



Come to Me Softly: The Closer to You Series

By A. L. Jackson

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From the New York Times bestselling author of *Come to Me Quietly* comes a scorching new adult romance in the Closer to You series.

A second chance at life...

A second chance at love...

Jared Holt never thought he deserved either—until he found both in the arms of Aly Moore. Aly has loved Jared for as long as she can remember, and she's more than ready for the future they're making together. But Jared can't help remembering his own family. And he'll never forgive himself for what happened to them. How can he allow himself the very happiness he once destroyed?

To live a life worthy of Aly, Jared knows he has to stop running and finally put his past to rest. But when he decides to face his demons head on, he encounters more than he bargained for: a dangerous mix of jealousy, lies, and dishonest intentions. When those intentions threaten Aly, Jared loses all control, giving into the rage that earned him his bad boy reputation years before. And he'll fight to protect her no matter what it costs...even if he destroys himself in the process.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for A.L. Jackson's novels

“Exquisite, beautiful, poignant—A.L. Jackson is in a league of her own!”—S.C. Stephens, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Reckless*

“A devastatingly beautiful story of love, grief, and healing. Every emotion on the page will grip at your heart, and leave you stuck in the characters’ lives for days after.”—Molly McAdams, *New York Times* bestselling author.

“*Come To Me Quietly* is a riveting tale of loss, two souls destined to be together and discovering strength in forgiving ones self from regrets keeping them chained to finding true happiness. Simply breathtaking.”—Gail McHugh, *New York Times* Bestselling Authors of *Collide* and *Pulse*

“A.L. Jackson has written such an emotionally impactful story that grabs you right from the start.”—Kim Karr, author of *Torn*

“A.L. Jackson delivered another emotionally driven love story. I was captivated from the first page until the last.”—*RomanceLoversBookBlog*

“Oh this book was amazing. I know I gush like a school girl, but I cannot contain myself when I find a story that leaves me clutching its pages to my heart.”—*Tina’s Book Reviews*

“Can A.L. Jackson write anything but excellence? Not in my eyes!...5 star perfection!”—*Madison Says*

About the Author

A. L. Jackson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Closer to You series. She lives in Southern Arizona with her husband and three beautiful children.

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Also by A. L. Jackson

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ONE

Jared

Comfort.

I'd gone without it for a lot of years. It was like this hole had been hollowed out inside me, begging for anything to fill it. Like hunger pangs when you're starving and your body eats at your insides, searching for satiety when there's no sustenance to be found. The idea of it'd become a vague memory, there to taunt me with what I could no longer have. Mocking me with loneliness and desolation, reminding me I'd lost the right to be loved.

Leaving me to rot.

Because without love, what's left?

Nothing.

And that's exactly what I'd become.

I'd accepted it because that's what I deserved.

My life as a penance.

A due.

In the hazy morning light, I breathed in the coconut and the good and the girl. Swimming in her warmth, I lost myself in the way it felt to have Aly's perfect little body all tucked up close to mine.

Comfort.

It surrounded me now.

I brushed my fingers through the silken strands of her long, dark hair, so dark it looked black in the

silhouettes of the soft morning light that filtered in through her bedroom window.

Did I deserve that comfort now? I had no fucking clue.

Really, I didn't know anything aside for one fact.

I loved this girl.

I was in love with Aleena Moore.

Now that I'd finally admitted it, it was all I could see.

Part of me wanted to climb out of bed and grab my journal, my fingers itching to pour my confusion out in words across the pages, to release the chaos tumbling through my mind. But at the cost of leaving Aly's bed? Not a chance.

A soft sigh slipped through her parted lips, and a little moan of contentment flowed from her mouth as she sank further into the security of my hold. That little sound lit every one of my nerves.

I pressed all my hard to her soft, holding her close against me as I flattened myself to the snowy skin of her back.

Mmm . . . yeah.

I was in love with this girl.

And I wasn't going to let her go.

Not ever. Days without Aly were darkness, and I was done surrendering to it. The seedy shit I always found myself in. The self-destruction. That fucked-up kind of life was over because I had finally come to accept Aly *was* my life.

I'd been lying there in her bed awake for hours. Just thinking, trying to sort it all out while I watched her sleep. Guilt fluttered along the fringes of my consciousness. Pressing in. All night, I'd been asking myself if I was wrong by coming back here to her.

Would she and our baby be better without me? Was I still taking what I had no right to? Was this gorgeous girl curled up in my arms tainted by me? Had I wrecked her good by putting part of myself inside of her? Would I destroy her?

I'd been certain I would. Now I had no idea what to believe. Because Aly had shattered all my beliefs.

Coming back to Phoenix yesterday had terrified me. I had no idea what to expect or what I would find. All I felt was the intense need spurring me forward. One that told me I had to somehow get her back.

Or maybe I'd come here to win her for the first time.

God knew I'd spent so many nights while I'd been staying with Aly and her brother over the past summer, sneaking into her room, that she and I had never really felt real. I'd given us over to fantasy. Figured if I couldn't have her, at least I could pretend. Take a little before I lost it all, before she became just another fucked-up memory.

Turned out she'd always been mine.

I'd just been too much of a fool to see us for what we really were.

Aly and I had grown up together, this girl a part of me for all my life. We grew up living across the street from each other, her brother, Christopher, my best friend, our mothers best friends, too, like our families were one and the same. Until the day I turned sixteen—I'd been so careless. Reckless. My chest tightened as visions flashed. Guilt pressed in as all the air seemed to get sucked from the room.

I killed my mother in a car accident that day.

I was driving us home from getting my license. I'd slipped quickly after that day, diving into drugs and alcohol, hoping it would cover up the suffocating guilt of what I'd taken from this world. But that lifestyle had never dimmed the shame, that shame growing so much that two months after my mother's death, I tried to take my life. But Aly, this girl, had been there. Saved me.

That act had sent me away to juvie until the day I turned eighteen. My father had shunned me, and I'd thought I had nothing left in Phoenix, so when I was released, I ran. As far as I could, living for four years in New Jersey. But I'd been drawn back here. Should have always known it was Aly, that we were connected in ways I didn't understand.

Six months ago I came back to Phoenix and ran into Christopher, who took me home to stay at his place. He was living with Aly. What grew between Aly and me was intense, and I soon found myself trying to keep from falling for her. But I did. I fell hard.

We kept what was going on between us a secret, mostly because I couldn't accept what we were or what I was feeling. I'd always believed love wasn't something I deserved. I didn't get happiness. But we'd also kept it a secret because of her brother. He knew as well as I did I wasn't good enough for his sister. So when he'd discovered us and everything had come to a head, I did what I did best. I ran. I fled everything I couldn't face and ended up in Vegas for the last three months, once again trying to drown out the pain of my life.

I thought I'd always be running until I crashed my bike one night three weeks ago. In that flash of a moment before I hit the pavement . . . in that singular moment . . . it was the first time I didn't want to die since I'd turned sixteen.

And I knew it was Aly. Even if I had to live with this guilt for all my life, I knew then I had to come back to her. And I finally made it to her last night.

Now her back burned into my chest. As I slowly slipped my hand down to her abdomen, my breath got all locked up inside me. I was filled with both fear and a need I didn't quite understand. My palm came to the flat plane of her stomach, to the place that harbored one of the greatest shocks of my life.

Beneath my touch, Aly's stomach lifted and fell in a slow rhythm, her breaths calm in the depths of sleep.

Pinching my eyes closed, I did my best to imagine what was happening inside her, this little life I had no idea how to manage.

If I'd expected anything, it sure as hell hadn't been this—the news Aly had given me last night when I returned to Phoenix, the new weight that had been added to my shoulders.

Yeah, a weight. I'd admit it. I wasn't cut out to be a father, and the idea of it scared the shit out of me.

But this weight was no burden, and the strongest sense of devotion pumped a new kind of need through my veins. Something overpowering. Something right.

Aly made me want to be better.

I pressed my hand firmer to her belly.

This made me want to be better.

Last night, I warned Aly that I was fucked-up and I was always going to be. I could feel it there, still simmering in my bones, the truth of who I was.

And damn, Aly and I were young. I got that. She was only twenty and I was twenty-two, and I knew that only added to our issues, too.

I buried my nose in her hair and held her as close as I could get her. Because I thought my love for her . . . maybe . . . maybe it was stronger than all of that shit.

God, I hoped so.

I needed to be better, because there was no doubt these two needed me.

What scared me most was how much I needed them.

Aly sighed and mumbled, these cute, muddled sounds that did something crazy right at the center of my chest.

I nipped at her ear, coaxing her from sleep. “Baby,” I whispered low. I just needed to see her face. Talk to her. Make sure it was all as real as it had felt last night. “Come here.”

In my arms, she slowly rolled over to face me and her eyes blinked open. The intense green slipped all over me, memorizing, searching my face in the shadows like maybe she was needing reassurance of the same thing.

Today was a first for us. Waking up next to her instead of sneaking out of her room in the middle of the night like the asshole I’d been, hiding us away and making her ashamed.

A slow smile curved her perfect mouth, and I couldn’t do anything but lean down and brush mine against the fullness, kiss the girl who’d undone me.

My chest tightened. All the months I’d been gone, I hadn’t known what to do with what I felt for Aly. The truth of what she was that I’d been fighting for so long. Now it was prominent, thrumming wildly with every pulse of my heart.

“Hi,” she said quietly.

Shifting, I wedged a knee between her legs as I climbed over her, hovered close. Damn, she was the most gorgeous thing. She stared up at me, her olive skin all smooth and flawless, her cheeks high and striking, defined.

Still, everything about her was soft.

Good.

I cupped my hand around that trusting face. “Morning, beautiful.”

God, how perfect was it waking up next to her?

Soft fingertips fluttered along my jaw. Something powerful simmered in her eyes. “You stayed.” The words seemed to come from somewhere deep within her, revealing the fear she still kept harbored inside.

My gut twisted because I wanted to take all that away from her, all the pain she’d been living with during the months I’d been gone. For the longest time, I just looked down at her, a promise held in my stare. “Baby, I already told you, I’m not going anywhere.”

My hold increased on her cheek, my nose an inch from hers. Because inside I already knew the answer to all the questions plaguing me.

Aly needed me.

I let part of my weight settle on her, careful not to hurt her, because I was finished with all that hurting shit. I murmured close to her ear, “I need you to believe that. Yeah, we’ve got some shit to deal with, but we’re going to do it together. Okay?”

Leaning back, I let myself get lost in her hopeful gaze. Instinctively, I twisted a lock of her hair with my finger. A bond. My home.

I’m not going anywhere.

Aly blinked like she was absorbing what I’d said. She wound her arms around my neck and buried her face in it. A breath of words flooded out to kiss the skin just under my ear. “I believe in you, Jared. I always have.”

Affection pounded against my ribs. God, it felt so good because this girl really fucking got me, understood when no one else could.

“Thank you.” I gripped her face and swept my mouth across hers. “Thank you for seeing something in me that I didn’t know was there.”

I kissed her deeper. My tongue dipped in to taste the sweet and the good, and Aly met me, her tongue all soft and welcoming.

And damn if just that little brush didn’t cause every last inch of my body to harden.

Motherfucking trigger.

For so long I’d thought of her that way, provoking all these feelings inside me I didn’t believe I had the right to feel.

Turned out I didn’t mind this trigger so much after all.

Outside her room, a door slammed, hard enough to shake Aly’s walls.

We both froze, eyes going wide, before our attention flashed to her closed door. For so many months, that

door had hidden us away. Like some kind of sick, dirty little secret. Instead I should've been screaming out about how much this girl meant to me.

That's how twisted I was. But I never claimed I was right in the head. Far from it. Thought I was doing her some kind of warped favor, saving face when in turn I'd just brought her shame.

Worry flashed in Aly's eyes when the heavy footsteps plodded down the hall. A shadow blinked under the door when her brother passed.

I dropped my forehead to hers, and I suppressed the groan that rose in my throat.

Fuck.

Could anyone blame me for being none too excited at the thought of going toe-to-toe with her brother Christopher? Him finding me here? Dude was not gonna be pleased. But that meeting was inevitable.

No time like the present, I thought sarcastically. Seize the day and all that.

Pretty sure it was going to be Christopher seizing my balls.

Last night Aly told me she'd confided in him about the baby and how important it was to her that he'd been there for her in the time I was away.

“Think I have some business to take care of. Why don't you wait here or maybe grab a shower while I have a little chat with your brother?” I whispered softly, tucking a lock of her hair behind her ear.

Wasn't exactly a question. More like a plea.

Aly didn't need to deal with more of the shit storm I conjured, then fled from the moment it hit land. I wanted her to stay here where I could protect her from what needed to be said. Or maybe I just didn't want her to hear it, whatever Christopher would spew, because in it would be nothing but the truth.

Aly grimaced, like maybe I'd just wounded her.

I shook my head, knowing exactly what she was thinking. “Give me ten minutes, baby, then I'll come back and we'll spend the day in bed. Just you and me.”

Knowing eyes peered up at me. The look alone called out my bluff. “You can't start hiding stuff, Jared. We're a *team* now,” she emphasized. “We're supposed to do this together.”

Old pain twisted my face, and I edged back a fraction. I was so used to handling shit on my own, just dealing, pushing it all aside so I could stay afloat. Really, I'd just been drowning.

And here was this girl, promising she'd stay by me and help me keep my head above water.

I searched for her hand and pressed her palm to my face. I hoped somehow she could feel the sincerity in my words. “This isn't because I want to hide you away, Aly. But I *need* to do this alone. I'm the one who fucked it up and I'm the one who has to make it right. I've known your brother a long, long time, and this isn't just about you and me.”

Before I left, I'd lost control on my oldest friend, beaten him bloody, my mind a cloud of rage and agony. It was the night he busted in Aly's door and discovered us together. He'd confronted us, and the tension

between us had escalated fast. I didn't even realize how far I'd slipped until it all came back into focus and I realized his body was a heap in the middle of Aly's bedroom floor. After what I did, I had no idea if I even could make it right or if he'd give me the chance. No doubt, I didn't deserve one. But for Aly, I was going to ask for it. Face him. Own up to the shit I still wasn't sure I knew how to control.

I brushed my fingers through her hair. "Let me talk to him, okay? I need to start facing some stuff in my life. It started with you yesterday, coming back here. Now it needs to be him. I can't keep running, can't keep tossing walls up to hide behind. Please understand."

"I get it, Jared. But I also need you to know you're not alone anymore." Tender fingers burned into my skin where she ran them down my jaw. "I want to be a part of whatever you have to face in this life so I can be a part of your future."

Her statement washed over me like a balm. Like overwhelming peace I didn't deserve. But there was no stopping myself from submerging myself in it. I placed a close-mouthed kiss to her lips, before I turned to the soft shell of her ear and whispered, "You are my life . . . my future."

Never had one without her.

Aly's fingers curled in my neck as she drank in the words that had been locked up in my heart. I could feel them race through her veins and take hold. Because the two of us?

We fit.

This fucked-up puzzle that finally made sense.

Reluctantly, I climbed from her bed. Grabbing the jeans I'd left in a pile on the floor, I couldn't help but smirk as she watched me pull them on. Those eyes raked down me with pure need. It felt amazing that this girl wanted me as badly as I wanted her.

Her fingers trembled toward me from where she lay on her stomach. I came back to her and brushed my lips over her fingertips. "I mean it, Aly."

"I know," she said, everything I never thought I'd have lighting in her eyes.

Then I turned and headed out her door. Quietly, I latched it shut behind me.

I stepped out of the sanctuary of Aly's room. In one second flat, all my nerves were wringing me tight. My chest tightened, and I could hear my pulse drumming in my ears, this steady progression of unease spinning me up and stringing me out. Harshly, I blinked and squinted, trying to adjust to the bright light blazing in through the sliding glass door in the living room.

I had no clue what to expect when it came to Christopher, but I sure as hell didn't want a repeat of the last time I walked out Aly's door, that argument and fight that ended with me running to Vegas for three miserable months.

Some things were unforgivable. All the fucking deplorable sins I'd committed that would haunt me all my life. I drove my hand through my hair. Pretty sure beating my best friend to a bloodied pulp qualified as one of them.

Figured the fact I knocked up his little sister probably didn't sit very well with him, either.

I drew in a deep breath and pushed all those thoughts aside.

Didn't matter. I made the decision when I came here. I was finished hiding.

Silencing my feet, I inched down the hall, buying a little time, trying to feel him out.

I spotted him over the bar that separated the main room from the kitchen. He was flinging open cupboards and slamming them closed just as hard. I studied him as I passed.

The shock of black hair on his head was a fucking disaster, sticking up everywhere, probably three inches longer than the last time I saw him. He wasn't wearing anything but a pair of holey jeans. Color bled all over his back and arms, intricate tats sketched in beautiful patterns across his skin, the opposite of the horrors that stained mine.

But I didn't miss the way his muscles bunched in his shoulders, his entire being ticking with hostility and his movements harsh. He kept banging shit around, all wound up and fucking on edge. Tension radiated from him as he shoved two pieces of bread into the toaster.

Awareness prickled between us like a live wire, just waiting for the spark, one little movement that could cause us to combust.

With my stomach twisted in about fifteen knots, I rounded the bar, hesitating right between the border of the kitchen and the small, round dining table. He kept his back to me, like maybe I was dead to him, the way I should be.

He will hate me before I'm gone.

How many times had that silent promise made its way through my thoughts? Enough times to know their truth—that was for sure.

Finally, I pulled out a chair from the dining table, turned it around, and sat down facing him. Slumping forward, I rested my elbows on my knees. I rushed my hand over my face and down my chin, as if the action could wipe away all the shit we had to deal with.

Christopher had been my best friend all through my childhood, our tie thicker than blood, the brother I'd never had. Without question, he'd welcomed me in when I'd first come back to Phoenix last summer, the guy cool enough to overlook all the crimes that had sent me away in the first place years before.

And what had I done to repay his welcome? Lied straight to his fucking face, taking advantage of the situation—and his sister—with every turn I made.

Shame. It was thick. Stifling. I hated what I'd done, how I handled things, the way everything had gone down when it all came to a head. The sad thing was I'd known it was coming. It'd been so clear what was building, and I'd just fucking stayed until the situation had exploded.

But it was because of Aly. Because of her I couldn't walk away all those months ago. Because of her I was sitting here today.

Still, Christopher didn't turn around. The toast popped up in the toaster, and he jerked a plate from the cupboard. Utensils clattered when he ripped open the drawer and grabbed a butter knife.

And I just sat there. Waiting. Giving him time to let out whatever was roiling inside him.

When he finally spoke, his voice was tight, laced with disgusted amusement. “Well, well, well, if it isn’t the infamous Jared Holt. Figured I’d be seeing your sorry ass this morning. Saw that piece of shit bike sitting in that spot downstairs when I got home last night. Then I come inside and, lo and behold, my little sister’s door is all locked up tight.”

A hot breath pushed from my lungs, and I tipped my head up to witness the disdain pouring from him when he turned around to meet my face. He crossed his arms over his chest and backed up against the counter. “How ya been, man?” It was all sarcasm and sneer. “Wait . . . let me tell you what it’s been like around here first.”

“Christoph—”

“Why don’t you shut your mouth and listen to what I have to say? Or do you feel compelled to feed me some more bullshit first?”

I sat back, staring up at the venom pouring from his gaze, welcoming it because I knew I had this coming. I mean, shit, I had no defense. I knew what I’d done.

“So how did it feel last night? Climbing right back into my little sister’s bed?”

My jaw clenched at the accusation, and my lips pursed into a thin line to keep from lashing out. Dude knew how to hit me where it hurt. I jerked my head with one harsh shake, nausea winding through my being while he stared down at me like I was some kind of bastard traitor. And maybe I was, but I hated the way he saw it, thinking I was taking advantage of Aly. As if she wasn’t the most important person in this world. To him, I’d just been fucking his little sister.

“Come on, man,” I muttered low. I rushed a shaky hand through my hair and cut my eye to the wall before I found the courage to look back at him. “It was *never* like that.”

“Wasn’t it?” The accusation dripped from his twisted mouth.

“No.” The word grated from my throat with the sound of remorse, and my knee was fucking bouncing because I didn’t know how to handle it. That old warning flare was blaring, telling me to grab my stuff and go. I strangled it, silencing that shit because nothing could tear me away from Aly.

Averting his gaze to the floor, he grasped the counter, contemplating something before he angled his chin up. “Did she tell you?”

My nod was slow, filled with understanding of what he was asking. “Yeah.” Shame hung my head, and I felt a new kind of guilt wash over me. God, I wished I’d been here for all of it. Wished I’d been the first one to hear Aly’s news. Wished she hadn’t had to rely on him.

Thank God she had him, though.

Christopher edged forward. Every step was calculated contention, anger, and hate. He worked his fists as he advanced on me. My chin lifted further with each step he took until he was right up in my face. “You think you can just come back here and act like nothing ever happened? Like everything is the same? Well, guess what, asshole. Nothing is the same.”

Aggression spiked, heated in my stomach. A tremor of that same fucking insanity that had tormented me for years rolled through my body. My own fists flexed, and I struggled under the weight of it. He was breathing his bitterness all over me, and it took about all I had not to shove it back in his face.

He laughed, smug, and his voice dropped lower. “Does me getting in your face piss you off, Jared? You want to hit me again? Watch me bleed? Lose control? Will that make you feel better?”

He was baiting me. I knew it. Maybe that pissed me off the most. My jaw clenched and I squirmed under the anger blazing from green eyes that were so much like Aly’s.

Something that sounded like fear wove into his words. “What happens when it’s Aly who pisses you off? Are you going to beat her, too? How about when that baby gets in your line of fire?”

Every nerve in my body fired—pressed and pulsed with a crushing pain.

“Never.” I blinked hard. My hands fisted in my hair and I choked over the words. “Fuck, Christopher, I would never hurt them.”

He took a single step back, still glaring down at me like the piece of shit I was. “Yeah, and you’re supposed to be my best friend, too, and you didn’t seem to mind letting it out on me.” Conflict reigned in his gaze, questions and worry and blatant hurt.

Guilt knotted in my throat, and I found myself trying to explain what had sent me over the edge that night. “I know you didn’t mean to, but you hurt her and I just . . . I lost it, man. The thought of anyone hurting her makes me crazy.”

Understanding flashed like a bolt across his face before his eyes darkened. The anger from seconds before was replaced with disappointment. “Yeah, well, guess what, Jared. You hurt her, too. You want to know what it was like while you were gone? Her not knowing where you were, or if you were coming back? The pain she’s been going through? And guess who was here taking care of her while she puked her guts out for three straight months. Guess who held her while she cried and wondered how in the hell she was going to make it. *Me*, Jared. And now I’m not going to stand aside and let you ruin her. Not after everything you’ve already put her through.”

I ruin everything I touch.

The thought slammed me like a kick to the gut. Air wheezed down my throat as I struggled to pull it into the well of my lungs. That was something I was going to have to come to terms with—the fact that I didn’t have the first clue what Aly had suffered while I was away. I only knew my own pain, the fucking misery I’d endured day after day—all those days praying she’d somehow find a way without me, not knowing I’d walked away and left her with the greatest reminder of me I could have. Marking her. Scoring my body into hers.

Even if I hadn’t left her with our baby inside her, I’d been a fool to believe she could ever forget about me. As if I didn’t feel the honesty in her touch and hadn’t witnessed the truth in her eyes.

Aly loved me.

I shot to standing.

Caught off guard, Christopher stumbled back. I began to pace. I turned back to him, hoping he could feel the truth in my own confession.

“I love her, okay? I’m fucked-up. I’m the first to admit it. But it doesn’t change what I feel about her.” The words bled from my mouth. That girl, the one lying in her bed down the hall, she was it.

My truth.

“You can hate me, Christopher, blame me . . . because it’s my fault. All of it. But it doesn’t matter what you say. I’m not going anywhere.” My voice dropped in the same second my face did, so that I was staring at my feet. “Before I came back the first time, I hadn’t felt anything but hate for a long, long time. It’s the only thing I felt until the day you found me in that bar and invited me into this apartment and I came face-to-face with her. She did something to me . . .”

Something terrifying and completely right.

“She *changed* me. And if you spent so much time with her over the last few months, then I know you know Aly and I are supposed to be together. None of this other shit matters. None of it. Nothing except for her and the baby.” I met his eye. “You and I have been through a ton of shit, Christopher. I know I messed up. I messed up with you and I messed up with your sister. And I’m sorry. I wish I could change the way I handled everything, go back and do it differently, but I can’t.”

I saw the hurt bleed through the anger in his eyes, and he shook his head as he looked to the wall. “You lied to me, Jared. Fucking lied straight to my face when I asked if you had something going on with my sister behind my back.”

“Yeah, I lied. But you didn’t just ask if there was something going on. You told me there couldn’t be. Aly and I . . . there was no stopping us. We were going to happen.” I swallowed hard. “And I was ashamed of it, ashamed that I couldn’t stop myself from going to her. You think I didn’t know I should stay away?” I touched my chest. “I *did*. But I couldn’t. Keeping it from you was shitty. Wrong. But I didn’t know what else to do. I didn’t want Aly feeling any of the shame I was feeling, and I thought by keeping us a secret, I was somehow protecting her. And that’s all on me.”

I looked at my oldest friend, fucking laying myself bare. “The first night I snuck into her room, I knew I was going to hurt her, Christopher. I knew it because I wasn’t right inside. And I’m never going to be completely right. You and I both know that. I’ve destroyed a lot of shit . . .”

I let my gaze fall, drift, and I slowly shook my head. “But Aly . . . I’m always going to love her. Pretty sure I have since we were all little kids growing up together. You can hate me all you want, but you’d better get used to seeing my face around here because I’m not going anywhere. And if I do leave, I’ll be taking Aly with me.”

My attention darted to the movement at the end of the hall. Aly was standing there tucked up against the wall, listening. Dark hair tumbled all around her shoulders, her eyes swimming with the assertion I’d just made. The girl was staring at me like I was her light.

I swallowed hard.

But she was mine.

And fuck, it hurt thinking and talking about everything I’d done, the past I could never outrun, the sins I’d committed, the destruction I continually left in my wake.

Still, she was there, her eyes flooded with all the love she felt for me.

I stretched a hand out in her direction, beckoning. She dropped her head, shuffled forward, and folded herself in my arms.

“I love you,” she mumbled when she buried her face at the side of my chest.

I kissed the top of her head before I ran my hand over it. Holding her close, I looked over at Christopher. He watched us with something that maybe looked like relief, all wrapped up with a ton of distrust that I didn’t know if I’d ever be able to erase.

Of course I wanted to fix the damage I’d done. Bottom line, Christopher was my best friend. He’d been my entire life.

But the girl in my arms?

She was the one who really mattered, the one I had to make things right with, the one I was going to love for the rest of my life.

TWO

Aleena

Warmth blanketed my skin, Jared’s admission like a balm that penetrated my soul. It filled up the places inside me that his absence had hollowed out, those places that had ached with abandonment and throbbed with the fear that I had to do all of this alone.

Like water to parched soil, that warmth filled me up until I felt it blossom into something else—pride.

I was proud of him. Because I knew how difficult it was for him to stand in front of my brother and say everything he had, to admit all of it aloud.

I burrowed myself deeper into his embrace because while his words soothed and nourished me, what I needed most of all was to feel.

“Thank you . . . for coming back to me. I needed you . . . I need this,” I mumbled almost incoherently. Once the words were released from where they’d been locked inside, I couldn’t stop them. “You don’t know how thankful I am.”

“Aly,” Jared said almost as if he was rebuking me, shocked by the confession pouring from my mouth. “Baby, it’s me who is thanking you. Without you, I don’t have anything. And you’ve given me everything.”

“But that’s where you’re wrong, Jared. I need you, too.”

His skin was hot and smooth, radiating the same desire he’d left burning in me since last night. Strength vibrated in his every move, his sinewy muscles corded and tight.

Jared was rough. Hard. The defined angles of his jaw were coated in coarse hair, and turbulence swam in the depths of his ice blue eyes.

But he was holding me as if I were delicate glass, as if he’d just been granted a gift, like I was the most fragile kind of treasure that he would guard with his life. There was something secure and strong and incredibly gentle in his hold.

Even as damaged as I knew he was, this gorgeous man was my perfection.

Almost on instinct, my fingers crawled up his narrow waist to the place where a haunting depiction of my eyes had been etched into his skin. The most intense green stared out from between two wilted petals on the dying rose sealed on the center of his chest.

That rose had always seemed a beacon to me. A key.

Almost every inch of Jared's torso and arms were covered in ink, swirled colors and sweeping scenes of blacks and grays that represented all of his pain twisted across his skin.

But the rose that represented his mother on the center of his chest had always seemed the most profound because it wholly represented his love for her and how much he believed he'd lost when she died.

I'd been undone when I found he'd made me a permanent part of it. Like the moment that had defined him had defined me, too.

And now he'd allowed me to become part of his definition. Still, I hurt for him because I understood that he was a broken man. Last night we'd lain awake for hours in the quiet, me in his arms while he stared at the ceiling and let all the revelations of our reunion seep into his consciousness. He'd murmured into my hair that he'd never be good enough for me, even though he'd spend his life trying to be. He told me it was so much easier admitting he loved me than accepting that I loved him.

I knew he still felt unworthy of love.

Yet I loved him with everything that I was.

That love was enough to crush me.

I knew that from the pain I lived through in the months he was away and recognized it in the devastating relief I felt when I found him sitting at the top of the stairs waiting for me yesterday evening. It'd been blinding.

And God, I'd been so scared, telling him about the baby. But he had to know, even though I'd realized there was a very real chance the knowledge would drive him away once again.

This was no longer just about Jared and me. Now I had a baby to think about, too. And I understood the risk in taking Jared back. How vulnerable it made me.

I'd missed him so much, and I wasn't sure I could deal with him leaving me again.

But it went far beyond that.

The little life growing inside me filled me with so much fear and anxiety, but even stronger was this surprising sense of anticipation. It filled me with love along with my worry, and wonder at the way that my life had been sent down a different course than I'd ever imagined.

So many nights had been spent praying and begging in the dark for him to return, drawing his face again and again in the pages of my sketch pads, those images that came to life in them the only thing I had left of him. Until last night, I'd never shown anyone my hidden drawings. They were so special to me, I didn't think anyone could understand how important the faces I drew inside were to me, and I worried that others might minimize the way I saw the people I loved as I brought them to life on a page. But last night, I'd shown Jared, because I needed him to know, to understand how significant he was to me and how he'd inhabited my drawings since I'd first picked up a charcoal pencil when I was just a little girl.

I'd desperately wanted him to be a part of my life.

I always had. But God, I couldn't fathom how much I wanted him to be a part of our child's life.

I believed in what we created. With all of me. In the beauty of it.

Last night, we'd talked very little about it. Instead, I'd found Jared's affection in his touch, in the way he kissed across my belly and looked at me with fear and amazement shining in his eyes.

I searched for his left hand and lifted his knuckles to my mouth. I brushed my lips across the tattooed skin that marked the year Jared believed he had ceased to exist.

2006.

Jared had spent his life running from his past.

I thought of his right hand, where the knuckles were stamped with the year of his birth.

1990.

Jared had once believed those sixteen years were the only ones he'd truly lived.

But he returned now because somehow, through all of that, he'd seen a future with me, that he'd seen life beyond the date when he believed he should have died in his mother's place.

I chose to believe in him because I knew no other truth.

I chose to believe in his love, as fragile as it was.

I chose to believe he would be strong enough to face all the demons darkening the goodness of his spirit, the ones he'd etched onto his skin in images of horror, the ones that manifested as tremors that shook him in the night.

Jared had always been a risk I had to take. Risks always involved danger. But the only danger I felt where he was concerned was the possibility of him no longer being a part of me. That was a fate I refused to consider.

He shifted, taking my face in his hands and lifting it to his. He pressed his lips to mine, softly, yet wholly intense. Almost desperate. His large hands covered most of my face. His fingers dug into the back of my head, something that I felt all the way to my heart.

"I love you, Aly." His voice was low, rough with the promise, like maybe he needed to remind himself. Blue eyes blazed as he pulled back and stared down at me. I'd seen his love for me in those eyes for so long.

It was unmistakable.

How amazing did it feel that he was no longer trying to hide it?

"I love you . . . so much," I whispered back.

"God." Christopher cursed from behind us, the sound a mixture of disgust and surrender.

These last months, I'd scared my brother. I knew that. I'd witnessed it in his expression as he'd watched me lying balled up on the couch. I'd seen the worry in his eyes and known he had no clue what I needed or how

to help me.

But he had. Just being there and supporting me had helped me. Up until last night when I told Jared, Christopher had been the only one to know about the pregnancy. I hadn't been able to bring myself to tell my parents, who lived so nearby. I don't know what I would have done without Christopher to support me.

My face was still buried in the safety of Jared's chest, but I could feel him and Christopher still staring each other down. Testing. Tension thickened the air, so heavy I could actually hear Christopher swallow.

"You want to stay here? With her?" Christopher finally demanded. "And I'm not talking some temporary bullshit. You know this isn't some kind of fucking game."

Jared placed his warm hand on the back of my head, as if he were shielding me. "It was never a game, Christopher. I already told you that." He ran his fingers through my hair, and I shifted to look back at my brother. "I think you already know that," Jared continued. "I wouldn't be here otherwise."

A grimace twisted Christopher's mouth and he looked to the wall again. He huffed a loud breath. "Guess I'm going to have to get used to the idea of you two."

Jared's heart thundered where I had my ear pressed to his chest. "Yeah, you're going to have to get used it." Jared brought his mouth to the top of my head, and I knew his words were whispered to me. "Because I won't let her go."

• • •

"Go," Jared grumbled at my mouth as he bent me back, those strong arms holding me up while he kissed me again.

"I don't want to," I contended with a forced pout, clinging to the back of his neck.

At all.

I just wanted to stay there.

In the safety of his arms.

Forever.

The arms that promised my future. The arms that told me he'd missed me as intensely as I'd missed him.

The exam I spent the last week struggling to study for, the one I had to take to pass my class? It suddenly didn't feel all that important after all.

The thought of leaving him physically hurt.

He pulled back. A smirk lifted one side of his full lips. "You think I want to let you out of my sight?" Tender amusement flickered around his mouth before he leaned in close to my ear. "Not in this century, Aly. I want to spend my life wrapped up in you, wrapped up in that body that has me itching to drag you back to your room and show you just how much I don't want to let you go. Just how much I've been missing you."

His teasing turned serious. "But you have shit to take care of, and I'm not going to be the one who stands in the way of it."

I nodded in acceptance, in understanding of this good heart that I was sure Jared still didn't understand himself. "Okay. But for the record, you dragging me back to my room sounds like a really good plan."

My heart had begged for him. Whispered and pled for him. But God, did my body ever ache for him.

He chuckled through a groan, and a grin danced all over his flirty mouth. Chills slipped down my spine with the expression that lit on his face, with the affection that played in his blue eyes as they played across my face. He caressed my cheek with his thumb.

"Baby, I'm going to be making love to you for the rest of my life. Don't worry about it. Go to class now, and to work. You can be sure I'll make it up to you later." His voice dropped low in suggestion, his promise resonating deep in the pit of my stomach.

I quirked a brow at him. He wasn't helping things.

"Go," he commanded through a close-mouthed kiss.

"Fine . . . I'm going." I hefted my bag up further on my shoulder. Tipping my chin up, I met his eyes when I stepped around him to open the front door. I paused in the threshold, caught in the million emotions that seemed to be fighting for dominance in him. Those emotions flitting through him had to be a mirror to my own.

I think we both got it. Neither of us really knew anything beyond the fact that he was here.

Last night, our discoveries had all been too deep, revelations that changed lives. Shaped them. We hadn't gotten into details or plans, and I had no idea how we were going to manage all of this. How our lives would merge. Become one.

But as I stood there staring at him, I knew they would.

"I'll be thinking about you," he promised.

"Me, too," I whispered. I stepped out into the day and shut the door behind me.

Sunlight shined down, fall's warmth a caress to my skin. Yesterday when I'd left for class, the sun had stood so much the same, though it had felt completely different. It'd cast the promise of its rise and then fall, just another lonely day that would give way to another lonely night. Never had I imagined when I climbed into my car yesterday that my life was hours from being rocked, that once again, Jared's return would come as something I couldn't fathom.

An upheaval.

But this was a disturbance I'd been praying for.

I lifted my face to the warmth of the sky. Thin ribbons of clouds rode on the breeze, sweeping out in slow waves.

Thank you, I said, so low it could not be heard.

Jared's mother, Helene, slipped into my mind. And I thought maybe . . . maybe she, too, was filled with joy. Maybe I *had* been heard.

I knew this was the way Helene would have wanted things, for Jared and me to be together, that she'd seen something between us long before either Jared or I could understand what the bond we shared as children really meant. I crossed the lot to where my white Corolla was parked in its spot.

I gasped when arms wrapped around me from behind, then melted when Jared buried his face in my neck. He spun me around and pressed me up against the cool metal of my car door. His hands were on my face, in my hair, slipping down my sides before he brought them back up to force me to look at him. "Thank you." Desperation poured from him, his hold increasing as he stared down at the shock I felt lining my face. "Thank you for believing in me, Aly. For *getting* me."

A lick of fear flashed across his face. Or maybe it was remorse. He swallowed hard, and his voice hardened with strain. "I'm scared to think of where I'd be right now without you."

The fear that flashed on his face coiled in my stomach. Because I didn't know where he'd been. I had no idea where the last three months had taken him. How far or how low.

I wasn't sure I wanted to know.

"You're here with me now." I had to believe that was all that mattered.

He grimaced. Gripping my face, he leaned down and kissed me, hard and demanding. There was no soft affection, none of the playfulness from upstairs. This was a seal. A branding. He jerked back. A storm raged in the blue of his eyes. "Don't think I can't see all those questions brewing in your mind, Aly. And I may not have all the answers right now, but we are going to figure this out. Do you hear me? I promise you that."

And I saw it all there, the torment that plagued Jared, this beautiful man who had lost direction, the one desperate to find his way home.

"I'm not scared," I promised.

A sad smile wavered at his mouth.

The only thing that scared me was I knew *he* was.

• • •

Anxiously, I glanced at the large, round clock hung high on the wall. My exam had gone as well as expected, if not better, and my lunch shift here at the cafe where I'd worked for the last two years had kept me busy. Still, the day had passed too slowly. Hours crawled by. Seconds . . . minutes . . . each willed away because I just wanted to see Jared's face.

I needed to see him again.

Feel him.

Be reassured that it was all real.

It was like the moment that I left him staring behind me in the parking lot this morning, Jared's fear had chased me. Caught up to me.

How the hell were we going to do this?

All I'd wanted was for him to come back.

I guess I'd never really thought beyond that, to what would happen when he did.

What I saw was clear. A family. Jared and me and our baby coming together like a picture of our pasts, the way Jared and I had been raised in houses full of love and support and encouragement.

But how distorted had the idea of family become for Jared? How much of it would be too painful for him to bear?

There had been no deceit when I told him I believed in him. I did, because I believed in the love that shined from him.

Maybe our family was something we would have to define for ourselves.

Finally, three o'clock rolled around, and I stuffed my apron into my bag after I finished up my side work. My stomach knotted in anticipation. I couldn't wait to get out of there.

"Someone's anxious." Clara, one of the other waitresses at the cafe, interrupted my restless thoughts. Even though we seemed an unlikely pair, mismatched, she'd become one of my closest friends. Older by almost ten years, she was loud, bold, a single mom who never hesitated to speak her mind.

A tease lifted her brow, and she smirked at me from where she tallied her checks for the day. "You've been skittish and fighting both a grin and a grimace since you walked through the door three hours ago. Care to tell me what's going on?"

I laughed under my breath. "God, Clara, do you have some kind of sixth sense or what?" She always knew when something was up. She had an intuition about her, a keen eye and a soft heart. So maybe I'd only told Christopher and Jared about the baby. But Clara knew.

Six weeks ago she'd caught me off guard, completely unprepared for her unsolicited question. "So how late are you?" she'd asked, keeping her attention trained on pouring dressing over two dinner salads and away from the shocked expression her question shot to my face, like she had been giving me time to process her words. That had been before I'd worked up the courage to take the test, back when I'd tried to convince myself it was just the trauma of Jared being ripped from my life that had thrown my body off schedule. Though in my heart, I'd known. Just as clearly as Clara had when she finally lifted her face and pinned me with a meaningful stare.

I'd stopped by a drug store on the way home and taken the test that evening.

In the middle of the night, Christopher had found me crying.

Just crying.

Because I couldn't see through sorrow to the other side, couldn't feel anything but the pain and the need. It'd hurt so badly, knowing what Jared had left me with and knowing he wouldn't be a part of it.

I had wanted it and hated it all at the same time.

Christopher had crawled into my bed and taken me in his arms, and the admission had bled free. He'd rocked me for the longest time, promising it would be okay. Then he'd slipped from my room and into his. Seconds later, I'd jerked to sitting, startled by the sound of the first crash, Christopher's curses and chair and feet

slammed against his wall, my brother taking all his anger out on his room.

I almost wanted to laugh now.

Jared and Christopher were so much alike, but neither of them could see it.

Violent.

Passionate.

Protective.

Each in their own way.

Now Clara grinned as she gathered her tickets into a pile and tapped the edges to straighten them. “Nah, babe, I’m just really good at reading people. You’ve been dragging your feet around here every day for the last three months and suddenly you have enough energy radiating from you that you have me contemplating the gym for the first time in five years.”

She lifted her chin, probing yet knowing.

I dropped my gaze to the dingy ground. “He came back last night,” I admitted quietly. Peeking up at her, I searched for her reaction. I’d come to value her opinion. I saw her as wise, as someone who’d learned the hard way.

She stilled before she tucked her stack of tickets into her front apron pocket and leaned back against the counter. “Came back to Phoenix or came back to you?”

Her question made a smile flutter around my mouth.

“To me . . . he came back to me. I just . . .” I shrugged in bewilderment. “It shouldn’t be possible to feel what I felt last night. The relief I felt.” It’d been staggering, both terrifying and perfect. “I was so worried about him. Not knowing where he went and if I would ever see him again. And he was just sitting there, waiting for me after I got out of class last night.”

“Did you tell him?” she asked.

I bit at my lip and nodded once. “Yeah.”

“And he stayed?” The question was weighted, like the answer to it would deliver the ultimate verdict.

“He freaked out at first and took off. But I knew he’d be back. He just needed some time to process it.”

I mean, I’d been shocked, too, the burden of it something I didn’t know how to carry. I’d known what it would do to Jared, the havoc it would wreak. But when he had finally returned, I knew our worlds had changed because they had aligned.

Jared finally understood what he had always meant to me.

He *remembered*.

He remembered *me*.

Joy and sympathy washed her expression into something tender. "I'm happy for you. You know that, don't you?" Her tone shifted, hardened in emphasis, and I could tell she was about to offer me some wisdom I might not want to hear. "Enjoy it, Aly. Enjoy him. But don't you dare forget these last months. Don't ever forget you made it through when you didn't think you could. Don't forget you're strong and you know what you want from your life." Softly, her head dipped and inclined toward my stomach. "And don't ever forget what's relying on you."

Unease flitted through my consciousness. My hand sought out my belly. "I know what's important, Clara."

"I know you do, Aly." Her voice softened, the same as her eyes. "I imagine things are going to be different between you two now. But that difference is either going to be for the better or the worse. Just make sure he treats you well."

That's what she didn't know about Jared. She saw the outside, the gorgeous, dangerous man. The one covered in a horror of tattoos, those same horrors reflected in the sea of pain that raged in his ice blue eyes. She saw a man plagued by his demons who knew nothing else but to run from them.

I knew that's what others would see, too.

But I saw so much deeper than that. I knew the good that lay beneath the shell of a hardened man.

No. There was not a single worry inside me about whether Jared would treat me well.

My concern was only with how he treated himself.

Still, I promised her, "I will," because my friend only cared and I knew a lot of her worry was with her own insecurities. Maybe our histories were hinting at similar circumstances. Her boyfriend left her with a tiny baby boy, never seeing her son's father again. We both knew there was a possibility my story could turn out the same.

But I had faith Jared and I would have an outcome different from hers.

She grinned to break up all the tension. "So what are you waiting for? Get out of here. Go get your man."

Crossing to her, I hugged her hard. "Thank you, Clara. I hope you know how much I appreciate everything you've done for me the last few months."

"Us girls have to stick together, right?" She grinned a little, repeating what she always told me, just this simple reassurance that no matter what, she was there for me.

I doubted many people knew how smart she really was, the woman who appeared to be nothing more than a sad cliche, the single mom working at the diner just struggling to get by.

I headed for the door, respecting her more than I ever had.

"I expect details," she hollered at me from behind, "'cause that is one crazy-hot man."

I laughed, because that was always Clara's way, a pendulum that rocked from one extreme to the other, from teaching to an outright tease.

I tossed a glance back at her as I pushed the door open wide. "Not on your life," I called.

Laughter broke through her wide smile.

“I’m all finished, Karina,” I called to my boss as I passed. “I’ll see you this weekend.”

She glanced up from the register and smiled softly. “Have a great Thanksgiving, Aly.”

“You, too.” The door swung shut behind me.

A cool breeze rushed over me when I stepped outside into the crisp fall air. Nerves buzzed in a quiet hum under the surface of my skin. The sun blazed a path westward, casting rays of late-afternoon sun across the canopy of blue, shedding its warmth and promise of a mild winter across the city sky. I lifted my face to it, breathed it in as I started down the sidewalk and around to the employee parking lot.

That breath left me when I saw him leaning up against the back of my car. His bike was angled sideways behind it. Short wisps of blond hair whipped in the breeze, the man absorbed in the hole he dug into the broken pavement with the tip of his boot. Completely lost in thought, he remained unaware that I approached.

I took the moment to appreciate him. My gaze made a slow pass across his jaw and full lips, down his neck to the strength bristling beneath his tight black tee. He lifted a cigarette to his mouth, and his wide chest expanded when he inhaled. My stare got stuck on his hands, the blocked-out numbers bold where they were stamped on his strong, long fingers.

Slowly he lifted his face. Those blue eyes locked on mine. I froze, stuck in them.

Something trembled within me.

Something powerful.

This was my man.

My future.

He dropped the cigarette to the ground and toed it out with his boot. Lifting his face, he pursed his lips and exhaled toward the sky. Smoke curled around his head, climbing toward the heavens before it bled into nothing.

Part of me wanted to deflect it—how beautiful he was, the intense feelings he stirred, the churn of need created with just a trace of his presence.

He looked back at me. One side of his mouth lifted, all sexy and indecent.

Could he know what that one look did to me? Not a chance, because this feeling was impossible.

Crossing his arms over his strong chest, he rested further back on my car, and his mouth spread into a full smirk.

I shook my head at myself. Maybe he actually did know.

“What are you doing over there when you’re supposed to be here with me?” His voice slipped along the ground, his intent reverberating against me.

With his words, I all out shook. A rush of red flamed against the cool breeze that caressed my cheeks. I dropped my head, trying to contain my grin as I shuffled toward him. It broke free when I stopped a half a foot in front of him and lifted up on my toes. I pressed my mouth to his.

Damn, it felt amazing to openly proclaim us.

“Hi,” I whispered. “What are you doing out here?”

“Couldn’t wait to see you any longer.” He brought his hand to my cheek and his flirty tone shifted. Everything about him sobered. “I’ve been missing you for too long, Aly Moore. I’m done with all that shit . . . missing you. No more, baby. I don’t want that for us anymore.”

He looked away, to the ground, before he brought his attention back to me. “If I’m being honest, maybe I couldn’t stay away because I needed to make sure all of this is real. It still feels like a dream to me.”

I wrapped my hand around his wrist, and he ran a thumb under my eye.

“It’s real, Jared. Us. All of it.”

“Yeah?” he asked. The fact he needed reassurance, that he felt compelled to come here to gain it, hurt my heart.

The sad thing was that I needed it, too.

“Yeah,” I promised.

He shook his head in disbelief. “Can’t believe I’m here, Aly. Can’t believe you want me after all the shit I’ve dragged you through.”

I leaned forward, tipped up my chin to capture his gaze, and brought us close. “You think I didn’t understand why you left? Do you really think that all those times we hid away in my room together that I didn’t understand you? That I didn’t understand why? That I didn’t *know* you?” I squeezed his wrist. His pulse thrummed wildly at my palm. “Because I did. I *know* you. I was there, too, Jared. I saw what you went through. And I’ll never pretend I understand everything you’ve gone through, but I promise I do *understand* you and I will always be here for you.”

Relief left him in a stuttered breath. “God, Aly, what did I ever do to deserve you?”

I pressed myself to him, to his gorgeous body and the power that radiated from his spirit. That warmth covered me whole. “It doesn’t work like that. We don’t earn love . . . it’s a gift we’re given.”

He pulled back. Brushing his fingers through my hair, he twisted a single lock in his finger. “And what if I want to return that gift?” he asked through a whisper at my ear. “Give it?”

I fisted my hand in his shirt. “You already have.”

His head shook. A hint of laughter floated out with his breath. “See, I was right to begin with . . . I’ll never deserve you.” He tugged at my hair. “You . . . perfect girl . . . will never see yourself the way I see you.”

I slowed. The hold I had on his shirt increased as my unease flared. Because I did want something from him. Or maybe I just wanted it for him . . . for us.

“Do you know what tomorrow is?” I hazarded, taking a chance as I pushed a little. Was I aware I was treading on dangerous ground? Yeah. But I knew we couldn’t go on as we had before, dodging what was important.

Jared stiffened. Nerves rocked through him and a rush of air left him on a heavy exhale. Shakily, he raked his hand over the top of his head. “Yeah, I know what day tomorrow is.”

Thanksgiving.

These last months had blurred, the holidays approaching with little anticipation. Or maybe I’d approached the thought of them with trepidation. I knew it was coming, and I knew the holiday would be the time I would have to tell my parents everything. Before Jared had returned, I’d planned to finally speak his name tomorrow and admit it all, telling them I was pregnant and I had no idea where Jared had gone.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marlon Hood:

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them household or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read any book. It is really fun for you. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent the entire day to reading a reserve. The book Come to Me Softly: The Closer to You Series it is quite good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not to fund but this book has high quality.

Marjorie Cook:

Come to Me Softly: The Closer to You Series can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to place every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Come to Me Softly: The Closer to You Series yet doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into fresh stage of crucial contemplating.

Kayla Wilson:

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Daniel Watkins:

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