

Blissful
LIES

Jennifer Brown-Thomas

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For my mom, I cannot imagine my
life without you. I know without your
constant support it would have been
impossible to achieve all of my dreams.
Never has a daughter been so lucky, as I.
I love you.

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INTRODUCTION:

You could almost smell the envy and jealousy of the passing tourists as they gawked at the extravagant lifestyles we were all fortunate enough to live. Yes, this was our world. Strangers to the decadent lifestyles of the rich and famous, we were not. It has been said, perception is everything and in this world of ours, it usually is. We drive the best cars, shop in the most expensive boutiques, vacation in the most exotic locations and live in homes larger than most people could ever dream about...so from an outsiders perspective it looks pretty amazing to be who we are. But underneath it all...every family, every group, every person in our world has their secrets, we just thought we were the exception to the rule.... turns out, we could not have been more wrong.

CHAPTER ONE:

It was a typical star-studded Los Angeles night; the streets were consumed with the bright lights of aspiring talent, major celebrities and an overall abundance of indulgent taste amongst the people walking in and out of some of the most luxurious restaurants and shops in town. It was typical, however, for everyone except Addison Hamilton. Tonight was a celebration and the night she would publicly accept the great honor of being named the first woman Chancellor of the ivy-league educational institution, Brown-Thomas University, a goal she strived to achieve for most of her adult life.

At the age of forty-five Addison was not only successful and brilliant; she was stunningly beautiful, a pillar of her community, hardworking, talented and confident. She was the kind of person every woman would fail to live up to, and every man would fail to conquer. She married her high school sweetheart and the love of her life, Spencer Hamilton, just out of college. Together they shared one flawless son, Parker. As the limousine pulled up to the grand ballroom and the driver opened her door, she gracefully stepped out and paused for a moment before walking in. She couldn't help but think that every dream she ever had for herself, at this moment, had officially been realized. She entered the ballroom to find herself surrounded by over five hundred people waiting to welcome her into her most recent accomplishment. As she walked in, every guest leapt to their feet and a thunderous applause imploded the four walls of the ballroom. This was it... the perfect night to accompany her picture perfect existence.

After a short meet and greet, everyone was asked to take their seats as Dr. Jim Crawford approached the podium. "It's been a long journey for our University, to find the next person who will honor and cherish the value of our institution, as we all do, and hold its future in the highest regard. But we found her." The crowd began applauding again with an astounding amount of support.

"With that said I would like to introduce the new Chancellor of Brown-Thomas University, Dr. Addison Hamilton." Addison emerged from her table of family and friends and approached the stage.

"Thank you, Dr. Crawford, and thank each and every one of you for being here with me tonight. It is an overwhelmingly incredible honor to be named the next Chancellor of Brown-Thomas University and one I do not take lightly. From this point forward I will strive to instill in all of our prospective and current students, the true value of an education." She paused for an instant as she noticed her husband eagerly excusing himself from the table to answer a phone call. She wondered, at that moment, what was more important than she was? With the crowd waiting, she continued, "I will dedicate myself entirely to the continued prosperity of Brown-Thomas University as well as its faculty, staff and students. So I'd like to thank all of you again for the opportunity to serve my community, my students and my Alma Mater, Brown-Thomas University. Thank you." She eloquently waved to the crowd and excused herself from the stage, focusing solely on returning to her table to address her husband's brief disappearance.

As she sat down to rejoin her group, Spencer kissed her on the cheek. It was obvious to her that something was amiss. After all, they had been married for close to twenty-five years and she thought she knew him better than anyone else. "So? How was I?" She asked with a gleaming sense of attitude, knowing he had missed part of her speech while taking his phone call. "You were amazing honey, we are so proud of you." He smiled charmingly. "So then what the hell

was so important it couldn't wait Spencer?" She asked with that Addison Hamilton force and attitude that made grown men instantly long for their mothers.

"The office called, I have to be in Boston tonight." He recited with absolutely no remorse for excluding himself from her important evening.

"Spencer!" she exclaimed with disgust.

"I'm sorry Addison, but this is business. It is not negotiable." An awkward silence consumed the table as Kate stepped up to break the ice. "Hey, um, Kinsley and I are going to do some serious retail therapy tomorrow. Come with us."

Addison set her napkin on the table as she responded, "Thanks girls, but I have a lot of work to do tomorrow." She paused momentarily as she glared at Spencer, "If you'll excuse me, this is a very significant night for me and I have guests to greet." She angrily excused herself from the table leaving Parker, Kate and their best friends, Jackson, Kinsley and Leighton sitting to witness this monstrosity of what started out to be such a promising evening.

Parker sat in shock of hearing his dad's holier-than-thou attitude, "Dad?"

"Parker, do not start with me. I can't help it. I have business to attend to and I refuse to apologize for doing my job."

Knowing how important this night was to his mother, Parker excused himself from the table to join Addison in conversing with her guests who were congratulating her on such a brilliant accomplishment, as his best friend Jackson quickly followed. At the table, Kate had taken it upon herself to be offended by Spencer's eagerness to care for his own needs with no consideration for his wife. Kate sat down in the chair next to Spencer and began to let him know exactly how she felt about his selfishness.

"With all due respect Mr. Hamilton, tonight was about your wife and she may not know it now, but we all know where you're really going this evening and I hope all the secrets you've been keeping, are worth all the damage you're creating. Your reasons...your justifications for doing what you're doing, they don't matter. This will destroy her. Or do you even care?" She stood up and threw her napkin down on the tabletop, "Have a great time tonight. I hope she's worth it." Kate walked away, disappearing into a sea of people, leaving Kinsley, Leighton and Spencer sitting alone at a once full table in a very long pause of awkward glances and blank stares.

"Ladies." Spencer stood up and shamefully walked away from the table, exiting the ballroom.

"That might have been the most uncomfortable situation I have ever been in." Kinsley exclaimed while consuming another glass of champagne.

"We should tell Parker what's going on," said Leighton.

"Why? So he can hate us for telling him? No way." Kinsley brushed off her friend's attempt at including anyone else in what would undoubtedly be an earth-shattering topic of conversation for every Hamilton family member.

"He's our best friend Kins, it doesn't feel right....keeping this from him. I would want to know."

"Kate's right. This will destroy Addison. His lies are one big ticking bomb.... He doesn't need our help to self-destruct. He'll do it all on his own and we'll be there to pick up the pieces." The girls continued to enjoy glasses of champagne and let go of the possibility of bringing all of this up to Parker earlier than necessary. After all, this would inevitably catapult into a life altering situation soon enough without their help.

As the girls were deep in thought, Jackson approached the table. “Hey. I think we’re going to head back to Parker’s tonight just in case Addison wants the company. You coming?”

“Yea, of course. Whatever we can do.” Leighton answered as if there was more she wanted to say, but couldn’t.

“Are you two okay?” Jackson suspected something was going on, but had no idea what it might be.

“We’re fine. It’s just been a long day.” Kinsley answered promptly.

“Okay. I’ll let Parker know.” Jackson stated, excusing himself from the table to find Parker and Kate.

Kinsley, Parker, Leighton, Shaley and Jackson had not only been the best of friends for most of their lives, they were like family. It wasn’t until later that Kate came on the scene and immediately conformed to the group. They knew everything about one another and trusted each other with all they had. Understanding that not being friends with one of them meant being friends with none of them was an unwritten rule at Brown-Thomas. The group began with Parker and Jackson’s mothers; they had grown up together and were like sisters themselves. This, in turn, led Jackson and Parker to becoming best friends. In the first grade they met and instantly bonded with Kinsley, Leighton and Shaley, and they had been together, relentlessly, ever since. The bonds the five of these kids shared were parallel to none. Their relationship blossomed early and grew stronger with each passing day, almost like they were all psychically connected at birth. Relationships with family paled in comparison to the ones they had with each other, they did everything together and wanted it no other way. Anyone who knew them envied the closeness and friendship they shared and would often fall short of achieving any type of bond near as powerful.

After leaving the ball they returned to the Hamilton house, which was something they almost always did. This house was where they gathered for everything... regardless of what was going on in their lives. It was their safe haven... the place where everything always made sense. They flocked to the patio, laughing and contemplating the night’s festivities and only imagining what would be next—considering the mother of the group would now head the University where they all attended. This fact left them sure it would negatively impact them somehow. As they continued to drink and laugh hysterically about things only they understood, Addison emerged from the Hamilton mansion to briefly join in on their conversation.

“Hey! Join us.” Kate pressed for Addison to sit down with them and enjoy her moment in the sun even though Spencer had refused to do the same.

“Ah, no thank you. I’m exhausted. I think I’ll just go to bed, it has been a long and... eventful evening.” She paused briefly, “But I do want to thank all of you for being there with me tonight to celebrate, it meant more than you will ever know.”

“There’s absolutely no way we would have been anywhere else. We are so unbelievably proud of you Addison.” Leighton hugged her to avoid getting teary and sentimental.

“Thank you.” Again she paused, “I’m very lucky to have all of you. Goodnight.” She turned around and walked back into the house. Her one of a kind maroon ball gown glistened in the moonlight as she took her last steps inside and the door closed quickly behind her. The group sat in silence for a moment when Kinsley said, “Can you believe your mom is officially the Chancellor of our school?”

“Oh my God, don’t make me think about it.” Parker covered his face with his hands and tried to erase the words from his mind. He stood up and began to un-tuck his tuxedo shirt.

“Baby, this is great for her.” Kate immediately came to Addison’s defense.

“Great for her, bad for us. You watch... her success will bite us in the ass. Just wait...”

Jackson laughed “Dude, relax. I think I speak for all of us when I say- we are so glad it’s your mom and not ours.

The group laughed as Parker’s face turned red and he argued back, “Screw all of you guys. You’ll see... It’s just a matter of time.”

Parker tried to relay the reality of what it really meant for his mom to be in charge of their school, but the group failed to see what he was talking about. They continued to converse amongst each other for a little while longer, laughing and joking and bringing up past events that were still so vivid in their imaginations they seemed as though they had just happened. As the group grew more tiresome they opted for bedtime. Just like so many nights before, they all chose to stay and sleep at the Hamilton house. They always got together for breakfast anyway, so what was the point in going home just to turn around and come back the next morning? Unconventional as it was, the friendships each of them shared were the center of their universe and it didn’t need to make sense to anyone but them.

The next morning the group gathered in the kitchen discussing plans for the day ahead, eating breakfast, drinking coffee and laughing as they always did. They all gathered around the island in the kitchen, each doing their own thing. Leighton was eating from a bowl of grapes, while Kinsley was making a cup of coffee, Kate was slicing an apple and Parker was eating cereal right out of the box. Amongst the not so quiet chatter, the subject of their annual school trip emerged with negative news attached to it and Jackson walked downstairs in time to join in.

“Morning. What’s going on?” He was greeted by the rest of the group and filled in on the trip details.

“We were just talking about our school trip. I got an email this morning saying it was cancelled.” Parker proceeded to break the bad news to his friends.

“Supposedly we can’t go unless we have another sponsor.” Leighton said as they all tried to explain the situation to a late arriving Jackson.

“What? How many do we possibly need?” He questioned.

“Apparently because it’s a school sponsored event we need to have a minimum of four or we can’t count it as educational and the school won’t pay for it.” Kinsley explained.

“Which wouldn’t be a big deal for any of us, but it is really expensive and a lot of our friends won’t be able to afford it, especially on such short notice.” Leighton continued.

“Okay. So we’ll just ask your mom.” Jackson popped off with an immediate solution to the obvious problem, laughing in anticipation of Parker’s response.

“Actually, we were trying to avoid any of us having our parents present on our vacation.... Namely - me.” Parker quickly responded.

“Dude. Your mom is awesome. If any parent has to go it might as well be Addison, right? She’ll do it.” He took a bite of his apple and Addison entered the kitchen in time to hear the last few words of Jackson’s rational solution to their overlying problem.

“Addison will do what?” She asked inquisitively as she made her way to the coffee pot.

“You look beautiful this morning.” Leighton said as she put on her ass kissing face and attempted to butter her up.

“Really! We couldn’t tell if that was you or Jessica Alba emerging from her morning slumber.” Jackson attempted to follow up Leighton’s valiant effort at sweet talking Addison. She laughed out loud without hesitation and said, “It’s Jessica, with a message from Addison. Whatever you guys want, forget about it.”

The group moaned with repugnance as she dismissed their need for her help.

“Come on Addy, just hear us out.” Jackson guided her to a nearby barstool in hopes that she would take a second to listen to their request.

“Alright, what do you want?” She conceded to hearing what they had to say.

“The University needs another parent sponsor to join us on our trip this year...” Parker began the conversation.

“And? You thought I might know someone?” Addison immediately responded.

“Come on Addy. If we don’t get another sponsor then we can’t go.” Jackson pleaded.

“So why don’t you just take a trip together? The six of you are together all the time anyway.... Always... Always together.” She paused momentarily, realizing for the first time that Shaley wasn’t present, “Speaking of six of you, where has Shaley been?”

“She’s out of town. She’ll be back next week sometime, I think. And believe me, we have thought about taking this trip together. We can afford it. But all the students who were counting on the school to pay for it won’t be able to go and we would really like to take it with all of our friends since the six of us are together all the time.” Leighton tried bringing logic to the table with her side of the argument.

“And as Chancellor, isn’t it your duty not to disappoint the students of your university?” Kinsley chimed in right away with the guilt card.

Addison sighed and rolled her eyes in light of the last remark. “Really Kin? The Chancellor card? It’s been all of twelve hours and you’re already using it?”

“Look. A girl has to do what a girl has to do, and you’re being unreasonable.” Kinsley offered some justification to her statement.

“Well, since you brought it up, and I have all of you here. Shouldn’t we implement some boundaries? Guidelines? I’m not just Parker’s mom anymore; I’m also the head of the University where you all attend and I would never want to be accused of preferential treatment...” Addison tried to exude some professionalism and reiterate that she was in a different place now than she was before. Although, it was difficult to make her words possess enough meaning to change anything when she was sitting on a barstool in her kitchen, wearing pajamas.

Immediately the group became defensive about the subject and Leighton asked, “So by boundaries you mean...?”

“I mean, I would never want someone to think I give you all special treatment over the other students simply because you’re friends of Parker’s.” Addison explained.

“Oh wait.... Wait.” Parker stood up and bent over in front of everyone. “Baby, is a piece of my ass missing?” Everyone but Addison laughed at his remark. “I told you this would be bad for us. That it would somehow bite us in the ass. And look. It just did.”

“I think you’re being a little dramatic Parker.” She paused for a moment, “All I’m saying is maybe you could spend less time here and more time anywhere else.” Addison took a sip of her coffee while awaiting a response.

“I see what you’re saying. We should have some set of limitations keeping us from getting so close to one another.” Leighton offered.

“Exactly. I just need to maintain a professional distance... At least until you all graduate.” Addison said as she continued drinking her morning coffee.

“Well maybe you should have thought about your “boundaries,” Leighton put two fingers from each hand in the air to simulate quotation marks and emphasize the word boundaries, “before Kinsley and I found you in the pool last July 4th...” She said with disdain in her voice.

Addison’s face turned red instantaneously as she pleaded to them with her eyes, in hopes they would not bring up the story that was lurking on the ends of their tongues.

“Why would finding her in the pool matter?” Parker asked, a little curious and confused.

“Oh see. We didn’t just find her swimming in the pool.... Did we Addy?” Leighton said with a smirk.

“You’re serious? I cannot believe you’re bringing this up,” said Addison, as she tried to hide behind any dignity she would have left after this story was told.

“We found her completely trashed. Naked! Swimming all alone.” Leighton concluded with a big smile.

“WHAT?” Jackson found himself suddenly very interested in the conversation at hand.

“Oh yea. Little miss Chancellor- drinking like a fish.... Ass out.... All by herself. It was epic. Definitely a moment I’m glad I didn’t miss.” Kinsley laughed aloud as she helped paint a crystal clear picture for everyone.

“How did I not know about this?” Jackson questioned.

“Everyone stayed out at the lake for fireworks, remember? Leighton and I came back because she had to be somewhere early the next morning.” Kinsley explained.

“Oh my God.” Addison paused, “That happened once. And you promised we would never discuss it again... Ever.”

“Well. Maybe you should’ve thought about that before you decided to get all Dr. Big Head on us and start throwing around words like boundaries and guidelines. Parker’s right. This is a boundary free zone, it always has been.” Leighton concluded.

Parker shook his head ardently as if trying to clear his mind and said, “Anyway. Now that I have that disturbing image seared in my brain for the rest of my life, back to the trip.”

The group tried to move past Addison’s “boundary” speech by continuing to discuss the future of their class expedition. After a few more minutes of pretending like she wasn’t eventually going to give in and accept the responsibility of needing to be a sponsor, she reluctantly agreed. Addison Hamilton was not the type of woman to be pressured into doing something she didn’t want to do, but ultimately she had a soft spot in her heart for every last one of Parker’s friends. They had, after all, been in her life for as long as her son had and making them happy was important to her. After verbally agreeing to sponsor the trip she placed her coffee cup in the sink and reminded Parker about a promotional dinner that was on the calendar for a good friend of the family, Dr. Asher Sheridan.

“Parker please don’t forget about the party tomorrow night for Asher Sheridan’s promotion to Chief of Surgery.”

“Mom?” Parker contested.

“I’m sorry honey but you are going.” She was not caving on this one. Parker had known Asher Sheridan his entire life and as a tribute to his success, the family would be attending.

Parker immediately turned to Jackson in hopes of salvaging a night which was destined to be an utter failure.

“Jack. You’re my best friend, right?”

“Depends.” Jackson knew where their conversation was ultimately headed.

“Don’t you want to enjoy your Friday night at the only party in the city that will make you wish you were somewhere else...? Really dude. Boredom is totally underrated.” Parker threw his arm around Jackson’s shoulder.

“Mom, who’s taking you to the party?” Parker asked Addison.

“Well, I had planned on your father being here, but since that obviously is not the case, I will be escorting myself.” She answered uncomfortably.

“See Jack, you can be mom’s date.” Parker smiled from ear to ear as he successfully roped his best friend into an evening of inevitable boredom.

“Parker, I’m capable of going alone. I’m a big girl. Do not make your friends go if they don’t want to. And do not put Jackson on the spot like that.”

“I don’t mind it’s really no problem.” Jackson smiled as he conceded to Parker’s request.

“That’s sweet. Thank you. And girls? I take it no one else is dying to attend such a lavish affair?”

Kinsley immediately answered, “I already have plans.”

“Kate?” Addison questioned.

“We have to go to my parents afterward, but I’m okay to go for a while.” She responded.

“Leighton?”

“Sorry Addison, Trevor and I are celebrating our two year anniversary tomorrow and hopefully we’ll be locked tightly in a Four Season’s suite for the weekend.” Leighton said with a big smile on her face.

Addison sighed, “Thank you for that image which I will carry around with me for the rest of my life.” She paused, “Okay then. Glad all of this is settled, I’ll change our reservation to four.”

Parker looked at his watch, “Oh hey, I’m late, I gotta get going...” He gave Addison a kiss on the cheek, “And I have to take these dorks back, they rode with me yesterday.”

“Whatever jerk,” Kinsley said as she threw a grape at Parker.

“Be careful and call me later.” Addison said as the three girls and Parker left Jackson and Addison alone in the kitchen.

“Thank you for being such a good friend to my son. He’s so lucky to have you in his life.” She started to make another cup of coffee, “And please don’t feel obligated to be my date tomorrow night, you’re more than welcome to ride with Kate and Parker. I am fine with going alone, Lord knows I’ve done it enough lately.”

“Really Addison, I’m happy to do it.” He answered politely and she smiled, remembering what it used to be like to have someone concerned about her feelings and worried about whether or not she was being taken care of.

“Well then. I better get going. I need to pick up my dress for the party and get to the office.”

“I should get going too. Is 6:30 okay for tomorrow night?” He asked.

She smiled sweetly at him, “Perfect.”

As they exchanged brief smiles the telephone rang and broke up the moment of solidarity where it seemed like, just for a second, this young man cared more about her happiness than her own husband did.

Jackson whispered, “I’ll just see you tomorrow.”

Addison waved goodbye as she walked into the living room to answer the phone.

“Hello?”

“Hey Honey,” Spencer said gleefully.

“Spencer. Did you get to Boston okay?” You could hear the repulsion in her voice as their conversation continued.

“I did. I was just calling to tell you, I’ll be here for a couple of weeks.” Spencer said, sounding as if that shouldn’t bother her at all.

“Big surprise.” Addison said as she sat down on the edge of the couch.

“I’m working Addison, you need to realize that and stop being so overly sensitive about everything. It’s getting old. Hey I have to go.... I’ll call you later.” He hung up the phone

abruptly, giving her absolutely no time to respond. She stared at the phone for a moment, hung up angrily and dialed another number.

In the midst of his earlier conversation with Addison, Jackson had walked out of the house accidentally leaving his phone behind on the kitchen counter. As he returned to collect it, he overheard her conversation.

Addison waited patiently for Spencer's office to answer, "Harper and Hamilton Law offices." The sweet voice on the other end of the line said.

"Gloria. Hi. This is Addison Hamilton, Spencer just called me from Boston but we got disconnected before I could get his contact information. Could you be a dear and get it for me?"

There was a silence and then a stammering as Gloria tried to gather her thoughts, "Um. Mrs. Hamilton would you mind holding for just a moment?"

"Certainly." Addison answered as she stood up and began to pace back and forth, feeling strangely awkward at the greeting she had just received.

A man's voice came to the phone and acknowledged her, "Addison?"

"Charles?" She asked in confusion.

"Listen. We don't have any contact information for Spencer right now. I'm not even sure where he is to be honest." Charles said in a very matter-of-fact way.

"What do you mean? He's working a case in Boston." She said as she paused for a moment to catch her breath.

"I'm sorry Addy, but he isn't working on anything right now. He called to say he would be gone for a few weeks. I just assumed it was a long overdue vacation he was taking with you." Charles declared.

"Thank you Charles." As she stood in her living room, completely dumbfounded by the news she'd just received. She paused briefly, threw the phone across the room and screamed, "Bastard!"

Jackson, who had listened to the entire conversation, rushed in to console her, "Hey. Hey," He wrapped his arms around her as she started sobbing uncontrollably. "What's going on?"

Gathering herself she realized who was holding her and how inappropriate it was for him to be the one comforting her, so she quickly composed herself. She wiped the tears from her cheeks and said, "It's nothing. It's nothing. I am so sorry you just saw that. Please, I'm fine. You really shouldn't be here for this Jack, go ahead and go. Please."

Jackson guided her over to the couch and they sat down next to each other.

"I can't just leave you like this Addison. What's going on?"

She hastily stood up and walked over to the bar to pour herself a glass of wine. As she poured she said, "Please Jack. Just go."

"Addy. Isn't it a little early?"

Addison turned around quickly, "Don't Jackson... Do not go there."

"Right.... I was just going to say it's a perfect time for a drink. I think I'll have one too." Uncomfortable, he stood up. "Vodka and Tonic, please."

She turned back towards the bar and poured him a drink too. As she finished she picked both glasses up and shoved one in his hand as she walked by, making her way back to the couch. Although there was a vast difference in their ages, Jack saw Addison for everything she truly was... a beautiful woman who was in desperate need of someone to talk to. As he sat back down on the couch next to her, he got a slight breath of her scent.... He always loved the way she smelled. As he drifted off momentarily to a place where things were easier and only seen in

black and white, a place where he could tell Addison that even the way she smelled made his heart flutter, he quickly snapped back to reality and responded to her situation.

“Do you want to tell me what’s going on?”

Addison took a deep breath and started rapidly consuming her glass of wine. After she took a breath she began to tell him what had just taken place.

“Spencer is cheating on me. My unbelievably selfish husband is having an affair...” She felt the embarrassment creeping over her and she began to cry again.

“What?” Jackson’s face sported a shocked look he couldn’t even pretend to hide. “Are you sure?”

“He called as you were walking out the door to tell me he’d be in Boston for a few weeks... On business. Then he rushed off the phone. I called his office to get his contact information because his cell is turned off.” She said, sounding skeptical.

“Maybe he’s just busy... working?” Jackson searched for realistic reasons of why Spencer would possibly be acting that way. He couldn’t imagine anyone thinking they could do better than Addison. She was perfect. If he was cheating on her... he deserved whatever he got.

“When I called his secretary she had no idea what to say to me... She sent the call to one of the other partners in the firm who told me he didn’t know why Spencer was gone but it was not because of work. He said they all assumed he’d taken a long overdue vacation.... with me.” “Wow.” Jackson searched for the right words to comfort her, but all he could think about was how selfish Spencer was being. He had the perfect life here with Addison, why would he ever risk losing it?

“Ya know... it’s one thing to think your husband might cheat on you.... It’s something completely different, knowing that he has.” Addison looked hurt in a way that she’d never been before. Her tear stained face left Jack feeling like he was seeing her for the very first time and he felt empathetic in a way he never had before.

“Um. I don’t know what to say to you right now... I’m searching for the words... but.” Jackson stumbled through the verbiage as he tried to come up with something that would make her feel better, so she quickly jumped in, “You don’t have to say anything. I’m just going to drink and sulk. And you.... should probably go.”

“I don’t think that’s the best idea Addy.”

They both sat in silence contemplating everything that had just occurred. After all Jackson had simply left his phone there by mistake earlier, he hadn’t signed up for any of this drama. After he considered, carefully of course, the right things to say he began with, “I know you must be hurting.”

A raging Addison immediately cut him off. “I am humiliated Jack. I’ve been here.... Taking care of everything and he’s been off.... Doing God knows what with God knows whom.... How could you do this to someone you claim to love?” She leaned back against the couch for a second to think about what her next realistic step would be but she couldn’t rationally process everything going through her mind.

“I don’t know much, but what I do know is this. You just became the first woman Chancellor in the History of our University. You’re brilliant, you’re beautiful... and those things are yours... he can never take them from you. You don’t need him.” Jackson felt confident in the words he was relaying to her because he believed them. He had always felt a special place in his heart for Addison, he knew she was worth everything in the world. Spencer had just lost the best thing in his life and he had no idea.

“I have to get out of this house.” Addison stood up from the couch and started pacing back and forth, trying to decide where to go.

“Okay. I’ll take you out.” Jackson jumped in to rescue her.

“Really?” She was surprised at his response.

“Absolutely. As long as you promise to try and have a good time.” He smiled coyly, trying to remind her that as long as he was there he would try and make a conscious effort to put a smile back on her face.

“Deal.” Addison agreed, polishing off her second glass of wine.

As she walked upstairs to get dressed, Jackson found himself surrounded by feelings he thought were locked tightly away. You see, Jackson had a secret... he had always loved Addison and always secretly hoped they would end up together. But of course everything about their current situation complicated things. The vast difference in age, his relationship with Parker, her relationship with his mother.... Nothing about his feelings for her made sense. So he had always hidden them... and tonight wouldn’t be any different. Waiting downstairs for her to return he reminded himself this was no time to act on impulse. She was vulnerable and hurt, and no good would ever come of him being inappropriate at this point. He continued talking to himself when the clinking of her heels on the stairs caught his attention. As he turned around, the sheer image of her in a strapless black dress took his breath away and forced his heart to race uncontrollably.

“You look amazing.” He said, trying to focus more on her eyes and less on her body. But her hopelessly troubled state of mind ensured she was not paying close enough attention to notice his inappropriate glances.

“I don’t feel amazing.” She said as she finished walking to the bottom of the stairs.

“Well you can just take my word for it.” He smiled adoringly as he extended his arm to her, she took it and for the first time, in a long time, she felt taken care of and important. She felt beautiful.

As they left the house and reached the car, Jackson stopped and opened the car door for her. It had been so long since someone had taken the time or the interest to care whether or not she opened her own door. She felt appreciated, in that moment, as the door slammed shut and they drove away.

CHAPTER TWO:

As the black BMW convertible approached a valet stand on Hollywood Boulevard it came to a stop and the pair got out. He again, extended his arm to her and they walked into one of the best restaurants in town. As they walked through the door they found themselves surrounded by some of the wealthiest individuals in the state. This was the place to dine in California. They walked down the long corridor leading to the Maître D stand and passed patrons who were clinging to the faint hope of actually getting a table. Even with the young celebrities and beautiful women who encompassed the restaurant, Jackson found himself thinking Addison had never looked more beautiful than she did right then. He looked at her like she was the only other person in the restaurant even though it was bursting at the seams with high-end clientele.

“Jackson Kensington.” He stated to the Maître D.

“Certainly Mr. Kensington, right this way.” They were led to a private table in a quiet back corner. “Will this suffice, Mr. Kensington?”

“It’s perfect, thank you.” He answered as he pulled Addison’s chair out for her.

“This is absolutely incredible, how did you get us in on such short notice? This is the best restaurant in town.” She smiled as she put her napkin on her lap.

He smiled back at her and answered, “I keep a table on reserve here.”

“I bet you do that for all your dates,” She smiled knowingly and picked up the dinner menu.

“Well that is a bet you’d lose. I don’t date much,” He paused for a moment, “I keep this table on reserve mostly for my friends and colleagues; my parents use it from time to time, like you said it is the best restaurant in town.” He smiled and subsequently picked up his menu.

“What’s the story behind that anyway?” She asked with curiosity.

“Behind what?” He responded, puzzled at the question.

“You not dating much.... I can’t ever remember seeing you with anyone, except.... That one blonde girl... what’s her name? Tall... Gorgeous.”

“You mean Kimber.” He said with a slight distaste in his mouth.

He dated Kimber for several years prior to her cheating on him with his roommate, which ultimately ended their relationship. Though she was the right one at the time, he always felt as though something was missing.... Something he seemed to find in Addison. But it was because of how things ended with Kimber that he empathized with what Addison was going through as the news of Spencer’s obvious infidelity emerged.

“Yes, that’s it, Kimber... What happened to her?”

“Uh. We dated for a while. But I think I always knew she wasn't the great love of my life. So the story is, there is no story, other than it just hasn't happened for me yet.” He brushed off the subject of Kimber, in hopes of letting it rest for the evening.

Addison took a drink of her very over priced wine while she contemplated the reality of never having seen him serious with anyone, ever. After all, he was a gorgeous twenty-three year old trust fund baby who was headed to Law School to follow in his father’s footsteps after his undergraduate degree was complete. He was funny, caring, sensitive... What more could a girl ask for?

In another part of the world, at a beachfront property belonging to the Hamilton family for more than fifty years, Parker, Kate, Leighton, Scott, Kinsley and Trevor gathered for a night away from the chaos of the city. They sat around the living room drinking and reminiscing about

the past. A rare moment of silence occurred, prompting Kate to realize several key people were missing from their usual beach house outings.

“Does anyone know when Shaley is coming home?” Kate asked as she took a drink of her wine.

“It’s so weird. She’s being so vague about this trip she’s on... Not really saying where she is or when she’s coming home...” Leighton said.

“Hmmm. Maybe she’s not really working. Maybe she’s on some sort of hiatus.” Kate alleged.

“I wasn’t going to say anything. I mean, she is my best friend.” Leighton said as Parker interrupted her.

“Wait. I thought I was your best friend.”

Leighton threw a piece of popcorn at him regarding his self-absorbed comment, “Anyway... I think she might be off somewhere with someone... if you know what I mean.”

“She has been seeing that one guy, what’s his name?” Kate asked.

“Austin.” She replied.

“She has been seeing him off and on for a while, maybe she just didn’t want to tell us.” Kinsley chimed in.

“I guess.... I don’t know why she would keep something like that from us. We’re her best friends.” Leighton responded.

“Uh, probably because we’d call her a slut for two weeks and then she’d never want us to meet him.” Parker voiced with his usual humor.

Seeing the noticeable accuracy in Parker’s statement, Kinsley said, “True.... Whatever... Let the little slut keep her secrets.”

The group laughed at the comment and as the conversation remained steady, the subject changed over and over. Random thoughts continued to emerge, derailing their focus from Jackson and Shaley to other, lighter topics.

However, as the evening progressed for Jackson and Addison the conversation intensified and soon took an inquisitive turn.

“Jack. Be honest. You haven’t had any serious feelings for anyone, ever?” She continued drinking her wine and sat waiting patiently for his response.

Jackson appeared a little uncomfortable, as he answered, “I didn’t say that. I’ve had semi-serious feelings for someone for a long time. It’s just very complicated, and something I don’t pretend to understand anymore. She’s with someone else and I’m fairly confident she doesn’t see me the same way I see her.”

Addison found herself intrigued at the possibility of finding a Mrs. Right for someone she had always cared so deeply for.

“Really? Tell me about her. I mean.... Believe me. You don’t want to be my age and facing what I’m facing now.” As she got closer to finding out who Jackson was secretly pining after, she placed all of her focus on him.

“It’s complicated, like I said. But she’s amazing, brilliant, successful, talented and beautiful; however, she doesn’t always see those things about herself. She’s let someone hurt her, for a long time.... But you never know... Maybe she will let me love her someday.”

Addison felt a strange feeling of confusion and familiarity creeping over her while she over analyzed the situation, as she often did. The waiter approached the table to take their dinner orders and she politely excused herself. Jackson ordered yet another bottle of wine which would inevitably be polished off before the evening ended. As Addison found herself alone in the ladies

room she wondered if she was really reading into the situation more than what was intended by the company at her table. She couldn't help but feel he was alluding to her as the mystery woman he secretly lusted after. But how could that be? Surely she was being overly analytical... She touched up her makeup while convincing herself she was doing just that, before returning to the table.

"Everything okay?" Jackson asked as she took her seat. He couldn't help but notice the bounce in the curls of her hair and the way the light reflected off of them as she approached the table. He couldn't imagine a more perfect human being.

"Everything is fine Jack. I do want to thank you for bringing me out tonight, it has really helped to take my mind off of everything going on. I want you to understand though, this is borderline inappropriate. I can only imagine the horrified look on your mother's face if she were to see us sitting here together. Not to mention now I'm the head of the school where you're attending.... I mean this is...." Jackson stopped her dead in her tracks as she tried to continue listing all the reasons why the dinner they were enjoying so much, was a bad idea.

"Addison. Addison, stop. You just went through something no woman should ever have to go through. You learned your marriage isn't what you thought it was and I feel for you because of it... because I know you're hurting. But I'm here as your friend because I care about you. And I could tell you, yes, from the outside, this might look bad, but for tonight... You're not Dr. Hamilton, Chancellor of Brown-Thomas University, you're just a woman who needed a night out... and I'm the guy who just happened to be there...." He tried to quickly offer logic to a seemingly impulsive situation.

As the evening continued Addison paused as she heard a sound she hadn't heard in so long... and then she realized it was the sound of her own laughter. On the eve of what should have been one of the worst nights of her life, she found herself content and feeling things she hadn't felt in a very long time.

"I can't remember the last time I laughed so much." She smiled as she set her wine glass down.

"I'm really glad you're having such a good time."

"I am Jack, a wonderful time.... I can't thank you enough; I really needed a night like tonight," She paused as her mind wandered to their earlier conversation and the comments he made, "Jackson.... The girl you were talking about earlier. What's her name?"

He looked uneasy as he responded, "Why do you ask?"

"I'm just curious.... Is it someone I know? Who is it? I won't tell anyone, I promise!" Her intrigue overpowered her good judgment as she searched for gossip to help continue to take her mind off her own personal tragedies. Jackson persistently contemplated whether or not he should be truthful in this moment here with her. Was now his chance? "Is it Shaley? I sort of always felt like maybe the two of you had something going on." Addison fished for an accurate answer.

"Shay?? Ew. No. I mean, don't get me wrong, anyone would be lucky to be with her. She's amazing. But she's more like my sister than anything else." He immediately shot down her educated guess.

"Well? Who is it then? Come on.... You know you're going to tell me eventually."

Jackson took a deep breath and decided he was past the point of no return in this situation and took a leap for the sake of sink or swim.

"It's you, Addison. It's always been you." Jackson felt the words pour forth like water from a stream; he felt a relief in his chest he thought would never be realized. He loved her, perhaps more than even he knew.

Addison stared blankly as she tried processing the words he had just spoken. She was shocked into silence for what seemed an eternity.

“I think I’ve really had too much to drink tonight and.... I uh.... Should take a cab home.” She stood up hurriedly; unsure of how to make her feet move towards the door.

“Wait. Please don’t go.” He pleaded with her.

“Jackson this cannot go one second further, I hope you understand. I will go with you to the party tomorrow night, only because I wouldn’t be able to explain my not going with you, to my son. But that’s it.” She said as she found it harder and harder to breathe. He reached for her and started to speak but she stopped him. “Please... don’t.” She pleaded while questioning herself repeatedly about how she let things get this far. She excused herself and quickly headed for the door.

Jackson waited a moment and tried to decide if tonight had really been the best time to tell her how he felt, how he had always felt about her. But honestly, when is the best time to tell your best friend’s mother you are in love with her? There’s no time like the present, Jackson’s father always used to say, and tonight he embraced those words of wisdom and hoped it would eventually lead to something he always dreamt about. He motioned to the waiter for his check as he continued contemplating the evening and how accidentally leaving his phone on the counter had led to this moment. Taking out his wallet, he threw down a large sum of cash to pay the bill and walked out towards the valet stand. Dialing Addison’s number repeatedly only resulted in getting her voicemail with every press of the call button.

“Hi, you’ve reached Dr. Addison Hamilton, please leave...”

He hung up before listening to the entire message, tipped the valet and drove off in his car not sure where exactly he was going. Without thinking at all he found himself headed directly towards the Hamilton mansion with an incessant need for closure. As he pulled in the driveway he felt an overwhelming sense of calmness, one he had never felt until now. Climbing out of his black convertible, he approached the house. Like many times before, he let himself inside in hopes of getting just another second to talk to Addison. He searched downstairs for her, calling her name repeatedly with no answer, “Addison?” He searched further with still no sign of her, “Addison?” He then walked upstairs to find her sitting alone on the balcony.

“You shouldn’t have come here Jack.” She said without so much as a glance in his direction.

The stars sparkled off the shine in her hair. Her black dress still hugging every curve of her body, made it hard for him to concentrate. Still, he sat down between her and the view beyond her balcony railing to force at least some eye contact between them. Affectionately, he took her hand in his so she could feel the sincerity in the words he was about to say.

“In all the time I have known you Addison Hamilton, I have never seen you laugh or smile like you did tonight. No matter what happens between us, all I want is for you to be okay and happy. Because that’s what you deserve. I think this situation with Spencer has the potential to break you.... Who you are deep down, the real you, and it would be such a waste, because you are the most incredible person I know.” It took every ounce of courage he had to get all of those words out. But he truly felt them in his soul, which made them a little easier to say. Still, she pulled her hand from his grasp.

“I love how much you care. I do. But I can’t be the person you have built me up to be in your mind. I’m not her.” It was clear how hard the words were for her to get out as she continued, “When I think about how wrong a relationship between the two of us would be, how many people we could hurt.... It’s just undeniably the worst thing we could ever do.” She turned towards him hoping he would understand where she was coming from.

His eyes pleaded with her to listen, "I know you feel for me a lot of what I feel for you. Regardless of whether or not you're ready to admit it, I could see it in your eyes tonight... I could hear it in your laugh. And I don't have anything built up in my mind I don't see every time I look at you. All I want is exactly who you are." As the words continued to come out he was desperate to convince her that what was happening between them was okay, but unfortunately Addison's wits were still about her and she made a conscious decision to disregard everything he was saying.

"Listen to me. I do care for you.... Probably more than I should have ever allowed. In the past, I have justified the occasional flirting and the mildly inappropriate touching as innocent and harmless but.... I'm sorry... we just can't be more than we are right now. I want you to understand what I'm telling you..."

In hopes of letting an uncomfortable evening die, Addison turned towards her room and began to leave the balcony when Jackson's hand found hers.

"Addy.... Please wait." She stopped in a moment of temporary insanity and turned to hear what he had to say, "You make me want to be a better person," He took a heartfelt pause and continued, "That's what you do for me."

With little to no chance of being able to brush his comments off as meaningless and insignificant, she found herself overwhelmed with emotion and initiated a passionate kiss. After realizing what just happened she rushed into the house leaving Jackson alone with nothing to hold on to but his thoughts of her. After a few moments of pulling himself together he followed suit and walked into the house to find her pouring herself another glass of wine. Whether it was bravery or complete self-annihilation, he made a final attempt to show her how he felt. As the door closed behind him, he walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. She couldn't move... and oddly she didn't want to. It felt so good to be held like she was the most important thing in the world, but was this really happening? Was she seriously debating a relationship with a child? As she found herself lost in a sea of mixed feelings he turned her around to face him.

"You keep telling me how wrong this is.... And maybe tonight it is. But I want you to understand..." He placed her hand on his chest and he continued to speak, "My heart races every time I look at you. I just love to watch you walk into a room... the way you laugh... and smile... and blush when you get embarrassed... You don't realize how unbelievable you are. And to me that's not wrong..." After a complete self-awareness check, Addison found herself so moved by his words, she initiated a second kiss.

The type of chemistry she shared with him in a fifteen second kiss was greater than anything she had ever felt with her husband and in that moment of realizing she still had a husband, she pushed him away again.

"Go home Jackson. This has gone far enough. You need to find someone your own age... This is insane." After completing her sentence she walked out of the room leaving a brokenhearted Jackson standing alone. He paused a few seconds in her absence and then turned to leave the house at her request.

Addison walked into her bedroom, trying to figure out where it had all gone wrong. Sure she went to dinner with a friend, but how did that end up being the beginning of all of this? As she sat reflecting on every moment of the evening she was startled by the sound of her phone. She looked at the caller ID and felt a sense of ease when she saw it was her sister, Blaire, calling. Still she answered apprehensively, knowing she would have no choice but to spill about the night's events. As she worked through it all with Blaire on the phone she couldn't believe what

she could hear herself saying. This morning she woke up, a semi-happily married woman and tonight she would go to bed a semi-separated adulterer. After finishing a very intense conversation with her sister she climbed into bed hoping things would be clearer in the morning light...

But as the sun crept in through the slit in her drapes she found herself still at odds about everything that had happened the night before. Nothing made any more sense than it did last night. Letting out a heavy sigh she grabbed her robe and headed downstairs. As she came around the corner she heard the clatter of dishes and the banter of several college kids that, for some reason, always consumed her kitchen. As she continued walking she was face to face with every last member of their little group, including Jackson.

“Good Morning,” Jack said with a smile on his face and the rest of the group quickly followed up with individual “Good mornings.”

“Do you... any of you ever go anywhere alone?” She said with a less than cheerful expression.

“No. Not really. There wouldn’t be much point if you think about it.” Parker began. “If we’re not together, we’re texting or calling to see what the others are doing anyway, so this ultimately just saves us time.” He smiled at his mother.

The group laughed at the truth of what was being said. They were always together, but it worked for them. They never grew tired of one another and that’s what really mattered. As Addison made her way to the coffee pot for her morning fix, she and Jackson made seemingly uncomfortable eye contact as everyone else continued chatting around them.

“So how was the lake last night? I’m surprised you were ready to come back so early.” Jackson said.

“It was awesome. It’s been a while since all of us just sat down and relaxed.... Well. Almost all of us.” Leighton directed her comment to Jackson.

Kinsley immediately chimed in, “What’s up with that anyway? I thought you were coming out there when you finished up here last night?”

“Uh, yea, I had some things to finish up after I left here and then it was late and I was too tired to drive out there.” He tried desperately to cover his tracks.

“See. All I just heard you say was... blah blah blah, I’m a giant girl.” Parker joked.

“And Shaley... our missing link. She is totally blowing us off for some two bit romance.” Leighton reiterated what the group had discussed the night before.

Laughter and conversation ensued as Jackson noticed Addison slipping out of the room unnoticed. She walked upstairs to phone Dean Morrigan and let him know she had decided to partake in the trip this year as a sponsor so it would not have to be cancelled. As she hung up the phone from talking to him, Jackson slipped in quietly in hopes of some type of reconciliation.

“Can we talk?” He asked politely.

“Jackson... I think we've said quite enough. I seem to remember it was all the talking we did last night that got us to this point in the first place.” She tried to ignore her own feelings and be the adult in the situation, because after all, she was the adult.

“I know you're... confused or pissed or whatever. I know this doesn't make any sense. But we do need to talk about it. Sober.” As he spoke to her he tried keeping things rational and logical in hopes of getting through to her on some level.

She turned around to face him, “I appreciate last night. The food was wonderful and the company was even better...” He smiled at her “But last night was a one time, confusing blur. I am... considerably older than you are. I have a career and a son to worry about and now a divorce

to contend with. Your mother is one of my oldest and dearest friends, just to name a few of the thousands of reasons why this thing between us will never be more than it is right now. I crossed a line last night that should have never even been a possibility and I am sorry. You're a sweet person, I appreciate what you tried to do for me and I'll always be grateful... you made me feel beautiful and it meant more than you'll ever know... but you deserve to find someone to share your life with, someone your own age."

She turned away from him and walked towards the balcony. It was a beautiful morning and had it not been for all the chaos and insanity in her life right then, she would have been able to fully welcome its splendor. As Jackson stood in the doorway admiring her beauty, he paused for a moment before walking up to wrap his arms around her waist.

"You're not being fair."

She turned around and faced him again. "Jackson. This just isn't about what's fair. You have to understand that." She was desperate to find the words to make him understand, it wasn't just about them. There was so much more to consider than just their feelings.

"If Parker came to you and told you he was having feelings for my mom... or... or Leighton's mom and it was the happiest he'd ever remembered being.... Would you tell him to walk away, because socially, it was easier?"

"It's not the same thing Jack." She said as she gently pushed by him and walked toward the house.

"It is Addison. It's the same thing." They both turned around, looking at one another again.

"Elizabeth isn't like me, she's not as forgiving and I'm not sure we could survive this. And when it didn't work out between us..." He interrupted her quickly and began walking towards her.

"How do you know it wouldn't work out...?" He questioned her.

The truth is, she really had no idea what would come of this relationship if she allowed herself to love him back, but she also had no intention of finding out.

A sad look emerged on her face as she spoke, "I'm sorry. But this is the way it has to be. I can't risk losing what I have with her, for what I might have with you."

As she walked back into her bedroom and then into her bathroom, she closed the door behind her, leaving a confused young man standing alone with nothing but his emotions to consume him. He stood on the balcony for a few minutes wondering what he could do, who he could be or what he could change to make her give him a chance. Unfortunately for him, and he knew this whether he wanted to admit it or not, but their life circumstances presented every possible challenge he could think of. Addison couldn't help but wonder if, in the end, she might have him and absolutely nothing else. After pulling himself together he walked back downstairs to join the inevitably meaningless conversation of lifelong friends.

"Dude. Where'd you go?" Parker jokingly asked.

"I was just talking to Addison about tonight. Seeing what the plan was." Jackson responded promptly and without hesitation to appear as though he was telling the truth.

As the conversation amongst the group continued, Jackson's heart began to pound when he heard the familiar clinking of heels approaching the kitchen.

"Okay guys. I'm headed to the office for a bit.... try not to burn the place down while I'm gone." She smiled as she dug for her keys in her purse. "Oh and before I forget, I spoke to Dean Morrigan earlier since he's the one in charge of your trip this year."

"Are we safe in assuming you saved us?" Kinsley crossed her fingers as she spoke.

"Of course. It's taken care of... your trip is still on."

The group all jumped to their feet as they hugged and kissed her for saving a trip that was sure to be one of the most memorable vacations of their lives.

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” Leighton squeezed Addison’s neck.

“You’re welcome.” She turned to leave and stopped, “Enjoy your anniversary tonight... you’re only this young once... this is an unbelievable point in your lives and you need to embrace every second of it. It’s a moment in time you can never get back.”

She turned to walk out the door and Jackson felt a sadness creep over him. He knew she was really telling him to find someone his own age since he is only this young once. He didn’t care about the age difference or about the friendships this would complicate. He only cared about her. That’s what mattered to him.... That she was happy.

“Alright. I’m out of here too. Thanks for the breakfast dude. I’ll see you at the party tonight. Let me know if you hear from Shay, I’m interested in what she’s been up to.” Jack put his cereal bowl in the sink and picked up his keys.

“I’ll text her and let you know what she says.” Leighton responded as she picked up her phone and keys. Jackson’s exit cued everyone else to begin thinking about starting their day, as they all put their dishes in the sink and said their goodbyes Kate and Parker were left completely alone in a house that was always filled with people.

“Well we’re finally alone.” Kate smiled as Parker started walking towards her. He positioned his body in between her knees and gently put his hands on her cheeks. As they kissed Parker guided her off the bar stool and they started making their way down the hall.

“Shouldn’t we go to your room?” Kate laughed as he kissed her neck suggesting a ‘right here, right now’ appeal.

“No one’s here. She’ll be gone for hours.” He unbuttoned her shirt and she unzipped his pants. The intensity was rapidly progressing as they continued to kiss and in the heat of the moment, Addison walked back inside, surprising them to the point of absolute embarrassment.

“Mom.” Parker’s shocked expression left very little to the imagination. Addison looked away as Kate hurriedly put her shirt back on.

“Parker. Living room. Now.” Addison stormed off leaving Parker and Kate alone for just a second and as his head dropped to his chest he walked down the hallway and into the living room to face the storm.

“Mom, I...” He began giving an explanation but was unexpectedly stopped.

“Shut up, Parker. Okay. First of all, I am not so naïve as to think you aren’t having sex with your girlfriend. But I do not appreciate you doing so in my home, out in the open for God and everyone to witness. Anyone could have walked in just then Parker, what were you thinking?” Addison’s disappointment in her son was written all over her face as she awaited his response.

“I’m sorry. We just got caught up.... We thought everyone was gone. You said you were going to work....” He tried desperately to push blame elsewhere to cover an obviously bad decision.

“I forgot my phone- not that I need a reason to walk into my own house. You need to slow down. Focus more on school and less on that girl. I can’t keep you from doing what you were... about to do... but I do not condone it going on here. I don’t need to lecture you on the consequences of unprotected sex, Parker. Get your shit together. Are we clear?” Addison was trying to keep her emotions in check as she berated her son for succumbing to his adolescent impulses.

“Yes mom.” Parker responded as Addison stormed off.

Kate immediately walked in and said, “Oh my God. What did she say?”

Walking over, he sat down on the couch symbolically dropping his chin to his chest and re-visiting every second of what just happened. “She’s pissed. Like really pissed.”

“Great. Tonight shouldn’t be awkward at all.” Kate said as they both sat quietly reflecting on the moments passed....

CHAPTER THREE:

Addison parked her brand new Mercedes SL500 in the parking spot on campus designated for the Chancellor. She felt a sense of overwhelming accomplishment for herself in that moment. As she got out and walked into her office, she knew without a doubt, this is where she was meant to be and what she was meant to do with her life. She sat down at her desk and a picture caught her eye. It was from her last birthday; Jackson and Parker were kissing her on the cheek as they all celebrated her special day. She smiled thinking about all the incredible times they'd shared with one another and how today was so different from any day before it. As she admired the photograph she leaned back in her chair and thought about all the moments that led to her kiss with Jackson last night and she rather enjoyed walking down memory lane....

A knock at the door startled her and she sat the picture down in its place.

"Dr. Hamilton, these just came for you." Her secretary, Nancy, said as she walked over to Addison's desk and placed them carefully in front of her.

"Thank you Nancy." Addison excused her as she pulled the card off the flowers to read it.

Here's to what's fair and what feels right.

See you tonight. J."

She sighed heavily and placed the card inside her desk drawer before returning to her mountainous stack of paperwork.

Later that afternoon she returned home, flowers in hand, and placed them on the counter as she entered her kitchen. After browsing through the mail and starting toward her bedroom to get ready for the party that evening, the doorbell caught her attention. Traipsing through her entryway, wondering who it could be, she opened the door to find her sister waiting patiently.

"Hey there chitty chitty ho bag." Blaire said as she smiled from ear to ear. Her twisted sense of humor never ceased to amaze Addison.

"That's lovely, thank you." She responded as her only sister stepped inside and closed the door. Heading toward the kitchen, Blaire followed closely behind.

They began their usual sisterly banter and Addison explained what had transpired in the hours since they'd last spoken to one another.

"I received an embarrassing display of pink calla lilies and white roses at my office this afternoon. You can guess they weren't from my husband." She pointed at the vase and smiled as she sipped a bottle of overpriced water.

"He sent you calla lilies and roses? They are gorgeous." Blaire stood in shock for a moment, "Addison. I love you. This is your life. Do what's best for you. Not for anyone else."

Rolling her eyes at her sister's mild mannered remark regarding a relationship that could ultimately jeopardize the comfort of everything she knew, she responded, "I just can't get over how right it feels in my heart, when I know how wrong it is in my head. This is without question, the most asinine thing I have ever done or considered doing." You could literally see the emotional struggle on her face when she spoke about this sordid affair.... It was something that intrigued her but equally was something she felt had the potential to destroy her. As she sat on the end of her bed to remove her shoes, Blaire began offering unsolicited advice.

"I say, for tonight, throw caution to the wind and listen to what your heart is telling you." Addison often envied the carefree attitude of her younger sibling. Not caring about how others felt or would be affected was not a quality Addison herself possessed.

“Ya know it's a good thing I don't have a drinking or drug habit.... I'm afraid you'd encourage me to keep doing it if it felt good.” Addison's response to her sister's comment was half joking and half serious. She never knew what would come out of Blaire's mouth but somehow it always made sense.

Blaire laughed aloud at Addison's comment. “The difference is Addy... I can already hear a change in your voice and in your smile... you're into him whether you want to admit it or not.... So, slut it up sister... put on your diamonds and your absolutely over priced dress and have some fun tonight. You deserve it.”

“Did you just tell me to slut it up?” Addison paused briefly as she tried to wrap her 165 IQ around her sister's recommendation. “What does that even mean?”

“I think you know exactly what it means.”

Addison smiled as she began to pace back and forth thinking of any kind of logistical argument for her current state of affairs. “Okay let's for a second pretend I am totally devoid of all common sense and any fore knowledge prior to this moment and I was interested in this child. I just found out my husband has been cheating on me- for God only knows how long This is the stupidest I have ever felt and instead of checking myself in for years of therapy, I'm going to start an affair which cannot possibly go anywhere because his mother is one of my best friends and he is the best friend of my only child.... This would be both unfair and problematic to the other people in our lives...”

Blaire rolled her eyes as she responded, “Cut the crap Addison.” An astonished look appeared on Addison's face as she listened to what her sister had to say. “This is not about all of them.... Granted it isn't the best of circumstances, but if he's the one who does it for you- nothing else matters. Your marriage hasn't been right for a long time and we both know it... You're afraid if you allow yourself to enjoy this he might treat you the same way and that terrifies you.”

Blaire also possessed a brain filter issue. She was never one to censor what she said or how she said it; fortunately, this was usually beneficial to Addison because it put everything on the table. She had no reason to justify herself as far as Blaire was concerned. This was her life and she deserved to be happy.

“It's not just that. Though I'd be lying if I said it had nothing to do with it.... He deserves someone to grow old with, to have a family with.... I don't want to take from him what can never be given back.... And I would never want him to regret the choices he's making now.”

“Let him make his own decisions. You act like he's still a baby and he's not, he's a grown man. If he thinks he's in love with you.... If he thinks it's you he wants to be with, for once in your life, go for it. Your ass hole husband hasn't done you any favors here Addy, and you do deserve someone who will fight for you and who will take care of you. If he is willing to sacrifice everything he's ever known for a shot at being with you.... what does that say?”

Addison knew in her heart Blaire was right, at least to a certain extent. She did deserve someone better than Spencer, but how was she supposed to know if that person was Jackson Kensington?

Later that evening as Addison put the final touches on her hair and make-up, she found herself anxious for the first time in a long time. She had seen Jack thousands of times before this evening and never had she been so nervous. As she stared in the mirror at the face of a girl she used to know, she couldn't help but wonder, with every available, gorgeous, young girl on campus, what was his interest in her? Of course she was stunning, always had been. She and Blaire had been blessed with a very gracious gene pool, but she could never give him everything

a younger version of her could.... He needed someone to grow old with, to experience life's lessons, greatest achievements and disappointments with. The flip side to all of this was she was accomplished, successful, strong willed and very few young women today had the motivation and drive she had possessed her whole life.

Downstairs the doorbell rang as Jackson waited outside to be let in. When the door opened, a brunette woman in her forties greeted him and he stepped inside.

"Good evening Maggie, is Dr. Hamilton ready?" He asked.

"Not quite Mr. Kensington, she should be shortly though. Can I get you something while you wait?" Maggie questioned politely.

"I tell you what," He reached in his pocket and pulled out two \$100 dollar bills. Handing them to her he continued, "Why don't you take the rest of the evening off? You look exhausted and Addison and I will be out for most of the evening anyway."

"Oh! Thank you Sir! Thank you!" Maggie's excitement lit up the room as she accepted the money and eagerly walked away.

Addison stopped obsessing about the situation for a second and when she stepped back from the mirror she couldn't help but admire the gown she had chosen. She wore a one of a kind black Luther Austin gown that fit her body like a glove and accentuated every last curve. The strapless gown revealed her soft neckline and the slit up the side would have men following her around the ballroom all evening. She touched up her lipstick one more time and then proceeded to head downstairs. As she began her descent, Jackson once again heard the clinking of heels that always made his heart skip a beat. He finished making his drink at the bar and slowly approached the bottom of the stairs. When he caught a first glimpse of her standing there in that black gown, which left very little to his imagination, it took everything he had not to kiss her. The very sight of her stopped him dead in his tracks.

"Well, well, well... Look at you." She voiced with a smile on her face.

"Addison... You look incredible" He stumbled searching for the right words to express just how breathtakingly beautiful she looked standing there.

"You sound surprised." She smiled girlishly as she moved towards him.

"Um. No, of course not. You're gorgeous... you know you are.... But you look flawless, absolutely amazing." Still scrambling to pull himself together, he continued to stare at her.

"Thank you Jack." She smiled sweetly again as they entered into an uncomfortable moment of silence. He noticed the flowers on the counter and attempted to break up the awkward silence.

"I see you, um, you got the flowers."

"I did. They're lovely. Thank you...." She sat down in a nearby chair next to the bar, "Incidentally, how did you know those were my favorite?"

"I know far more about you than you think I do. I am just full of useless Addison Hamilton trivia information." He smiled as he took the seat next to her.

"Is that so? Like what?" She asked inquisitively.

He looked down towards the floor as if trying to recall every last detail he could. He had always paid close attention to her and now he finally had a reason to recite the particulars he could remember.

"Like... I can always tell when you're lying about something because your nostrils flare... You bite your bottom lip when you're nervous. It's a tie between three movies for which is your favorite- Dirty Dancing, Breakfast at Tiffany's and An Affair to Remember- but when someone asks you always say an Affair to Remember because you love the idea of Deborah Kerr and Cary Grant sharing this epic romance. You love pop tarts even though you refuse to eat them." He

continued to think and then started again, "When you're worried about something, you have this look on your face, like you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders... Thunderstorms terrify you. You love Broadway shows. If you could pick one other place to live besides here, it would be New York. Winter is your favorite season. You still pout when things don't go your way. You look the most beautiful after you come home from a long day and you put on your sweats and put your hair up..." He paused briefly, "A few things I think very few people know about you is you love trashy romance novels and gossip magazines, Miley Cyrus's The Climb and Party in the USA are two of your FAVORITE songs even though you would never admit it- I happen to know they're on your ipod and on a CD in your car. And regardless of owning what I can only assume is hundreds of thousands of dollars in diamonds- your favorite piece of jewelry is the strand of pearls your grandmother gave you before she died..." He looked up at her to see tears in her eyes. No one had ever paid so much attention to her before tonight, how could he possibly know all of these things? How long had he been harboring these feelings for her?

"Addison" He called her name as she sat there speechless.

"I don't know what to say." She wiped a tear from her cheek.

"You could say, 'you're right Jackson. You know me better than I know myself'." He smiled.

She laughed adoringly, "You're right Jack. You do know me pretty well." Trying to compose herself quickly before her evening turned into a repeat of the one before, she continued, "It's refreshing. My husband still thinks my favorite flowers are Tulips."

"Tulips? You hate tulips." He said with a certain amount of disdain in his voice.

She giggled, "Yes I know. Yet I inexplicably receive a dozen of them every anniversary." They smiled for a moment at each other and he moved a little closer.

"I can't stop thinking about you."

"Jack. Stop."

"And I mean that literally. I cannot comprehend any thought that doesn't start and stop with you..." He looked a little frustrated.

She looked away, noticing a familiar scent from his closeness made her feel something she hadn't felt before, "We really should get going. We're going to be late." It took every fiber of her being to take the first step in the direction of the door but his words convinced her to stop.

"You can't tell me you haven't thought about what a relationship would be like... or even a night, for that matter." He stood motionless, hoping for a positive response.

She paused for a moment before taking a small step towards him, "I'd be lying if I said I hadn't considered what a life with you would be like. And to actually hear myself say those words," She shook her head in wonderment, "Makes me think- What the hell am I even doing anywhere close to this conversation right now? I never should have allowed myself to be in this position."

"Addy." His voice was pleading, but she interrupted him.

"I know how difficult this is.... Believe me. I've given it a considerable amount of thought and energy.... And I keep coming back to the same outcome. We can't do this.... We should really go." As she uttered the last syllable she walked towards the door and he followed after a few seconds of standing there with his tail tucked between his legs like a small child. He wasn't sure where the evening would go after this, but it was already not where he hoped it would be.

After a relatively quiet car ride over to the promotional ball where they would meet up with Kate and Parker, Addison realized she had made the right decision. As usual when she let her

head rule and her heart follow along, things became far less complex and in this case it would be the best choice for both of their futures, she was sure of it. As they entered the ballroom Jackson spotted Kate and Parker and immediately joined them at their table. Addison instantly began to mingle with the guests who had already arrived. She knew almost everyone there, a duty that came with the territory she had recently acquired.

“What’s up dude?” Parker asked as Jackson sat down at the table looking less than thrilled about life.

“Are you okay?” Kate asked directly following Parker.

“Uh. Yea. It's just been a long day. I say after I drop your mom off, we go to the lake and get totally hammered and have meaningless drunken sex with strangers.” Jack said as both Kate and Parker laughed aloud.

Smiling, Kate answered, “We would really love to, but we're meeting my parents in a little while. It's their anniversary tomorrow so we're spending the night at their house and the day with them. I'm sorry. Champagne?” She tried to make a peace offering with Jackson as he sat sulking in a pool of his own misery.

“Great. Desert me in my time of need. Awesome.” He responded while quickly removing the champagne flute from Kate’s hand and finishing it off in just one gulp.

“Besides, I’m pretty sure Addison doesn’t even want to look at us right now.” Kate followed up.

“What? Why?” Jackson asked.

Parker took a drink of his beer as he responded “She sort of caught us in a compromising position earlier this afternoon.”

“What?” Jackson tried desperately to mask his laughter.

“We weren’t like butt ass naked or anything but... It was clear where we were headed...” Parker found it more comical now than he did earlier that afternoon.

Jackson reveled in the embarrassment of his best friend’s public display of affection because somehow it proved to be a great distraction from his own pathetic existence. “What did she say?”

“Oh... She was pissed.” Parker laughed aloud, “Like super pissed. Probably the most mad I’ve ever seen her.”

“I’ve never been so embarrassed. The Chancellor of our school saw me in my bra.” Kate put her face in her hands as they relived the afternoon’s events.

“So what are your plans for tonight?” Parker inquired.

“Eh. Just dropping your mom off and heading home. I have a psych paper I could really stand to work on.” He motioned to the waiter in mid sentence to bring over more champagne.

“Exciting Friday nights we have planned... You’re going to work on homework and I have to pretend to give a shit about Asher Sheridan and his promotion.” Parker and Kate laughed as a distant view of Addison flirting with another man distracted Jackson from everything around him while he polished off his second glass of champagne.

“So what are the plans for our trip?” Jackson asked, trying to distract himself.

“All I know so far is we have a meeting on Monday afternoon in Beasley Hall to talk over the details. But we leave on the 22nd and we come back on the 30th? Or the 1st? Somewhere around there.” Kate responded and took a sip of her champagne.

“And we’re going to St. Barts? I didn’t even look at the flier, Leighton and Kinsley signed me up.” Jackson added.

“I’m excited. We all really need this break.” Kate voiced as she caught a glimpse of her watch, “God it’s already 9:30... We better get going babe. We have a long drive ahead of us.”

“Wait a second. You’re already bailing?” Jack asked in the disgusted tone that had recently become his signature sound.

“It’ll be after midnight by the time we get there as it is...” Parker tried defending their actions.

Jack took another drink, “Fine... fine.... You owe me. So big. You know what? You both owe me... Big. Huge, actually.”

“We know.” Parker smiled as they stood up from the table.

“Have a great time at your parents Katie.”

“I’m sorry we’re deserting you. We love you.” Kate kissed him on the cheek and they both excused themselves from the table.

Sitting alone at a table big enough for ten with two empty champagne glasses already in front of him, Jackson waved down another passing waiter to take two more glasses as Addison approached him.

“Hey. I haven’t seen you much tonight.” As she sat down in the empty chair beside him, her long legs peeked through the thigh high slit in her one of kind gown that distracted not only Jack, but every other man in the room.

“I am honestly surprised you noticed.” He brushed her off as he continued to sulk.

“What is that supposed to mean?” She asked with a slowly disappearing smirk.

“Don’t patronize me Addison. Why don’t you get back to your boyfriend and let me know when you’re ready for me to drive you home.” Jack angrily ignored her as the man she was flirting with earlier in the evening approached their table.

“Addy, is everything okay?” John asked with a certain amount of concern present in his voice.

“Of course. Um. Jonathan Adler, this is Jackson Kensington. He’s a friend of my sons’ and my escort for the evening.” John extended his hand to Jackson who ignored it all together.

A little surprised, John continued, “Okay... Listen I was just going to tell you if you want to let the kid go home, I’ll be happy to drive you.” Jackson made immediate eye contact with Addison, who instantly felt a little unsure of what might happen next.

“If you two will excuse me...I need some air.” Jackson declared as he stood up from the table and angrily tossed his napkin down. As he stormed off in the direction of the balcony attached to the fifth story ballroom, Addison’s heart sank in her chest.

“John if you’ll excuse me just a moment, I better go see what type of girl trouble he’s having now.” She laughed dismissingly, hoping to distract John from the obvious tension between the two of them.

Hurriedly rushing off in search of Jackson, she stepped out onto the marble and cement covered balcony over-looking downtown Los Angeles when she noticed him standing solemnly in the corner. Letting out a nervous sigh, she paused briefly before approaching him.

“Look...” She began, but was immediately interrupted.

“What Addison? What?” He snapped back at her.

“Why are you so upset? She tried to pretend she didn’t know why he was feeling the way he was, which inevitably only made things worse.

“Why? You won’t talk to me, seriously, about what’s going on between us. But you’re here, flirting with some guy, right in front of me.”

“Flirting?” She asked at the laughable accusation as she tried to deny it.

“You know what... It doesn’t matter. If you can’t sit down and have a grown up conversation about feelings we’re both having.... I can’t make you.” His heart pounded in his chest as his

anger for her ability to ignore anything she was feeling, took precedent. Storming off, he walked back inside to resume his original position at their table.

The dark sky was lit by the Los Angeles horizon as Addison was left standing outside alone. She took a deep breath, composed herself, and remembered she was the adult in this situation. As she walked back inside the ballroom and smiled at passing by guests, she took the seat next to him again.

She took a deep breathe. "I agree and if you want to talk endlessly about this very uncomfortable situation, then let's talk."

From across the room John noticed Jack and Addison had returned to their seats and he approached them hoping he would have the opportunity to escort Addison home at the end of the evening. When he reached the table he leaned down and whispered in her ear, prompting a coy response.

"John... I, umm, am really tired. Jackson is going to drive me home. I appreciate the offer though." She smiled sweetly at her dear friend knowing he wouldn't understand why she was suddenly not interested in spending time with him as she always was in the past.

"Are you sure? I'd love to get some more time with you.... You know you're my favorite girl." He bent down and picked up her hand in his.

Addison looked across the table to see a look in Jackson's eyes that she had never seen before. Jealousy, alcohol and resentment were all factors contributing to his feelings at that point in the evening. He had never felt this way about anyone... he was shamelessly enamored with her. He wanted her more than he had ever wanted anyone but she wasn't feeling the same and in a moment of weakness he let his emotions get the best of him as he stood up to confront John.

"She said no." Jackson declared as he raised his voice, causing everyone in the room to stop and stare.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't speaking to you. Addy and I have a long history together... I think I know her a little better than you do." John stood Addison up out of her chair and put his hand around her waist so they both faced Jackson.

"With all due respect Mr. Adler, she said no. That's it. I suggest you leave her alone." Jackson tried repeatedly to regain his self-control when all he wanted to do was fight the one guy who stood between him and Addison right then.

"Or what pal?" John questioned as he bowed up to Jackson, which caused things to become heated rather quickly.

Instantly Addison stepped in between the two of them hoping to detract from the scene about to be caused because of her.

"Guys. Guys. Stop. You're making a scene. Jackson, go get the car. John, I will call you in the morning." She tried making peace and offering a quick resolution to an ego problem she wasn't exactly sure how to diffuse. After all, she was a woman who had absolutely no grasp on what caused men to be so territorial.

Ready to excuse herself from the evening, Addison picked up her bag and began to walk away when John gently grabbed her arm with the faint hope of gaining a little insight into what was actually going on.

"Addison... wait." John said as he pulled her back.

In that split second, Jackson made a choice that could have easily landed him in jail with Addison never speaking to him again. He tackled John, punching him in the face and the two men went at it like animals. It was, to say the least, a very embarrassing display in which Addison was right in the middle of.

“Oh my God. Jack.” She yelled as she stepped right in between two men she cared about, who were fighting each other in the middle of a multi-million dollar lavish affair like it was a street bar in the Bronx. As she grabbed his hand, she pulled him towards the door in hopes of a quick escape.

The car ride home was a quiet one, as the ride to the party had been. As they pulled into the driveway of the Hamilton house, Addison had a hard time formulating any complete thoughts, much less the words to attribute them to anything meaningful. She sat there for a moment trying to gather terminology that might make things better instead of progressively worse.

“Look. Parker's gone for the evening. I don't expect him back until late tomorrow, come in and let's finish this conversation. I don't want any animosity between us.... And there will be if we don't clear this mess up.” She thought talking about it, thoroughly, might reduce any further misunderstandings, but instead of eagerly jumping out of the car, Jack sat there for a moment in silence.

“Please? Come in and talk to me.” She asked again. Without saying anything he disgustingly got out of the car and they walked inside together.

Given the night's events, Jackson walked straight inside and gathered a towel and ice for his hand.

“Are you okay?” Regardless of how mad Addison was at that moment, she was mostly concerned about the physical appearance. Jack had a small cut above his eye and his hand was swollen.

“I'll live.” He answered as short as possible.

“Look.... I know we're both really struggling with how to adjust to this situation.... And it's complicated at best...” She tried searching for the logistical explanations of why they kept reliving this over and over, but she was cut short quickly by his response.

“I'm learning to deal.” Cockiness and attitude began to emerge as the conversation continued.

She looked at him for a brief second, “Jack. Can we lose the attitude please?” She asked in a pleading manner in case there was any possible chance of reconciliation between them.

“I just punched some guy in the face, for what? Because if I hadn't... it might be him who was here with you now?” Jackson looked away from her as a shocked expression surfaced across her face.

“That's not fair Jackson.” The anger of his words finally hit her.

“Yet you were the one who said this was not about what was fair.” He threw her own words back in her face.

Placing her hand on her hip, she took a deep breath and began again, “Okay. Let's start over. Shall we?”

“I've told you how I feel Addison. How do you feel? What do you want? That is, what do you want other than to ignore what you're really feeling?” He faced her again, searching for any type of response that might offer a semblance of hope for their future.

“What do I want? I want my son to stop obsessing over this girl he's with and finish school on the Dean's list so he has a chance at any career he wants. I want my husband, not to be cheating on me for what I feel has been the better part of twenty-five years.” She paused briefly searching for the courage to continue and not break down in tears, “I want to not be faced with what I know will be an ugly and very public divorce because I am humiliated for what he's done to me and to our family... I want you to be a little older or me a little younger because then maybe we'd have a shot at anything more than you being just my son's best friend.... And I want

this situation not to just completely terrify me..." She leaned up against a wall to find her strength, desperately hoping he would understand and finally let all of this go.

In a brief silence she found herself unbelievably confused about what she really did want. She started walking out towards the pool to catch her breath and he quickly followed.

"What do you mean? What terrifies you?" He slouched down in a nearby chair knowing his miniscule hope for a successful evening was gone.

"I mean this. Us. This whole situation is the most incomprehensible thing I've ever thought about doing. I don't know if I've actually considered a relationship with you because of what I'm going through personally or if it's because..." Pausing briefly Jackson jumped in.

"Because you feel something too? It's always been there Addison. Always. I think you're the one I'm supposed to spend my life with and no... it does not make any sense to me. Okay? I'm not sure how I'll explain to Parker I punched some old guy in the face because I couldn't stand the thought of you leaving with him.... But." As quickly as he had interrupted her a multitude of times during the course of the evening, she did the same thing to him.

"I don't know what you think of me Jack, but that isn't exactly the reality of the situation." She uncrossed her legs and crossed them again in the other direction, which caught his eye and only made it harder to concentrate.

"Really Addison?? Because I'll tell ya, it looked like a very realistic ending to an excruciating evening."

She smiled at this point knowing her next words would be a complete shock to him.

"What I think you've failed to realize during all of tonight's events is that I'm not really John's type." She smiled at him briefly.

"You're everyone's type Addison..." He looked away.

"Not everyone darling." She caught his attention rather quickly, "He's gay, Jack." A look of sheer humiliation came across his face and she knew, he never anticipated such an outcome.

"What?" He paused trying to quickly reassemble the events of the evening that led up to the big blow out in the middle of the ballroom.

She nodded her head, "Afraid so..."

"No way. He was all over you. That doesn't make any sense." Baffled by the thought of having punched someone for absolutely no reason, at this point, had Jackson's head spinning out of control.

"We've been friends for twenty years. He hugs me and kisses me because he loves me and he's affectionate, but I promise you can take my word on this one.... He is absolutely one hundred and ten percent gay." She crossed her arms in that 'I told you so' way that always made her feel superior to everyone else in the conversation.

"Oh.... Shit." He leaned back in his chair contemplating where the evening turned from bad to unrecognizable.

She leaned forward in her chair to close the large gap between the two of them in hopes of making him realize what happened this evening was just one of many embarrassing situations they would face if things continued on the path they were on.

"Look. I am sorry if you thought he was hitting on me. He wasn't.... and even if he was, Jackson, it cannot continue to be any concern of yours."

"But he wanted to drive you home...." Still trying to make sense out of how he could possibly have confused a gay man for a straight one, nothing was adding up.

"John and I met our freshman year of college. We hit it off immediately and started dating.... After about 3 months of dating we decided it was time to.... Ya know." She made a

sexual implication, Jackson looked away and she continued, "Anyway, he couldn't go through with it, if you know what I mean and he'll tell you that's when he knew he was gay. He knew if he couldn't be with me, he could never be with any woman."

Utter humiliation and major embarrassment contributed to the way Jackson felt at that point in their conversation. He had never felt like he did tonight, threatened so much by someone he'd never even met before. His feelings for Addison literally consumed every inch of who he was and at that moment, he wasn't sure he would ever feel normal again, without her.

"So," He collected his thoughts all over again, "Why if you've been friends for so long have I never met him, not once?" He felt compelled to ask at least one logical question.

"Well he doesn't come over here much. Spencer never cared for him, or the history we share. He wanted to drive me home so we could stop for cheesecake at this little dive over on Wilshire. He's having some problems with Michael, his boyfriend, and he wanted some advice. That... is why he wanted to take me home." The more explanation she gave, the worse he felt about what happened.

"Why didn't you just say that?"

"I shouldn't have had to explain myself to you Jack. But I could see the jealousy in your eyes and I knew we needed to have this conversation. I didn't know you were going to hit him..." She leaned back in her chair again, flashing an excessive amount of thigh.

"In all fairness, I didn't know myself until it happened. I don't know what's going on with me. I can't focus on anything but you." As he spoke to her he looked more and more distraught. "I don't know what to do Addison."

"I admit there is something between us. Some chemistry I'm not even pretending to understand, so I am taking myself out of the equation before this gets any further out of hand. If you do care for me, you won't pursue this anymore." She stood up from the square glass and granite table, "Thank you for tonight. For standing up for me when you thought I was being taken advantage of and for caring about me. I won't forget it." She placed her hand on his cheek, "You're a good man Jackson and you'll find someone you can't live without. I promise." She took her hand away and smiled pleasantly. "Goodnight."

He stared at her as she walked away, knowing if he let this door close... it may never be reopened. He stood by the light of the pool struggling with whether to listen to his head or his heart and in one instance, he decided. "I already did..."

He laid the towel from his hand down on the table and walked back inside locking the door behind him. As he reached the bottom of the stairs and took a deep breath, he knew that once he walked into her room tonight, nothing would ever be the same. He found himself unsure of many things in that moment of weakness, but how he felt about Addison, was not one of them. He loved her. He had always loved her. And tonight was the night he would show her how he felt. He walked up the stairs and into her bedroom where he found her at a standstill on her balcony staring at the stars. The glow of the moon above illuminated her entire body and she looked more beautiful than he could ever remember. He walked up behind her, spun her around and they kissed for what felt like forever. After several seconds he picked her up and carried her into her bedroom. As he laid her across her Egyptian cotton sheets, he whispered in her ear...

"I've already found someone I can't live without."

She pulled him close and for the first time, they made love. Her body tingled from one end to the other as it felt like their souls became one. She felt things with him she had never felt before. No boundaries were considered, no analyzing or logistical thinking came into play, and for tonight they just had each other....