

“Are you ready to go?” I asked Sara, pulling a blue hoodie over my head.

“Sure,” she returned jubilantly. “We’re going ice skating.

“We’re doing what?” I shot back.

“Evan can’t be the only one to do new things with you,” Sara argued. I didn’t have the energy to come up with a better reason not to go, so I groaned in acceptance.

“Going out?” my mother questioned when I opened the hall closet to take my jacket off the hanger. She was only half paying attention as she texted away on her phone from her slouched position on the couch.

“Yeah,” I replied. “Sara needs a reason to laugh.”

“We’re going ice skating,” Sara explained, shaking her head at me.

“I’m sure you’ll be great,” my mother laughed, tucking the phone in the front pocket of her jeans. “How was the concert?”

“Amazing,” I responded, instantly smiling at the mention of it. “How was your date?”

“Oh, yeah,” Sara added enthusiastically, walking into the living room and settling herself down on the love seat to get a front row seat of the details. “Tell us everything.”

“Sara, he’s so incredible, I could die,” my mother responded, instantly transformed into a giddy sixteen year-old. “He took me to this sushi restaurant and then we went dancing.”

“Nice,” Sara offered with genuine excitement. I listened, leaning against the entryway, with a small smile on my face, watching as she lit up just mentioning him.

“He makes me feel like I’m the only girl in the room,” she gushed. “And believe me, *every* girl in the room is looking at him. He’s so…”

If she said *dreamy*, I was going to laugh.

“...intense.”

This description got a raise of an eyebrow out of me.

I knew she was talking about the same guy who walked in the house last night. I could feel my cheeks heating up at just thinking about how he seemed so nonchalant about seeing me in a towel, like it was the most common thing in the world. And of course, I couldn't be any more awkward. I hadn't told anyone, even Sara, about it. It's not a moment I wanted to relive.

"He sounds perfect," Sara stated, smiling at my mother's adoring expression. "We should get going." Sara stood from the love seat.

"Have fun," she offered as she walked us the door.

"I'll be home later," I announced before shutting the door.

"What's Evan up to tonight?" Sara asked, following me down the path toward her car.

"He's going to Dillon's."

If they could, Evan and Sara wouldn't let me out of their sight. The protective repercussions after *that night*. I made a point of making sure that they had a life outside of mine. It took them awhile to venture from my side, but they've found their way back into the social scene sans me.

"I heard about that, but it sounds like it'll just be the guys from the basketball team hanging out."

We got in the car and headed to the local pond in the middle of the largest park in town. It became the designated skating rink for the winter when the temperature was low enough - and this winter's been frigid.

The pond's charming in a Hallmark sort of way with wooden benches surrounding it, lit by barren trees wrapped in twinkle lights. A perfect date spot... with Sara.

“So, why are we are we doing this?” I asked Sara, watching the parade of couples holding hands lap the frozen water.

“Shit,” Sara moaned. “I didn’t think it would be date night.” She hesitated but then followed it with, “Screw it. I’m single, my choice. I’m here with you, so who cares.”

I laughed and proceeded to lace up the skates Sara brought for me that belonged to her mother. I wrapped the scarf around my neck, sliding the doubled up ends through the loop and tucking it in my jacket. I was not a fan of the cold, and standing on ice wasn’t about to change that.

“Now what?” I asked Sara, afraid to move from my seated position.

“Stand up,” Sara insisted, holding out her hand for me to take.

“Are you sure?” I pushed the blades down on the packed snow, testing their sturdiness.

“Sara, I’ve barely mastered heels, I’m not sure my balance can handle teetering on a quarter inch blade.”

“Shut up and give me your hand.”

I took her hand and proceeded to stand up. Then I lurched over and grabbed her arm with my other hand. She remained steady, not letting my death grip and unbalanced weight drag her to the snow

“Easy,” she instructed. I stood upright, sorta. “Now walk to the ice, nice and slow.”

I took large, clumsy steps toward the edge of the ice. My heart was racing at just the thought of stepping onto it. Sara let me go to step out onto the ice and skated forward, turned with ease and glided back toward me. She held out both hands for me to take.

I took a deep breath and reached for her hands. I stepped onto the ice and pretty much as soon as the blades touched the ice, they slid out from under me. Sara's hands slid out from mine

as I flopped onto my back. She skated toward me and looked down over my sprawled body as I groaned. She pursed her lips, trying not to laugh. I was close enough to the edge of the pond to scoop up a handful of snow and threw it in her face.

“Hey!” she hollered, wiping the flurries from her eyes. I sat up and started to laugh at our ridiculousness. It only took the first note of laughter to get Sara going too.

Couples skated by us, eyeing us with dread since we were obviously ruining their romantic evening with my clumsiness and Sara’s poor teaching skills. Somehow, we managed to get me back on the skates. Sara instructed me to concentrate on keeping my feet shoulder width apart so that the skates remained parallel, then she proceeded to skate backwards, pulling me along with her. I wobbled, prepared to topple at any moment. I bent forward to keep my balance and gripped Sara’s hands tightly as she dragged me around the circle.

My skates didn’t seem to want to cooperate when we rounded each turn. Sara tried to show me how to pick up my right foot to cross it over my left to move along the turn, but that effort caused me to collide head first into a snow bank. Sara had released me to save herself and was crouched on the ice in hysterics.

I turned over and plopped down on the snow, refusing to get up, brushing the snow off of me. A little girl, probably around six, skated by giggling at the sight of me, then proceeded to spin in a circle. I wanted to trip her.

Since Sara was too busy laughing at me, she wasn’t watching what she was doing and bowled right into a guy wearing hockey skates and a Bruins sweatshirt. He managed to keep them on their skates but practically had to lift Sara up to do so. I let out a quick laugh.

I sunk my skates in the snow and slowly worked my way over to the nearest bench, retiring from being dragged around the ice and dumped in the snow for the evening. Instead, I watched as Sara started talking to the guy and proceeded to skate with him around the ice.

I pulled out my phone and sent Evan a text, *Hows your nite goin?*

Within a minute there was a response. *Pretty sad here. Wish I could bail. Hows Sara?*

*Flirting*

*Haha! Want me to rescue you?*

I smiled at the thought of it. But decided I couldn't ditch Sara. Then I looked up at her and she was laughing at the burly guy with the buzz cut. She said something to him and left his side, coasting toward me. She hopped off the ice and plopped down next to me on the bench.

"Let's get out of here," she breathed, her cheeks and tip of her nose bright pink from the cold. "So, that guy and his friends are heading to a bonfire in the next town. What do you think?"

I remained still. I could feel the panic starting to take shape in my gut. It wasn't the party that got to me. It was the first time I was going out since everything happened, and I didn't want the questions if they figured out who I was.

I took a deep breath, squelching the nerves - I couldn't hide forever. Then I heard myself say, "Can we pick up marshmallows along the way?" Sara's eyes widened and she let out a shocked laugh.

"Uh, yes!"

As Sara skated toward the guys, I looked down at my phone with Evan's question still on the screen. I thumbed, *Not yet. I'll keep you posted but I think I'll be okay. See you tomorrow?*

*Library day!*

I laughed, recognizing tomorrow was Sunday - our day.

Sara and I followed the guys to a house next to a small lake where a bonfire blazed along the water's edge. I got through the party without melting, even making conversation with a drunken hockey player - mostly I made fun of him but he was too wasted to notice. Instead, he found me funny.