

(Nick) *"I'm Nick and I plan to win my ex girlfriend back, although before I begin you may ask why I'm making such a big effort, well it's simple, I want her back. I have watched Ash move on with her life without me, out with my brother, I have realised how much I miss her, and it tears me up. I still have pictures, her bracelet I got her for Christmas and even the love letter she wrote me.*

*Therefore, I have a plan and it will work, plus it will not take long to put into action. Before I start this I will not apologise for any third party getting hurt, all I can apologise for not starting all this sooner"*

(Ashleigh) *"From the day me and Nick broke up I've never stopped loving him, I mean our relationship ended so abrupt after the accident. I NEVER really got the time to fall out of love with him, don't know I suppose in the back of my mind I know Nick will always love me. He was gutted when we broke up, but the damage was done, it was so severe not even a prayer could have healed us.*

*What is worse is I know Nick will never give up, his last words to me were 'I will not love anyone else Ash and that is not a threat'. Those words will haunt me until the day I die and Over the next few months I know I'm going to find out how much Nick love me and it scares me"*

(Joe) *"Nick has never been much of a loser, so when Ash broke up with him it was a huge shock to him and one I don't think Nick will ever forget.*

*I know Nick wanted to smash my face in when I told him Ash and I were together, I could see the rage and disbelief in his face but I didn't give a shit as I had the one thing he wanted which made me feel like I was on top of the world.*

*I know Nick will fight back; it is just a matter of when and how. I know my brother has never gotten over Ash.*

*Deep down I know I will always be a replacement for Nick to Ash. I look at the way Nick and Ash look at each other and their body. Paranoia?? I don't think so, I am certain Ash will never love me the way she loves Nick and that's what makes my brother a winner, unless I change that"*



Nick Hunter frowned as an ambulance van drive past the window wondering what was going on , Trying to make out where it was going he sat forward slightly as the van disappeared round the corner towards the front of the building of the university campus.

"Is there something out there you wanna tell us about Nick?" Pip Morris asked clearly annoyed as Nick has spend the last few minutes looking out side the window, it amazed how Pip many students including Nick passed any of their courses where they never paid attention or even bothered to attend their lectures or seminars. Pip is the unit Leader for Psychology for second year students at the university, today one of lecturers were off sick which resulted in Pip standing in, much to her distain. Glaring at Nick, she wanted to throw him out for disturbing the lecture for she hated nothing more when others did not pay attention.

Nick pointed to the outside with his pen without looking at Pip, which infuriated her even more "Just seen an ambulance Pip, it's gone round the corner to the front of the building"

Pip suddenly looked concerned "Oh, I'd better go to the front desk, someone will know what's going on"

Nick looked at Pip "Nice one Pip" he smiled sitting back slightly "Tell us what's going on when you bet back"

Pip rolled her yes, deciding not to respond to Nick's comment "I'll be back" Pip warned as she pointed at her seminar group "Look over your notes please and I will continue when I get back" and she was gone

Leanne Lebroke leaned forward and tapped Nick in his shoulder, sighing Nick waved without turning to look at her "So, why haven't you returned my calls, I don't like to be kept waiting Nick"

"Been busy' Nick quipped tapping his pen against a page of notes in his notebook, despite his couldn't care less attitude Nick portrayed he did intent to pass his psychology degree and graduate with honours.

Leanne ran her fingers through her long brown hair "What too busy to return my calls, I do not believe that for a second" looking at Nick from the side Leanne almost lost her breath. Thinking how gorgeous Nick is and admiring his dirty cropped blond hair, brown eyes and chiselled features that belonged on a billboard selling the next best aftershave. Leanne fantasised about how good Nick would be in bed and how much chemistry they could make together, Leanne HAD to have him. Leanne cannot believe Nick is single and asks herself what was Ashleigh thinking of when she dumped him and concluded that it obvious not much. Leanne sighed to her self and thought as they say one woman's trash is another woman's treasure.

Nick sighed as he turned to look at Leanne, he had to admit she looked hot today in a bright pink shirt opened at the bust, hair dead straight finished off with a fringe and blonde hi-lights and her dark brown eyes, wide, and hungry. At first he was flattered when Leanne left messages on his phone, but now he's finding her a nuisance which is why he puts all her calls to voice mail and has

not replied to her saucy text messages. "Look Leanne, I'm really not interested at the moment"

Leanne's face fell "I'm sorry?" not interested?

Nick rolled his eyes and asked himself if this woman really thought she was the bell off every ball and thought her ego must be as big as her double D chest "Sorry Leanne, I'm interested in someone else"

"I don't believe you" Leanne said trying to call Nick's bluff

Nick shrugged before turning his attention back to his work, he had to admit Leanne was right to question his decision as he had given signals in the past but now things were different. Nick was interested in someone else and it was not just anyone, it was his ex girlfriend Ashleigh. Nick glanced up and saw Ashleigh sitting in the far end corner of the room; head down he could see she was reading. Staring at her for a moment Nick wanted her back even more than he realised.

Leanne was astonished, but she disguised it well "Your loss Hunter" she whispered before sitting back in her seat feeling utterly humiliated.

Pip burst back into the room, looking distressed "Umm, I'm afraid there's been a serious accident"

Nick looked up "What happened?"

"A student is dead"

Ashleigh Day shook her head in dismay as she left the building later that day; "Oh my god" she whispered

The grounds were swarmed with police and paramedics. There were a group of lecturers and unit leaders among the scene, who included the head of the sociology department and Pip Morris. The victim had not been identified yet, but Ashleigh had heard it was a girl studying I.T and that she was found at the bottom of the stairs, she wondered whom it was and decided to ask Jarrett later. Ashleigh wanted to know how she fell to her death, she knew it was VERY unlikely the girl tripped as the stairs in the campus were not very steep, she had to be pushed, but the big question was who pushed her.

"Wait up Ash" Ashleigh turned to see her boyfriend Joe jog up to her

"I swear you're always on a mission when you're walking" Joe said before kissing Ashleigh on her nose

"Sorry, I was miles away"

Joe glanced back at the scene "Fucking hell it's like something out of a murder series"

Ashleigh felt a chill go down a spine "That could have been me"

Joe was taken back, but knew there was some truth in Ashleigh's comment. The victim was a student just like the rest of them, whoever killed her had to be a student, how else could they get pass campus security? Taking Ashleigh by the hand, Joe squeezed it "It wasn't though was it Ash"

Ashleigh sighed and gazed back at the scene “I know, but I’m finding it uncomfortable having a murder almost on my doorstep babe”

Joe agreed it was distressing to have this happened, he just hoped it wouldn’t happen again and even more so brought the killer to justice “Let’s get out of here Ash, I don’t think we should be hanging around”

Ashleigh agreed, despite dreading the questioning that everyone was talking about which every student who attended university that day would have to endure.



Nick met Ashleigh and Joe back at home, finding them sitting at the kitchen table was all too familiar for Nick a year ago that would be sitting beside Ashleigh. At times, he still could not believe that he and Ashleigh were no longer together; it had been eighteen months since their relationship ended and Nick hated every minute. With books scattered and open on the table, there were a few bottles of water, an empty bag of salt and vinegar crisps and both Ashleigh's and Joe mobile phones. The scene looked set for a good session of studying, both were struggling to deal with what seemed to be a murder on their own doorstep.

Walking into the kitchen Nick grabbed an apple from the fridge "Supposed you heard about what happened"

Joe threw his biro down onto his open text book, he had hoped to avoid the subject for a while for Ashleigh's sake but wondered if it was possible "Yeah it's all over the campus, it's mental"

Nick gazed at Ashleigh for a few moments, he thought she looked stunning in a tight black long sleeved top; green baggy combats, wearing very little make up and her hair braided on top with the rest left out at the back.

Ashleigh shook her head "It's like fucking law and order on your own doorstep" she added quietly

Nick bit into apple he could sense Ashleigh was scared. Her shoulders were tense, her arms were crossed, and she had a frown on her face, wishing he could cuddle her Nick felt helpless "It's a pain in the arse, you have to walk through the fire exit to get out the building"

"Yeah if you don't have your student id on you, you're not allowed on the grounds until you have it" Joe added

Ashleigh uncrossed her arms and placed them in her lap "I just don't get how someone can walk uni which has everybody all over, and no one notice someone push a girl down the stairs"

Joe looked at Ashleigh "No one knows she was pushed"

Nick laughed out loud "Come on Joseph, there's no way anyone can trip down them stairs and break their neck" he pointed out "The stairs as high as the pavement, she's have to be a centimetre tall to trip"

Ashleigh nodded as she crossed her arms across her stomach, suddenly she felt sick. "The girl was pushed, end of discussion,"

Joe did not want to go into a big debate about this, but he felt as if he was being backed into a corner "Well we can't say anything until we've officially heard right, that's all I'm saying"

Nick smiled slightly good old Joe, always there to look at the grey in every situation he thought. "You should be a politician Joe, always avoiding the obvious"

Joe shot Nick a look, not appreciating to be the subject of Nick's jokes

Ashleigh sat back and relaxed a little as the nausea eased, it has always amused her they way Nick sometimes belittles Joe and even more when Joe reacts to it

"Who was she anyway?"

"Some girl from I.T apparently" Ashleigh replied, picking up her mobile phone she checked time, it was ten to four.

Joe frowned "Wonder if Jarrett knows her, gunna ask him"

"Where was Mr Hill today anyway?" Nick asked

Joe knew when he did not see Jarrett it had something to do with things at home, shrugging Joe replied, "Fuck knows"

"Anyway what's for dinner?" Nick asked looking around

Joe still slightly annoyed with Nick, he hated it when Nick belittled him and even more when Ashleigh took his side. "Don't know, don't care"

Nick finished his apple and threw it in the bin, which was just behind Ashleigh "Well, we'd better decide cos mum and dad are out tonight"

Both Nick and Joe's parents work in banking both in England and the United States where their mother originates from, it is not usual for both Kim and Chris Hunter for either to absent from the house or the country.

Joe closed his books it was obvious that now his brother was home he was not going to get any amount of work done, standing up Joe pulled a leaflet off the wall behind him "Pepperoni or Meat supreme?"

Nick looked disgusted "I'm not eating anything from Pizza land, do you know how much shit they put in their pizza?"

Joe sighed with irritation, wondering if he and his brother were separated at birth. "Wicked, all the more for the rest of us then"

Nick does not eat junk food and as long as Joe can remember never has, even when all his friends were eating jelly and ice cream at each other's parties Nick would be munching on carrots, fruit and healthy sandwiches. When Nick entered his teens Joe thought his eating habits would change slightly, but instead Nick began

using the local gym on a regular basis, joining local football and rugby teams. Now Nick is in his early twenties his regime is stronger than ever with daily runs and heavy workouts at the gym.

Throwing the leaflet onto the table Joe turned and grabbed the kitchen handset from the wall "Okay, you can have tuna salad again can't you"

Looking at Ashleigh "Ash, what do you want?"

Ashleigh shook her head, not feeling all that hungry she replied "Not for me thanks, you have what you want"

Rolling his eyes with irritation Joe faced the wall and listened for someone to answer

"It's better than fat, grease on high salted bread" Nick scoffed "Isn't that right Ash?"

Ashleigh held up her hands in defence "Don't get me involved Nick, I'm just a third party"

Nick pretended to sound disappointed "You're lack of support surprises me Ashleigh"

Ashleigh stood up, she could feel her leg getting a cramp "We're all full of surprises Nick" she remarked

Joe Hunter could not concentrate on his essay that evening, sitting at the desk in his father's study he stared at the blank piece of paper in front of him. Joe turned to the desk clock, it was just after ten, and he had been trying to start his essay for the last hour. Joe sat back and began swinging in the chair from side to side, his mind drifted back to earlier this evening when himself, Nick and Ashleigh were in the kitchen Joe could sense there was something going on. There were moments where Nick and Ashleigh would share a joke or even hold a glance with each other, making Joe feel he was invisible. Joe hated it when Nick and Ashleigh joined forces against him over Donna, it felt as if they were still together and Joe never existed. Despite Ashleigh's insistence, her relationship with Nick is over, Joe still feels jealous when he sees them together as he is convinced he and Ashleigh will never have what she and Nick had when they were together. He knew it sounded crazy, but Joe is convinced something is going on.

Quickly Joe grabbed his mobile phone and rang Ashleigh, holding it almost close to his ear. Joe listened desperately waiting for her to answer; suddenly there was a click

"Ash?"

'Hi you've reached Ashleigh's voicemail, sorry can't take your-'

Swearing aloud Joe ended the call and threw his mobile down on the desk. In sheer frustration, Joe pushed everything off the desk onto the floor; staring at the mess Joe slowly regained his temper.



*'1 missed call'*, Nick read the screen and smiled at Ashleigh  
"Someone's trying to get in touch with you Ash"

Ashleigh glanced at her mobile for a second and felt a huge pang of guilt "It can wait, this can't"

Joe picked up the papers off the floor, suddenly he winced as he cut his finger on something, looking around he saw a picture of himself and Ashleigh was smashed to pieces.

Nick looked at Ashleigh "So what's this all about then?"

Suddenly the temperature rose in Ashleigh's bedroom feeling slightly faint she sat down on the edge of her bed and faced her reflection in the mirror "Nick, you have to stop" her stomach was filled with butterflies

Nick was silent for a moment guessing she has received the flowers he sent her this morning "Didn't you like the flowers?"

"You shouldn't have done that Nick" Ashleigh found them outside the back door when she got home earlier, with a empty greetings card attached to the side she knew they were from Nick. When Nick used to send flowers to her when they were together, he never used to write a note saying 'Flowers say it all Ash, words mean nothing'

"Why not? I still love you Ash"

Ashleigh closed her eyes in frustration, hoping with all her might this conversation with Nick was going to be simple and easy  
“Nick, you can’t keep doing this. It’s not fair”

Nick almost laughed, standing before Ashleigh “Do you know what’s not fair? You dating my fucking brother, you not being with me night after night and you not appreciating my flowers which cost me arm and a leg”

Ashleigh knew this was not going to be easy “That’s too bad Nick, we’re over and I’m with Joe now” she said firmly

“Which is why I’m standing here”

“Why do you have to make things so about you all the time”

Nick frowned “Ash, that’s bull and you it. You’ve made it all about us since you asked me here tonight”

“You really think there’s hope for us after what you did to me Nick” Ashleigh said bluntly

Nick fell silent for a moment, he had lost count how many times he had apologised for the accident “Yes I do”

Ashleigh wanted to laugh out loud, but she knew Nick was serious he was adamant he could make things up to Ashleigh even though he put her in a coma and caused her injuries so serious that she will never dance again professionally “Not going to happen, too much damage”

“Damage of which I wanna repair” Nick said edging closer

Ashleigh moved back “Some things are just beyond repair Nick”

Nick edged even closer, there was no way he was letting Ashleigh go and he wanted to Ashleigh to know that “Well, I’m willing to



try Ash" leaning forward he kissed her on the lips, he kissed her again cupping her face in his hands "I can't go on looking at you from afar Ash"

Ashleigh could feel the intensity in her bedroom, she wanted to control it, but at that moment, she felt unable to do anything. Feeling slightly weak and overwhelmed from Nick's kiss, Ashleigh tried to stand up, but Nick pushed her back down. Nick began to unzip her pale pink hoodie down the bust line.

Ashleigh could not believe what was happening and whispered under her breath "What the fuck am I doing?"

Looking at Nick he was dressed in a black 'No Fear' T/shirt, light ripped jeans and white trainers. Nick looked like he belonged to a five-piece boy band, with added silver chain, bracelet, and a designer watch. Ashleigh has always been attracted to Nick's ability to look good, she inhaled his designer aftershave and remembered the scent, Ashleigh wondered if Nick was looking this good on purpose.

Nick looked Ashleigh deep in the eye "This is it Ash, there's no going back"

Joe looked at his watch, it had just gone midnight, and he had not heard from Ashleigh. Sitting on the edge of his bed, he stared out into the darkness, gripping the mattress with his bare hands Joe waited.

Ashleigh feels sick, knowing that sleeping with Nick will destroy Joe. She knew it wasn't fair, but Ashleigh also knew she still loves

Nick more than Joe and it was just a matter of time before her love for Nick took over. Despite all that had happened between Nick, Ashleigh still loved Nick and listening him breathing beside her she knew she always would.

Turning over she sat up and met her reflection in the mirror, she was surprised also to find Nick staring back at her. There was a silence in the room; outside Ashleigh could hear the faint twitter of the birds in the early morning sky. Ashleigh tugged at the duvet which was wrapped around her, she needed to get out of there and Nick staring at her as if she was a trophy won at a skate boarding competition made her feel even more ashamed at what she had done. As the guilt grew thick inside Ashleigh, she wondered how she was going to tell Joe. Explain how she feel back in bed with her ex-boyfriend, feeling slightly frustrated with her self Ashleigh muttered under her breath "None of this was meant to happen, it's all going wrong"

"What's the matter babe?" Nick asked interrupting Ashleigh's thoughts, with the blanket wrapped around her Nick could see her tattoo of a (Nick's astrological sign) scorpion on her right shoulder. Looking at her Nick remembered the day Ashleigh had the tattoo and felt as if it was a trademark label, feeling that Ashleigh only belonged to him and no one else. At that, Nick just realised how much he loves Ashleigh and Nick was almost certain that Ashleigh felt the same way.

Ashleigh gasped slightly "Nothing"

Nick sat up behind her, leaning forward he kissed her shoulder, Ashleigh wanted to shrug him off, but she could not. Despite the

accident and the months of pain she had to endure to walk again, nothing seemed to have changed. Ashleigh was starting to realise her love for Nick was stronger than ever and she was not sure how she was going to cope with it.

Rolling his eyes Nick leaned back slightly "Don't start feeling guilty Ash, it's too late babe"

Ashleigh shifted away "I know Nick, I've just got some things to do today"

Nick sighed as he lay back down facing the ceiling, he had hoped Ashleigh would be a little more positive after last night, in contrast to how Nick was feeling which is on top of the world Ashleigh looked as if she regretted every minute of it, but Nick knew that was far from the truth.

Ashleigh got up from her bed "You'd better get going Nick, its gunna be a busy day"

Nick shot Ashleigh a look "What do you mean by that?"

Ashleigh did not answer; instead, she reached for her bathrobe from her rocking chair

"Ash" Nick said sitting up

Ashleigh tied her robe quickly and looked at him dead in the eye "Nick you're getting what you want, so let's just leave it at that" getting up she headed for the bathroom.

Joe walked down the stairs staring at the front door, he knew Nick had not been home all night and he still had not heard anything from Ashleigh, feeling sick with dread Joe headed for the kitchen not sure he was about to get through the next few hours.

Ashleigh sobbed as she stood underneath the hot water, taking a shower she washed scrubbed herself violently with her sponge and large amounts of shower gel. Sinking to the bottom Ashleigh the water run over her body, easing her sobs she suddenly leaned over and threw up.

There was a deadly silence, Joe sat at the kitchen table, and looked at Ashleigh, dressed in a denim mini skirt, a pink tank and pink suede boots Joe thought she looked great. Joe remembered the day he fell in love with Ashleigh, it was six months after the accident and Joe had been visiting her everyday and Joe confessed to Ashleigh how he felt, how he wanted to be with her. Joe can even recall what Ashleigh wore on that day, how she smelled, and where they were. Joe was the happiest person alive when Ashleigh told him she felt the same way, it was a week later they told Nick and both Ashleigh and Joe knew everything was only the beginning.

Standing before Joe, Ashleigh felt like she was about to be executed for a committing a dangerous crime, which felt ironic to Ashleigh as sleeping with Nick is unforgivable and she was already paying the price. Ashleigh looked at her boyfriend,

slimmer and less muscular than Nick he was dressed in a light grey fitted t/shirt, dark jeans, and converse trainers. Joe's bright blue eyes stared back at Ashleigh, burning with pain and anxiety. Brown spiky with light brown lo-lights Joe looked like a younger version of Nick, but did not possess the edge in his looks that Nick has. There is no doubt Ashleigh loves Joe, but her love for Nick is a lot stronger.

"So, what happened to you last night?" Joe asked quietly. Ashleigh could feel the tension in the kitchen that afternoon, combined, she could almost see the tension in the atmosphere, it was like thick smoke with loomed over a huge fire, so thick it would take a long time to clear and once it does it would leave a stench. As her guilt resurfaced Ashleigh looked down at her boots "I was busy babe" she replied quietly, Ashleigh was still re-living last night in her mind and despite spending half an hour in the shower this morning she could still feel and smell Nick all over her body.

Joe sat forward resting both arms on the table, he knew Ashleigh was not telling him the truth and he wasn't sure how long he could keep his temper. Inside his heart was racing and his adrenaline was pumping so hard his head was beginning to hurt; he was now reducing to silent prayers just to help him get through this.

"You must have been busy a long time, because I was ringing you well after three"

Ashleigh knew this day was not going to be easy, she never intended to hurt Joe but she felt she had no choice and there was

no denying her feelings for Nick. Ashleigh knew she had to get everything out in the open and now was her best chance

“Look Joe, I’m sorry this had to happen but it-“

Joe could not believe what was happening, he never thought Ashleigh would lie to him. He thought Ashleigh valued their relationship more than that “So you slept with the bastard” Joe interrupted, inside he wanted to break down and cry he felt like everything for him was ending and there was no way from him to stop it

Ashleigh could see Joe was hurt, but it was not fair living her lie any longer “Yes I did”

Suddenly Joe felt sick, but instantly his nausea turned back into anger. He wanted to lash out and despite wanting to keep his temper “Well at least your honest, for once. I never expected you to keep your fucking knickers on for much longer anyway,” Joe said icily

Ashleigh swallowed hard; knowing she was about to deserve everything was going to get “I’m sorry you had to find out like this, but-“

Suddenly Joe stood up he was breathing hard “So, what’s he got that I haven’t? Why Nick and not me?” he asked calmly

Ashleigh sighed, “Joe, it’s just the way things are. I can’t help how I feel about him”

“So, you had to sleep with him? You didn’t have to” Joe continued struggling to stay calm

Ashleigh watched Joe moved closer to her; she did not like the look in his eyes "I know that Joe, it just happened and there wasn't a lot I could do about it"

Joe clenched both his fists, "You could have gone home Ash!" he spat "What's the fuck matter with you!"

Ashleigh rolled her eyes, she was beginning to realise that nothing was going to console Joe for what she did maybe she could stop trying. Thinking for a moment Ashleigh suddenly realised she needed to regain control of the situation before anyone else was to happen.

Joe stood up and touched her cheek, looking at her he was in love with her more than ever. She was his love of his life and the one person he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, many nights he'd lay at night fantasising about the day he would ask her the marry him and her positive response. Now all this has changed, Ashleigh with Nick has spoiled Joe's dreams and inside was almost inconsolable. Suddenly Joe grabbed Ashleigh by the face, squeezing hard with his thumb and forefinger.

"This wasn't meant to happen, it's going all wrong!" He barked in her face

Quickly Ashleigh slapped Joe's hand away, glaring back at him  
"What the fuck are you doing!" Ashleigh hissed

Joe gave Ashleigh a fifty look "You've just slept with my brother  
what else do you expect me to do Ash? Throw a fucking party!" he  
shouted

Ashleigh looked at Joe deep in the eye "Don't ever touch me like  
that again Joe" she warned

Joe said nothing as he looked out the kitchen window, he knew  
Ashleigh was right but he would not control his anger now.

Ashleigh pulled out a chair and sat at the kitchen table behind him  
"Look, sleeping with Nick wasn't the best thing but at least it puts  
things into perspective"

Joe tutted "Yes I know that Ash, I just wanted you to go another  
way that's all" he said without looking at her

Ashleigh sighed as she rested her arm on the chair "Yeah, well I  
didn't but it still doesn't mean things won't work out"

Joe turned around and faced Ashleigh, having calmed himself  
down he was able to face her without wanting to smash  
everything to pieces "So what now Ash?"

Ashleigh had mapped out what to do next in her mind, she hoped  
it would all go to plan as if it did things would work out for the  
better for a long time "We've just gotta step up our game Joe, if  
we wanna make the best of this"

Joe sighed, "I know, but for me it won't be easy"

Ashleigh stood up and shrugging her shoulders "Too bad Joe, if  
you want this to work you are going to have to chill out"



Joe nodded "Okay you're right, I just need to know you won't run off with him Ash, I don't think I could handle that"

Ashleigh shook her head "I won't"

"I know you still love him"

"Yes I do"

"More than you love me?"

Ashleigh did not want to get into this right now for she herself sometimes needed to distinguish how much or how separate she loved them both. "Joe, now is not the time"

Joe could feel his eyes well up with tears, but he blinked them away. Moving towards Ashleigh, he took her hands and began caressing her fingers with his. Looking down at her fingers, he imagined a large diamond ring on her wedding finger, blinking away his fantasy he looked up at Ashleigh who had tears in her eyes

"You know I'd do anything for you don't you"

Ashleigh could only nod

Joe smiled a little before kissing her on her lips, running his hand underneath her tank he squeezed her left breast making her flinch

"Sorry" he said drawing his hands from underneath her tank top  
Ashleigh smiled "Hands are cold"

Nick let the front door slam shut behind him when he returned home later that day, listening out for Joe he walked down the passage to the kitchen. Wondering about the whereabouts of his brother Nick grabbed two apples from the fruit bowl on the

kitchen table, looked back down the passage towards the front door and slowly bit into one.

Nick was annoyed with Joe not being home, he wanted to rub his nose in the fact he had slept with Ashleigh. Nick had planned to keep things quiet, but changed his mind as seeing the look in his younger brother's face that he had slept with the love of his life would be priceless. Although Nick could not stop thinking about what Ashleigh said to him this morning, he did not like what she said and wondered what she meant. He hoped it was nothing serious.

Nick walked out the kitchen to the living room picked up the remote and switched on the television. Backing away from the television, he sat in the sofa and munched away through his two apples.

Joe was still haunted Nick and Ashleigh sleeping together, but chose to push it back of his mind, he needed to focus on himself, and Ashleigh as staying together was the only thing that means anything to him. Looking at his watch, it was a minute to four and if he did not make a move, he would be late. Pulling his hooded jumper over his head, grabbing his phone and keys he made his way down stairs and headed for the front door. Suddenly he stopped his tracks, looked at his reflection in the hallway mirror, and saw Nick standing behind him.

"What"

Nick was reading the local newspaper; on the front, the headline was about the murder of the student who was identified as a young girl called Donna. Nick was surprised how quick it reached the local press and wondered how far the investigation had gone. Seeing Joe took away his concentration.

At this moment in time Joe would have done without his brother trying to play mind games with him today,

"I haven't got time for your shit today Nick, I've got things to do"

Joe said heading for the door

Nick shook his head and opened the newspaper to the inside page "See that's why you always come second, because there is always something blocking you from getting first"

Joe turned and looked at Nick "And we all know why that is, don't we Nick" and before Nick could reply Joe walked through the door and slammed the door behind him

Smiling to himself Nick turned back inside the living room and continued reading the newspaper.

Ashleigh looked down at her mobile, frowning she picked it up and put it in her top pocket of her jacket. Sighing with relief Joe and Nick had not text her, with what had happened over the last few days she felt drained and needed to be alone. Pulling the blinds open in her room Ashleigh looked out across to the house next door, the neighbours were selling up and moving across seas. Ashleigh wished that was possible for her, but knew her situation with Nick and Joe would only follow her. Turning to the rest of

her room Ashleigh began tidying up, suddenly she heard her phone beep, she knew it was either Nick or Joe and really did not want to talk to them. Picking up her stuff from the floor Ashleigh threw everything on the bed, not wanting to tidy her room anymore she left her room.

Walking down the stairs to the living room, Ashleigh thought about when she would be questioned or if she would at all. Entering the living room Ashleigh listened to the silence, both her parents were at work and her sister was out for the day. Suddenly she snapped her head to the door, thinking she heard something, it was the local newspaper that dropped through the door. Feeling her heart thump against her chest Ashleigh picked up the newspaper and spotted the headline '*University Student Murdered*', she could not believe it as never did she think something like that would happen so close to home and wondered how all Donna's friends and family were coping. Ashleigh remembered when she had her accident and the press she had to endure, she hated all the questions and interrogation by not only the police but by her family. Her mother demanded to know why and how Nick let go of the wheel just in time for the car to swerve out of control. Ashleigh did not want to tell her it was because she and Nick were arguing and took his hands off the wheel for second while shouting, one minute she was on the road with Nick and the next she woke in hospital with half her body in a plaster cast.

Her mind switched to her best friend Casey and remembered the last time she spoke to Casey and how she spoke of her hopes and

fears about her relationship with her boyfriend Jarrett. Ashleigh knows Casey is still struggling to deal with it and for that Ashleigh did not want Casey to be alone, plus she felt she needed her best friend right now.

Gulping down a glass of water, Nick has just finished his run. Standing by the kitchen sink Nick caught his breath, pulling out his phone, he checked for messages but there only few from his mum and delivery reports from sent messages. Feeling slightly annoyed with Ashleigh for not replying, he wondered how long Ashleigh was going to deny she did not love him and could not understand why she insisted she was over him. Nick thought about last night and knew it did not signify the end of their relationship; in fact, it was the beginning. Leaving the empty glass on the aside, Nick wiped his brow from sweat and headed up stairs for a shower.

Joe rang Ashleigh's mobile a third time before being put through her voice mail, ending the call abruptly Joe wanted to scream aloud. Taking a deep breath Joe sat back on his bed and tried to remain calm, he always feared the worse when he did not hear from Ashleigh and especially when Nick was out as well. Reaching for the remote control for his stereo Joe turned up the volume hoping to drown out his despair.

When Ashleigh got into university the next morning, half of the building was still closed off and was surrounded by the law and

order of the area. The entrance to the stairs where Donna fell was taped off, and Ashleigh could see what she assumed where members of the forensic team standing within the area. Feeling slightly sick, Ashleigh still felt uncomfortable with the concept of having a murder on her very own doorstep.

“Still here are they?”

Ashleigh jumped to see Joe standing behind her “Fuck, you scared the shit out of me”

“Sorry” Joe apologised looking at Ashleigh, he noticed she was wearing mascara and smelt of designer perfume, one that he had not smelt before. “You ok?”

“Fantastic” she replied walking towards the main building “Why?”

“Didn’t see you much this weekend Ash, I rang you yesterday”

Joe replied

Ashleigh felt a slight pang of guilt, despite spending most of the day with Casey and that is when she remembered what has been going on with her “I saw Casey”

Joe frowned as they came to the campus security, showed their id cards, and were allowed inside. Joe waited until they were both inside before he asked

“How is she? Aint seen her for ages”

“Yeah, well she’s not to good at the moment” Ashleigh said wondering how she was going to help her best friend overcome the last week, but deep down Ashleigh knew Casey would never recover and she would only blame herself for the rest of her life. Ashleigh thought how Jarrett hid the terrible relationship with his

father and how it led to that fatal night. It amazed her Jarrett leaving Casey, wondering how he could not have known how emotionally devoted she was to him and how he would just about to anything for him.

Joe was not interested in Casey now, but he did not want to appear insensitive “Ill?”

Ashleigh shook her head “No Jarrett’s left her and home”

“Oh” Joe said

“Why is it you don’t sound surprised?” Ashleigh said suspiciously “Jarrett never said much about it was apparent they did not have a good father/son relationship”

Ashleigh shook her head “It’s just sad, he had to keep everything inside”

Joe sighed wishing they could talk about something else rather than Casey and her troubles “Ben beat him black and blue since he was knee high Ash, it’s not something you wanna share with people”

Ashleigh pretended not to hear Joe, as she was worried about Casey. Casey has a serious family of mental illness that are combined with delusions and paranoia, her biological mother threw herself under a train when she was train and her brother jumped to his death building after inhaling substances. Since then Casey has been fostered by a nice couple that were unable to have children, but the second chance at a new life as not allowed Casey’s demons to rest. Ashleigh has known Casey since the age of five; last night was the lowest she had seen her best friend and the most she had ever feared for her.

"I take it Casey isn't doing too well"

"That's a understatement, she didn't know things were so bad either"

Joe shrugged "It's no secret Jarrett's Dad bullied him since they day his mum died, he finally had enough" Joe paused for a moment and faced Ashleigh "There's only so much one person can take"

Ashleigh looked at Joe, studied him for a moment she could see everything was tearing him apart. Dressed in a black slogan T/shirt saying 'I'm not dead yet', combats and sandy coloured boots, his bright blue eyes were glassy and behind his glasses. There were also tiny frown lines on his forehead and his face looked thinner than normal, which meant Joe was losing his appetite. For a moment, Ashleigh wondered if their plan to get back at Nick was worth it, all the pain and sacrifice worth it all.

Ashleigh pulled Joe towards her and kissed him "It depends who's dishing it out babe"

"I'll see you lunchtime ok" Ashleigh touched the tip of Joe's nose with her forefinger

"Ok cool" Joe managed to say as he watched Ashleigh walk off, Joe tried to hold back his tears as his heart sank knowing Ashleigh was spending the next few hours with Nick. These days he was struggling with Nick and Ashleigh at times he wondered if all the pain he was feeling was worth it but then he pictures Nick's face when the plan comes to and end and Joe realises he can not wait.



“Am I talking to myself or what?” Nick said with irritation, he hated being ignored, especially by Ashleigh

“What? Sorry” Ashleigh yawned as she sat back in her chair

Nick threw his pen down on his table in the library and crossed his arms “What’s the problem?”

Ashleigh shook her head, as she glanced out the window “Nothing”

Nick leaned forward “What’s my brother said to you now? I know what he’s like Ash, he can’t help himself”

Ashleigh almost laughed, “You should know where he gets it from”

“Whatever”

Ashleigh was right; Nick and Joe were alike in more ways they would like to admit. Nick stared at her for a moment; Ashleigh was wearing a fitted white t-shirt, jeans, and red ballet pumps. Nick inhaled recognising the scent of one of which she used to wear when they first started dating. Nick still remembers the first day he met Ashleigh, jeans, red tank top, and white pumps running down the stairs into him at college during their last year of A-levels. Nick loved her then and nothing has changed now.

Ashleigh looked at Nick “He hasn’t said anything to me Nick”

Nick took up his pen “Good, now can we get back to business now?”

“Yeah sorry” Ashleigh sighed as she tried to focus; she had forgotten how insistent Nick is with his studies. When they used to study together, Nick was always one who had his books around

him while Ashleigh was distracted with what was going on around her.

"Good, 'cos I wanna get a sixty on my next essay" Nick said opening his unit reader

"A sixty? You can do that with your head down a toilet"

Nick laughed, "Sush Miss seventy five"

Ashleigh half smiled "Don't play a hate, congratulate"

"Pip wants to fail me and it aint gunna happen"

Ashleigh took up her pen "She's a hard marker"

"I know, which is why I want my mark" Nick flicked over a page

"She's already threatened to put half the year back"

"You can forget that, I aint going no where back" Ashleigh searched for her notes

Nick glanced up at Ashleigh for a moment, he could tell something was worrying her and knew it was Joe. Nick knew Joe had been making her feel guilty about something, Joe's ability to make everything everyone else's fault was very good, and Nick could see it was working on Ashleigh.

Nick rammed Joe's ran up against the wall outside the building, his fingers were fixed around his neck and at a touch he could squeeze until he wanted to stop.

"What's your problem?"

Feeling his head pressing against the brick wall, Joe could feel his head beginning to graze. Joe just managed to push his brother off him and caught his breath "What the fuck's wrong with you!" he spat

"Lissen, just stop making Ash feel guilty will you, it's annoying"

Nick said through clenched teeth

Joe shook his head "I haven't said a word to her, what has she told you?"

Nick shook his head "Nothing, but her silence today with me explains you've been whining to her like you always do when things get too tough for you"

Joe could feel his temper rising "Oh Nick, go fuck yourself!" he spat as he picked up his bag from the ground

Nick watched Joe for a moment thinking how much of a mess he was "You are going to have to deal with this a lot better"

Joe rolled his eyes, not wanting to hear another one Nick's famous last words "Just leave it Nick" he said though clenched teeth as he swung his bag over his shoulder

Nick grabbed Joe by the arm "Just remember Joe, you'll always come second"

Suddenly Joe swung around and punched Nick in face, startled Nick fell back. Looking at Nick, Joe could feel his heart beating hard against his chest, clenching his fists he spoke "Don't you think I know that"

Nick could feel his mouth with blood; he spat onto the ground as he stood up. Touching his lip, he rubbed his own blood between his fingers. Looking at Joe, he walked away before Nick could say anything.

Ashleigh knew something was wrong from the minute she saw Joe later that evening, following him into the kitchen, she closed the door behind her.

"Hey babe, you alright?"

Joe shrugged "Yeah, how come you didn't tell me you were coming over?" not that it mattered as Joe was glad to see Ashleigh "I wanna give Nick some notes from this afternoons seminar"

Joe nodded, not caring less what notes Ashleigh had for Nick "Cool" he hated Ashleigh sharing lectures and seminars together, many times he hoped one day either Nick or Ashleigh would give up studying Psychology but Joe does not see that day coming.

"What's up"? Ashleigh silently listened out for Nick, being unaware of his whereabouts in the Hunter household always made her nervous.

Joe shrugged again "Should there be anything?" he replied sitting down at the kitchen table, as usual he was failing to concentrate on his studies as he had only written the date and title for his English essay. Joe was still reliving the fight with Nick, not believing he hit his own brother but somewhat convinced he deserved it.

Ashleigh sat and faced Joe "I was just asking, you don't look right that's all"

"I'm cool Ash" Joe said quickly, he noticed Ashleigh was wearing a top he had not seen before, with the perfume earlier on Joe was beginning to see a pattern.

Ashleigh was not convinced she could see Joe had been finding it hard dealing with everything, she could not blame him as who

could handle their partner sleeping with their ex. "Sorry about lunch, I had something to do"

Joe sat back slightly "How was your day with Nick?"

"Just swapped notes for Sigmund Freud Joe, that's all "

"Seen the local" Joe asked trying to change the subject a little

Ashleigh sighed "Yeah it's depressing"

"Treating it as murder"

Ashleigh sighed, "Yeah well we know long time ago it was a murder"

Joe leaned forward across the table and kissed Ashleigh on the lips

"You look nice"

Ashleigh smiled with almost tears in her eyes, every time Joe kissed her or showed her any sign of affection she felt emotional guilt and inside it was killing her "Thank you"

Suddenly Ashleigh noticed the bruise on his hand, instantly she knew Nick and Joe had been fighting and she knew what it was about "What happened to your hand?"

Joe quickly stood up "Nothing, I hit it"

Ashleigh was not taking that as an answer "On what a crane? You've broken the skin"

Joe rolled his eyes "I'm used to being broken Ash, I've spent my whole life being in pieces"

Ashleigh hated this, she wondered how long it took before things would get worse, and she did not want anything to get any further. Sleeping with Nick was a mistake, telling Joe was even bigger mistake, and everything else they planned afterwards would only result in the unthinkable. Taking a deep breath

Ashleigh put her hands on the table "That's it Joe. I don't wanna do this anymore"

Joe frowned "What?"

Ashleigh looked at Joe "This isn't worth it, just forget everything Joe this is going all out of proportion Joe and I can't take it"

"Why?"

"Fighting with Nick, getting yourself in a state is tearing everything apart Joe" Ashleigh cried "I didn't want this to happen, everything's going all wrong, and it has to stop"

Joe shook his head "No, it doesn't"

Ashleigh frowned "What?"

Joe held up his wounded hand "I didn't get this for nothing Ash"

Ashleigh was not sure if she had misheard

Joe lost his temper slightly, he could not believe Ashleigh felt like this "Just because you wanna stop, suddenly it makes it alright when it was you last week telling me we have to make it work"

"That was last week, but now I've realised it just aint worth all this, just look at us Joe" Ashleigh explained "We can barley get through the day without tears, arguments and fights, just look at your hand"

Joe rolled his eyes "Do you think I give a shit A-"

"Well I do!" Ashleigh interrupted "I don't want any of us to end up hurt, just like I was!"

Joe stepped forward, inches from Ashleigh's face "Do you know what's it like being second best to you Ash, always just too late. For once I'm gunna be first, not too late and for once I'll be one all

in one piece, not scattered all over the fucking place like I have been for years”

Ashleigh shook her head “I said I wanted out Joe and I mean it, you, Nick the whole fucking thing”

“Ash, this isn’t all about you”

Ashleigh backed away towards the door “Joe, we can’t carry on like this, it’s messed up playing one against the other”

“Well it’s too late Ash” Suddenly Joe picked up a cup, which was on the side and threw it at Ashleigh, missing her by centimetres.

Realising how much Joe had reached boiling point, Ashleigh panicked, opened the door, and ran out.

Nick watched Ashleigh ran down the rainy street through the sitting room window, pulling back the curtain he turned and faced Joe.

“I can’t believe you just did that”

Joe clenched his fists before backing away and heading for the door, the next thing Nick knew Joe was gone. Nick pulled back the curtain and watched his brother walk down the street, noticing it was the same direction of Ashleigh.

Ashleigh did not stop running until she got to the park, never had she seen Joe in such a state and it was her fault. Finding a bench Ashleigh sat down, not caring it was wet she sobbed into her hands as her nausea returned. Despite tonight’s events, Ashleigh was not surprised, Joe’s frustration was due to explode, and both Nick and

she had been there to see it. Ashleigh did not know what else was going to happen, but what she did know is she planned to stay away from both Nick and Joe for a while. Wiping away her tears Ashleigh rubbed her stomach, never had she felt so rough over the past few months and it looked as if her symptoms were not going to disappear. Getting sudden pangs of nausea every morning, loss of appetite was starting to concern her. She had planned to go to the doctors, but having spent so much time in and out of hospitals in the past has resulted in her fearing them. Ashleigh remembers spending eight weeks in hospital after her accident two years and thinking she would never leave.

Ashleigh sat in while the rain drizzled in from the evening sky, she could hear the busy roads along with the rain from all around her.

Joe jogged further down the road, which leads towards the park, intent on finding Ashleigh he listened hard and looked around him. He had no intention of hurting Ashleigh and was sorry he lost his temper, but she had to understand how he felt and he did not want to carry around his emotions any longer. Joe walked across the road into the park, the night had fallen darker and the park lights were turning on glowing the across the pavement. Walking through the park Joe suddenly spotted Ashleigh sitting on the bench facing the flowerbeds, looking up she saw him her instant reaction was to run but she could not be bothered.

“Found me then?”

Joe shrugged “Was not hard babe”



Ashleigh sighed as she rubbed her stomach begging her nausea to pass "This is such a fucking mess Joe, I just can't do this anymore"

"It's hardly meant to be a picnic Ash, we knew this from the start"

Joe sat opposite to her

Shaking her head, Ashleigh added, "It was never meant to be like this Joe"

Joe paused for a moment before he added, "I know, but it's how it is"

There was a moment silence before Joe spoke again, "I'm sorry about earlier"

Ashleigh shook her head "Forget it, like you said it's not always about me"

Joe looked at Ashleigh "I know, but it doesn't excuse me losing it like that, not with you anyway" Joe took Ashleigh's hand and squeezed it "I love you Ash"

Ashleigh felt her heart sink; Joe always made her want to burst into tears when he tells he loves her. A lump began to appear in Ashleigh's throat, swallowing it away she smiled "I know" she croaked

Joe kissed her hand "This is the only reason why I do all this, I don't think of anything else"

Ashleigh understood, she knew Joe had found the entire situation too much for him which was partly the reason why she wanted to put an end to everything

"I'm tired of fighting Joe, I've got uni and this is fucking up my studies, it just aint worth it"

"But we've only just started"

"It's how I feel, this has to stop once and for all"

Joe understood the effect everything was having on Ashleigh, but he did not want to give up, although looking at Ashleigh he felt he had no choice. "Ok"

"Time to go home" she stood up and walked towards the gate leading out to the main road. Following Joe felt relieved he had sorted everything out and was glad Ashleigh understood why he reacted so badly and has done. Joe watched Ashleigh as she got to the pavement, jogging to catch up he called after her

"Ash, wait up"

Ashleigh did not hear, just as she stepped out into the main road a car ran into Ashleigh and knocked her to the ground. For a second Joe froze, and then ran to Ashleigh's lifeless body, which lay in the middle of the road.

The road was sectioned off with vehicles, police, and a few passers by who claimed they saw the accident happen. Joe stood over Ashleigh's body; there were lights sirens, police, and paramedics surrounding the scene. In shock Joe just stared at the scene, this is not happening. Suddenly he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket, pulling it out he answered it

"What did you do?"

"Solve the problem like we said"

Tears streamed down Joe's face, at that moment, he had never felt so much hate for Nick, but he was right. He wanted Ashleigh dead in the beginning; he could not handle being second best to Nick and was desperate. Ashleigh dying was the only way, but witnessing everything Joe felt his feelings were changing.

"We'd better pray she doesn't survive Nick, otherwise this will carry on"

"Which ever way, you'll still be second best Joe" and the line went dead

Joe took a deep breath, he had to remember Ashleigh loved Nick or than him.

"Excuse me were you with the victim at the time of the accident"

Joe nodded at the male police officer that walked towards him

"Yeah"

"I think you'd better come with the hospital with us"

"I'm fine, I don't need any medical attention thank you," Joe told him

"We think she does" a paramedic said behind him

Joe's eyes widened as he spun around "What?"

“She keeps mumbling something about her baby, is she pregnant?”

“N-not that I know of”

Joe followed the paramedic without a word, half in a daze he could not believe it but Joe now knew that maybe he was not going to be second best after all.

Ashleigh winced in pain as she sat down on the sofa that evening, sighing she looked at the television and tried to watch her favourite soap. Ashleigh has been to the toilet three times in the last hour, it had been a hot day, Ashleigh had downed a litre and a half of water, and now she was paying the price. Ashleigh's arms began to ache, it had been six months since her accident and despite gaining full uses of her arms and shoulder, and she still suffered bouts of pain in her left shoulder. She managed to get all her missing essays and notes from lectures and seminars from her tutor. Ashleigh was grateful to Pip who had given her extensions and told her the marks she received all year should prevent her from repeating any units. She was still coming to terms with the accident, having to deal with questions about the accident and Ashleigh hardly being able to remember anything prior. Ashleigh felt a sense of de JA vu and was beginning to wonder whether it was time to move on.

Moving her shoulder around a few times the pain eased, suddenly her phone beeped. Looking at the phone, she had received a message; without reading it, she knew it was Joe; not wanting to speak to him Ashleigh reached over for the remote and turned up the volume.

Joe felt like throwing up as he stood outside Ashleigh's front door, this was the first time he was going to see her since the accident. Ashleigh had kept Joe at arms length with little contact; Joe was beside himself with worry. University has been a blur for Joe, handing in work late or not at all was almost costing him his

cultural studies. Fin Hope his course tutor has warned him if he doesn't raise his marks he will fail the year, but all Joe can think about is Ashleigh. Joe had to see her and tonight was the night.

Looking up at the dark sky Joe felt a drop of rain on his forehead, the air was warm, and the sky had a light streak of blue clouds running across.

With this stomach, tightening Joe rang the doorbell and waited. Ashleigh peered through the spy hole before answering, seeing it was Joe she felt like standing and hoping he would give up and leave, but she knew Joe's stubborn streak would allow him to stand out there for the rest of the evening. Her shoulder ached as she opened the door Joe's heart sank, for a moment; he could not find anything to say he was overwhelmed to see Ashleigh. The smell of cigarettes went up Ashleigh's nose; she knew it was coming from Joe. Looking away in slight disgust, she left the door open and walked back into the lounge, leaving Joe to let him in.

"Hi babe" Joe said trying to make eye contact with Ashleigh, but she kept focusing on the television. Joe tried to make conversation again "Missed you" Ashleigh sighed with irritation, wondering why she did not tell Joe to go away when she had the opportunity. She did not want to see him; in fact, she did not want to see anyone. Casey was the only person she had kept in contact with, among a few others but Ashleigh wanted to keep Joe and Nick out of her life, it seemed everything has gone wrong since they day she met them.

Joe sensed Ashleigh's hostility and he hated it, he hated Ashleigh not being close to him and him having to fight for her, but he knew he deserved it. Joe thought about what he had done to Ashleigh, his involvement in her accident and joining forces with Nick and how much he had hurt Ashleigh. Thinking about it Joe knew his making up to Ashleigh began now, even if it took forever.

Joe sighed; he could not help feeling frustrated he wanted Ashleigh to understand how he was feeling and how important it was for him to start afresh.

"How long are you going to keep this up Ash?" Joe asked sitting before her

Ashleigh kept her eyes on the television screen, tired to focus on what was going on but Joe's presence was distracting. Holding the television remote tightly, Ashleigh moved her thumb to the volume button

"Ash, I'm not leaving until you speak to me" Joe said trying to keep the desperation out of this voice, he had not spoken to ask light in six months, only exchanged a few words. Joe needed to talk to her; it was destroying him inside having Ashleigh cut him out of her life. Joe knew he had a lot to play in what happened, but he was willing to make up for it at any expense. Ashleigh closed her eyes, begging Joe from inside for him to go. Please just leave me alone; I do not wanna see you right now, please. However, Ashleigh knew Joe was not going and she would have to speak to him, sighing Ashleigh turned of the television

and                   threw                   the                   remote                   aside.  
Joe shifted in his seat slightly; he knew Ashleigh was ready to talk.

Joe walked home in shock that evening, trying to comprehend what had happened. Ashleigh was leaving and the end of her university year and his desperate pleas and protests were not enough to convince her to stay. Ashleigh says she was tired of everything and everyone, Joe knew she meant him. 'I nearly got killed because of this shit Joe, I wanna leave it behind' she told him. "Ash, I know it's been like this but it will change, I'll make it" Joe protested, Ashleigh was not listening and told Joe there was nothing he could do and then to leave. Joe was speechless. Two cars passed Joe, his mind began to race, and she can't leave me! I won't let her go! Joe could feel his adrenaline beginning to pump. He could not believe this was happening, reaching inside his pocket he took out a box of cigarettes, shaking he took one out, and lit one. Blowing the smoke out into the cold night air, he sighed. Joe started smoking soon after the accident, taking one of people in his lectures here and there, now he smoked half a pack a day. Rattled with guilt Joe sleeked condolence in smoking a habit of which he is not proud. I have to do something Joe thought, I'm not losing Ash. Joe suddenly stopped in his tracks he knew there



was only one way to make Ashleigh stay and that was to deal with Nick for the last time.

Nick bit hard into this apple, chewing he watched Joe walk in through the door. Coming out from the kitchen Nick noticed how old and haggard his younger brother was looking; his cigarette smoking that he been secretly hiding was aging him fast. He looked thinner and was wearing his glasses more often; Nick felt a little sorry for him but vowed never to allow a woman to reduce him to be an emotional and physical wreck. Joe slammed the door, ignoring Nick he headed upstairs "I take it didn't go to well then" Joe stopped dead centre of the staircase, without turning to look at Nick he replied "It will from now on"

Ashleigh frowned at Casey as she sat before her in the kitchen, all the family were out leaving Ashleigh home alone. Since the accident Casey was the only person she kept in touch with, Ashleigh knew she had not been as supportive to Casey as she should have been and it was time to start again.

"What do you mean he's back?"

Casey looked at Ashleigh "Just appeared at home last night, like some ghost"

Pulling out a chair to sit down, Ashleigh asked, "Well, what's his excuse?"

Casey gave a small chuckle "Stayed with some friends"

Rolling her eyes, she thought better of Jarrett and hoped he would be more honest with her "Fucking typical, always vague" she tutted "Can't believe he's back"

Casey tapped her fingers lightly on the table "I still don't know what happened with his dad"

Ashleigh's eyes widened "Still?"

"Every time I ask he changes the subject or tells me he doesn't wanna talk about it"

"He's hiding something Casey and you need to find out what it is"

Casey shrugged "I'll never forgive him for leaving me Ash"

Ashleigh was silent for a moment before speaking "I know" looking at Casey Ashleigh noticed she looked stronger as a person, but inside there were still pieces to be put together. She hoped Casey and Jarrett could work things out, but somehow felt things had gone too far.

"Any word on the outcome with the driver"

Ashleigh shook her head "Got suspects, but I aint holding my breath"

"So how are you and Joe?"

Ashleigh tutted "Sometimes that boy just doesn't get it, I don't know who is worse him or Nick"

"I take it you've seen him"

Ashleigh sighed; she was tired of the entire situation "Last night, full of broken promises as per usual, tired of this shit"

"Did you tell him you wanted to leave?"

Ashleigh nodded "And as usual he took it badly, but it's how I feel. I've been in two accidents in the past two years, lost my

dream of dancing professionally, broken up and made up between Nick and Joe and I'm tired of it case"

Casey smiled "Sounds like both of us have had enough of the opposite sex"

Ashleigh did not smile "Well at least your ex- boyfriend didn't try and kill you in the past"

Casey's smile faded before she answered, "When you're in love killing is the only cure Ash"

Ashleigh crossed her arms as both she and Nick stood face to face in the library, this is the man who tried to kill me she thought, my -ex boyfriend the man I once loved tried to kill me! In addition, here he is acting as cool anything while I spent the last few months trying to put myself back together. Ashleigh wished she had the strength to knock Nick to the ground; instead, she just stared at him.

Nick was quiet for a moment before replying, he could see Ashleigh was bothered about something "What's your problem Ash?" he asked noticing she was wearing a very short skirt, it had been ages since he had seen her wear one and he thought she looked great

Stepping closer to Nick, Ashleigh could feel her adrenaline beginning to pump inside her. She thought about everything Nick had done to her, but this made everything non-existent “Oh I dunno, just a pissed off you tried to kill me”

Nick frowned wondering if he had heard correctly, “I tried to kill you,” he said slowly

Looking at Nick, Ashleigh could not believe Nick had sank so low to kill her and wondered what possessed him to feel so much hate towards her. How much hate can one person have someone to have him or her killed? “For once, just be fucking honest”

Nick wanted to laugh out loud “I think I have heard it all, you think-”

“You are just pure evil” Ashleigh was beginning to lose her temper, how dare he try to kill me! What have I ever done to deserve this! “This is the most you have done to me, apart from killing my dream of dancing forcing me to learn to walk again, but it wasn’t enough was it?”

Suddenly Nick felt his blood run cold, looking into Ashleigh eyes he could see pain and hurt “Ash you know if I could take that back I would” Nick said, feeling the lowest scum of the earth

“Making my learn to walk again, dislodging my disk and shattering my pelvis is not something you can take back” Ashleigh spat

Nick’s mind raced back to the time of the accident, seeing Ashleigh in hospital and dealing with the prospect of her never being able to walk again. Nick remembers sitting in the waiting room and swearing on his life that if Ashleigh did not survive that

he would take his own life, for the guilt alone would kill him anyway. When Ashleigh regained consciousness Nick saw it as a second chance, one of which he will not waste no matter what.

“Ash there is not a day that goes that I don’t-“

“Nick save it!” Ashleigh barked, “Nothing you can say will make a difference”

Nick felt a little numb; reliving the accident was heartbreaking for him. The emotions are still there and rot away inside him each day, but hearing Ashleigh’s hatred for him was even more soul destroying. Despite this, Nick was not prepared to take Joe’s responsibility for the accident, Nick had been waiting for the opportunity to take Ashleigh away from Joe for good and this was the perfect way “Ash I think you’d better ask Joe how much he wanted you dead that night”

Joe? Joe wanted me dead. Ashleigh felt her heart stop, she wanted to scream at Nick telling him he was lying bastard, but by the look on his face she knew Nick was telling the truth “Joe” she managed to say

“Joe wanted you dead Ash, he said he can’t deal with fighting for you anymore”

Anger burned inside Ashleigh like a forest fire spreading, standing looking at Joe in the corridor Ashleigh wanted to burst into tears but she was too angry “Just stay away from me!” Ashleigh warned, shaking a little “I don’t want you anywhere near-“

Joe grabbed Ashleigh by the shoulders, pushing him, away Ashleigh inhaled the stench of alcohol which lay thick on Joe's breath "Get the fuck of me!" she hissed looking at Joe in disbelief she could believe what she saw. Unshaven, red eyed and dressed in a hooded sweatshirt, jeans and dirty trainers Joe reminded Ashleigh of one of the local residents of the local estate. Ashleigh saw the gentle and loving person she loved had gone.

"I only did what I did because I had no choice," Joe protested  
"So you tried to kill me, even after everything we have been through!" Ashleigh screamed, her voice ran through the corridor echoing

"I know babe, but--"

Still angry, Ashleigh trembled as she spoke "When I was lying in that hospital do you know I thought about you, what you said to me and thinking that just may--" stopping herself Ashleigh let tears run down her face, she could not believe Joe wanted her dead.

Joe's eyes filled with tears "Ash please, I--"

Ashleigh wiped away her tears "You're no better than Nick, you might as well have been driving that car that night and run my body into a tree like he did" she said through clenched teeth

Joe glared at Ashleigh "I am nothing like Nick"

Ashleigh gave a false laugh "Ha! So taking half my life away and there's you willing to take what I have left"

"No! Ash that's not it!" Joe shouted desperately

"So what was it, a thrill? What a joke, a rush?"

Joe was struggling to answer, "Nothing's meant to be like this"

“So what was it!” Ashleigh cried “She doesn’t want me so I won’t let anyone have her or I love her so much I’ll kill her”

Joe could not take it any more “No!”

“Which one!”

Joe lost his temper “You messed me up, so much I couldn’t fucking take it! Nick pushed my buttons and then it all went wrong after that”

Ashleigh was slightly taken back with Joe’s response, but she knew he was right he messed him up “So, this is the price I had to pay”

Silently wishing he did not lose his temper, Joe paused before answering, “Ash, I’m sorry”

Ashleigh hit Joe in the face “You bastard”

Joe’s face stung, but he knew he deserved it “I love you and this is what I get”

Joe felt like he was running out of time, as if he only had a few seconds to answer a question to secure a huge cash prize. Ashleigh was right, what he did was unforgivable but he did not care as he was prepared to do anything to make it up to her “Ash, I love you so much”

Ashleigh looked Joe deep in the eye “You made me feel like shit when I slept with Nick and all this fucking time you had your own plans”

Joe moved forward in desperation he went to grab Ashleigh by the arm “Ash, you have to listen to me”

Moving back “You cried begging me not to leave you for him and all the fucking-,” Ashleigh stopped herself, shaking her head she was not sure if she had the strength to continue

“Ash, you know it was killing me inside, but I tried so hard,” Joe protested

Ashleigh put both hands over her ears as if blocking out a sound “I don’t wanna hear it, for fucks sake just stay away from me” she said through clenched teeth

“NO!” Joe kicked his rucksack across the corridor, his books scattered out spinning in front

Holding back a sob, Ashleigh backed away from Joe and walked away, which seemed to be out of Joe’s life for good. Eyes widening in disbelief Joe stood with both fists clenched with tears running down his face, staring after Ashleigh until she was out of sight. Joe then walked to the nearest set of lockers and began punching them repeatedly until his knuckles began to bleed.

The room was hot and stuffy; the only means of light came from a small lamp on the bedside table. Joe sat on the edge of his bed; sipping from a small bottle of whisky Joe felt the strong taste of alcohol drain down his throat. Swallowing, Joe took another sip, bigger this time. Sniffing, Joe wiped his nose with his hand and tried to focus on the almost darkness around him. Hearing



footsteps outside the door, Joe took another sip from the bottle and replaced the cap. Standing up, Joe looked at the door and swallowed hard, Nick was home.

“Could not help yourself could you?” Joe stood in the open doorway, which lead out to the upstairs passage

Nick waved the stench of alcohol away from his face “How much have you had?”

“Why did you have to go and tell her?” Joe slurred slightly

“Because she needed to be told some home truths Joe” Nick replied before pushing passed him

Joe rolled his eyes as he held onto the doorframe “So you thought you’d tell her”

Nick did not have time for Joe rant tonight; he had only come home for a change of clothes. “It’s over Joe, you fucked up”

Joe followed Nick into his bedroom “I never would have if you had kept your mouth shut” he hissed starting to feel the affects of the drink

Unzipping his jacket, Nick looked at Joe “You have no one to blame but yourself, now get out my room” just as Nick went to shut the door in Joe’s face, Joe kicked it back.

“But you’re partly to blame Nick”

“Don’t make me repeat myself”

Joe moved closer, his room was almost dark only with light from the moon shining outside the window. Outside the rain eased up, but the breeze was still strong, a line of condensation ran along the

window as the temperature outside was falling. Suddenly Joe threw everything of Nick's dressing table onto the floor, Nick looked down at the mess and then at Joe.

"You have taken everything from me!" Joe raged, "Ash, my life and you wonder why I'm so messed up! You are the reason why I am me Nick!"

Nick edged forward; stepping on broken glass and puddles of aftershave, which spread across the carpet "You are you because you're second best which is why Ash loves m-" suddenly, Joe punched Nick in the face sending him into his dressing table

Standing over Nick Joe stared down at his brother; never had he felt so much hate for one person. From the day Joe was born Nick had taken everything away from Joe, whether it was toys, food, clothes and even money Nick took it all without any conscience. Joe had always felt powerless against Nick, but now things were about to change.

Nick looked up at Joe, scrambling to get up he glared at Joe. Touching his lip with his forefinger he felt blood, rubbing his fingers together Nick almost smiled before lunging forward, grabbing Joe by his collar and rammed his body into the wall. Pictures on the wall fell and smashed; Joe could feel the glass cracking underneath his trainers as he was pinned up against the wall.

"It should have been you that night and then I wouldn't have a brother"

"That would make things so easy for you wouldn't it?" Joe managed to say

Trying to push Nick off him Joe forced his weight forward but Nick was far too strong "You have been a loser since the day you were born" Nick hissed before Joe suddenly pushed him away, Joe took a swing at him. Nick ducked just in time and punched Joe in the face so hard Joe lost his balance and fell down the stairs, Nick breathed hard as he watched his brother's body roll down the stairs, it took him moment to realise he could be dead.

Nick opened the front door to let the paramedics in, watching he felt slightly in a daze as they attended to Joe asking for a response "How long has he been like this?"

"Not long, he just fell down the stairs" Nick replied pulling his sleeves over his knuckles to hide the bruises

"What's his name?"

"Joe"

"Joe? Joe? Can you hear me?" the paramedic checked for a pulse, it was very weak but hopeful "Slight pulse, but he needs to get to a hospital fast" opening his bag the paramedic pulled out something and looked at his colleague for assistance "Get out the stretcher and set up the machines"

Ashleigh pulled back the curtain and saw two ambulances race down the road, frowning she saw they were heading locally. Suddenly she got a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, she knew there was no coincidence.

"Ash, what's wrong?" Jarrett asked pulling off his jacket and hoodie at the same time

"Everything" Ashleigh replied sitting down

Putting his hoodie inside his jacket he put it on the armchair, Jarrett joined her on the sofa "When isn't it in this place?"

Sighing Ashleigh leaned back "Why is everything going wrong these days? You and Casey, me and Joe, Joe and Nick"

Jarrett shrugged "Guess we didn't deserve each other, one of us did" glancing at his watch he was surprised to learn it was nearly half ten at night, Jarrett knew it was late but he was happy to stay. This was the first time he had spent time with Ashleigh, they had talked about everything, and he enjoyed her company. Jarrett wondered how Ashleigh coped with Nick, Joe and surviving having two accidents.

"Still, doesn't mean we all have to suffer. All this shit is just too much"

Jarrett looked at Ashleigh "Why do you think I broke up with Casey? I was so tired of it" Jarrett wondered telling Ashleigh about Casey killing Donna was a good idea, but decided the less people who the better.

"How did she take it?"

Jarrett looked down at his trainers "Same old Casey way, tears and tantrums"

Ashleigh was not surprised, Jarrett was Casey's life, but day-by-day she thought things had changed between them and thinking back to their argument in the canteen, her relationship with Jarrett was not the only one, which had changed.

"Yeah I was on the receiving end of that"

"Bitch at you did she?"

"Yeah, but I could see her point I should have kept my nose out"

Ashleigh sighed as she examined her nails, they were in need of a manicure

"She was a mate," Jarrett pointed out

"Still, I should have minded my own business" Ashleigh sighed

Ashleigh has not spoken to Casey since and remembered her last words to her about Joe and Nick

"Don't worry, Casey did some damage of her own too" Jarrett shrugged

Ashleigh looked at Jarrett "Such as?"

"She just had issues of her own with me leaving and didn't wanna get passed them" Jarrett wondered whether he should tell Ashleigh about Donna, but decided the less people knew the better. Jarrett felt the speculation was high enough without involving Ashleigh.

Ashleigh rolled her eyes wondering if Jarrett knew how much she meant to Casey "What do you expect? You're her life"

"That was the problem, I want my own with someone who doesn't need mine" he looked at Ash who sat curled up on the sofa, suddenly he felt instantly drawn to her it had been a long time since he had sat and spoken to her and it was surprising what he learnt about her. Despite Ashleigh carrying out a defence Jarrett was sure she was just as vulnerable and any one else.

"True, there's only so much of yourself you can give yourself to" Ashleigh said breaking away from Jarrett

"Yeah, so you gunna try and sell the house" Ashleigh continued changing the subject

Jarrett shrugged "Dunno what I'm gunna do with that place to be honest"

"Why didn't you tell us what as going on?"

"It's not a great conversation starter Ash, it was nobody's business anyway"

Ashleigh studied Jarrett for a moment, she though he was a nice person who generally cared for those around him. She always thought Casey was lucky to have him and was surprised to learn how much inner strength he has and what he has had to deal with. Dressed in a black 'Thin Lizzy' t-shirt, dirty jeans and trainers Ashleigh felt Jarrett had matured which she put down to Jarrett wearing contact lenses instead of his old glasses. "Fair enough"

"The bastard's gone so I can move on," Jarrett added quickly

Ashleigh listened to the sound of the sirens coming down the road; she still had a sick feeling in the pit of their stomach "Now you can move on" Suddenly Ashleigh's phone beeped, receiving a message she opened it 'Joe's in hospital'

The flashing lights lit up the road as the ambulance van raced to the hospital, sirens wailed into the air as Joe lay connected to machines and an oxygen pump attached to his mouth, fighting for his life. With multiple injuries and a punched lung, it was vital Joe got to hospital in time. The paramedics shook their head in dismay wondering how Joe got into this state and more who did it to him. The second ambulance, their casualty was no lucky as the huge

blow the back of the skull and neck killed her instantly. With one casualty critical and the other dead, staffs of the local hospital were in for a long night.

Clearing up the mess, Nick hung up all the pictures, picked up all the broken ornaments and glass. Putting everything in a large black bin liner, he tidied back the furniture in its place. Standing at the top of the stairs, Nick looked down them he could still see Joe's body roll down the stairs and see the image of his lifeless body at the bottom of the stairs. Nick was dreading informing his parents, he wondered what he could say to cover up the fact attempted he and his brother almost killed each other. Walking down the stairs, Nick made his way to the kitchen and went to get some carpet cleaner.

"You going?"

Ashleigh deleted the message and threw her phone aside "I'm not getting involved anymore Jarrett"

Jarrett was relieved he did not want Ashleigh having any more to do with Nick or Joe "Good, because I don't want you to"

Ashleigh smiled "Now, why doesn't that surprise me"

Jarrett shrugged feeling a little warm inside "What can I say I'm a bloke full of surprises"

Ashleigh sighed, "I've had my fair share of those"

Jarrett nodded noticing the outline of Ashleigh's bust in her vest top, trying not to look Jarrett glanced away and cursed him for

looking “Not everyone has to deal with a boyfriend who wants you dead”

Ashleigh crossed her arms “I could handle Nick, but not Joe. Never in my life would I think Joe wanted me dead, it’s so shit”

Jarrett agreed, he thought Nick and Joe’s competitiveness had gone to far towards Ashleigh and wanting her dead as part of their ridiculous plan was crazy “I’ll never understand what’s inside those two heads, especially Nick”

Ashleigh looked at Jarrett deep in the eye “I’m inside their head Jarrett, I’m the reason why they’re messed up and in some ways visa versa”

Jarrett shook his head “There’s nothing wrong with your head Ash, it’s time you started believing that”



Nick pulled his tie from around his neck as he walked in through the front door, letting the door shut behind him he headed for the kitchen. Listening to the silence, Nick felt lonely. It has been a fortnight since Joe's accident and he had only visited him once to be told Joe had survived all his injuries but needed another weeks in hospital. He was asked the whereabouts of his parents in which Nick replied abroad and on their way home as he spoke. Nick thought Joe brought everything on himself, the outcome of everything was down to Joe, and him lying in hospital was the high price he had to pay. Nick thought about the funeral and the surprise in Casey's death, he wondered how Jarrett was coping. Opening the fridge he thought about Ashleigh, seeing her today was a surprise, she looked great. Biting into an apple Nick knew that despite everything, he still loved Ashleigh and doubtful that will ever stop. Nick knew it was wrong to have her killed, but he felt he could no help it as when it came to Ashleigh it was simply all or nothing.

A click to the left and the back door was open; holding the catch down the intruder entered the home through the kitchen. Letting the door quietly, he made his way out of the kitchen and up the stairs.

Ashleigh was dozing off as her bedroom door opened, her eyes saw Joe staring back at her, but before she could scream Joe put a cloth over her, mouth and she blacked out.

Ashleigh's head pounded hard, her stomach was tight, and her throat was dry. Opening her eyes, Ashleigh saw Joe sitting before her with a roll of black tape in one hand and holding his left side with the other.

"Wake up sleeping beauty"

Ashleigh tried to move but her hands and feet were taped together, wincing the tape pulled on her skin. Taking a minute to realise what was going on she asked anxiously "W-what are you doing?"

Joe smiled which frightened Ashleigh "Sitting her looking at the most beautiful woman in the world"

Ashleigh's mind began to race, oh my god! How did he get inside my house? "P-please Joe, just let me go" she begged looking at him "What good is this gunna do?" he could hardly believe how bad Joe looked. His eyes were glassy, unshaven with a huge

plaster above his left eye and a cut above his top lip. Ashleigh was sure he spent a few days on the street before coming to see her. Joe put the tape down beside him, shifting slightly in the chair he winced in pain "No, not yet"

Ashleigh could feel the circulation in her hands and feet weakening "Why have you tied me up?"

"Because you would have run away otherwise or told me to fuck off, I just wanted you to listen to me for five minutes"

"There's nothing you can say to me Joe-"

"SHUT UP!" Joe interrupted before pulling out a tiny pocketknife from his jacket pocket; Ashleigh's eyes widened in horror as Joe stood up and came towards her with the knife. Keeling before her, Ashleigh tried to edge away from the three-inch blade.

"W-hat are you doing?"

Joe looked at the blade "Wanna know who beat the shit out of me?"

Ashleigh knew it was Nick, but was not sure if she should answer as looking into Joe's eyes she felt a sense of uncertainty, which made Ashleigh think he could lash out any minute.

Joe looked at Ashleigh "It was Nick, he put me in hospital and made me like this, so I'd thought I'd let you see me seeing as you had no intention of visiting me in hospital"

Ashleigh swallowed hard "Joe, you can't tie me up" she managed to say

"Threw me down the fucking stairs, left me for dead" Joe touched the tip of the blade with his forefinger "Nothing like siblings"

Oh god, what if Joe attacks me? What if he lunges at me? I wanna get out of here! "Joe--"

"We fought over you Ash, can you believe it?" Joe looked at Ashleigh "We fought until the end"

Ashleigh did not care about the fight or what it was about; her main concern was escaping from Joe alive. She could not believe Joe was keeping her hostage and was holding a knife inches from her face "Joe, you can't keep me here" she said bravely

Joe fell silent; he swore if he heard those words, again he would smash up everything all around him. Looking at Ashleigh he could see how scared she was, the fear was burning all over her face like a rash. Suddenly Joe felt a large lump in his throat, he felt sick with shame. What am I doing? I'm scaring the shit out of her and for what? For everything, Nick and me have done to her. Joe flipped open the pocketknife, Ashleigh gasped

"I'm not gunna hurt you Ash" Joe said sullenly cutting the tape from around her legs and wrists. Joe attempted to pull the tape off her left leg, but Ashleigh moved away.

"Now get the fuck out," she said through clenched teeth

Joe stood up and let the tears run down his face, wiping them away he reached out to touch Ashleigh but she moved back "Told you I'd only be five minutes" backing away out the room Joe whispered "I love you" closing the knife he put it back into his pocket and he was gone

Listening to make sure Joe had gone, she heard the front door close. "I love you too," Ashleigh sobbed before collapsing onto the floor in a heap



"Why did you tell me Joe was back?" Jarrett asked Ashleigh, both sat out in the open grounds of the college during free periods. It has been over a week since Jarrett had seen Ashleigh; dealing with the house and finalising it had kept him busy. Ashleigh had been trying to get on with her life since seeing Joe, she had seen neither Nick nor Joe and had heard both their parents had sent for them from overseas. Ashleigh took the opportunity to move on and was not going to waste it.

"Well he's gone now, so there is nothing to tell Jarrett" Ashleigh tapped the edge of the bench with her forefinger; she did not want to talk about Joe.

"I know, but I thought he would have said something to you"

"Nope" Ashleigh said bluntly hoping Jarrett would drop the subject, she was still dealing with that night Joe broke into her home and talking about him felt as if he was watching her.

"So what happened?" Jarrett asked feeling a little hurt he had hoped Ashleigh had considered their friendship something special enough for her to confide in him.

Ashleigh wondered if she wanted to relieve one of the most terrifying moments in her life, the next night she did not sleep as visions of Joe in her mind were keeping her awake. "He just paid me a visit that's all" she replied

Sensing how uncomfortable Ashleigh was Jarrett guessed Joe terrified Ashleigh that night "Just as long as you're not hurt"

"Only inside Jarrett" Ashleigh crossed her arms and watched a couple who were holding hands walk past them, feeling a little jealous she thought about her and Joe when they started and even

Nick. She remembered her first date with Joe to the cinema, but soon cut her reminiscing short with flashes of how everything went wrong. Wanting to cry Ashleigh pushed it to the back of her mind.

Jarrett wanted to find out what happened but did not want to ask any more until he knew Ashleigh was ready, then he would tell her that he bumped into Joe and Nick's cousin, Jodie who told Jarrett, Joe was found hanging in the garage in their home overseas with a note attached to him saying 'my work is done'. Jarrett did not what to say but think how much of a coward Joe was and taking his life was maybe the best option. Jarrett had not thought about how he was going to tell Ashleigh, but he knew it would be a long time before he did.

"Well, just as long as you're okay Ash"

Smiling a little "I don't even know, but I'll find out soon enough"

Jarrett glanced out to the small crowds of students who were also enjoying their free afternoon "I can relate to that Ash"

"In relation to Casey"

Jarrett nodded "Yeah and dad"

Ashleigh was not going to ask about his father, as it was obvious Jarrett wanted to keep that to himself and she believed there were some things you kept to yourself "You miss Casey?"

Jarrett made a face "Sometimes, but we were over long before we knew it Ash and I think that was killing her"

Ashleigh reached down for her bag from the ground, standing up she was ready to go "Well, time to go"

Looking at his watch Jarrett realised the time, almost time for his next lesson "Shit! I didn't even see the time," he muttered picking up his books and rucksack

"I didn't know you clocked in" Ashleigh began walking towards the college

Jarrett shoved his door keys in his pockets "Shut it"

Smiling Ashleigh looked at Jarrett "Let us know what you're doing tonight Ash"

"Gunna spend time with the family tonight, since they've got back from holiday I aint really seen them"

Reaching the main door of the college building, Jarrett pulled the door and they both stepped inside "Okay, well I'll see you tomorrow"

Looking down the corridor Ashleigh felt a sense of nervousness; this was the first time she was without Nick and Joe, not seeing Casey running toward her.

Feeling like a new chapter in her life had begun she silently took a deep breath and walked down the corridor.

"Yeah, see you tomorrow" she said without looking back.