

Black & White

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To myself, to my family by blood
and the chosen one.

I love you all

Summer

“Oh my God, Summer! Get up already! We’ll be late for our first day!”

I cover my ears with my pillow as I hear Jared scream at me. What I am not prepared for is the fact that he actually comes into my bedroom and literally carries me out of bed and takes me outside.

“Oh, no. No no no no no” I scream. “No! Jared, seriously!” He wouldn’t. Would he? I’m on my pj’s...

“Sorry, sis, but this is for the greater good.” He smiles as he replies to me.

“Jared Spencer Lester-Fuentes, don’t you dare!”

SPLASH!

I find it really hard to decide whether I should laugh, scream, or cry as I swim out of the pool. Jared has it clear, though.

“Summer Joy Lester-Fuentes yes, I did dare.”

He keeps laughing as he walks away from the pool edge. He knows me too well.

“Don’t worry” I say as I sit on the same edge, dropping water wherever I stand. “I’ll be the bigger person for once. Just this once” He smiles and lands me a towel “Seriously, I’ll kill you and everyone you’ve ever met. Or, even better” I smirk. “I’ll hook up with them all.”

Jared rolls his eyes.

“You already did that” I wouldn’t say ‘everyone he’s ever met’... but I guess I’m getting closer. “Now” He continues “Hurry up and get dressed, dear sister. I’m not about to arrive late to our first day as juniors. If you want a ride, you’d better be ready in thirty minutes.”

Even though I don’t actually believe he’d leave without me, but you never truly know with my brother, so I start getting ready as fast as I can.

A few minutes later, as I’m trying to get this eyeliner decently done for once, our bathroom door bursts open with no sign of hesitation.

“I honestly hate our trust sometimes. I could be naked right now, you know?”

Jared rolls his eyes again

“We’re leaving in five minutes, so you shouldn’t be.”

“And I am not”

“Then there is no point in this conversation. Besides, you’d locked the door if you weren’t visible.” He glances at me and adds “Two minutes.”

“We’re not going anywhere until I get this stupid thing done...” I growl in frustration as a crazy long line follows my eyeliner pencil.

My charming brother rolls his eyes at me for the third time this morning as he watches me fail another try.

“Oh, come on... For God’s sake, give that to me.” He pushes me to sit in the toilet as he takes my eyeliner pencil from my

hand “Now, close your eyes, stay still, and let’s get this thing over with already.”

He’s done in no time and I get up to pack the rest of my things after checking the result.

He glares at me as he spits

“You’re welcome.”

“Well,” I say, as I get my backpack “We had to find a good use for your unbelievable drawing skills, right?”

For the fourth time now, Jared rolls his eyes, this time so extremely forceful that I honestly believe he could hurt his vision. Even with that, he smiles. Probably because he knows I’m right.

We both make our way across the house to the garage, where we find our mother getting also inside her own vehicle. I’m guessing she’s already late for work, so she just has time to tell us “*¡Que vaya bien el primer día!*” and to throw a kiss in our direction before disappearing.

“She does realize” I start, seeking my brother’s gaze “that telling us to have fun has the exact same effect on us as if she was to tell someone that’s going straight to hell not to burn themselves, right?”

Two laughs follow my joke.

“That was a good one,” says Nicholas Zone, AKA, my brother’s best friend.

“Morning, Nick” answers my brother walking towards him before they do this nerdy hand-sake that they’ve been doing since fifth grade “” Sup, bro?”

It is my turn to roll my eyes as I also walk towards him to give him a tight hug.

“Hello, Nick. How was your week?”

“It was fine. A little too much of my sister.” We part while he answers, under my brother's suspicious glare.

“That’s new,” he says, referring to the hug. I let him get there as I slid into the car’s front seat. It takes him a little longer than five seconds to figure it out

“Oh, come on! Not you too?!”

Nick shrugs and smiles while I laugh my guts out. The two boys come into the Jared still with this hilarious expression that makes me laugh even harder.

He looks at me.

“Seriously? My best friend? You had to hook up with my best friend?” He pauses for a second before repeating “Seriously?”

I look back at Nick, mainly to see if he’s feeling any kind of uncomfortable, but since he seems to be having as much fun as me, I stare back at my brother to answer directly.

“Listen, it happened at Pascal’s party last week. We were both drunk and horny and yes, we hooked up. But it was a one-time thing and we are both okay with it, so the only one making a big deal out of this is you.”

Jared glances at Nick, who’s nodding with a smile as I speak. Then, he pants and leans back in his seat to ask

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

He’s looking at me again and, for the first time, I feel a touch of guilt. I should’ve told him, but I completely forgot about it.

“Look, we both knew you were going to find out sooner or later,” I say “And, besides. If I have to tell you everyone that I’ve hooked up with this past holidays, we all know we’d be here until Friday night, so...” I leave the sentence unfinished while both boys laugh a little, so I add “Now, how about we get going? We’ll be late, and not because of me this time.”

“It’d be the first” answers Jared, but he starts driving all the same.

I love seeing my brother drive, but I feel a little bad that he has to take me everywhere. I didn’t get my license because, at the time, I had my mind on other things and I couldn’t bring myself to get another thing to figure out.

When we arrive at the school I see the line that’s waiting for us when we get to the door so we can take our timetables and get our lockers.

Probably next year will be me the one that’s behind all those folders. At least it will be me if I get picked as head girl again this year.

A granting voice gets me out of my thoughts.

“JJ, Hi!” Then, as if she had just seen Nick and me, Arlene Tice ads “Oh. Hello, guys.”

Honestly, I don’t know what bothers me the most: her nickname for my brother (I mean... seriously? JJ?) or the fact that Jared seems to be ok with it. I get it, they’ve been fooling around all summer. He wants to get laid, but still... a little self-respect never hurts anyone.

Besides, they're not even official, and you can almost feel Arlene's glare directed at any girl who dares to speak to my brother. She gives me a look from time to time. I know we don't look alike, but she knows perfectly well who I am. We've known each other for more than seven years.

"Hi, Arlene." Says Jared, giving her a hug with a big smile.

As much as I hate to admit it, Jared does look happy when she's around, and I know he feels genuinely glad to see her, so I let my feelings slide. I just want the best for my brother. If she makes him happy... Then be it. Though I doubt it'll last very long.

"Do you have your timetable?"

"Yes. A friend of mine is one of the girls handing them. Come one, you don't have to wait for the line."

Fine. If I've got to say something good about Arlene is that she's got contacts everywhere. And I guess is a good thing we don't have to wait like an hour on this line.

The girl at the counter smiles at Arlene, winks at me, and asks "Family names and age, please?"

"We're Lester, Lester, and Zone. We're all juniors" I answer, returning her greeting. I've also recognized her.

After a moment of looking through a whole lot of papers, she gets three out.

"Alright. Zone: locker number 886; here's your timetable. Jared Lester-Fuentes: locker number 1216 and Summer... Locker number 1982."

We smile at her but, when we're all about to leave, she grabs me by the wrist "Hey. You up tonight?"

This has caught me by surprise.

"Erm... Sorry... I can't... Ok, it is not ideal to tell you this here and right now but... You do know what happened was... Fun and all but..."

She laughs, which gets my anxiety levels a little lower.

"Hey, relax girl. I'm not proposing or declaring my 'undying love' to you. I'm just saying my parents aren't going to be home tonight and, as you just said, last time was really fun. That's all." A relief wave crosses my whole body "So... You up?"

I'm not very sure why, but I decline her offer again. "I'm sorry... But I already have plans." She lets me go with a shrug but, after a second thought, I realize something. "Hey, I can't tonight, but why don't we exchange numbers and see if we can make it work some other time?" She smiles and gives me her phone so I can type down and save my number, just in case.

After that, I make my way to my new locker and, thank God, I find it rather quickly. Once I get there and change its code, I go back to find my brother.

I spend the whole way there waving at people that I haven't seen in some time until I find Jared with Arlene and a friend of ours, Katelyn Jemmott.

"Well, hello. Are you done with your girlfriend?"

"As you very well know, she's not my girlfriend"

Jared laughs

“I know”.

“Where do you have to go now? Who is your counselor?” I ask. I like to know where he is.

“I’m headed to the classroom number...” He takes a look at his timetable. “2841 with Mrs.Russom.”

What?!

I take Jared’s timetable from his hand as he stares at me

“Hey! What are you...”

“Why do we have almost the same classes?”

“Maybe because last year we chose almost the same subjects?”

I glance at him.

“No, you idiot. I’m not talking about subjects. I’m talking about classes. We share almost every hour!”

Jared looks confused.

“That can’t be right”

I give him my timetable

“See it for yourself, dear brother.”

“What’s the big deal?” asks Katelyn “You are so close, right? I wish I had this relationship with my sister.”

“Our good relationship is based on two main rules,” starts Jared “Unconditional trust...”

“And not seeing each other every second of every day!” I finish the sentence, almost screaming. “This is a disaster.”

Even though Jared doesn’t react, I know he feels the same way. He’s just playing “calm brother” right now.

“Why don’t you talk to the principal?” Asks Arlene, right on point “It could always be a mistake, right?”

“Right.”

So, after a brief argument about who should go where, Jared and I make our way to the principal’s office, where Miss Netherfield looks at us with curiosity.

“What do you kids need?”

“Hi, Miss Netherfield.” I start “We need to speak to Mr. Locke.”

She looks at us with care in her eyes. She’s known us since we were very little, so she usually tries to protect us.

“He’s with a new student right now, but I’ll let him know you are here.” She smiles and takes the phone to make the call.

We stand a little back, sitting on the waiting chairs and, not long after, the main office door opens and a white-haired man comes out smiling at someone inside the room.

“Alright, I believe in angels now”

I look at my brother, confused, and I figure he’s referring to the girl that’s standing behind Mr. Locke’s desk but, besides her long blond hair, I cannot dissert any other significant fact about her.

I take his glasses from his face, I put them on, and then I understand why he said what he did.

“It is messed up that we have the same diopetre graduation... Where are your glasses?”

“In my backpack.”

“Then why don’t you use them?”

“Because yours were closer. And you are right, she’s gorgeous.”

“Oh, no. Nah ah. Forget it. I saw her first.”

I laugh as he gets his glasses back.

“Well, first of all, I don’t think your girlfriend would appreciate you checking out other girls like this and...”

“Arlene is not my girlfriend. Yet.”

I laugh at his response before Mr. Locke starts talking to us:

“Well if there aren’t my favorite juniors this year. What can I do for you, Lesters?”

“We’re very sorry to bother you, but this is kind of important and urgent. It seems like it has been a mistake printing our timetables.” Says my brother.

Mr. Locke takes his glasses and extends his hand so we give him our timetables.

“Let me see... No. No, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with them.”

“But... sir” I begin, taking a deep breath to try and not make a scene “It seems like Jared and I are together in almost every class... And yes, I love my brother, but I see him enough of him already, don’t you think?”

“Miss Lester-Fuentes, we find ourselves in a brand new era, and this year we are making changes in our working methods. You both have always had amazing social and academic skills being separated. We want to try how it will work for you to be together. Not because we want it to be worse... But because we feel it will be even better. Mrs. Russom is a new teacher who doesn’t know you, so she’ll be even better at analyzing your behaviors.”

I let go of a little breath. When Mr. Locke gets all psychologists, there's no point trying to argue with him.

"On a different note..." Mr. Locke makes a sign to the beautiful girl behind him so she gets a little closer. "Miss Ellender, these are Summer and Jared, I don't know if you remember I talked about them before... They'll show you around today."

She smiles shyly at us.

"Hi. Nice to meet you.

I smile back, without wanting to look at my brother.

"Hi, nice to meet you too. I am Summer, and this silent dumb dude beside me is my brother, Jared."

"You are so funny, sis." Jared smiles kindly before addressing the girl and shaking her hand "Nice to meet you."

"I'm Maia. So... You guys are siblings?"

"Yep." I answer "We're twins"

"You don't look much alike."

"And thank God for that" laughs Jared

"I don't understand why you sound so relieved. We can all see that I got the pretty gens" I say, playfully touching my hair.

"If I have to be honest," Says Maia "I believe you are both beautiful."

"Well, thank you very much"

My God. Jared is using that smile. He just uses that smile when he is really into someone. I better back my butt off now.

Now that I think about it... even better, because she seems way nicer than Arlene.

"Hey, Summer!"

Oh, no.

Jared is laughing at me even before I let go a deep breath.

“Here we go... Feel free to keep it going, J.”

“And miss the fun? Oh, I don’t think so.”

Tristan Yeoman gets closer but, before I leave him any space to talk, I start speaking.

“Hey, Tristan. How are you?” I don’t give him the chance to answer my question “Look, I seriously would love to talk to you right now... But I have to show Maia around. Principal’s orders. Sorry.”

I try to keep walking, but he stops me.

“No, wait. Summer, please.”

I sigh and turn around to face him again with a forced smile.

“Look, just one thing: As much as you try not to, you’ll end up craving for me as much as I crave for you.”

Eugh.

Again, I force a nice smile.

“Listen, Tristan. As I’ve told you a thousand times already, you and me, are never going to happen. And not just because I’ve never felt the same way about you as you seem to do about me, but also because we’re family. I mean... I get it. But come on.”

“We’re not actually related. We’re not related legally either. Not yet, at least.”

“What the hell does that mean?” I ask

“Hasn’t your father told you? He proposed to my mother like a week ago.”

“What?” Screams Jared, voicing my feelings. I’m literally in shock right now. “That can’t be true” Jared stares at me shaking his head.

“Why would I lie, Jared? I don’t like this either. Don’t you realize this gives Summer even more reasons to reject me?”

“Shut up, Tristan!” We both scream at once.

“Since when is this happening?” I’m freaking out a little too much, and I see Jared taking in two deep breaths to steady himself. Calm twin to the rescue. I am too far away already to get back to the rational world.

“OK... Let’s be rational.” Begins my brother “We knew this was going to happen, didn’t we? I mean... They’ve been together for five years, and living together for three now... This was doomed to happen.”

“We have to stop this.”

“Summer, listen to yourself. Let’s not do anything stupid. Remember that it was us who decided to live with Mum to not have to deal with... her, and to let Dad be happy... Right? Besides, we owe nothing to the guy.”

“Jared, I understand that you’re resentful... But still, we can’t let our father marry that... witch. I mean... he didn’t even remember to tell us, his children, that he was getting married.”

“Summer, you saying all this as if he does not care for us was something new.”

I take a step back. I understand where he’s coming from but...

“He’s still our dad. At least we should try to talk to him about how much the She-Devil has drowned.”

“You remember that you’re talking about my mother, right?”

That’s bad timing.

“Seriously, Tristan. What are you still doing here?!” I scream so close to his face that I’ve probably spit on it. “I do not want to see you. I do not want to hear you... I want you as far away from me as possible in two seconds!”

I know I’m as red as a tomato right now, and that every single soul in this hallway heard me but... I honestly don’t care. At least Tristan has disappeared.

I face Jared again.

“We have to do something about this”

“We don’t have to do anything”

“We’re going to see him this afternoon.”

I start walking towards our classroom, where I sit in the middle row next to Willow Berks, who recognizes my face and, thank God, doesn’t speak to me.

2

Jared

I watch Summer march into our classroom without another word.

“Well” Maia’s voice surprises me, and I turn to face her
“That was... something. Is she always like that?”

I see she doesn’t mean that in a bad way, so I decide to answer her with as much honesty as I can.

“Not at all. She is usually very chill but... well, this news wasn’t exactly the best to start the school year.”

“And what will you do, about it?”

“About what?”

“Well, she said you were going this afternoon to see him, but it doesn’t seem like you really want to.”

“I don’t. This is his life, and he chose to kick us out of it a while ago. I owe nothing to the guy. If he wants to bury himself in the mud, that’s his choice.”

“But you’ll go either way.”

It’s not a question, but I answer all the same

“For her.”

After that, we walk towards classroom number 2841.

Arlene has saved a seat for me beside her, and I look at Maia, not knowing what to do.

“Don’t worry, lover boy.” Says the girl, winking at me
“Go and sit beside your damsel, I’ll find my way around here. I’m a big girl.”

I can’t help the laughter. I quickly scan the room and I bend closer to Maia.

“Want free advice?”

“Sure.”

I point at an empty seat in the back row.

“You may want to sit beside Fiora. She’s really nice, and one of my sister’s closest friends. Well, we all call her Batgirl or just Bat.”

“Why?” laughs Maia “Does she own a bat for a pet or something?”

“Well, no.” I smile back “Her surname is Hotham.”

“Oh.”

I nod and watch her walk towards bat as I make my way to sit beside Arlene.

“So... Who was that?”

Something’s wrong.

“Her name is Maia. She’s new in town. The principal asked me and Summer to watch a bit over her and to help her settle in.”

“Good thing you guys went to talk to him, then.”

“Yes...” I stare at her just for a moment “Are you ok?”

She looks at me with such a cold expression that I feel chills down my body.

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

Oh, just great.

I first started liking Arlene a few months ago, and we’ve spent all summer fooling around and making plans together, but we’re not together-together. There is nothing official. I do like her a lot, and I’m waiting for the right moment to ask her to be my girlfriend. I just don’t want to mess this up, which is exactly what it looks like I’m doing right now.

“Listen, why don’t we grab lunch after this and go to the football fields to eat there? It’s normally very quiet, and it’d be a good moment to spend together.”

“Her expression changes a bit, looking more warm and excited.

“I’d love that.”

It looks like she wants to say something more, but the classroom door closes behind a young woman who I’m guessing is Mrs. Russom

“Hi, guys”

She doesn’t look older than to be in her late twenties, but she speaks with force and confidence, which tells me she’s been doing this for a while.

“My name is Mrs. Russom. I’m going to be your counselor this year, as well as your new English teacher...”

I zone out as she begins to talk about the importance of a junior year, being almost our last school year, and how every mark will have an impact on our chances of getting into college.

“... also, at this point of the year, you guys should choose who your head girl or boy will be. I think you all know each other fairly well so, how about last year’s head boy or girl stands up.”

I can feel every single stare right at me... and on Summer.

I glance at her, who seems to have calmed down a little. At least, she doesn’t look like a tomato anymore.

I stand upright after she does.

“Alright.” Mrs. Russom continues “Does anybody else want to be this year’s head boy/girl?”

I sense that nobody even thinks of it.

Summer and I have been head boy and head girl for our corresponding classmates forever.

“Really? No one?” Asks Mrs. Russom, noticeably confused “Well, then it is between you two, I guess.”

I turn to see Summer, who looks as uncomfortable as I am.

I’m not an idiot, and as much as I enjoy this kind of work, it means much more to her than to me.

And I believe that the fact that she’s willing to do this is such a good sign of her recovery.

“Mrs. Russom?” silence reigns in the room. I know what I am about to say, it's not very... Habitual, but it is the right thing to do.

“Yes, dear?”

“With all due respect, I’ve already been a head boy for so many years, and I honestly am bored about it. I think it’ll be better if my classmate here got the position.”

Mrs. Russom readjusts her glasses.

“What’s your name, boy?”

Suddenly, Summer has a cough attack that ends up being a “Segundo apellido” in disguise.

I have no idea why she would want me to introduce myself with our mother’s surname, but whatever. I’m on it.

“I’m Jared Fuentes, ma’am”

“And yours?” She asks my sister.

“Summer Lester.”

“Alright. Well, Summer, how do you feel about this situation?”

“Well...” She looks at me but, instead of showing the smirk that I believed she’d have, she has an honest smile drawn across her lips “As much as I appreciate what my classmate just said... which I seriously do, I think the only fair here is to let the classroom vote. It’s not us who this choice affects.”

Oh, no. You're not getting out of this that easy, sister.

"You see?" I say, addressing the whole class, "She has just put the class' sake before her own once more. She deserves to be our head girl, and that's just a fact."

There are so many agreeing expressions all over that it's clear that I've made my case. I sit back down as if that ended the whole situation.

"I think it's settled, then."

"Wait, Mrs. Russom. I'll need an assistant, right?"

Mrs. Russom seems confused

"Well, I guess... If you think you'll need one..."

"Of course, I'll need one! Do you have any idea how much work this is? And with exams and all..."

"Who did you have in mind?"

"Do you have to ask? Obviously Jared. He's already proven that's good at the job. "

I'm so proud of her.

Not for saying my name. I already expected that. She isn't a little bit worried about the commitment that this whole affair puts on her, and she looks so happy with it.

I just saw my sister there, and I wasn't expecting it.

Mrs. Russom snaps me out of it.

"How do you feel about that, Jared?"

"Love the idea."

“Great. Now, let me talk to you both outside for a minute.”

We walk through the door and Mrs. Russom turns around to face us.

“Ok. Who of you lied to me?”

“I’m sorry?”

I have no idea what she means, but Summer doesn’t hesitate before answering

“Neither of us did. I’m Summer Lester-Fuentes, and he’s Jared Lester-Fuentes”

Oh. That.

Our teacher smiles

“I thought so. I assume you’re the special twins everyone has told me about?”

I shrug

“I suppose so.”

“Well, you’ve already surprised me. You don’t seem to have much competitiveness with each other, what is good and weird between siblings.”

“Well, we are already way past that phase.”

I can’t believe Summer right now. She’s talking to our teacher as if they were friends.

Mrs. Russom, on her side, seems to be enjoying this feedback.

Oh my God.

Really, Summer?! Our teacher?! Really?

I have to talk to her now.

“Well, I’m glad. Let’s get in, I’ll continue with the introduction, and let’s discuss a few calendar dates before we go for lunch.”

“Right.”

Damn it. I’ll never get this image out of my head.

When the bell finally rings and the class is over, Arlene tells me that she’s going to leave her books at the locker and she’ll wait for me in the cafeteria so, after talking a little bit more with Summer and Mrs. Russom about some dates such as Homecoming, I quickly make my way to my locker, where Ryan Nobbs and Katelyn are waiting for me.

“You know the new girl, right?”

That’s so typical Ryan. He tries to get it from every girl that he crosses. Almost like Summer, only she’s a little more elegant about it. And she usually gets what she wants.

“I don’t know her. Principal Locke asked Summer and me to watch a little bit over her. She’s new in town.”

“You may want to watch over her from your sister...”

“Weren’t you Summer’s friend, Kate? You should know much better than what you’re implying. Or maybe you are just jealous of her.”

I don't even look at her as I make my way to my locker, with Ryan right behind me.

"You know that's not what I meant."

"Yes, it was. Only you aren't used to being called out like that. She's who she is, and she's been through enough things already to have someone she's close to talking shit behind her back."

Katelyn just shrugs and goes away without uttering another word.

Ryan, on the other hand, walks faster to keep up with me

"That was something I wanted to talk to you about..."

"My sister's manners, were something you wanted to talk to me about?"

I see him swallow hard, which makes it really hard not to laugh at him.

"Well... Not exactly." I raise my eyebrows, waiting for him to continue. "It's just... If I were to hit on her..."

Here we go again.

"I am not my sister. If you want to deal with her, you can try, but I honestly don't think you'll be able to keep up with her. She's completely out of your league. But it's her choice whether she wants to go for someone beneath her."

I open my locker as I feel how Ryan walks to his. Thank God Summer is not stupid enough to fall for it.

“Hi, Jared.”

I don't want to deal. I just don't.

I bang my locker closed and I turn to face this...

“Beckett, what the hell do you want?”

I start counting backward on my mind, as my therapist suggested, to calm down the rage.

“First of all, how was your summer?”

Ten, nine, eight...

“What do you want?”

Seven, six, five...

“Well, as you well know I came back yesterday from Perú and...” four, three... “Well, I've been hearing loads of crazy things about Summer, and I just...”

That's as much as I hear before the buzzing in my ear gets unbearable and I pin this Son of a bitch to the locker with a hard push that is not hard enough, and my arm in his throat.

“Listen. Are you listening?” he sort of nods over my arm

“I swear to God that if you dare to pretend to care about my sister even in the slightest; or talk about her or even think about talking to her...” my face is so close to him that I have to force myself not to spit on him “I will end you.”

I let him go, and he leaves without uttering another word. I wish he'd given me an excuse.

Breath in... Ten, nine, eight... Breathe out... seven, six, five... Breath in... four, three two one, breath out.

“That sure was something too”

I turn towards the sweet voice that has dared to speak to me right now.

I let go a half sigh, half laugh to give up some tension.

“Would you believe me if I told you that I have my reasons to hate that boy’s guts that much?”

“Summer’s ex?”

“How’d you figure that out?”

“I’m new in town, not new in life.”

Just when I’m about to answer I get a text from Arlene asking me where I am.

“I’m sorry, Maia but... well, I have to go. But I really like your attitude.”

“Off you go.” And, after a short wink, she turns her back at me and walks away. This girl is something different.

Once at the cafeteria, the first thing I do is try to see if Summer is around here, somewhere. I don’t like the fact that Beckett has come to talk to me.

She’s nowhere to be found.

“JJ!”

I really have no idea when she started calling me that... But now there’s no coming back as much as I tried. It just looks like I’ll have to get used to it. And I will.

“Hey, Arlene. You’ve decided what you want to eat yet?”

“Nop. I was waiting for you.”

We both get some lunch and get two trays so we can take it all to the football field.

As I expected, everything is quiet here. Not everyone knows that we are actually allowed to come here for lunch.

Normally, just head boys and girls know, because it is something that is said in meetings, so we can keep everything controlled here too. Every year, those who are new to this “head boy/girl” thing get really surprised.

We sit down in the grass, and we talk about almost everything. She tells me about her family and listens while I tell her about the whole Tristan, her mother and my father situation.

A part of me is also bothered about it, but I try to be as little involved with that man as I can.

After a while, Arlene is laid down on my legs and I’m caressing her hair.

With a lazy voice, as if she’d just woken up, she says

“You know... you could find a nickname for me too. If you want.”

If I haven’t thought about this a thousand times already, I haven’t thought about it once.

“I promise you, I’ve been trying to find one that’s a good fit, but I honestly like your name so much. No nicknames or anything.” After a brief pause, I bring myself to add “Although... I’ve been about to call you babe like thirty times already.”

I wink at her as she smiles. She looks so beautiful when she smiles... And it is true that in more than one situation I’ve been about to call her Baby, but I’ve shut up just in time.

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I don’t know if we’re there yet. Are we?”

She bends over to sit down again and looks at me straight in the eyes.

“Do you want us to be?”

I knew this was coming, didn’t I? And I was waiting for it.

If this is not the time, I don’t know what else it could be. What I do know is that she’s waiting for me to do something. So I do.

I lean over and kiss her.

“I’m not good at these things, but I’m going to try,” I say, with her face in my hands and a smile “I don’t want that to be just another kiss. Well, I never wanted any kiss to be just another. I’d like so much for us to be in a relationship, and to build something together... Do you want to be my girlfriend?”

She has this amazed smile on her face, and she nods as she grabs me by the neck with her arms and kisses me again, now with also a bit of aggression that I surprisingly love.

And, of course, my phone decides that this is the exact moment it should start ringing. I probably should ignore it... but I still have this nagging feeling about Summer, and I decide to see who's calling.

I break the kiss.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry." I look at the screen and see that the caller is my mum "It's my mum. I have to take this." Arlene doesn't look as disappointed as I thought she would look, but she just nods, still smiling, and takes my hand as I reply.

"¿Mamá?"

"Jared!"

"¿Qué pasa?"

"Pues pasa que tu hermana no me coge el teléfono."

What? That's weird. We have strict orders to always pick up our phone when our mum is calling, and more so Summer. Even if we're in class, every teacher is aware of this.

"¿Sabes dónde está?"

No. I don't have a clue where she is. And right now is making me feel so uncomfortable I can hardly think straight.

When I'm about to answer with some excuse, the sound of an explosion kills the words in my mouth.

I need to find my sister.

"Ahora te llamo."

And I hung up. This is probably the worst thing I could've done because it's rather difficult that my mother hasn't heard the explosion.

I take Arlene's hand and we walk fast until we arrive at the road before school, where there's been a massive accident. I can hear a baby cry and a lot of students rambling around, but Summer is nowhere to be found.

"Babe" I turn to look at Arlene "Why don't you go to class? I want to find my sister real quick, and I'll see you after classes. I promise."

"OK."

I kiss her with what I intended to be a quick kiss at first, but I end up pressing her against me with need.

After that, I start looking for Summer, but I get gripped by the scene that I have right in front of me.

There's one car that's been completely smashed, while the other has hardly any dent and, outside them, coming right at me, a girl's figure covered in blood.

3

Summer

“Jared!” I run at him as I see him standing there, observing this awful scene but doing nothing to help. “Come here, you have got to help me.”

His eyes stare at me, wide open.

“Wait, Summer. Summer!” He screams as he focuses his stare and realizes it’s me who’s talking. He takes me by the arms to steady me.

“Are you ok? What the hell happened? And why are you covered in blood?”

I can’t deal with this right now.

“Come on. Jared, come on!” I try to pull him towards the car, but he’s still scanning me “Listen. It’s not my blood, I swear. But is someone’s, so I really really need you to help right now.”

I guide him to where the woman is lying and I see where his eyes land

“There’s nothing we can do for him,” I say, referring to the other’s car driver. “but this woman really needs a hospital right now, and there is a horrific traffic jam and I don’t think the ambulance will make it here on time.” I see Jared trying to snap out of it and be of some use, so I try to help him to come back “Do you hear the baby?” he nods “This is her mother, and she’s in the car. You have to take us to the hospital ASAP.”

“Em... But... Police... Ambulance...” I can tell this is too much for him.

“Jared! Focus!” His look suddenly changes. I can tell that now he is listening to me. “Hospital. Now.”

Jared comes into the driver’s seat of the car.

“Summer, there are no keys here”

“How on earth is that possible?”

“I have no idea.”

“I’m a little preoccupied at the moment, Jared. Can’t you check her purse?”

“They’re not here. I already checked.”

I’m still fighting against the freaking bleeding, so I’m not thinking straight.

“Well, let’s take your car, then”

“Are you taking care of the baby?”

“Of course, just let me heal her real quick so I can think of what’s happening to the freaking baby.”

“Then we can’t take my car. We need the baby’s chair.”

“And how are you supposed to start the car, Einstein?”

For a few seconds that feel like hours, he’s silent, until he suddenly screams

“Got it!”

He gets down and helps me get this woman inside the car and, the next thing I know, we’re on the road and Jared seems to be much better.

“Now,” he says “call mum.”