeing how distraught he seemed had offered him a few days off, but Danny told him he was fine as he went back to work on Sam's car.

The brakes after that had seemed just fine. Danny had even checked a few extra things for her for free. The drive to the grocery store had gone smoothly, but as she was on the freeway home and coming to her exit, she had gone to press on the brakes only to find she wasn't slowing. She had ended up slamming into another car, the impact was so hard that it totaled her vehicle and Sam ended up breaking the lower part of her right leg.

At the hospital, the police came to question her for their report; at the mention of Danny's restraining order involving his ex-fiancée, they wanted more information on him, so with Tucker by herself, Sam gave in to their request. "So let me get this straight," one of the officers had began. "You, Mr. Foley, and Mr. Fenton, are all *still* friends. You dated Mr. Fenton, but things ended on a sour note, and you're now engaged to Mr. Foley. Mr. Fenton dated a Ms. Gray, who now wants nothing to with him, for reasons you don't know." Sam nodded her head. "Okay," the officer drawled slowly as he turned to his partner.

"I'll have a unit pick up Mr. Fenton," he told him.

"Wait. For what?" Tucker demanded, but already knew how things looked like to the officers, that Danny was jealous of the two of them and that he harbor ill feelings towards them because of everything

that gone down between them. It also didn't help anything with him having a restraining order. *They must think we're the plot line to a bad soap opera*, Tucker had thought.

"It wasn't like that," Sam said back to Tucker as they sat in the kitchen. Sam's mother and the wedding planner feeling an argument rise between the two discreetly got up and left the general area. "It was an accident."

"The brake line had been cut on purpose, Sam," he tried to tell her. Sure, Tucker didn't want to think that Danny was capable of something so cruel, but as the days had gone on, Tucker realized he could have lost her in that crash. And they had both known Danny for a long time and knew the vengeful mentality he had when he felt he was done wrong, maybe now it was just finally coming to the surface when it came to him and Sam. Tucker didn't know, but he would rather be safe than sorry. "And who's know, maybe by this time next year, we will know the truth, and if it was truly an accident, we can apologize to Danny and re-invite him," he suggested.

"No," she made clear. "I'm not apologize for anything because we are not uninviting him."

Tucker looked back at his hands. "Must you *always* defend him, even when all signs point towards him?" he asked bitterly.

"Tucker, that's not what I'm doing." Sam reached out and placed her hand on top of his. "He is our best friend, he deserves our benefit of the doubt," she explained.

There was a moment of silence as Tucker took in the situation. He then shook his head. "I'm sorry," he turned back to her, "but I can't. I don't want him there."

"Tucker, you're being ridiculous." Sam reached for her crutches and got up from the table. "Danny *will* be at our wedding," she put her foot down, figuratively speaking.

"Fine," Tucker spoke softly as Sam headed towards the kitchen door leading to the family room. "But if he's there. . . I won't be."

Sam stop in her tracks and turned her torso so she could look at Tucker. "What?"

Tucker stood up and pushed in their chairs, he then headed towards the back door before opening it. "Just once," he began with his back to her. "I wish you could just pretend to put my needs above your precious Danny." And than he was gone, leaving Sam to stare at the kitchen door in his wake.
OoOoO

Nathan frowned as he looked to the sky on the bright spring afternoon. The Country Fair was in town, an event he knew Valerie looked forward to every year. It was almost like having their own amusement park right on the outskirts of Amity Park. There were games upon games and rides from death defying roller coasters to little kiddie rides all around them.

Nathan held Valerie's hand as they walked around the park. They had been there about an hour and Valerie declined every attempt he made at them riding any of the rides. Instead they stuck to playing the many games the park had to offer. In fact, in Nathan's other arm he carried a large stuff animal, a panda

bear to be exact. After trying many times to win Valerie a prize, she laughed at him and called him an amateur as she took the remaining rings in his hands and proceeded to toss them at the empty coke bottles in front of them. Needless to say, Valerie ended up winning him a prize. *Damn her aim*, Nathan had thought as she pointed out what she wanted for him.

“Val?” Nathan called gently.

“Yeah?” Valerie looked up from the ground and placed a smile on her face. Nathan slowly took in her appearance. They had been dating for almost a month and Nathan was happy with where their relationship was going, but the last two weeks had been strange in his opinion. Valerie had grown mellow and was less talkative than she used to be. Then when they were alone together, she would keep a certain distance between them as if she didn't like him touching her. At first this frustrated him, but as he looked at her now he realized that maybe something else was going on.

“Do you not want to be here?” he asked her. “Are you not having fun?” He had brought her here as a surprise, the first reason being to celebrate the first day they had met back in the eighth grade and the second was hoping to cheer her up.

“It's not that,” she reassured him before sighing. “I guess I'm just distracted,” she told him, letting go of his hand and sticking her hands into the light jacket she was wearing. Nathan wondered why she had been wearing it so often lately. Spring was in full bloom and though there was a small breeze most days it wasn't anywhere near cool enough for her to be wearing it all the time.

“Distracted about what?” he asked, thankful he was actually getting somewhere.

Valerie shrugged. “School, I guess,” was her response as she turned her head away from him and started watching the people who walked by them. “Um I'm just a little worried about finals and graduation and all.”

Nathan smiled. “Oh yeah, I forgot that you graduate this year. With my transfer and the internship I still need to do at the hospital, I won't walk till next year,” he told her. He then put his arm around her shoulders. “But you shouldn't worry, Valerie. I know you'll do great,” he encouraged her. “You're smart and there's nothing you can't do.” Nathan then kissed the top of her head.

Valerie looked back up at him and smiled at him in a way that made Nathan think she was more radiant than the sun itself. “Thank you.” She stopped walking long enough to stand on the tip of the toes and place a light kiss on his lips.

“So do you want to stay or blow this popsicle joint?” Nathan asked of her as he pulled away and retook her hand.

“Yeah, let's take Ms. Panda back to your place.”

“I could have won it myself you know,” he felt like saying.

“Sure you could have,” she began, reaching for the toy under his arm and taking it into her own. “If you were shooting for the moon,” she teased.

"How did you get so good at something like that anyway," he asked her.

Valerie slightly frowned at the question before correcting her expression. "Let's just say, I've had a lot of practice at it, but it's something I don't do anymore. Well, not recently anyway," she explained as they left the park. The statement didn't really answer Nathan's question, but he decided to let it go as they continued towards his truck. Before long they were on the freeway, heading home, and listening to music to pass the time. "Nate?" Valerie addressed him.

Nathan turned his head slightly to look at her. She was taking long deep breaths. "Yeah?" he replied curiously.

"I think," she took another breath, "I think I need you to pull over," she told him holding on to the car door handle.

"For what?"

"Nathan, now!" she said loudly. Nathan then turned on his signal light as he tried to get to the right shoulder of the freeway. As he put the car in park, Valerie opened up the door and hopped, leaving it open as she only traveled a few steps before tossing her cookies.

"I told you not to eat all that food on the fair grounds," he called worriedly after her.

"Don't you ever shut up?" Valerie asked Nathan angrily. "God, can I please have a minute without hearing your lip?" she wondered before she went back to what she was doing.

Nathan said nothing more as he patiently waited for her to return. He didn't like being yelled at, especially when there was no valid reason for it. A few minutes later, Valerie climbed back into the truck and fastened her seatbelt. "I'm sorry," she said shyly as Nathan started the engine. "I shouldn't have yelled at you," she apologized picking up the stuff panda that laid near her feet onto her lap as she wrapped her arms around it and rested her head on top of it.

Nathan kept his eyes on the road, shrugging off the matter. "No problem," he replied stiffly. A moment later, he sighed as he dreaded what he was about to say. "Do you not like being with me?" he asked her. "Because lately you've been treating me like shit," he told her.

Valerie guiltily looked at him. "I don't mean too," she told him, knowing she had a difficult personality and for some reason thought of Danny as she wondered how he had put up with her so long. "I like being with you, Nathan, it's just. . ." she trailed off as she sat up in her seat and looked down at herself.

"Just what?" Nathan turned his head for a moment as she had cut herself off.

Valerie took a deep breath and she closed her eyes. "I've been keeping something from you. Something I should have let you in on way before now," she began.

"Alright, what is it?"

"Well I- I'm pregnant," she finally confessed to him. She opened her eyes to see his eyes upon her.

"Really?" Nathan couldn't help the smile that came across his face as he remembered that first night they had been together. It was the only time they hadn't used protection. *With a baby, she's tied to me for life*, Nathan thought. *I'll never let them go.*

Seeing his smile, Valerie realized what he may have thought and opened her mouth to tell him that she had been pregnant before they had met that day in the library, but as she went to say this she couldn't help but stare at him for a moment longer. He just looked so happy. . . like Danny had the moment he had came out of his shock. But allowing Nathan to think that she was pregnant with his child, any longer than she already had, would have been cruel. "Nathan," she began slowly, turning her head away, not wanting to see his face as she broke the news to him. Her melancholy tone, caused Nathan to once again look at her. He then watched as she took a sharp intake of air before yelling, "Look out!"

Nathan's head quickly turned back to the road, his eyes growing wide and his heart jumping into his chest as the vehicle in front of him dangerously cut him off. It caused Nathan to turn the wheel to a hard right to avoid a collision. He lost control of his truck as he slammed on the brakes, but it went sliding across the asphalt. He heard Valerie scream as they veered off the road, at top speed, pass the shoulder before they entered in to an area full of trees. The force of a thick branch hitting the windshield caused it to shatter before the truck went off a small cliff and landed hard, head first, before slightly tilting to the left side.

Nathan groaned softly, as he lifted his head from his airbag. "Valerie, are you alright?" he asked with his eyes closed as his hand with to the back his neck. He made a face of pain as he tried to move it. "Val," he called again when he got no response. He opened his eyes as he turned to look at her. His expression grew to one of shock as he took in the sight of her unconscious and slumped over in her seat. "Valerie!" he cried loudly as his hands went to unfasten his seatbelt, but he was so anxious to get out of it that he was having difficulties. He screamed at it in irritation before it finally came loose.

He slid a little as the truck was titled in her direction. As he reached her he lightly brushed the broken pieces of glasses off of her. "Valerie, can you hear me?" he asked her knowing she couldn't. He touched the top of her head gently, his features growing curious as it felt wet. He drew back his hand only to find the evidence of a bright red liquid. "shoot," he whispered to himself as he started to frantically search for his cell phone, wiping his hand on his shirt as he found it on the floor near the accelerator. "frack!" he yelled as he dialed in 911 only to discover that he no service.

Panic slowly started to set in as he threw the useless object back to floor and raked his fingers through his hair. He then went back to Valerie, his hand finding her wrist as he searched for a pulse. He smiled in relief as he found it beating steadily. "Come on, baby, you got to-" he cut himself off as he remembered the baby. Nathan then reached out and lowered his hand to her stomach, there was a firm roundness to it. *I can't lose them*, was all his mind would allow him to think.

"Hey!" Nathan heard someone yell out. "Is anyone down there! Are you alright!"

The voice was coming from the other side of the cliff, was all Nathan could guess as he couldn't see anyone. He straightened up as he yelled back. "We need help!" he yelled, not able to keep the sound of fear from his words. "Call 911, my girlfriend's hurt!" he told him. "Tell them she's pregnant!" Nathan's

attention went back to Valerie, he then gently touched her cheek. "It's going to be alright now," he reassured her calmly. "Help is on the way."

To Be Continued. . .

9 - To Be Loved

Chapter Nine: To Be Loved

He's going to hurt us. . .

Valerie heard the voice of a child amidst the darkness.

He's going to hurt us. . .

Valerie turned and made a complete circle, but only saw what she saw before, which was nothing but the piercing darkness. "Who's there?" she asked walking towards where she thought the voice was going from, but it was more difficult than it sounded as she stretched her arms out in front of her as she slide slowly across the smooth feeling floor.

Please, he's going to hurt us. . .

"Who's going to hurt us?" she asked.

You have to run. . .

"Who are you?" Valerie wanted to know. Putting caution aside she started moving faster towards the voice.

No! the voice yelled out. Valerie swiftly turned around as it now sounded like it was coming from behind her. *Go back, you must go back!* the voice demand.

"Who are you? Who's going to hurt us!" Valerie asked loudly as she grew impatient with the situation.

Suddenly, it was like someone turned on a light switch as there came a blinding blue light that erased the darkness and forced Valerie to cover her eyes with both arms. A moment later, she steadily lowered her arms and began to open her eyes. They went wide as a full grown ghost hovered in front of her. She had time to say not one word before it rushed to her and pushed her back.

Valerie screamed as she found herself falling back into a hole of darkness.

"Ahhh!" she continued to scream as she bolted up.

"Valerie, Valerie, it's alright," Valerie ceased screaming as an all too familiar person came into her view.

She breathed heavily as she looked curiously at the man holding her arms. "Uncle Vlad?" she questioned softly before looking at her surroundings. She was in a private hospital room. She then spotted her father standing behind Vlad as he pulled away from her. "Daddy?" She then groaned as her

hand with to her head, which was covered in bandages. She closed her eyes. "What- What happened?" she asked.

"Don't you remember, sweetie," Damon began. "You were in a car accident."

"An accident?" she said a bit confused. Her face than began to scrunch up as she tired to remember. She then gasped as she looked back and front between Vlad and her father. "Where's Nathan?" she demanded. "Is he alright?"

"The boy is fine." Vlad took her hand and patted it gently. "Nothing more than a few scratches and bruises on him. He's somewhere on the premises. I'm sure he'll be here any minute to come back and check on you," he reassured her.

Valerie watched as her father took a sit on the chair across from the bed. She looked to Vlad. "How did you know I was here?" she asked him. Knowing that either the hospital or Nathan called her father, but certain that either would have a reason to call Vlad.

"Dear child," he smiled dangerously at her. "My company, Vlad Co., bought out this hospital several months ago, of course they are going to inform me when someone on my VIP list comes in the way you did," he explained. Valerie nodded her head in understanding. Vlad then turned to Damon. "Don't worry about a thing. From now on, when Valerie enters my hospital, everything will be taken care of of," he told him.

"Mr. Masters-" Damon stood up to protest.

"Now, now Damon," Vlad interrupted him. "How long have you worked for me? You are my Chief of Security at one of my most profitable companies and your daughter is a dear friend of my mind, please feel free to call me Vlad."

"Thank you, Vlad, but you are being too generous. I couldn't possible accept," Damon tried to make clear.

"Nonsense," Vlad said as he reached into his blazer pocket and pulled out his vibrating cellphone. He flipped in open. "Excuse me a moment, please." He then turned around walked to the other side of the room as he spoke quietly to the person the other side of the line.

"Dad," Valerie called her father to him. Valerie placed her hand on her stomach. "What did the doctors say about my baby?" She could hardly believe the concern that lined her words as she spoke. "It is alright?"

Damon smiled sweetly at her. "Yes, everything is fine."

Valerie nodded her head. "Good," she whispered to herself.

"Well, it looks like I have to run," Vlad announced as he put away his cell phone and made his way back over to Valerie.

Damon frowned as he watched the other man lean in and whispered something into his daughter's ear. "Of course, Uncle Vlad. Understood," she said to him as he straighten back up.

Vlad then once again patted her hand. "Get well soon, child," he told her before leaving the room.

"I don't like how attached he is to you," Damon announced. "It doesn't seem right somehow."

Valerie looked to her father at the statement, blinking a few time in surprise as she had never heard him say anything that remotely sounded negative about the man before. "Uh," she began, not nothing how to the respond to it. "His attachment to me isn't all that strange," she tried to explain. "Uncle Vlad-

"Please don't call him that," Damon told.

She nodded before she continued. "Mr. Masters is a very powerful man. You can see that in the way he conducts business, but with everything he has there's something he can't buy no matter how much success and money he has." Damon looked asking of her. "Mr. Masters is lonely, Dad. He has no family and few friends. In fact, he told me when I turned eighteen, as a gift, that he had made me his sole benefactor in his will." Valerie shook her head. "I don't mind calling him Uncle Vlad, honestly I don't. He's been very good to me - to us - so I don't see the harm in indulging him a little," she clarified to her father.

"I see," Damon said before he saw Valerie cringe in pain as she once again held her stomach and shifted uncomfortably. "Should I go find a doctor?" he said on the verge of heading towards the door.

Valerie's hand shot out and took her father's arm. "Not yet," she replied. "I need to talk to you."

"I really think I should go get-

"Dad, please," she begged tightening the grip on his arm. Damon looked at her for moment before nodding his head and taking a seat on her bed. Valerie took a deep breath as she let go of Damon and begin to tug nervously at the sheet cover her legs. "I think- I think I've been foolish," she began softly. "When it comes to Danny."

"I think you hit your head harder than realized," Damon commented. "You have been anything but foolish," he tried to reassure her. "You were in a bad relationship, you got of it and-

"No," Valerie shook her head. "I think I may have mislead you." She had to make him understand. "Danny isn't abusive the way you think he is."

"So he was abusive?"

"No not really. I just wish I knew how to explain this. The reason Danny and I broke up, when I really look at it, was because of the lack of communication. . . and maybe fear."

"You were afraid of him?" he asked.

Valerie looked straight into her father's face as her eyes began to brim with tears. "No. . . he was afraid

of me.” Damon only looked at her. “He was afraid of what I would do, how I would react,” she lowered her head, “and I did nothing to ease those fears. I just simply proved him right, when he wanted nothing more than to be wrong.”

“Valerie, what are you trying to tell me?” Damon offered another question.

“I still love him,” she confessed for the first time since the day the two of them broke up. “When I was in that car, thinking I was going to die, I could only think of one thing, and it was the people I loved.” She wiped away her tears. “I thought of you, Star, Uncle Vlad, and Danny.” She looked back up at him. “I thought of Danny.”

“I understand that you have them through something that makes you reevaluate your life, but I don't want you to rush into anything. I know you care deeply for Danny, but I don't want you getting into something that'll you'll regret later,” he advised.

“I want to drop the restraining order,” she told him, not paying much attention to Damon's words. “And when the doctors say it's okay, I'm going to go find him and pray to God he forgives me.”

“Praying isn't required,” came a voice from the door. Both Damon and Valerie turned their heads to find Danny standing at the entrance of the door. “I know I shouldn't be here,” he looked at Damon. “I've been trying to be good and keep my distance,” he then looked to Valerie, “but when I heard about the accident. . . I just had to see with my own two eyes that you were okay,” he told them. He looked as if he wanted to come closer, but dared not to.

“Valerie?” Damon turned back to his daughter.

“It's okay,” she said softly. “I'll be fine,” she told him before he got up and left the room to seek a doctor. “Don't just stand there, Danny,” she said as Danny continued to stand in the door after Damon left.

Danny approached her cautiously as if not certain of the situation. “Are- are you and the baby alright?” was his first question.

“Yeah, I believe so,” she told him as she patted the spot where her father had been sitting wanted Danny to sit next to her. Once he was there Valerie found it hard to look him in the eye. “I've been really stupid, haven't I?”

“Yeah,” he told her point blank in a tone that almost sounded angry. “Why did it have to take something like this to make you see that?”

“I'm sorry,” was all she had to offer. “I see now that you have done nothing but love me-”

“Damn right.”

“-and that I have been nothing less than-”

“A dog,” Danny supplied.

Valerie glared at him. "I was going to say difficult," she explained.

Danny smiled goofy. "My bad, but you got to admit it fits too."

Valerie rolled her eyes. "Fine. I've been a dog."

"A royal dog," he continued.

"Danny, I'm trying to apologize here, don't push it," she told him.

The smile then slipped from Danny's features. "You're right," he agreed. "I'm just happy that you're okay." He placed his hand on her cheek as he shook his head from side to side. "I don't know what I would have done if I lost you."

"I don't care what you are, Danny, be it ghost or human." She slowly began to pull him closer. "I love you, dammit, and that's the only thing that matters."

Danny placed his hands on top of hers, which were still clinging to his shirt. He closed his eyes as he tilted his head down and whispered, "I was so afraid that I would never again hear those words leave your lips."

"I'm sorry," she said again.

"Me too," he told her as he felt Valerie kiss his forehead. He took a breath of relief as he gently put his arms around her, minding the I.V. attached to her. "No more secrets. No more lies," he promised as for the first time in months he took her lips with his own and kissed her in a way that surely made up for it.

Unknown to both Danny and Valerie as they reconciled, two angry green eyes shot daggers through them. Nathan had gone to get himself something to drink as he waited for Valerie to wake up only find Danny in her room when he returned. He crushed the paper cup he held as he let its contents spill all over his hand and onto the floor. He breathed heavily as he spoke, "I won't allow you to take what's mine, Fenton."

To Be Continued. . .

10 - Falling Mask

Chapter Ten: Falling Mask

It had been a few days since the car accident and now Valerie was recouping at home. She was resting in the living room, studying for her upcoming finals, but found she really couldn't keep her mind around International Business. She was deeply distracted, because as of now, she technically had two boyfriends and that wasn't going to work.

She had tried breaking things off with Nathan, but every time she got around to saying something about it, she chickened out. He was just such a nice person and the last thing Valerie wanted to do was hurt him. Especially when she realized, when he had come over the other day holding a baby name book, that she still hadn't told him the child she was carrying wasn't his. "Damn, I am in this deep," she thought out loud as she finally put her book down. She crossed her arms as she leaned back on the couch and stared at the cordless phone on the coffee table debating how she should go about with what needed to be done.

If she could, she would have driven over to his dorm, but the medication she was on for her head injury really didn't permit that. Valerie then finally picked up the phone to call Nathan over. "Hello?" he answered his phone.

"Hey, Nathan," she began. "I was wondering, do you think you could come over for a little while? I want to see you." she told him.

"Uh, now?" he asked.

"Yeah, now," she said as she thought, *before I lose my nerve again*. She then heard something strange in the background on Nathan's end. "Nathan, what are you up to?"

"I'm in the middle of a project. Give me half an hour, an hour at most, okay?" He then hung up without her giving him a reply.

"Okay," Valerie drawled as she looked at the phone curiously. "That was weird," she declared before deciding she would go back to studying.

Two hours later, Nathan finally arrived at her front door. "Sorry I'm late," he said immediately when he stepped inside. "I really am." He then gave her a quick kiss before she closed the door behind him. Nathan made himself at home as he went and took a sit in the living room. He picked up the remote and began channel surfing. "Come sit with me," he said patting the space next to him. "I got news you're going to love." Nathan then looked at Valerie strangely as she took a sit on the lazy-boy. "What?"

Valerie's nervous habit then kicked up as she began to tug at her clothes. "Um-well," she thought she would start with the good news. "Remember when you mentioned that you needed to complete an internship at a hospital before you graduate?"

"Yeah," he responded as he crossed his ankle over his knee and threw his arm over the edge of the couch. "What about it?"

"Well, I've talked to the owner of Amity Park General and if you want, you can do your internship there," she suggested. "You can get an interview with the department of your studies as soon as next week," she informed him.

Nathan smiled. "You did that for me?" He was generally surprised. "Thank you, I really appreciate it, but you didn't have to. I actually got news yesterday, that I got approved to have an interview with Texas Children's Hospital. It's been ranked as one of the best pediatric hospitals in the nation," he said excitedly.

"Wow, that's a great opportunity for you, Nathan." Valerie then made clear, "But if for some reason things don't go your way, know that the offer for AP General is always open." She then said softly, "No matter what may happen between us."

Nathan's eyes narrowed. "What's that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"It means-" she looked at him for a moment before lowering her head. "I'm sorry, Nathan-" he frowned at her words, "-you're a good person and I wish there was an easy way to say this-"

"Stop," he told her, causing her to once again look at him. "I know where this is going." He lowered his head before shaking it as a small chuckle escaped his smiling lips. "Can't really say I didn't see it coming." He looked back up. "I saw you with Danny in the hospital. You two are back together, aren't you?" he asked sadly.

"Yes, we are. I'm sorry," she said again. "You shouldn't have had to find out like that."

"It's alright." He stood back up. "I kind of had my suspicions, but when you didn't break up with me right away, I kind of hoped I had been mistaken. But I know you have to do what's best for you." Valerie smiled. She really didn't see him taking it this well, but was glad he understood, as he walked back over to the door. "I mean, just as long as we stay close enough for our child's sake, that's all that really matters, right?"

"Oh, god," Valerie whispered to herself before standing and going over to her now ex-boyfriend. "Nathan, there's something else you should know before- before you-"

"Before I what?" Nathan looked concerned. "Before what?" he asked again when she gave him no answer.

"Before you become too attached," she finally said. "Nathan," she shook her head, "this baby- I was pregnant before we met."

"What?" Nathan didn't want to believe his ears.

"I'm now only starting to show, but I'm a little over six months," she explained as she watched him clench his jaw and his face grow pale.

"Fenton's?" he asked, his eyes no longer able to look upon her. "The baby, is it Fenton's?"

"Yes," she replied softly.

Nathan shook his head as he licked his lips. Everything else he had planned, everything else he was ready for, but this? To lose the connect he thought he would always have? No, something had to be done. "I got to go," he said quickly, opening the door and stepping out. "I've got things to do," was all he offered as he started to walk away.

"Nathan, please." Valerie reached out and grabbed his arms, but he didn't turn around to look at her. "Don't leave like this, not this angry. Can't we still be-

"If you say *friends*, I swear to God I'll-" he stopped himself before saying something he knew he would regret. He turned his head and stared into her eyes, his voice was lost of the warmth Valerie had grown to know. . . and almost love. "Funny, how girls always want to be your friend after crushing you beneath their heel," he told her.

"Nathan," she whispered as concern filled her face.

"I have loved you since before I knew what love was," he began, his voice now gentle. "You may not see it now, *my sweet Valerie*," an eerie smile crept onto his lips, which caused Valerie to finally let go of his arm slowly, "but what we have isn't over." He then drew a little closer before whispering, "You'll always be mine." He then chuckled at the confused look on her face before making his way down the porch stairs. "Sweet dreams, love," was the last thing he said to her before getting into his truck and driving away.

OoOoO

It was late- well, it wasn't really late, it was only a little after ten, but to Valerie, it felt as if she had been up for days. It hadn't been the easiest day for her, putting aside her studies all together, she found her mind wondering back to Nathan and what he had said to her when they – when *she* decided to call it quits. His eyes had been different somehow, after finally telling him that the baby wasn't his. Valerie would never mention it out loud, but they had frightened her a little. So Valerie just chalked it up to him being upset and tried to put it out of her mind as she fastened up the buttons on her pajamas before climbing into bed for the night.

Valerie dreamt of Danny that night. He was laughing, smiling, and just plain happy as he played with three small children, which Valerie soon realized were theirs. They were in a small backyard with a swing set and one of those small inflatable pools on a bright summer day. Valerie sat in a lawn chair with a book in her hands as she pretended not look at her playing family. The three children, which made up a two boys and a girl had tackled their father to the ground. "Look ma!" the eldest yelled out while sitting on Danny's back. "I caught me a ghost!"

"Yeah, this one definitely takes after my sister," Danny said with a smile. "Val, some backup would be nice," he told her as he found himself at the bottom of a dog pile.

Valerie laughed. "Now, I can't do that. I don't want to ruin their confidence."

"Their confidence? What about mine?" he asked, which only caused more laughter. Then, without warning, their sunny day turned into night. "*VALERIE!*" she heard Danny yell out alongside the cries of their children as it grew darker.

"Danny?" Valerie rose from her seat. "Danny!" she shouted as she ran where they once had been, but there was nothing.

"It's alright, Valerie," she heard a soft voice. "You're having a bad dream, but I'm here now."

Valerie opened her eyes only to see someone sitting beside her in her bedroom. "Nathan?" she whispered unsurely. She then began angrily, "What the hell are—" but she never finished her question as she gasped in surprise when a cloth was placed over her mouth and nose.

"Shh, dream now," was all he said as the woman before him fell unconscious. Nathan looked at the clock and smiled, he had plenty of time. He stood up before throwing back the blanket and sheets on her bed. He then gathered the sleeping Valerie into his arms and carried her out her room and eventually out her home. It was the dead of night as he placed her into his truck and made sure she was security in place before driving off. A smile was on his face the entire time.

OoOoO

Valerie felt groggy and weak as her eyes finally opened. She looked around the room only to discover that she was no longer in her own bedroom, but in the bedroom of a cabin like place. There was a door on the far left side of the room and another next to the bed she was laying in where light was coming from. Valerie could tell from where she was it was a bathroom. Her face then cringed in pain as she tried to move and heard the rattling of chains. Her right ankle was throbbing, as she found she was bound to the bed with a long chain attached to the bed.

Her head then turned to look at the door on the far left of her as she heard it open and a man stepped through. He carried a small tray in his hands as he approached her and as he came into the light Valerie saw Nathan's face. She then instantly remembered, that he had been in her bedroom, and realized that he had brought her here. "Ah, it looks like I'm right on time," he said happily as he set the tray down on the nightstand and took a seat next to her. "Did you sleep well?" he asked her as he took her left arm. He then reached over to the nightstand and picked up a cotton ball soaked in alcohol before running it across Valerie's skin.

"What- what are you doing?" Valerie asked tiredly. She then watched under drooping eyelids as Nathan picked up a syringe and checked it. "What are you doing?" she asked again as Nathan found a vein and stuck the needle into her arm before slowly pushing down on the plunger.

When the syringe was empty and back on the tray he placed a band-aid where he had stuck her. He then kissed the place where he had placed the band-aid before looking to Valerie and saying, "Doctor's orders, you know." Nathan then sat back up and cocked his head to one side as he continued to look at her. He ran his fingers across her lips. "You are so beautiful," he told her softly.

"I want to go home," Valerie said as she tried to move his hand away. She was able to wrap her hand around his wrist, but didn't have enough energy to do anything else. "Please."

"You are home," he told her. "This place was my surprise to you when I thought you had chosen me over-" he didn't want to say his name. "A little cottage, out in the middle of nowhere. The nearest neighbor? Three point four seven miles away," he explained. "Welcome home."

"Nathan-"

"I thought buttons were a no-no?" he asked, completely ignoring her plea as he played with the buttons in question.

"Please, stop," she begged of him as he unfastened her top and she felt his cold fingers fondle her breast. Once again he ignored her and he lend forward and gently kissed her cheek. Valerie turned her head away.

"Don't act like you don't like it," he told her as he released her, but relief for Valerie was short lived as she then felt his hands tug on her pajama bottoms.

Valerie gasped silently as her own hands went to tug them in the opposite direction, but Nathan easily won the little game of tug-of-war and so he got up and pulled them down until he could pull them down no more because of the chain around her right ankle. He then retook his seat next to her as his hand found the inside of her thigh. "Look at me," he told her as he found she was wasn't looking at him again.

Valerie slowly turned her head towards the man she once called kind, the man she once called sweet, still not able to believe that he had drugged and kidnapped her. Had her judgment of people always been this far off, she couldn't help but wonder. Valerie tried to hold back her tears, not wanting to give Nathan the satisfaction of seeing her cry as his hand cupped over her sex, a thin layer of fabric separating him from his true intent.

"Let's play a game," he spoke, the smile on his face no longer presence. "Who's child are you carrying?" he asked her. Valerie was confused, she had already told him just yesterday the truth about her baby.

"Danny's," she whispered, before a lightening strike of pain shot though her leg causing her to scream loudly.

"*WRONG ANSWER!*" Nathan yelled as he squeezed a major artery located on the inside of her thigh. "Again, who's child are you carrying?" he asked, furious at the last answer she had given him as he slowly released her leg.

Valerie shook violently as she whispered again, "Danny's," before he took a firmer grip on her leg. Valerie yelled for him to stop as tears ran down her face, not only from the pain, but at the feeling of being so helpless. It was a foreign feeling she didn't want to become used to.

"Do you like making me angry, Valerie, huh!" he yelled, letting go of her leg and grabbing the syringe on the tray and pulling the plunger so now that it filled itself with air. Valerie froze as Nathan held her shoulder and placed the needle near of neck. "Do you know what a bubble air can do in the

bloodstream?" he asked.

"No," Valerie answered, her frightened green eyes not leaving the now unrecognizable man before her.

"And you won't have to know, if you answer my question correctly," he warned her. "Who's child are you carrying?" he asked for the third time.

There was a moment of silence before she began to answer. "Dan-" she stopped as she felt the needle touch her skin. "Yours," she finally answered. "The baby is yours."

"Good answer," the red head said, as he dropped the syringe back on the tray. "Very good answer," he told her as he kissed her lips tenderly as if a moment ago he hadn't threatened to kill her.

Valerie found herself not surprised, but still scared, as a moment later he pulled away from her and stood up before taking off his pants. "Nathan, please," she begged, not knowing why as he pretended not to hear her as he positioned himself between her legs. He didn't even bother to remove her panties as he simply pushed them to the side. "Why are you doing this?" she asked him.

Nathan's eyes then met hers. "To erase him," he gave her an answer that only made sense to him. Valerie grew angry, *helpless*, she decided wasn't a word she wanted to use to describe herself, and so she tried to fight, but it was useless as it only help to spread the drugs Nathan had given her run through her body, causing her to feel weaker and more tired than she did before. "Done now?" he asked her, but it was him this time that was ignored.

Valerie said nothing more as she turned her head away from him and closed her eyes. A moment later, she felt Nathan push himself into her and her body betray her as it arched forward to greet him. She then felt the steady rocking of the bed as she heard the headboard rhythmically hit the wall behind her. She cried, as he violated her, as she concluded it was the only thing she could do. "I love you, Valerie," she heard him say to her. "And I'll never let you go."

To Be Continued. . .

11 - Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven:

"Danny," the boy in reference heard his name being called in a sweet sing-song manner. "Danny, wake up," the voice of the woman called again. Danny opened his eyes and a smile immediately fell to his lips as he was met with a pair of green eyes. "Hey, you," Valerie said with a smile before she kissed his chest.

"Hey there yourself." Danny wrapped his arms around the woman laying on top of him, his fingers tangling in her long dark hair as he did so. Danny was a bit confused. Though he knew this woman was Valerie, she looked different. She looked older, maybe in her late thirties to earlier forties. "What are you so happy about?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Nothing," was her answer. "You up for some breakfast?" Danny nodded before she rose. She was already fully dressed and looked as if she had been up for hours. "Alright, get ready while I wake the kids."

"The kids?" he whispered, but it went unheard by her as she left their bedroom. Danny rose as he looked around the room. His surroundings felt familiar, but at the same time they didn't. His feet seemingly knowing the routine, carried him to the bathroom connected to the room. That's where Danny caught his reflection in mirror above the sink. He was older as well. His hair slightly gray around the edges. He reached up to touch his face and as he did so he noticed the wedding band around his ring finger. Danny didn't know what was going on, but so far, he didn't have any complaints.

He then quickly took a shower and once dressed headed downstairs to the dining room. There he was greeted by three children in their early teens. "Morning, dad."

Danny only smiled and nodded as he realized he didn't know their names. He took a sit at the head of the table when one of his two boys, sitting to the right of him, spoke. "Look, dad, I worked on it all night. I think I finally got it." Danny then watched as his son's black hair, done in cornrows, turned white and his eyes, which were already green, turned an electric blue.

What struck Danny as strange was that his cloths remained the same and when he entered his ghost form their weren't rings of blue light, but a swirl of blue smoke instead. His son's hand then stretched out on either side of them and an energy, not green, but blue like his eyes, shot out and formed a shield around table. "See, I've stabilized it." He looked to his father. "I can hold it for about three minutes now."

Danny looked at the shield. "Is this your max circumference?" he asked causally, but when he didn't receive a response he turned to his son to find him lowering his head. "No, it's good!" Danny said immediately as he realized the boy had been trying to impress him.

"Really?" the boy asked.

"Really," Danny reassured him. "I'm proud of you, son." He smiled at him.

"Shield down," suddenly said his daughter to the left of Danny. "Here comes mom." His son quickly obeyed and lowered his shield not a moment too soon as Valerie stepped into the room.

She looked curiously at her son with the wide eyes. "L.D., what are you doing?" she asked as she sat a plate down in front of her daughter and another in front of their other son, who had his nose in a book.

"Nothing," the boy named L.D. lied.

"Then why are you in your ghost form?" she asked putting her hands on her hips. "How many times do I have to tell you not inside the house?"

"Stupid," his sister whispered to him.

"Sorry," he said softly as he turned back into his human form.

"Ow!" Danny suddenly yelled, not expecting Valerie to hit him upside the head. "What did I do?" he asked.

"You probably encouraged him," she accused before turning around back towards the kitchen.

"Great," spoke Danny's other son from behind his book. "Now, we're all in trouble. Nice going L.D."

"Bite me, Damon," L.D. said to his brother, finishing the piece of bacon he stole from Damon's plate before he noticed.

"You're so immature, Little Dan," Danny's daughter spoke with a forkful of eggs. Danny only smiled as he watched his children bicker, it reminded him of him and Jazz before she. . .

"Sissy, stop!" Danny was broken from his thoughts by L.D.'s protest. He looked to L.D. as one of his braids was being undone roughly. "Not the hair. Not the hair!"

Danny frowned wondering what was happening. If Sissy had gone invisible it would have made sense, but she just sat, in her human form, quietly in her seat as she finished her eggs.

"Sissy?" Danny called, he then gasped silently as his daughter's head turned towards him, but she didn't look at him. Her eyes were all white and it was then that Danny realized his beautiful little girl was blind. "Uh- stop messing with your brother," he said trying to sound unfazed by the discovery.

"Yes, sir," was all she said before taking a deep breath and everything went back to normal, or as normal as things could be in their home. It was then Danny felt stupid as he realized what she had done. While in her human form, she projected her ghost self. Danny had only done it on a few occasions. It was something he found he could only do under extreme stress. He smiled, despite her age, Sissy was very powerful.

It was then that Danny started to wonder about Damon and if he had inherited any of his ghost powers. He didn't seem to please when his siblings had expressed their powers. Danny wondered how he could ask without sounding too suspicious, but before he could, he heard the shattering of glass. "shoot!" Danny rose for his seat when he heard Valerie curse.

He made his way to the kitchen to see what was wrong. "Val," he called as he turned the corner and entered into the kitchen. "What's wrong?" he asked, though he could see the problem. She had dropped the plates she had been preparing to carry to the dining room.

"I ran into the counter. I cut myself," she explained as Danny walked over the spilled food towards his wife.

"Let me see," he reached out for her hand and examine her hand. "Oh, you big baby," he teased. "I've seen you survive worst," he told her as he guided her to the sink to wash the blood from her wound.

"Danny?" Valerie whispered as he went about his task.

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry," she said sadly.

Danny looked to her and frowned. "Sorry? About what?"

She said nothing at first, as she lowered her head. "We could have been so happy." Danny's frown deepen as he realized that his hold on her was fading, no, that she was fading. "Val?" Worry instantly arose as he tried to hold on. "Val?" And then before he had another chance to blink, she gone. But Danny wasn't given a chance to figure out what had just happened as he heard his children screaming for him.

He then ran out the kitchen towards the dining room. He paused in the doorway. "Where's Damon?" he yelled when he wasn't in sight.

"I don't know," Sissy shook her head, fear in her voice. "L.D. said he- he just disappeared!" She grabbed on protectively to her remaining brother who had left the table and was now standing on the other side of the room.

"How can he do that, dad?" L.D. asked. "He couldn't have gone ghost, our ghost sense would have gone off. Plus," he shook head, "he's never had ghost powers."

"It'll be okay," Danny began walking over to his children. "We'll figure this out."

Then without warning, L.D. slumped into his sister. "I don't feel so well," he stated as he began to faded away.

"L.D.?" Sissy cried, as she tried to hold her brother, but couldn't as they slowly slid to the floor. That's when a strange feeling started to take over her too. She then looked in Danny's direction. "Daddy. . . I'm scared," she told him. "Daddy, are you there?" Danny was completely frozen in fear for a moment

as he watched the same thing that happened to Valerie happen to his children. "Daddy!" Sissy yelled snapping him out of his daze.

Danny didn't know what he was doing. He knew he couldn't stop it, but the instinct to save them somehow took over and so he ran towards them anyway. Everything was going in slow motion as he jumping on and over the table as L.D. disappeared and Sissy realized she was alone. "Daddy!" she screamed again.

At that moment, something snapped into Danny's head and he called out his daughter's name. "Ceacily!" And as he reached her, the last thing he saw were the tears running down her face before she dissolved away and everything went black. "Ceacily!" Danny then fell out of his bed and crashed onto the floor. He bolted up to his feet quickly as he looked around, breathing heavily as his eyes searched his room within his parent's home frantically.

When he realized it was just a dream he crashed back to the floor and took slow deep breaths to calm his racing heart. "Valerie? Cooking?" He slightly shook his head, "Yeah, should have known that was a dream," he said to himself as he closed his eyes. Had it only been just a dream? He wondered. It had seen more real than anything he had ever experienced before, but yet still one of the strangest.

Danny then finally picked himself off the floor, Valerie still on his mind as he prepared for work. It was the week before finals and he hadn't seen her in two days, but truth be told that wasn't strange. Last year he hadn't seen her for a week and that's when they lived in the same apartment. He figured she was spending her free time at the library and so he decided he would call her when he got off that afternoon.

OoOoO

Valerie sat silently on a plush chair within the room she was being held in as she watched Nathan change the sheets on her bed. She sat in nothing more than her pajama top as Nathan had released her from her chains only long enough to removed undesired items. "Hmm," he mused to himself as he shook the pillow out it's case. "Seems your dosage will have to be lowered again," he told her.

"Just another so I can go to the bathroom on my own, but not enough to fight you off, right?" Valerie asked acidly.

"Well, of course, my sweet." He dumped the sheets on the floor. "Can't have you having another energy to try to escape, can I?" He then walked into the bathroom. Valerie then heard the running of bath water for a few minutes before Nathan approached her. He bent over her as he removed the only clothing she had left. "Lean forward for me," he instructed and Valerie slowly obeyed as she had learned, evident by the bruises on her body, that disobedience would not be tolerated by him.

Nathan smirked at the shudder that Valerie's body emitted as his hand slid down her arms as he removing her top. Once it was well discarded, he rolled up his sleeves and picked her up before walking into the bathroom, careful not to trip over the chain that was still securely around her ankle. He then lowered her into the warm water of the bath he had made for her. "I believe I got it just the way you like it this time, yes?"

"Yes," she responded with a little nod, keeping her head, along with her gaze, downward. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he replied as reached for her wash towel. He then dipped it into the water and lathered it up with a bar of soap that had been resting at the edge of the tub and gently began to wash her. "You're behaving well this morning," he commented. He had never seen her so docile.

"I was just hoping," she finally meet his eyes, "if I were really good. . . if you'd let me go home."

Nathan frowned. "We've discussed this. You are home. This is your home. With me," he made clear.

"I'm worried about my father," Valerie confessed.

Nathan's smiled returned to his features. "Well, I could make it so, that he never worries about you again."

Valerie's eyes wideen, quickly recognizing the threat behind his simple words. "No," she whispered shaking her head. "I won't bring it up again. I promise, I'll be good."

"Don't fear," Nathan began as his wet hand stroked her face. "I'm not that cruel." He shrugged. "Not today anyway." His fingers ran patterns on her brown skin. "So tell me, what would you do to see your father again?" At the question, Valerie took a deep breath before leaning towards her captor. Nathan found his eyes on her lips as she pursed them together and licked them. She hovered for only a moment before closing the gap between them. Nathan slowly closed his eyes as he felt her tongue beg for entrance before it was greeted by his own. When they broke the kiss, his expression, much to Valerie's surprise, was darker. "Good answer."

OoOoO

It was nearing six o'clock as Danny prepared to get off work. He had just serviced his last car for the night and was heading towards the employee room to grab his things to head home. As he said good night to some of his co-workers he heard the bell above the door of someone entering the shop. He was in the middle of turning towards the customer to tell them they were closing up when he heard. "That's him officer."

Danny was caught off guard as he was slammed hard over the counter and his arms were forced behind his back. "Daniel Fenton – You are under arrest for the violation of your restraining order against Valerie Gray," he heard one of the officers. "You have the right to remain silent. . ." he began Danny's Miranda Rights.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Danny asked angrily. "Valerie is my girlfriend! She dropped that restraining order!" he barked.

"No, she didn't," Danny recognized the voice of Damon Gray. "She disappeared before she had a chance to."

Danny looked at him in a shocked awe. "What?"

"Where's my daughter, Danny?" Damon asked gently at first. "Where's my daughter!" he demanded to know.

Danny looked Damon straight in the eye and told him the truth. "I don't know."

"You damn bastard!" Damon marched towards him ready to beat the information out of him. "I know you know!"

The other officer held on to Damon. "Mr. Gray, please, let us handle this."

Danny's brow was creased in heavy thought as he tried to think of where she could be, but then his dream came back to him and the image of her fading away. He now feared it's meaning as a sense of lost started to invaded him. Danny's eyes then flashed a vivid green as he swore he would find her, no matter what the cost.

To Be Continued. . .

12 - Cinderella

Chapter Twelve: Cinderella

Valerie woke up in the middle of night as she found herself securely within Nathan's hold. She faced him as he slept and as her eyes adjusted to the darkness she could see that it was peacefully. Valerie pondered his expression. He seemed so carefree and so innocent. How could a man with such a sweet and caring face, do the things he had done to her? How could he say such threatening words, and then claim to love her the next minute? How did she allow someone like this into her life?

Valerie found she couldn't stop her quivering mouth and the tears brimming in her eyes as she said to herself again that she wanted out. She wanted out of this room, out of this bed, and out for his arms. She started to pull away, almost desperately, putting a hand on his shoulder and trying to lift his arm from around her waist, but she did so in vain, as she only discovered that Nathan was a light sleeper. Then, in what seem to be one swift and continuous motion he stopped her hands and pulled her tighter against his naked flesh. "What are you doing?" he asked her, not bothering to open his eyes to look at her.

"Only- only going to the bathroom," she told him. It was the only place she could go where she wouldn't have to look at him, if only for a little while.

"Don't take long," was all he said before he released her and shifted in the bed so now that his back was to her. Valerie, as quickly as she could, rose from the bed, the sound of her chains disturbing the once quiet air. She closed the door as much as she could before sitting on edge of the tub, it was still fill with water as Nathan had forgot to let it out after their last bath.

She held her hands in front of herself and concentrated as hard as she could. A small smile came to her face as she watched the black and red fabric of her Ghosthunter 2.0 suit slowly materialized around her fingers, her hands, and then her forearms. But as it began to go pass her elbows, it suddenly seems stuck. It tried to stretch onward and Valerie looked pleading of it, but her pleads would go unanswered as the material dissolved away.

"Dammit!" Valerie cried in a loud whispered. She then gasped as she turned towards the door hoping Nathan hadn't heard her. She waited for a very tense moment, before she sighed in relief and relaxed her shoulders when she realized he hadn't. "Dammit," she said again. She just didn't understand. Valerie had tried summoning her suit before, but with less than staler results. She knew it was because of all the drugs Nathan was pumping into her body. And although Nathan had lowered the dosage several times, something in her brain still wasn't connecting correctly.

Valerie then rested her hand on her slowly protruding stomach. Valerie wore her ghost detecting watch all the time and so had it on the night she was kidnapped. It know rested on the nightstand next to the bed, it was the only thing Nathan had allowed her to keep, other than her pajama top. What worried Valerie was that it hadn't gone off in days and she didn't know what to think of it. Either her baby just wasn't going go or it was. . . Valerie shook her head from that train of thought. Nathan wanted this child,

that she knew for certain. She didn't know what kind of drugs he was giving her, but she knew. . . *she hoped*, they weren't effecting her baby.

All of a sudden, Valerie was overcome with a huge amount of guilt. "Oh, God," she whispered as she rested her face in her hands. She wondered if there was truly a point in her pregnancy where she didn't want this child? How could she have thought like that? Of course she was mad at Danny, about his lies and what he was, but she had no right to try to take that anger out on his child. . . her child.

She then started to wonder about Danny, about if he was looking for her and if he would find her, because Valerie could slowly feel herself going insane just a little bit more every time Nathan forced himself upon her. She had thought, if she had pretended to be willing, if she just closed her eyes and thought of Danny, that it wouldn't be as bad. But he wasn't Danny, no matter how much she wished he was. Valerie didn't know how much more of this she could handle and at points she just wanted to die.

"Didn't I tell you not to take long?" Valerie's head snapped up from her hands to find Nathan standing in the doorway of the bathroom and he didn't look pleased.

Valerie violently shook her head. "Nathan, I—" she had begun, but he gave her no chance for excuses as the back of his hand streaked across her face with such a brutal force that she lost of placing and fell back into the water filled tub. Her mouth was open when she fell in so when she rose above the surface she spit out the water she she had than in. "Nathan, no!" she screamed to him as his hand went around neck and he dunked her head back beneath the water.

She grabbed onto his wrist as she struggled to loosen his grip, which tighten with each word that he spoke. "I don't like being yelled at, Valerie," he told her angrily. "And when I tell you to do something, I expect you to obey. Do you understand?" Valerie shook her head. She would have agreed to anything at the fear of drowning as she didn't know how long she could hold her breath. Nathan then loosened his grip, but still held her beneath the water. "You belong to be and don't you soon dare forget that," he made clear. He then watched as Valerie's eyes pleaded for him to let her up, he did so, but only when he saw her mouth open and try to take a breath of air that she couldn't take. Valerie then bolted straight up out of the water, having a coughing fit as fresh air filled her lungs once again.

Nathan then stood up and grabbed a large bath towel off the railing. He sat back down on the edge of the tub before reaching out to Valerie and help her to sweep her now wet and matted hair out of her face. "There we go," he said gently as he tucked it behind her ear. He then took one corner of the bath towel that he had rested in his lap and took his time as he dried her face. He gave a heavy sigh. "Sometimes I don't think you appreciate me," he began. "Or the things I've done for you." He then placed his hand beneath her chin and lifted her gaze to his. "Do you know what I've done for you?" he asked.

Valerie shook her head. "No."

He smiled as he released her face. "As I remember, you were never too fond of that Manson girl, were you?" Valerie said nothing. He frowned. "I never liked her either or the way she treated you when it came to Fenton," he told her. "It was quite tricky really. Pulling something like that off, in the middle of the day, in a parking lot full of people." Valerie only looked at him, confused at his words. "Truth is, I don't know anything about cars. I wouldn't even have known what to cut, if it hadn't been that movie we

went to on our first date. Of course, everything didn't go as I had hoped, I heard she only broke a leg, but-" he smiled happily as leaned in and kissed Valerie's dry forehead before whispering, "-I must say, when I learned that Fenton was the main suspect, it was good runner-up prize." Valerie's eyes grew wide as she finally pieced together what he was talking about.

"You didn't," she said in disbelief as Nathan pulled away.

He then rose for his seat again, leaving the towel within her reach. "Hurry up and finish drying off. Then come back to bed," he told her before leaving the bathroom. As soon as Nathan left her sight, the tears Valerie was once able to hold at bay broke free and ran down her cheeks as she wished he had drowned her.

OoOoO

"What?" Sam stopped what she was doing, which was rinsing off the dishes she and Tucker had used to make breakfast.

Tucker's head was down, staring at his submerged hands within the dishwater. He had waited so long to ask that question, but never had the nerve, for fear of the question. They had been arguing since her accident and about Danny attending their wedding. He wanted to ask it every time they did, but just couldn't. Eventually he just gave in to what Sam wanted. But then today, completely out of nowhere, it slipped from his lips, but that didn't make it any easier to repeat. "Do you still love Danny?"

"What?" Sam said once again, still not believing she had just heard it, but as she looked at Tucker and the blank, detached look on his face, she knew she had and so she placed her word carefully. "Of course I do," Tucker eyes closed, "but as a friend and you know that, Tucker." Sam turned off the running water and dried her hands. She then paused for a moment as if something finally dawned on her. She turned to him. "Is this what this whole thing has been about?" she asked him. "Is that the real reason you didn't want Danny at our wedding, because you thought I was still in love with him?" Tucker hadn't move. "Tucker!" she said loudly to get his attention.

Tucker finally just weakly shrugged. "I don't know. I don't know what I thought." He turned around, still not looking at Sam as he walked to the kitchen table, water from his hands dripping onto the floor. Sam took her crutches in her hands and made her way over to him as he continued. "Honestly, I didn't want Danny at your wedding even before the accident."

Sam looked at him oddly. "Why?" she queried as she set her crutches by her feet.

"I keep having this dream," he began softly. "It's our wedding day and we're at the alter. All and all friends and family are there and everyone is so happy." He then finally looked up at her. "You're in the middle of saying your vows and then you just kind of trail off and look around the church. You don't even look at me as you tell you you can't go through with it. That our relationship was never supposed to go this far and I was only meant to be your rebound after Danny. You then confess that you still love him," he told her. "I just need to know if you do, to tell me now, because it's one thing to dream about it," he began shaking his side to side and he slowly lowered it, "but if I have to live it, Sam, I swear. . ." his voiced faded.

"Tucker," Sam reached out and touched his leg. "You are such an idiot," she told him laughing, curious

Tucker met the joy-filled eyes. "Are you telling me, some silly dream has gotten to you?" She leaned in. "I love you, Tucker Foley. I would never do anything that cruel."

"You did to Danny," Tucker said seriously.

Sam looked as if she had been slapped as she straightened up. Her brow then creased. "Yeah, after he put Valerie before me, mind you." Tucker sighed as he realized he messed up. He was about to apologize, but before he could the phone rang. Sam grabbed her crutches and stood up. "I'll go finish the dishes," she announced before walking away from him.

Tucker got up as he walked to pick up the phone that hung on the wall. "Hi?"

"Tuck? It's me, Danny," he said.

"Hey man, whassup?" he asked as he leaned against the wall and watched Sam as she washed the remaining few dishes.

"Nothing much," he stated casually. "I was just wondering if you could come bail me out of jail?"

Tucker cocked an eyebrow. "What the hell did you do now, Danny?" he asked.

"I didn't do anything," he said a little bitterly, not liking Tucker's tone. "Valerie never dropped the restraining order because I just learned that she's missing and her father is blaming me of course."

"Alright, I understand." Tucker pushed himself off the wall and sat back down. "Why don't you just go intangible and slip through without anyone noticing?" Tucker asked.

"I thought about that too, but I don't know how long it will take to find Valerie, and if they find me missing before I can locate her, I can be in more trouble than I'm already in," he explained. "Tucker, please, I need you to have my back on this," he begged.

Tucker didn't even need a split of a second to make his choice. "Give me half an hour and I'll come and get you, okay?"

"Thanks, man."

"No problem," he whispered before hanging up the phone. He then looked up to see Sam looking at him. "Danny," he indicated, holding up the phone. "Valerie is missing and he needs us to bail him out of jail," he laid out the story for her.

Sam nodded her head. "I'll go get dressed," she told him before leaving the kitchen.

An hour later, Danny was bailed out of jail and riding in the back seat of Sam's car as Tucker drove. Things had been oddly quiet between the two of them. "Is everything okay guys?" he asked.

"Everything is good," Sam's eyes didn't leave from looking out the window. "Right, Tucker?"

"Yeah," Tucker said softly. "Peachy even."

Danny shook his head, knowing it was anything but "Peachy", but he didn't have time to get to the story behind their dispute, there were other pressing matters at hand. "Val has to be found," he got to the matter at hand.

"Yes, we know," Sam said to him. "So where should we began?" she asked.

Danny frowned. "I don't know. I mean, up until last night, I thought she was either home, but answering her phone or studying at the library for finals."

"While then, we should start asking around," Sam suggested. "Her neighbors, her friends-"

"She didn't have a lot of friends," Danny admitted sadly. "It was pretty much just us."

Sam's forehead furrowed. "No," she drawled. "I've- well kind of met one of her friend's before. A redheaded boy. It was the day of my accident actually. Never caught his name."

"Yeah." Danny balled his hand up into a fist. "I know of the redhead," he said trying to keep his voice even as he remembered the night he had seen Valerie kiss the guy in question. "But I don't know his name either. So we can scratch that."

"Alright then, plan "A" we ask her neighbors," Sam confirmed.

"Actually," Tucker spoke. "I may have a better idea."

"Well spit it out, Tuck," Danny demanded of him.

"Tell me, Valerie's watch, she wears it all the time, right?" Tucker asked.

Both Sam and Danny looked at him curiously. "Yeah, what of it?" Danny asked.

Tucker put on his signal light and looked over his shoulder before changing lanes. "I have an idea. It's a long shot, but I think it may work."

"Well, what it?" Sam asked, growing impatient.

"Valerie's watch is very high tech. It's a prototype of one of Vlad Co. on going projects. There's a device within the watch, that may help us find her, but it is still in his beginning stages, so it may not be fully functioning and even if it is, it will only allow us to know what grid she is in and not the exact location."

"But you can track her, right?" That was the only thing that was important to Danny.

"Yes," Tucker answered. Danny smiled at him and placed his hand on his shoulder.

Sam only looked a little concern. "How do you know so much about her watch?"

Tucker took a quick look at Sam and then Danny before eyes went back to the road. "Because I designed it."

It took Danny a moment to realize the depths of his words and when he did, his eyes grew a bit wide and he released the boy. "You- you work for Vlad?"

"Yes," Tucker admitted. "He's a silent partner for the company I work for. So in case you're wondering: No, I didn't take the position, knowing I would be under that Vlad name."

"But you kept the job, even after you found out?" Sam asked.

"Of course I did," Tucker looked at Sam angrily for a moment. "It's my dream job. I busted my @\$@ to get where I am. And in five years, after I've busted my @\$@ some more, I'll have Glenn's job and then be able to move up."

"I understand that, but you should have considered Danny and how-" she was cut off.

"Danny?" Tucker yelled, looking at her in disbelief. "Yes, he's my best friend, but not every decision I make involves him. I mean, for crying out loud, it's not like I betrayed him, it's not like I'm Vlad's second hand man and we're planning something diabolical or something," he explained. Danny only sat back as he tried not to interfere with the couples relationship.

"But it's still Vlad's company," she counter. "He's Danny's enemy, which makes him ours." Tucker rolled his eyes. "Couldn't you just work at another company, not owned by him."

"Come on, Sam, where have you been for the last several years?" he asked. "Vlad is steadily buying up everything he can within Amity Park. So you want me to go to another company, not knowing if he already owns it or not until I start working there? Then what if he does, quit and go to another one?" He shook his head. "My reputation would be shot, because I am more than capable of doing the job, employers would see me as a flake and unreliable."

"That wouldn't matter, Tucker," Sam began. "If that did happen, know that I was serious before, you wouldn't have to work. It's not like we need the money," she said softly as she leaned over and rest her hand on his thigh. "We can spend the days traveling the world, lounging on exotic beaches, sipping on Piña Coladas, and raising money for all kinds of charities."

"No, I want more than that, Sam. I *want* my career," he told her. "I want to at least *pretend* that I'm able to take care of you, pretend that you need me, pretend that I'm more than just. . ." he shook his head.

"Tucker," she whispered as she realized how deep Tucker's insecurities actually ran.

"I don't want to talk about it anymore," he stated as he removed her hand from his thigh and continued to drive.

OoOoO

After going through several securities points, which involved a metal detector, a retina scan, and

fingerprint recognition they arrived in a long hall with many doors. As they walked down the long corridor, slowly to Sam's condition, Sam looked around curiously. "What exactly do you do here again, Tucker?" she asked. Danny also looked at Tucker, looking for an answer as well.

But the question went unanswered as they arrived at their desired destination. Tucker pulled out a keycard and swiped in where a door knob would be on any regular door. He typed in a nine digit password before the door beeped, hissed, and then slowly came open. The three friends then entered the room. Sam and Danny were amazed as they looked upon the largest computer they had ever seen. "Good morning, Sofia," Tucker spoke clearly.

"Voice recognition accepted," spoke a computer in a very robotic manner. "Good morning, Mr. Foley. How are you today?" the voice spoke again, but this time it sounded like a woman, but not just any woman, but Sam.

"I'm doing well," he responded as he took a seat in front of a large monitor. Several hidden departments opened and out came what could only be described as a keyboard, but far beyond what you would find in your local computer store. Tucker switched several dials and lights came on and all around the large computer. Danny and Sam could only watch as Tucker did what he was best at.

The monitor then came on showing a very realistic picture of the earth. "Alright, Sofia, we're going to be doing a scan for Prototype V four dash two." Tucker then began typing, his fingers moving with great grace across the board. The picture of the earth then began to zoom in as it eliminated where Valerie wasn't located. Tucker then leaned back in his chair as he twirled a dread lock around his finger that had come loose. The monitor then focused on their state before it was divided into many grids. One then began to blink. "Bingo!" he said in triumphantly as he bolted up.

Tucker then pressed a few more keys and another hidden door came open. Tucker pulled out what looked to be a PDA and connected it to the computer to download the file. When it was finished he stood up and handed it to Danny. "The blinking area is grid seventeen. That's as far as I can narrow down it. Hopefully it'll be another."

Danny looked down at the device before looking back to Tucker. "I know it will be," he reassured him before taking a step back, going invisible and then intangible before flying through the walls towards grid seventeen.

It only took Danny an hour to get where he needed to be, but he had gone at top speed and somewhat regretted as he touched down and became tangible again. He had never flown at that speed for so long before and so sat down on the forest floor as he studied the map on the PDA to check his own location, but it had done all it could do and now Danny was on his own.

"I should have thought this through," he thought out loud as he stood back up and began to pace. Grid seventeen was a large area, alone it would take him days to locate her. He thought of coping himself and each going in different directions, but he knew from experience that once they reached a certain distance from the original they could not sustain themselves and became useless.

Danny then ran his fingers through his white hair as stress filled his features and for some odd reason he thought of Tucker, twirling his finger around his dread lock. He always thought he seemed so girly

doing that and then remembered thinking the same thing during his dream when he saw his son fuss about his hair. "That's it," Danny cried as he sat back down, going into his human form. He took a deep breath and hoped with everything he had that this would work. He had to concentrate hard as he tried to release his ghost self, but focusing seemed to be the last thing on his mind.

He didn't know where Valerie was. He didn't know if she was in trouble or if she was okay. He wondered if she had finally given into temptation and donned her ghost gear and gotten into something way over her head. He needed to find her and now. Danny screamed in frustration, which incidentally accomplished what he was trying to do in the first place as his ghost self escaped from his mouth. Danny couldn't see it, but he could feel it and so closed his eyes. With his eyes closed he was able to what his ghost self saw. He then proceeded to allow his ghost self to copy itself, diving his vision behind his closed eyes lids. It was little sicking at first, but had no time to get used to it as he sent his twelve ghost self copies in different directions. He would have produced more, but was not sure if he could watch over more than twelve, for this was still very new to him. So Danny tried to relax as he held his stomach and tried not to toss his cookies.

It was more than an hour into the search, with the ghost clones checking out anything that looked suspicious around the mountain and forest like section of grid seventeen. One clone was zipping by his dedicated area so quickly that he nearly missed a small looking cabin hidden behind many thick trees, he wouldn't have thought anything of it, as he went closer, but the bars on all the windows looked so out of place in such a secluded region of the state.

The clone simply thought the owner to be paranoid and so turned around to leave, when he heard a scream from within the cabin. Then the clone heard Danny within his mind, telling him to check the place out. The clone nodded and obeyed as he turned around and phased himself without hesitation into the cabin. Mean while, Danny left the other clones to their own devices as the eleven separate visions faded into black and he focused on one's line of sight for the moment.

The clone made his way carefully through the cabin towards where he believed the scream had come from before going through the wall close to the door and found exactly the person he had been looking for. But Danny, who had been at the edge of nausea, no longer had that problem, for his stomach had dropped so low he could feel it his groan. He had been so worried about her, thinking she was in some kind of trouble, only to discover her in bed with another man, the same redheaded guy he had seen those months ago. And as he watch the other man pull her closer to him, Danny knew he had been a fool to think she had actually forgiven him and had accepted who he was. The clone then turned his head away and was about to head back to Danny when he heard Valerie's voice. "Please. . . why won't you just let me go home?" Danny and his clone clearly heard fear within her words.

The clone turned around as he actually looked around the room, to shocked by the initial sight in front of him to take notice of it. He then saw the long chain connected to the bed and how parts of it disappeared under the sheets the two laid beneath. He then noticed the night stand that held Valerie's watch and a tray with a bottle of alcohol, cotton balls, and a full needle on it.

The clone then watched as the redhead sat up and leaned over Valerie to check the watch. "Time for your medication, my sweet," he announced softly. The clone frowned as the other man sat up and pulled out Valerie's arm, which was lined with many track marks.

"Please, I'll be good today, I promise," she begged as he prepped her arm before picking up the needle and placing it to her arm. The clone grew angry as he watched the redhead try to drug Valerie. He went over prepared to yank him off of her, but his hands went right through him and the clone looked at himself, confused.

"shoot!" Danny yelled miles away as he opened his eyes, because though his clones had no distant limit, being divided greatly lowered their power, something he didn't learn until a moment ago. He stood up, but couldn't go ghost when his ghost self had left his body. Danny closed his eyes and called all his ghost clones back to him. Wherever they were they puffed into nothing, instantly returning them to day. Now whole, Danny went ghost, and flew across the forest like a streak of light. "Valerie!" he yelled when he arrived at the cabin. He entered the room quickly near the same place his clone had enter and froze in the exact same spot when his feet touch the ground.

His feet would not allow him to move as he discovered Valerie was now appeared to be alone with the room. The sheets that once covered her body now seemed to be on the floor on the under side of the bed away from Danny's view. Danny took in the sight of Valerie as her body lay naked and beaten on the bed. She looked so fragile and broken as he realized she wasn't moving, "Valerie?" his throat finally allowed him to whispered, but there was no response from her. "Valerie?" he called louder from where he stood, now almost afraid to approach her as his the anger started to build within his body.

This anger, it was intense as Danny shook in it, his hand coming up to his chest as he grabbed tightly onto the material of his uniform and pressed his fist against his ribcage. He had felt this type of anger before and could not let it control him, because Danny knew if he did, he was liable to kill the one who did this to her. And though the redheaded man who did this deserved death, Danny would not allow more blood to stain his hands.

Danny had only been focused to kill once and it was with great remorse. Jazz had surprising fallen in love with Dash Baxter and more to everyone's surprise they were happy, to the point that it made you sick to watch them. But Dash was not as clueless as some had come to believe. He noticed the quite, but vivid conversations Danny and Jazz had when they thought he wasn't paying attention and how they seem to talk in code when they were in ear range of him. One night Jazz was worried more the usually about Danny as she said to herself, "I can't believe he's moving in with her. Doesn't he know that girl is going to be the death of him?"

She was startled as Dash came up behind her and asked why she thought that, but she gave him no answer. Dash, tired of being left in the dark, followed Danny one night and finally discovered why Jazz was always so worried about him as he watched him turn into Danny Phantom. But Dash would never have a chance share his discoveries with anyone as he was attacked by a parasite type ghost with attached itself completely to Dash, controlling everything that he did. It was almost like Dash never existed and for all intent and purposes he was already gone.

Trying to explain that to Jazz was difficult as she didn't believe and that Dash was still her Dash. Danny always hated how Jazz was always right, but it was first time in his life that he wish she wasn't wrong. His wish did not come true as the parasite held Dash became desperate at some point and took Jazz hostage. The moment Danny heard her scream in pain, nothing existed outside of it. When he came out of his daze, all he continued to hear was screaming, he then realized he was covered in blood that was not his own. He looked down at a unrecognizable body before him and his sister cowering in the corner

as she continued to scream. When he tried to approach her she only screamed harder, before running away from him. When it was all over, Jazz had packed her things and moved out of Amity Park. She had spoken to him since.

“Valerie,” called again, his feet finally allowing him to towards her. He reached out slowly her, his finger were but a brush away when Valerie's eyes immediately flew open at what could hardly be qualified as a touch, and started yelling for him not to touch her anymore. Danny grabbed on to her firmly as he told her it was okay, that it was him, that he had found.

“Da- Da- Danny?” she hyperventilated. “Danny?”

“Yes, it's me,” he confirmed before Valerie broke down into tears and clung on to him.

“He hurt me. He hurt me,” was all Valerie could say through her sobs, causing Danny to tighten his hold around her.

It didn't matter what he thought before, he would kill this man, and he would take great pleasure in doing so. “Where is he?” Danny asked in voice Valerie never heard him use before.

“I just want to go home,” she begged.

“Where is he?” he asked again as he rose from the bed despite Valerie's protest. She gave him no answer and so he went find it himself, but not before touching the chain around her ankle and melting the insides until it popped up and she was free.

Danny than made his way out he room and down the all carefully going deeper into the house. He blinked in surprised as he straightened up and found the redhead man laying on his back and naked on the floor within the living room area. Danny went closer to investigate as he knelt down he discovered an empty syringe sticking out of his neck and his eyes rolled in back of his head. “I learned what an air bubble does in the blood stream,” Danny's head snapped around and he saw Valerie, covered in a sheet from the bed, leaning on the wall.

Danny stood up as Valerie made her way, her legs a bit wobbly as she walked. She then knelt down beside the one she as Nathan and gently touched his face. Danny frowned at the gesture, wondering what she was thinking as her other hand snake out from underneath the sheet. Danny's eyes then widen and his head jolted back as he watched Valerie break his neck before spitting in his face. “Damn bastard,” she spoke through gritted thee. “If you even think about coming back as a ghost I'll make your afterlife a living hell.”

Danny then reached down to touch Valerie's shoulders and frowned once again as she flinched away from him. “Come on, Valerie,” he whispered, his hand extended to her. “Let's go home.” Valerie looked at his hand and then up into his green eyes before nodding her head and accepting her offer. She wrapped her arms around his neck as he picked her up and he left the ground, his legs turning into his tail as they did so. They went intangible and went straight up until they were over the top of the trees.

Valerie held on tight to Danny, not out of fear of flying, because she had none, and not out of fear being dropped, because she knew he never would, but out of fear that this was a dream and that she would

wake up and that she would be back in that cabin alone with Nathan. And so she prayed that it wasn't as she closed her eyes and rested her head against Danny.

Danny looked at Valerie as he held her in his arms and listened to the steady rhythm of her breathing. When he walked into that room, he honestly believed that he had been to late and feared that he would never again be able to do something as simple as watching her sleep. For in doing so, he knew he would never let any harm come to her again and if someone did happen to get pass him, Danny knew -good guy or not- he would take that person down without mercy. And he was as sure of that as she breathed.

"I love you, Valerie," he spoke sweetly.

"I love you, Danny," he heard her softly respond, her eyes still closed.

"Through anything?" he asked with a smile.

Valerie could feel his smile and so gave him one of her own even before she opened her eyes.

"Through it all," she whispered, knowing it was a promise she would never again break.

THE END