

"Emma, what are you afraid of?" his voice echoed through me. I remained perfectly still with my eyes closed, unable to breathe. I didn't want to believe he'd actually said it. That he was standing right behind me. "Because it never was heights. And if you're thinking about jumping, then it's no longer dying either."

I swallowed audibly as my stomach twisted. I refused to turn around. I slowly opened my eyes and stared at the coppery stone wall across from me, wanting more than anything for him to be a memory that had taken on a hallucinogenic form. *Please don't be real.* I preferred to be losing my mind.

"I know you never wanted to see me again," he continued, "but I had to find you. I had to see you one last time."

"Why?" I choked, the tears blurring my vision as I remained perfectly still, staring across the water. "Why would you want to see me? You shouldn't want anything to do with me."

"I know," he answered quietly. "But this isn't about you. This is for me. For what I've done."

It took every ounce of willpower to face him. My entire body fought it, my muscles straining in refusal. And when I finally confronted him, my chest ached so bad I thought I might collapse. He stood before me in just a pair of shorts, a sheen of water reflecting off his sculptured body. His dark wavy hair was longer, swept back from his face, and the California sun had turned his skin a deep bronze. He was still breathtaking.

When I brought my gaze to meet his, his eyes flickered in alarm. He appeared confused when he peered into me as he always did. Maybe because there wasn't anything to see.

"What happened to you, Emma?" he asked as he continued to examine me, his dark eyes delving into the hollows of my soul.

Other than the expression that was carved on my face, I was scraped clean and empty. The only thing left inside was a flicker of a flame that threatened to scorch my insides with the slightest accelerant. And I feared he was armed with the words that could burn me alive.

"You look... different," he noted, his eyes flinching ever so slightly as he searched for me in the emptiness.

"Don't." I shook my head, denying him access. "You shouldn't be here."

"I have to fix what I've done."

I kept shaking my head, my sight blurred with tears. "There's nothing to fix. It's done. It's the past." I stepped back and I could hear the gravel shift beneath me, pebbles cascading over the edge. Jonathan raised his hands in alarm.

"Emma, stop. Don't jump. Please. Let me explain, okay?" He eyed the edge that was inches from my heel and evaluated the drop below. "Just take a few steps toward me. It's not a jump you want to take."

I closed my eyes as my chin quivered. "I can't. I need you to leave. Just go."

"Emma," he implored. "Please. There's things I need to say, before I can't."

My throat closed up as I continued to shake my head, not wanting him to continue. Not wanting to think about what I said, or what I'd done. I couldn't go back to that night. Back to memories of Weslyn that harbored so much guilt and pain.

*This is what you do. This is what we do. We hurt people.* I squeezed my eyes shut against the memory that was forcing its way to the surface.

"Please, Jonathan, don't," I begged again in a whimper, shuffling back again. I could feel the void behind me and knew all I'd have to do was turn around and I'd be able to escape him and his confession.

"Emma?" I heard Cole's voice calling to me from farther down the trail.

Jonathan quirked his brow up in confusion. "Who's that?"

"Doesn't matter." I turned my back to Jonathan, tears streaming down my face.

"Emma, don't jump," Jonathan implored desperately. "I'll leave, I promise. Just step back from the edge. At this height, you could kill yourself."

I glanced back over my shoulder as Cole came into view. His eyes widened in shock as I murmured, "Maybe that's not a bad thing."

I turned my back toward him, my insides blazing and my hands trembling. Everything blurred beneath me as the tears filled my eyes.

"Emma, what the hell are you doing?!" Cole demanded in a panic from behind me. "Don't you dare jump!"

"Emma," Jonathan called to me, he sounded closer. I knew I was running out of time. "Please..."

I shut them out and closed my eyes. My chest quivered as I took quick breaths. My insides turned to molten lava swirled with a rush of adrenaline. I opened my eyes and took the last step before disappearing over the ledge.

My entire body rippled with adrenaline. My stomach opened up as the gust of air hugged me tight, stealing my breath. Nothing mattered in those few seconds. Not Jonathan. Not Evan. Not Cole. Not even me. Everything was lost and devoured by the rush that overtook me.

My feet slammed through the surface of the water, robbing me of the brief retreat. My insides violently ricocheted upon impact, nearly knocking the wind out of me as the water swallowed me whole. The velocity forced me down until I collided with the rocks lining the bottom. Horrific pain shot through my leg as it scraped against the unforgiving surface. I restrained a scream.

I kicked off of the rocks and parted the water with my arms to propel me toward the light. My lungs burned for air as I fought for the surface with each desperate kick, pushing the water past me.

There was a whispering thought that drifted through my head, telling me to stop. To stop fighting. To stop trying. To just...

I gasped and coughed as I broke through the water. It took me a moment to orient myself as I sucked in bursts of air to satiate my deprived lungs.

I looked up to the top of the jagged rock from which I'd just taunted death. Cole and Jonathan stood side by side, hovering over the edge. I couldn't make out their features as I squinted up at them, but they couldn't be more opposite. Dark and Light. The guy who pushed me over the edge. And the guy who picked up the pieces. My leg shrieked from the exposed nerves as I tread water, drawing my attention away. I was afraid to see what it looked like.

When I glanced back up. Cole had disappeared but Jonathan remained, watching.

I grit my teeth as I kicked toward the boats. When I neared, Cole came racing down the path and plummeting into the water.

"Are you okay?" he questioned out of breath, water splashing around him. I tried to shrink away, but all he had to do was look at me. "You're hurt. Where?"

"I scraped my leg," I murmured averting my eyes, continuing toward the canoe. "I'll be fine. Can we just go back to the back to camp?"

Cole released a deep breath. "Yeah. Let's go." He turned toward the beach and hollered, "We're going to take off. We'll see you back at the camp."

Meg's forehead scrunched in concern. Before she could question us, Peyton yelled back, "Okay. See you there."

I gingerly lifted myself into the canoe. My entire body was starting to ache from the impact. I wrapped my leg with a towel before Cole could see it, but I couldn't prevent the blood from trailing along the floor as he paddled out of the cove.

"Let me see it, Emma," he requested sternly. "Let me see how bad it is."

Hesitating for a moment, I slowly turned toward him and unwrapped the towel.

He sucked in through his teeth as if he could feel the pain. "Shit."

I didn't respond and wrapped the towel around the bloody leg, clenching my teeth against the stinging burn that engulfed me.

Cole didn't speak to me as we paddled past canoes of drunken, laughing students. When we finally arrived at the load-out, my leg was pulsing and blood had seeped through the towel. Cole wordlessly helped me out of the canoe, and I limped over the rocks to the van where he lifted me in.

"There's a first aid station at the campground," the driver announced, eyeing the bloody towel. "I can drop you off there if you want."

"Thanks," Cole responded for me. We continued in tense silence until we were escorted back to the Stanford camp on a golf cart, my leg thoroughly cleaned, bandaged, and throbbing profusely.

"Who was that guy?" Cole asked after I lowered myself into a canvas folding chair.

"No one," I murmured, unable to look at him.

"Emma," Cole demanded sternly. The strained emotion in his tone made me raise my head in surprise. "What the hell were you thinking?! Do you even know how fucked up that was?! You could've seriously hurt yourself, or even died. I can't believe..." He ran his hands through his hair and backed away. He shook his head in angered disbelief. "I don't understand you."

I remained silent. He closed his eyes and clasped his hands behind his head. "I need to clear my head." He turned away from me and walked off down the gravel road.

I watched after him. He deserved an explanation. But I didn't have one that would satisfy him. Or one that I cared to share.

I closed my eyes and sunk back into the chair. I didn't know how Jonathan had found me, or what he intended to say, but I hoped today was the last I'd ever see of him.

Meg and Peyton arrived about an hour later. Cole still hadn't returned.

"What happened to your leg?" Meg asked eyeing my gauze wrapped leg apprehensively.

"Scraped it on some rocks," I answered plainly.

"Ow." She grimaced. "Are you okay?"

"I'll be fine," I murmured, still not recovered from everything that had happened that afternoon.

"Um... so this guy came up to us and asked if we knew you," Meg stated, watching me carefully. "He gave me this to give to you." She handed me a folded up piece of cardboard torn from the side of a beer box.

"He was probably the hottest guy I've ever seen in my life," Peyton chimed in.

"Do you know who he is?" Meg asked, ignoring her.

"Yeah," I mumbled, taking the cardboard from her with a shaky hand. "I used to. Did you read it?"

Meg shook her head as she examined me curiously.

"I'm going to the showers," Peyton announced. "Do you guys wanna come?"

"Sure," Meg responded, her eyes lingering on my sullen face. "You coming, Em?"

"Not yet," I replied, staring down at the folded board in my hands.

I continued to stare at it after they'd disappeared. My breath quivered, fearing what it might say. I slowly unfolded the cardboard, my stomach writhing as I looked down at the words he'd left for me.

*Emma,*

*I'm sorry for what just happened. I knew you wouldn't want to see me, but I had no idea it would affect you like that. I wouldn't have come here to find you if it wasn't important. So I'm just going to have to write it and hope you read it and not burn this as soon as you get it.*

*I doubt you know this, but you should. The dealer was found with a bullet in his head (a detail the police left out when they stopped by that day to question me). Someone took advantage of his condition and made off with a trunk load of drugs. The gun was matched to another shooting six months later. Let go of this guilt, we did nothing wrong. And I would do it again if put in the same situation.*

*I still care about you. I always will. But I also know that you were right, about so many things. And what we had, as much I needed it, it was not the kind of love that lives are built on. It was a selfish kind of love. I needed you. I needed you to understand me, and I thought it would help me forgive what I'd done. And you were there for me, and I ended up taking advantage of that. I'm sorry. I hope someday you'll be able to forgive me. But I never did forgive myself for what I've done to you... or my family.*

*What you said to me that night hurt more than I can express. But I don't blame you. I should actually thank you. You opened my eyes to how destructive I truly was. I ended up seeking help after hitting an all-time low last year. I cannot tell you how freeing it is to finally be able to talk to someone without judgment. But there's one truth I've yet to confide in my therapist. I'm planning to tell him the rest of my story. That's why I needed to see you... before I leave. Because once I tell him, he'll be obligated to report me. But I'm ready for that. I'm ready to accept the consequences of my actions. I owe it to me. More importantly, I owe it to my family. I'm hoping it will bring me closer to redemption.*

*Emma, I'm begging you, make things right. I don't know what's happened to you. But whatever it is, fix it. I can't tell you how much it disturbed me to see what I did today when I looked into your eyes—nothing. I don't know what scares me more, that you're no longer afraid of dying, or that you're not living. You deserve to be loved. You deserve to be forgiven. You deserve to be alive.*

*Please call Evan. He's the only one who can fix you.*

*Love,*

*Jonathan*

I stared at the words written in haste across the dark brown surface. I swallowed the tears held tight in the back of my throat.

I scanned over the words again and got caught on, *I'm ready to accept the consequences of my actions*. My breath stopped. "Oh no. He can't."

Without taking a second to think, I stood from the chair and ran to the USC camp, ignoring the shrieking through my leg. I frantically scanned the group, searching for his face. I asked everyone I came across if they'd seen him. Not many people even knew who he was.

Then a guy finally confirmed, "Reeves? Yeah, I know him. He took off a little while ago. Said something about a family emergency."

"Shit," I murmured, the panic pulsing through me as I ran my shaky palm across my forehead.

"Are you Emma?" the lanky guy asked.

"Yeah," I responded, nodding, trying to remain calm.

"He said if you came by looking for him, to tell you to call him."

"Uh, Thanks." I turned away, my pulse erratic as I tried to figure out what to do next.

"Do you need his number?" the guy asked, turning me back towards him.

"Uh, yeah, if you don't mind." Obviously I wasn't thinking clearly since that's what I should've asked for to begin with. "Do you happen to have his address too? I wanted to stop by and surprise him after classes get out."

"Sure," he shrugged. "You weren't at his graduation party, huh?" I shook my head. "You missed out. It was insane. You'd think he was hired by a huge architectural firm with a six figure offer or something with the amount of money he dumped on that party." He laughed in remembrance.

I handed him my phone to plug in Jonathan's info, understanding all too well why he'd gone to the expense. It was a going away party, not a graduation party.

"Thanks," I said, taking my phone from him. I rushed back to the Stanford site.

"You're bleeding again," Cole noticed from beside his SUV. "Emma, you should probably not move around so much to give it time to start healing."

"I need to leave," I told him. "I have to go and I need to borrow your car. Please." I didn't even try to hide the panic in my tone as my body trembled.

"What's going on?" Cole demanded, examining my distraught face.

I looked down and took a breath without answering.

"You'll get your car back, I promise. There's something that I have to do, and it's important. I just... please trust me, Cole."

"Trust has to go both ways, Emma," he snapped, his jaw tight. "Take it." He removed the keys from his pocket and dumped them in my hand. I opened my mouth to thank him but his back was already toward me as he went to the back of the vehicle to remove his bags.

"Thanks," I whispered, but I knew he couldn't hear me.

I climbed into the driver's seat of the SUV. As soon as he slammed the trunk, I pulled away. I glanced in the side mirror to find him watching me with his hands clasped behind his head. I had

to look away as the guilt spread like acid in my stomach. A sensation I was all too familiar with. I knew I'd hurt him. It was only a matter of time.

I sped through the campground, leaving a cloud of dust behind me, determined to find Jonathan before he ruined the rest of his life.