

SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2009

Okay, so it's true. I can time-travel. But it's not as exciting as it sounds. I can't go back in time and kill Hitler. I can't go to the future and see who wins the World Series in 2038. So far, the most I've ever jumped is about six hours in the past. Some superhero, right?

Tonight, I finally let someone in on my secret. Someone whose IQ is light-years above mine, so, basically he might actually be able to figure me out. The one request Adam insists I follow is documentation. A record of nearly every moment from this point on. Actually, he wanted the eighteen years prior to today, but I talked him out of it—for now. Even though I'm going along with this journal idea, it doesn't mean I buy into it. It's not like the world's going to end just because I can jump around in time. Or that I'll serve some greater purpose, like saving the human race from dying. But as Adam says, I must be like this for a reason and it's up to us to find out why.

—JACKSON MEYER

## CHAPTER ONE

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2009, 12:15 P.M.

“How far back should I go?” I asked Adam.

We kept a good distance between us and the long line of kids gathering around the polar bears.

“Thirty minutes?” Adam suggested.

“Hey, let that go!” Holly snatched the bag of candy one of the campers had swiped from a toddler’s stroller and threw an exasperated look in my direction. “It’d be nice if you would actually watch *your* group of kids.”

“Sorry, Hol.” I scooped Hunter up before his kleptomaniac habits got any worse. “Hold up your hands,” I told him.

He grinned a toothless smile and opened his chubby hands in front of my face. “See? Nothing.”

“Let’s keep it that way, all right? You don’t need to take other people’s stuff.” I set the kid back down and gave him a shove toward the others, who were heading for the large stretch of grass reserved for campers having lunch at the zoo.

“Holly Flynn,” I said, grabbing her hand and twining her fingers in mine.

She spun around to face me. “You have a soft spot for the klepto kid, don’t you?”

I smiled at her and shrugged. “Maybe.”

Her face relaxed and she tugged on the front of my shirt, pulling me closer before kissing my cheek. “So . . . what are you doing to-night?”

“Um . . . I’ve got plans with this really pretty blond chick.” Except I couldn’t remember what we had planned. “It’s a . . . surprise.”

“You’re so full of it.” She laughed and shook her head. “I can’t believe you forgot your promise to spend an entire evening with me

reciting Shakespeare . . . in French . . . backwards. Then we were supposed to watch *Titanic* and *Notting Hill*.”

“I must have been drunk when I said that.” I glanced over Holly’s shoulder before kissing her quickly on the mouth. “But I’ll agree to *Notting Hill*.”

She rolled her eyes. “We’re supposed to go see that band, remember?”

A little girl from Holly’s group tugged on her arm and pointed toward the bathroom. I darted around her before we could discuss my inability to make plans two weeks in advance and actually remember them two weeks later.

“Yo, Jackson, over here,” Adam said, nodding toward a tree.

Time for precise and exact time-travel planning.

“Are you coming with us to see that band tonight?” I asked.

What I really wanted to know was if he remembered it.

“Um . . . let’s see. Spend an evening with your high school friends who, I’ve heard, are like a real-life version of *Gossip Girl*? Not to mention blowing an entire paycheck on an appetizer and a couple drinks?” He shook his head and smiled. “What do you think?”

“I see your point. How about we hang out in your and Holly’s neighborhood tomorrow?”

“Sounds good.”

“All right, on with it. I can’t eat while smelling camel ass, so we might as well experiment now.”

Adam tossed my journal onto my lap and threw a pen on top. “Write down your goal, because time-travel without a goal is just—”

“Reckless,” I finished for him, trying not to groan.

“The gift shop is right behind us. I’ve been watching for the last hour and the same girl’s at the register.”

“You’ve been checking her out, haven’t you?”

Adam rolled his eyes and pushed his dark hair from his forehead. “Okay, so, you set your stopwatch and then jump back thirty minutes.

You go into the gift shop and do whatever it is you do so a girl remembers your name.”

“It’s called flirting,” I said quietly so no one else would hear. Then I focused on writing my notes before Holly got back from the bathroom.

*Goal: Test theory on someone who has no knowledge of the experiment.*

*Theory: Events and occurrences, including human interaction, while traveling into the past will NOT affect the present.*

Non-geek-speak translation: I jump back thirty minutes in time, flirt with the girl in the shop, jump back to present time, walk back into the store, and see if she knows me.

*She won’t.*

But Adam Silverman, winner of the 2009 National Science Fair and a soon-to-be MIT freshman, won’t confirm this conclusion until we’ve tried it from *Every. Single. Angle*. Honestly, I don’t really mind. Sometimes it’s fun, and until a few months ago, nobody except me knew what I could do. Now that the number has doubled, I feel a little bit less like a freak.

And a little less lonely.

But I’ve never been friends with a science geek before. Although Adam’s more of the bad-boy-hacking-into-government-websites-kinda-geek. Which is beyond cool, in my opinion.

“Do you know for sure you can jump back *exactly* thirty minutes?” Adam asked.

I shrugged. “Yeah, probably.”

“Just make sure you note the time. I’ll record the seconds you’re sitting here like a vegetable,” Adam said, placing a stopwatch in my hand.

“Is that really what I look like when I jump? How long do you think I’ll be like that?” I asked.

“I’m guessing that a twenty-minute excursion, thirty minutes into the past, will leave you catatonic in the present for about two seconds.”

“Where was I thirty minutes ago, just so I don’t run into myself?”

Adam clicked his stopwatch on and off about ten times before answering me. He’s so totally OCD. “You were inside, looking at the penguins.”

“Okay, I’ll try not to end up over there.”

“We both know you can choose your location if you really concentrate, so don’t give me that I-don’t-know-where-I’ll-end up shit,” Adam joked.

Maybe he was right, but it’s hard not to think about *anything* but one place. Just one tiny half-second thought about any other location than the one I was aiming for, and I’d end up there instead.

“Yeah, yeah. *You* do it, then, if you think it’s so easy.”

“I wish.”

I get why someone like Adam is so fascinated by what I can do, but for me, I don’t exactly consider it a superpower. Just a freak-of-nature occurrence. And kind of a scary one, at that.

I glanced at my watch, 12:25 P.M., then closed my eyes and focused on thirty minutes in the past and on this exact spot, though I really, truly have no clue how I do this.

The first time I jumped was about eight months ago, during my first semester of college. I was sitting in the middle of a French poetry class. I nodded off for a few minutes and woke up to a cold breeze and a door slamming me in the face. I was standing in front of my dorm. Before I even had a chance to panic, I was right back in class again.

Then I panicked.

Now it’s fun, for the most part. Even though I still have no idea what day or time I traveled to that very first jump. As of today, my

known record jump has climbed from six hours to forty-eight hours in the past. Jumping to the future has yet to work, but I'm not going to stop trying.

The familiar sensation of being pulled into two pieces took over. I held my breath and waited for it to stop. It's never pleasant, but you get used to it.

## CHAPTER TWO

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2009, 11:57 A.M.

When I opened my eyes again, Adam was gone, along with the rest of the kids and my coworkers. The horrible splitting sensation stopped, replaced by the light-as-air feeling I always get during a time jump. Like I could run for miles and not feel a bit of ache in my legs.

I hit the start button on the stopwatch and glanced at the giant clock above the zoo entrance.

11:57 A.M. *Pretty close.* I strolled over toward the shop and walked inside. The girl at the register looked about my age, maybe a little older. She leaned on the counter, holding her face in her hands, staring at the wall.

Whenever I do these little experiments, I have to constantly remind myself of one very important fact: Hollywood gets everything wrong when it comes to time travel.

Seriously.

Okay, here's the weird part. The chick at the counter could punch me in the nose, maybe even break it, and when I jumped back to the present time, it would be sore or bruised, but not broken. Why it's not broken is a whole different (unanswered) question, but the point is . . . I'll remember being punched.

If I broke *her* nose, then went back to the present, she'd be totally unhurt and wouldn't remember a thing. Of course, I was supposed to be testing that theory right now (again). Well . . . except I'm not going to punch her. Either way—same outcome.

"Hey," I said to her. "Do you guys sell . . . sunscreen?"

She didn't even make eye contact, just pointed to a wall to the left. I walked over and snatched four different bottles and then dumped them on the counter. "So . . . are you at NYU or—"

“You know, you can buy these somewhere else for, like, half the price,” she snapped.

“Thanks for the tip, but I need some now.” I leaned on the counter right in front of her.

She straightened up and started ringing up my purchase. “Four bottles? Seriously?”

Okay . . . so much for flirting. “Fine, I’ll just get one. I guess you’re not working on commission.”

“You work at a day camp?” she asked disdainfully, eyeing my green staff shirt.

“Yep.”

The girl snorted back laughter and snatched the credit card from my hand. “You really don’t remember me?”

I had to pause for a second to process her words. “Um . . .”

“Karen . . . I sat behind you in economics all semester. Professor Larson called you unbalanced and said you needed to get a better grasp on realistic finances for college students.” She rolled her eyes at me. “Is *that* why you have a job?”

“Nope.” Totally true. I don’t even get paid. I’m a volunteer, but I wasn’t about to tell *her* that. She had obviously already made up her mind about me. “Well . . . it was nice to see you again, Karen.”

“Whatever,” she grumbled.

I left the store quickly. Jumping back to the present didn’t require the same level of focus as going into the past, mostly because I always had to come back before I could jump again. Adam calls the present my “home base.” He’s mastered the art of dumbing it down for me to understand. And baseball analogies are my favorite. Hopefully, I wouldn’t return to a bunch of strangers staring at my catatonic state.

## CHAPTER THREE

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2009, 12:25 P.M.

When I opened my eyes again, Adam was standing over me. “Jackson?”

“Dude, you need a breath mint,” I mumbled, shoving him to the side.

“You were a zombie for one-point-eight seconds. I was almost right. Pretty soon I’ll have enough data to produce exact calculations. You didn’t sustain any injuries this time, did you?”

“Nope.”

I knew exactly why he asked. Last week, I jumped a few hours back, lost my concentration, and ended up in the middle of traffic instead of inside my apartment. A huge semi truck ran right over my leg. When I jumped back to home base, I felt this sharp pain shooting up my thigh and then it was gone. A light purple bruise appeared, but otherwise my leg was perfect, even though that truck totally should have shattered my bone.

I stood up and dusted off the back of my pants. “Apparently we had a class together. But I totally pissed her off just now. Well, in the past. You know what I mean. So, if the theory is wrong and I *did* change something, she’ll be annoyed when she sees me again.”

“Let’s find out.” Adam waved to Holly. “Hey, Hol, we’ll be right back.”

I grabbed Hunter, who was inching his way off the grass and toward the pile of abandoned backpacks, looking for some loot to stash in his pockets, no doubt. “Come shopping with us, little dude.”

The three of us strolled through the door as the girl at the register was dumping a box of key chains into a plastic container. I stopped and stared at her, playing dumb. “Aren’t you . . . in my economics class?”

Her eyes lifted and she actually smiled a little. “Yeah . . . Professor Larson.”

*Ding, ding, two points for Jackson Meyer.* She didn’t remember me pissing her off. Just like I said. Nothing changed as a result of my jump thirty minutes into the past.

“Karen, right?” I said.

Her eyebrows lifted. “And you’re Jackson, the French poetry major, right?”

Adam groaned and shoved past me. “Don’t see anything I want in here. Let’s go.”

I ignored Adam and lifted Hunter up onto the counter. “English lit, too. I have a double major.”

Even though my little excursions to the past didn’t change anything in my home base, there were *some* advantages, like getting information. So, I guess, in theory, time travel to the past *did* change something.

It changed *me*.

Adam, Hunter, and I left the store and all of us stopped outside and came face-to-face with Holly. She had a handful of garbage she was dropping into a bin outside the store. I took her hand and pulled her over to a tree that we could hide behind.

“Adam’s got a thing for that chick in the store. I was trying to help them hook up.”

Holly laughed and I nudged her backward so she was leaning against the tree. “Did Hunter steal anything?” she mumbled, but my lips were already on hers, preventing her from speaking clearly.

“Not that I know of.” I kissed her again and felt something wet land right on my cheek. Both of us pulled apart and looked upward just as the sky opened up and rain came down in huge sheets.

“Damn! I thought it was supposed to be nice all day,” Holly said.

We left our tree and made a run for the grassy area where Adam and the other staff were already lining up the kids.

A few of the little ones screamed as a loud clap of thunder rumbled through the zoo. "Are we getting on the bus?" I asked Adam.

"Yeah," he shouted over the sudden storm.

All the kids started running in jagged lines, pulling backpacks over their heads. Holly and Adam ran up to the front of the line and I hung back to push along the stragglers as we jogged to the exit.

Luckily, the bus was parked right in front of the entrance. By that time, my clothes and tennis shoes were completely drenched. Just as I lifted the last kid onto the bus steps, I saw a red-haired girl, about ten or eleven, standing outside, alone. Her back was to me and all I could see was the hair and the blue jeans and the long-sleeve shirt. Water dripped off the end of her long braid.

My heart pounded all the way to my ears as theories spun through my head.

It couldn't be her.

But what if it was?

I moved toward the girl and heard Holly shout through the rain, "Jackson, where are you going?"

"That girl's not with us," Adam said. "Come on. Let's go!"

My steps got longer and faster until I finally reached her. I tapped her shoulder and the girl turned around instantly. Her eyes widened for a second and then her expression smoothed into a smile. If it was somehow her, would she even recognize me?

The rain pounded against the pavement and a bolt of lightning lit up the now-dark sky.

"Jackson!" Holly shouted again.

My heart sank back down. The little girl's eyes were blue. Not green. It was both a relief and an utter disappointment. "Um . . . sorry. I thought you were someone else."

I turned around and ran back toward the bus. Dozens of little heads were watching me through the windows. I trudged up the steps and shook the rain from my hair. All the eyes had moved from the windows to me, standing in the aisle. Holly's gaze locked with

mine for a second, but I stepped right around her and slid into the seat next to Adam.

I felt a twinge of guilt when Holly took an empty spot, alone, without asking any questions. And I knew she wanted to. The way everyone was staring, it must have been quite a scene.

“What was with the kid you were chasing?” Adam asked.

I had to look away from him. “Nothing . . . she just looks like someone. False alarm. No big deal.”

Adam leaned his head closer and spoke again after a minute of silence. “She looks like Courtney, right?”

I sighed but finally conceded by nodding. “It’s stupid. I know.”

“It’s not stupid. It happens to people all the time.” He drew in a quick breath before whispering, “Wait . . . you don’t think . . . hmm . . . it’s an interesting theory, but way too many logistical problems.”

“Just forget it,” I said, before he could drill me with questions. “Please.”

There was no way around it. My twin sister was dead. Four years later and it still haunted me. *She* still haunted me. Mostly because I missed her so much.

When we were filing off the bus, Holly waited for me and stepped in my path. “You okay?”

I stared at her eyes, which were full of concern, then shrugged. “Yeah, why?”

Her face fell and she turned her back on me. “Nothing . . . never mind.”

Okay, so I totally sucked at the personal, boyfriend shit. Holly never came right out and said that, but I knew she was thinking it.

I took her soaking-wet backpack off her shoulder and threw it over mine. “So . . . you want to come over later . . . maybe dry off before we go out anywhere?”

She jumped off the last step and onto the sidewalk before facing me and smiling. “Sure.”

I wrapped one hand around her blond ponytail and squeezed water out of the end. “I think you’re going to need a blow dryer.”

She reached up and rested her hands on my face, her light blue eyes turning serious, like Adam had a few minutes ago. “Are you sure you’re okay? What were you—”

“I’m just a little bit of a freak sometimes. That’s all.” I forced a grin and turned her shoulders toward the front doors so we could get out of the rain.

## CHAPTER FOUR

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2009, 6:00 P.M.

Tonight, me and my sidekick are implementing a plan that has been in the works for a while: stealing my medical records from Dr. Melvin's office. Adam's convinced we may find something in there to indicate why I'm such a freak of nature. But seriously, does he think "Crazy Time Traveler" will be stamped on the outside of the folder?

I've spent the last two days observing Dr. Melvin's erratic and very inconsistent schedule. Basically, he's always working. Except tonight. Late tonight. This experiment will involve a two-day time jump into the past (my current record), and some very scientific and devious maneuvers.

Adam's on his way back from MIT now and is probably pulling out his hair, trying to come up with all the formulas beforehand. I've done my part, writing down my goal, and now I just have to rearrange my plans with Holly. Adam's trips home have been so last-minute since school started that I keep canceling on Holly. But she's totally busy with classes and some kind of dancing team. She'll probably be relieved. Besides, I can still make it to dinner, just not the movie . . . Speaking of dinner. Shit! I'm already 15 minutes late . . .

More data entry later.

OCTOBER 29, 2009, 9:30 P.M.

*Okay, so maybe Holly didn't take the change in plans as well as I thought she would.*

"Come on, Holly, open the door."

Two girls zipped past me in bathrobes, giggling.

"She doesn't want to see you," Lydia sneered. "This is exactly why I decided against men. I've been telling Holly for nearly a month that she needs to do the same."

I fought back the urge to shout at Holly's eternally angry roommate. Her arms were spread in front of the door, blocking me. Like I might try to knock it down or something. "Lydia, don't you have a Sylvia Plath Fan Club meeting to go to?"

Music started playing from the other side of the door.

"You're just darling, Jackson. Now I'm really not giving you my key."

I banged my head gently against the wall next to the door. "Please let me in."

"Don't forgive him. He'll just screw with you. Again and again," Lydia shouted.

*Okay, I am seriously going to strangle this chick.*

A door flew open behind us and I turned to look at the girl standing with a thick textbook cradled in her arms. "Jackson, I'm really sorry, but I've got to study. And Lydia, please shut up. No one cares about your angry men-hating rants."

The music coming from Holly's room cranked up even louder. I turned to Lydia and shouted over the noise, "I'll pay you a hundred dollars to hand over your key and disappear for the night."

I waited for her lecture about violating the dorm rules or some shit about women giving up the metaphorical "keys" in life.

To my surprise, her dark eyebrows lifted and she said, "Make it two hundred."

I opened my wallet and pulled out a credit card and thrust it in her hand. "Just take this."

She dropped the key onto the floor in front of me and took off down the hall. I sighed with relief.

"Thank you!" the girl behind me said.

I snatched the key from the floor and held it to the doorknob. "Hol, please talk to me."

The only answer I got was the chorus of a Pink song. I put the key in the door and opened it slowly, expecting to see Holly standing on the other side, waiting for me. So she could steal the key and shove me out again.

A red shoe flew across the room and slammed into the far wall, above the window. I stepped inside and shut the door before glancing around the room. Holly's feet stuck out from the closet along with the ends of her blue bathrobe.

I wasn't sure if she'd heard me come in, but then again, maybe the shoe was meant for me. Wouldn't be the first time a girl had thrown a shoe at me, but for Holly, it was a bit out of character.

I had to dodge a brown sandal as I crossed the room to turn off the stereo. As soon as the music stopped, she quit digging through her junk, crawled out of the closet, and stood right in front of me.

"I have good news," I said, attempting to smile, but it didn't quite go with the mood. "Lydia's actually willing to turn off her angry-girl mouth for the right price. She won't be back until tomorrow."

"Seriously? You paid my roommate to leave?"

There wasn't even the slightest hint of amusement on her face. A knot formed in my stomach.

"Tell me what's wrong. What did I do?" Just by saying this I had admitted that I knew it was more than just canceling a movie. Very stupid on my part. I reached out my hand, but her arms stayed folded over her chest.

“You’re always hiding stuff from me, running around with Adam like a couple of little kids.”

“Are you jealous? I know he was your friend first, but maybe we can work out a schedule.” *Bad. Very bad. The absolute wrong thing to say.* I cringed, waiting for her to shout or grab another shoe to launch in my direction.

She turned her back on me and walked over to her desk, sifting through a pile of papers. “Fine. You’re right. It’s no big deal.”

It would have been impossible to insert even one more drop of sarcasm into her voice. And it hit me like a gust of icy air. I ran my fingers through my hair and tried to come up with something decent to say. Or to decide if I should run. Instead, I went for a change in subject. “Did you . . . lose something? You were digging through the closet?”

“Yes. One of my memory cards.” She slammed a book against the desk, her back still to me. “I really need to study, okay?”

I snatched a couple of shoes from the floor and tossed them back into the closet. “Well . . . maybe I could help—”

“No,” she said quickly before hitting the power button on her computer monitor. She let out a breath and her shoulders relaxed. “Seriously, Jackson, just go so I can get something done. Please.”

The sarcasm had dropped from her voice, leaving only an exhausted and slightly exasperated tone. She was giving me an easy way out of this argument. But curiosity took over and I opened my mouth again. “Hol, why are you so pissed?”

She shook her head a little. “I’m not . . . *mad* at you.”

I let out a frustrated sigh. “Then what . . . ?”

*What do you want from me?* I had started to say, because I really didn’t know. But the words got stuck in my throat when I saw the drop of water fall onto the piece of paper in front of her. I took a couple steps toward her and she turned around, giving me a one-second glimpse of her tears before she leaned her head against my chest,

hiding her face. “You never tell me anything . . . It’s . . . it’s like you have this whole other life and I can’t be in it.”

Hearing the tears trembling in her voice hit me harder than I expected. I should have run when I had the chance. I wrapped my arms around her and squeezed her shoulders. “I don’t mean to push you away. I’m . . . I’m sorry.”

Holly ducked under my arms and flopped down on the bed, her blond hair spilling around her. She groaned loudly. “I hate that I can’t stay mad at you.”

I released the breath I didn’t even realize I’d been holding and lay down next to her, burying my face in her neck. “I thought you said you weren’t mad.”

She slapped her hands over her eyes and pressed down hard. “I *was* mad. Past tense.”

“Does this mean we get to have make-up sex?”

She cracked a smile, then her mouth formed a thin line again. “Only if you promise no more secrets . . . ever.”

*Not possible. No way.*

I slipped my fingers inside her robe and glided them up and down her back. “You’ll cave either way.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Try me.”

“Okay, I promise.”

“Liar.” She laughed and pulled my shirt off, tossing it over the lamp. “Lydia’s going to be such a bitch tomorrow.”

I loosened the tie on her robe. “She’s at least two hundred dollars richer, so there’s nothing to bitch about. And when is she *not* angry?”

“Never. But thank you for one night free of feminist lectures.”

I leaned over and whispered, “Consider it your make-up gift.”

She wiggled out of her robe. “Do I get anything else?”

“Like a new car?” I asked.

“No.”

“A pound of that really expensive nondairy chocolate?”

She kissed the length of my neck. “You know what I want.”

I groaned loudly. “Not a chance.”

“Please.”

“You’re turning me into a complete freak. Or worse—a chick.” I made the mistake of turning my head. One glimpse of the tears still drying on her cheeks and I caved. “If you tell anyone, I will kick your little ass. Got it?”

She mimed zipping her lips, then snuggled up to me. “Do you think you can manage a British accent this time?”

I laughed and kissed her forehead. “I’ll try.”

“Okay, on with it.”

I rolled my eyes, then took a deep breath. *“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness . . .”*

My ninth-grade English teacher always made us recite Dickens while standing in front of the class. I hated it. For Holly, I didn’t mind too much, but I’d never tell her that.

“Do you think he did the right thing?” Holly asked after I’d recited the first few pages.

“You mean Sydney? Getting his head chopped off so the woman he loves can be with another man?”

Holly laughed and her lips vibrated against my chest. “Yeah.”

“No, I think he’s a complete moron.” I kissed the corner of her mouth and she grinned at me.

“You’re lying.”

I pulled her closer and kissed her again, ending the discussion that would inevitably lead to spilling out more secrets than I cared to share.

“You weren’t aiming those shoes at anyone earlier, were you?” I asked in between kisses.

She leaned over me, her hair forming a yellow curtain around us. “I didn’t even know you were in here.”

“Okay, good, because that red shoe had a really pointy heal. You could take someone’s eye out with that.”

She laughed really hard and then kissed me again before whispering in my ear, "I'll save it for all my other boyfriends."

I woke up early the next morning to Holly's alarm buzzing loudly in my ear. Blond hair tickled my nose and a big chunk fell right in my mouth. She slammed her fist into the snooze button before mumbling, "I set it so you wouldn't miss your eight o'clock lab."

"I can skip it today." I pushed her hair from my face and kissed the back of her neck. "Go back to sleep."

She pulled my arm tighter around her, then muttered something nearly incoherent, but it sounded like, "Tell me a secret."

This was Holly's favorite game. I usually responded with a random and stupid remark like, "*I used to have a crush on Hilary Duff.*" But after last night's argument, I owed her a little better than that.

I touched my lips to her ear and whispered, "I'm crazy about you."

I could practically hear her smile right before we both drifted back to sleep.

My eyes opened again two hours later. This time to the sound of someone knocking on the door. I reached for my jeans and yanked a T-shirt over my head before shaking Holly. "I think Lydia's back."

She groaned and grabbed her robe from the floor, and then opened the door. Two men pushed past her and strode into the room.

"What . . . ?" Holly said, grabbing the sides of her robe and tying them tight.

One of the men, the shorter one with red hair, slammed the door shut. "That's him," he said to the other man.

"What's going on?" I asked

The shorter one looked right at me. "Are you Kevin Meyer's son?"

My heart rate sped. Something had happened . . . When was the

last time I'd seen my dad . . . ? *Two days ago*, I remembered. He'd been out of the country since.

"Is he . . . okay?"

Holly drew in a breath and moved closer to me, squeezing my hand. I could guess the theories spinning through her head: *company plane crashed into a mountain somewhere, leaving the CEO's only child without a single living family member*. Sweat trickled down the back of my neck.

The taller of the two men reached into his jacket and flashed a badge, too fast to read it. "You need to come with us."

Cops . . . maybe FBI? Investigative reporters? Or maybe my dad's pharmaceutical company was being charged with money-laundering or some other scandal. My dad and his clan of business advisers had drilled into me, on many occasions, the lengths reporters will go to get information for a story. And the quick flash of the badge, not letting me really see what it said . . .

I shook my head. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Jackson, maybe you should—"

I held my hand up to silence Holly before turning my eyes back on the men. "What paper are you with?"

The two men looked at each other and the taller one shrugged before uncertainly saying, "Newspaper?"

I raised my arm and pointed at the door behind them. "Get out. Both of you."

Holly slowly sidestepped behind me from her place next to the door, without turning her back on the intruders.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Holly inching backward toward her dresser, reaching for something. A cell phone? Pepper spray?

"Are you currently involved with any government agencies?" the short one asked. "Have they approached you with information?"

*These dudes are seriously pissing me off.* I quickly scanned the room for a makeshift weapon, and slowly reached for a tall floor lamp.

Before I could open my mouth to speak, one of Holly's shoes flew across the room and hit the man on the side of the face. His head snapped in her direction. I could see a heel print burning bright red above his eye. I felt the blood rush to my face as my heart threatened to beat out of my chest. Channeling Carlos Beltrán, I swung for the fences. The lamp's glass shade connected squarely with Holly's shoe print. He crashed backward, his body slamming against the door. A shard of glass had opened a good-sized gash above his left eye.

Crouching low, with his arms spread wide, he dove for my legs. Instantly my feet went out from under me, smashing me facedown into the tile floor.

The other man stepped over our tangled bodies as he advanced toward Holly. Holly inched backward with her right hand behind her back.

"Just cooperate, and no one will hurt you," the advancing man said to Holly.

Before he could complete the sentence, she revealed her right hand. Her clenched fist erupted in a well-aimed stream of pepper spray. "Get out of my room!"

"Fuck!" he shouted, leaning over and rubbing his eyes.

Holly darted around him and ran toward the door.

The tall man and I both scrambled to our feet. While he was distracted by his partner's screams, I followed Holly to the door.

From behind me, I heard, "Freeze! Don't move!"

I turned in time to see the tall man's hand plunge into his half-unzipped jacket. His hand emerged, tightly gripping a semiautomatic pistol. He aimed directly at my head with only one eye, his vision obscured by the flow of blood.

I sucked in a breath, knowing I was in over my head. Defeated. Holly's hands froze on the knob, her back now pressed against the door.

The short guy held up one hand and kept the other one over his eyes. "No . . . not yet. Only if he jumps."

*Jumps where?* Now my heart was really thudding. They couldn't possibly know about . . . could they?

I took a large step backward, but tripped on the lamp now lying on the floor, and felt something catch around my ankle. Once again, my feet went out from under me.

A booming sound rang in my ears, followed by Holly's scream. Then everything seemed to stop—my heart, my breath . . . time.

Holly fell to the ground and I wanted to shout, to drop down beside her, but the second the seeping red blood started to show through her robe, I jumped. This time I couldn't seem to control it.

But right before everything turned black, I saw it. Her chest rose and then fell again. She was alive and I just left her there.