

Midnight

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M.J. O'Shea

"Cameron..."

I felt it more than I heard it, my name a chill whisper in the dark that raced up my spine. I sat up, heart hammering in my throat. The sound, or whatever it was, had woken me from a deep middle of the night sleep. I looked around my room, wondering if one of my drunk frat brothers had somehow wandered in. All I saw was darkness and silence. No movement. Nothing. The room was empty except for me. Of course it was. I felt like a total idiot.

No more watching Paranormal State after dark. Apparently my imagination was just a little too active. I was wide awake, adrenalin pumping through my veins. I looked at my clock. Midnight. Damn! I had just fallen asleep an hour and a half ago and I had a big test at eight. I was annoyed with myself and my overactive dreams. There was obviously no one in my room. I was just punching my pillow and getting ready to lie back down when I heard it again.

"Cameron..."

This time it was distinct. I hadn't been imagining it. Someone was in my room whispering my name, but I couldn't see a damn thing. Where the hell were they hiding?

"C'mon guys, this isn't funny. I've got an Econ test in the morning."

I waited, the seconds stretching out. There was no answer other than the pure silence that could only come in the smallest hours of the night. I sat up in my bed, stock still. I was listening for breathing, shuffling, anything that would tell me that this was some dumb prank. *Please let it be a prank!*

"Cameron..."

The whisper broke the silence once more. If anything it was more pronounced. I could feel a slippery coldness work its way through my body. I couldn't see or hear anyone else in the room but I could *feel* someone there. I can't explain it any other way than that. There was someone in my room who wasn't supposed to be there and he was scaring the crap out of me. I had to get the hell out.

I grabbed my pillow and my comforter, my cell phone so I wouldn't sleep in, and headed for one of the lumpy beer stained couches in the second floor common room. I wasn't going to sleep well and my back would hurt like the devil in the morning, but it had to be better than this. As I was about to turn the doorknob, I heard a final whisper.

"Cameron, don't leave. I need you..."

I felt a tingling again, like that feeling when you know someone is watching you. *No freaking way am I staying in here!* I shut the door quickly, and had to force myself to walk instead of running like hell down the hallway to the common room.

I lay for what seemed like hours on the disgusting old common room couch, trying to fall asleep. I couldn't even get my heart to calm down, couldn't get that whispering voice out of my head. I was still scared by whatever had just happened in my room. If this did end up being a prank, someone was going to get his ass kicked tomorrow. I didn't even want to think of another possibility.

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I practically crawled into the kitchen the next morning. I was tired as hell and my body was aching from the hours spent on the couch. I needed some food and a major jolt to my system if I was going to make it through my test. I was actually glad I had to pull a shift at work later. I'd probably be mainlining double shot *americanos* the whole time. Free coffee was probably one of the only perks of working at one of the busiest Starbucks in the university district.

I heard the quiet shuffling of feet coming over the threshold onto the cold tiled kitchen floor. I jumped a little, then called myself an idiot under my breath. I turned and saw Jason, a senior and my big brother from freshman year eyeing me strangely.

"Dude, you look like shit. What happened to you?" *Tactful as always, bro.*

"Rough night. I couldn't sleep."

He gave me another strange look. "You're in the corner room right by the back stairs, right?"

We had just moved in a few weeks ago, and no one had gotten used to the new arrangement.

"Yeah, why?" The way he had asked made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Was I being paranoid, or did he look like he knew something?

"No reason," He answered quickly.

"Seriously, what?" After the night I had, I didn't need any more strangeness.

"Wasn't that Adam's room last year?" Adam had moved in with his girlfriend somewhere before Thanksgiving last year. He had been two years older than me. I didn't know him that well. I thought someone else had taken the room over after Christmas, but for the life of me I couldn't remember who.

"I think it was, why?"

"Never mind, Cam. Just go to class." I shook my head, basically at my limit for weird creepy events. First last night, now this cryptic conversation. Whatever. I had a test to take and a five hour shift. I didn't have time for this crap.

I had plenty of time to think at work while I was foaming lattes and bagging overpriced scones for the hoards of pink-cheeked students. I tried to rationalize the night before, think of a reason that I could have heard someone whispering my name. I didn't want to include the obvi-

ous but impossible explanation. That someone was in my room whispering. Someone invisible. *Don't be ridiculous.*

But honestly (and here's where I really start to feel nuts) fairly often in the past few weeks I had come back from class to find my stuff in slightly different places. Like someone curious had come in and looked through it while I was gone. Nothing was ever missing, so I hadn't said anything, but I could swear someone had been in there. And that feeling was there. Not as strong, but it was there. A milder version of that 'I'm not alone' chill I had gotten the night before. *Yeah, right Cameron. You have an inquiring poltergeist.*

I shook my head, and poured one of the bubbly Kappa Pi's a non-fat white mocha.

"Thanks Cameron," She purred, smiling at me. I hated the fact that she knew me only because I was in Sigma Epsilon. It was kind of a trophy thing for a sorority girl to end up with one of us. How long was it going to take those girls to realize I really wasn't interested?

I continued my shift, my tired brain still sorting through all of the slightly weird events that had happened in my room since term started. My books moved, mail shifted through, my bed being made (which I never do). That last one was really kinda creepy. Let's just say I was starting to see why Adam had found his girlfriend's apartment so...appealing.

By the time my shift was done, I was worn out, and my mind had been spinning in circles for hours. I hadn't had a chance for a nap earlier, and I was so desperate for sleep I nearly curled up in the stock room. With a sigh, I zipped into my fleece and headed for home.

* * * *

"Cameron..."

I looked at my clock. Midnight. Again. I groaned. *You have got to be fucking kidding me.*

"Leave me alone," I said to the general darkness. I felt like an idiot, but I needed sleep. I didn't feel like dealing with whisper boy again tonight.

"Cameron, I need your help."

Oh my god. What part of 'leave me alone' was confusing? I sat up in bed, more angry than scared. My eyes focused slowly in the dark.

That's when I saw him.

I nearly jumped out of my damn skin. There was a guy sitting calmly in the easy chair that I had squished into the corner of my room. He was watching me patiently, as if waiting for me to wake up so I could talk to him.

The funny thing is, as soon as I saw him, I knew he was a ghost.

I mean, it wasn't an intellectual deduction, I didn't sit there and catalog his faint edges, and pale skin. I just knew it. Somewhere inside of me could tell that the boy was dead. Even stranger, after I realized that he was dead, and the first ghost I had ever seen, I also realized that I wasn't afraid of him. In fact, he seemed a little afraid himself.

"Who are you?" I asked. *Other than a dead kid in my room of course...*

"Jamie Douglas," He answered, as if I should already know that.

"There's no one named Jamie living in this house." I'm not sure why I said it. Sounded kind of stupid even to me.

"I live in this house. This is my room. It has been for...what year is it?" He looked slightly confused.

"It's two thousand and nine."

"Then I guess it's been fifty years."

So if it had always been him in this room...

"What did you do to Adam?" I asked. I wanted to be prepared in case he tried it on me too. Jamie looked sheepish.

"I didn't like his girlfriend's perfume. They couldn't see me, not like you can. I just played a few games."

"What do you mean, they couldn't see you?"

I was more curious than anything Not afraid at all. I was starting to notice things about him, like his neatly pressed khakis, his snug t-shirt that was definitely filled out, the chocolatey waves that curled around his ears. *Jesus!* I was cruising a ghost.

"In all my years in this room, watching, learning, seeing the lives of so many guys, you are the first one who has *ever* heard me. Believe me, I've tried. I don't know what it is. I decided tonight that I would try to let you see me. Obviously that worked too."

"Why me?"

"I told you. I don't know. Maybe because it's exactly fifty years...wait what day is it?"

"October first."

"Well, not exactly fifty years yet, then." He cocked his head to the side as if considering something. I noticed the long line of his neck, arched as his head turned. An image of me sucking on that soft skin flashed into my head. I realized I was being ridiculous. I couldn't touch him!

"Fifty years since..." I prompted. I knew what he was going to say. I just had to hear it for some reason.

"Fifty years since I died. On Halloween. Nineteen fifty-nine."

"And I'm the first one who can see and hear you. For whatever reason."

"Yes." I thought of something he had said a few minutes earlier.

"You said you didn't like Adam's girlfriend's perfume. You can smell?" He grimaced.

"Yes. Much better, as far as I remember, then when I was alive. Smells are very overwhelming to me. But not you. You smell nice."

He blushed, as if realizing he had said a bit too much. *No way*. I literally couldn't believe this was happening. Either I had completely gone bat shit or I was really sitting in my room talking to a ghost who liked how I smelled....and I actually kinda liked that he had noticed.

"Jamie, you said you needed help. What happened to you?" I felt like I wanted to do something for this kid. It must suck to be stuck in the same room for that long. Jamie gave me a disappointed look.

"I don't remember. That's one of the bad parts. I guess I need to fix something, to get closure. You know the typical story. But, like I said I don't remember what happened. I do remember everything about my life since I died. But hardly anything before." Well that was no good. How do you help when he doesn't even know what he needs?

"I guess I have to do some research, then?" I said it like a question. I really had no idea what I was going to do. He looked so hopeful that my heart broke. "I'll help you. I promise. I'll start by learning as much about you as I can find. I have to warn you, it might not be much." Where do you even start looking for stuff about an ordinary person who lived fifty years ago?

"I know." He answered. "I was just a nineteen year old kid. A nobody. Thank you so much for even trying, Cameron." That reminded me.

"How did you know my name?" I asked. There was that sheepish grin. *So cute*. He pointed at my mail pile.

"You're the one who's been looking through my stuff aren't you?" I raised my eyebrows. He blushed again. I couldn't believe a ghost could actually look embarrassed.

"Just a little bit. I wanted to know who you were."

"So you can touch things."

"Sort of. Like in the movies. I've seen a lot of those in this room. It's hard, and I have to concentrate, but I can move things. That's how I freaked out Adam and his girlfriend." He grinned as if remembering a good joke. *Wow. Playing pranks for fun. He was a frat boy.*

"Hey Jamie?"

"Yeah?"

"Listen, I promised I was going to help you, and I will. But I gotta get some sleep. I have four classes tomorrow, and if I'm going to try to figure out who you are, I can't be falling asleep in the library."

He nodded, and stood. I was curious suddenly as to where he would go. He actually came towards me, hesitated for a second like he was concentrating on something, then brushed my cheek with his halfway translucent hand and whispered,

"Thank you,"

Then he disappeared.

My cheek tingled where he had touched me. Chills swept up and down my spine, but not unpleasant chills. Amazing chills, like the kind I imagined you would get when you first kiss

someone that you are totally into. All the little hairs on my back were standing and sensitized, and I could feel blood pounding through my body towards my groin. *All from one little touch?* Impossible!

I had my silent room all to myself, but not too surprisingly, I couldn't sleep. You would think that anyone would have a hard time dozing off after a face-to-face encounter with a ghost. My reasons weren't quite what you would expect. Instead of lying awake afraid or unsettled, I stared at the ceiling and thought about his shiny brown hair, and those big black lashed blue eyes. He had looked so sad and vulnerable, adorable when he grinned. I was totally infatuated. *Oh my god Cameron. You've held it together for two years, both feet planted solidly in the closet, and now this? You want a guy...who's dead?*

So here comes big confession time...which you've probably already figured out for yourselves. I'm gay. At least I'm pretty sure I am. I figure I can't really say I'm gay since I've never *actually* been with a guy. Sad, huh?

You wanna know how I got to be twenty and still have only messed around with a few girls that I was totally not into? It was surprisingly easy. Classic high school golden boy, smothered by his proud father who couldn't wait for his only son to join the clan of cavemen at the Sigma Ep house just like his dad. I was a legacy, and I would have fit in anyway (at least on appearances). I got in no problem.

But there *was* a problem...I didn't really want to be there. The jock frat boy thing wasn't who I was, who I wanted to be. It was just that my dad had always been so proud of me and I hated to make him unhappy. Truthfully, I was also afraid of what would happen when he found out and I wasn't his golden boy anymore.

So there I was, living in a frat house pretending to be straight. No matter what you see on TV, the hot guy jock fraternity isn't exactly a safe haven for the queers of the world. I'd heard the way they talk, and I decided a long time ago to keep my mouth shut. I didn't want to get my ass kicked or worse.

I really don't mind the guys other than their ridiculously archaic views on sexuality. Most of them are pretty cool, and will be as long as they don't find out what's swirling around in my head. It's been basically okay. I have two more years of hiding, then I'm off to live my own life. At least I've had some great man candy to look at along the way!

Unfortunately, now I have a new problem. Jamie the friendly (and hot) ghost needs my help but doesn't even know what kind of help he needs. I promised to help him and even worse... I'm totally attracted to him. A ghost. I know how crazy that sounds. Don't even get me started.

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My first step was to figure out if, in fact, I was really talking to Jamie Douglas, deceased Sigma Ep. Since my other option was being nuts, I really hoped I was going to find some kind of record of him living in our house.

In the main living room, we had a bookshelf full of photo albums. They were kind of like fraternity yearbooks. Every year, there was a group shot, and each brother had their picture taken on his own. They were organized into photo albums along with candid pictures from different fraternity events. There were a ton of books, dating back to the start of the house somewhere in the twenties. I started looking through the books for the one that would contain pictures from nineteen fifty-nine.

They were dusty, and not quite in order, but I eventually found the one I was looking for. It had pictures from nineteen fifty five to nineteen sixty. If Jamie Douglas existed, he would be in there. I grabbed it, stuck it in my backpack, and headed up to my room.

I turned my lamp and ceiling lights on, a little freaked out. I had no idea why the creepies were suddenly taking over. I mean, I wasn't scared of the ghost himself. Just the opposite. So why was I freaking out over some old photo album? I guessed it meant that if and when I saw Jamie's picture, it would mean this whole thing was real.

I flipped slowly through the pages, starting in the beginning. I knew that Jamie wouldn't be there yet, but it was interesting looking through all the old pictures. The guys looked so uptight back then, with their Mr. Rogers sweaters and slicked back hair.

I wondered what they would think of the way my brothers dressed now. Most of them were total slobs. It didn't even matter, since the sorority girls would fall all over them based on social status alone. It totally annoyed me that I was hit on all the time based purely on what letters were stitched on my sweatshirt. It seemed so shallow. I guessed it probably wouldn't annoy me too much if any of them looked more like Jamie. Yeah right. That wasn't likely to happen.

I was getting close to the back of the book, almost to the section where he would be. I could feel my heart pounding. I wanted him to be real so badly. I wanted to find out how I could help him. When I finally got to nineteen fifty-eight, the year he would have been a freshman, I turned the page slowly.

It didn't take me more than a second to find him. He looked exactly the same. Just to be sure, I checked the name typed below his picture. James Douglas. There he was. Warm dark hair, curled haphazardly over his ears, sweet open smile, and those eyes...wow. Even in black and white their power was intense.

I looked at his picture for long minutes, memorizing the features I had seen so clearly the night before. I couldn't believe what was happening to me. I had never looked at these old books, never seen his picture. I couldn't have imagined him. There was only one possible conclusion. Jamie Douglas's ghost was real. And he needed me.

I spent a long time looking at the pictures in the old photo book. The formal shots and candid of the brothers together. There was one guy that Jamie nearly always stood next to in pictures. He had sandy hair and a big grin. I looked up his name. Grayson Turner. *That's an unusual name for back in the years of Jacks, Bills, and Johns.*

In all the pictures, Grayson seemed kind of like a Kennedy or something. This golden boy who would have had a crowd of admirers. I wanted to hate him. I did kind of hate him. Mostly because there was something in Jamie's face in all the pictures. It was there, in the way he smiled the pretty blonde boy. I recognized that look. It made an irrational snake of jealousy slither down my spine. Had Jamie been in love with him? It seemed pretty obvious, but I didn't want to jump to conclusions. One thing I did know for sure. Somehow this Grayson guy was the first step in solving Jamie's mystery.

I tried to go to sleep early, anticipating a wake up call in the middle of the night. But I found myself getting excited to see Jamie again. I wanted to talk to him more, get to know him. I knew that excited, happy feeling. I had felt it a few times in high school. It had nearly gotten me into huge trouble with one of my friends from the soccer team. Thank god I came to my senses before I tried to kiss him or something. I punched my pillow, annoyed with myself for being so dumb. A crush on a ghost? So stupid.

I woke a few hours later, not to the sound of my name, but to a whispering touch trailing across my cheek. I smiled, not afraid at all, and opened my eyes.

"Hi, Cameron," He said quietly, greeting me.

"Hey Jamie," I answered, and sat up in my bed. I could feel the silly happiness flow over me. Crush away, Cam. Crush away.

He was perched next to me, as if he had been waiting there a long time for me to wake.

"How long have you been here?" I asked. A huge smile threatened to burst open at any second.

"A while," He answered, smirking. "You can learn a lot about someone when they're asleep." I groaned.

"I wasn't snoring, was I?" Jamie laughed.

"No, you mumble. It's actually kind of adorable."

Okay. That's it. First the comment about how I smelled, the little touches, then the pictures, and now this. I had to know.

"Jamie, listen. You've said a couple of things that I don't know which way to take. Are you...?" I didn't want to say the words. I was afraid he'd get mad.

"Am I into guys? I think you know that answer. I don't remember much about my life, but that I know. I *definitely* know." He grinned sheepishly at me, as if he was trying to confess something. As soon as he said it, I had an idea.

"Do you think that's why I can see you?" He looked confused so I elaborated. "Maybe I can see you because I understand you. Because I'm *like* you."

"What...you're dead too?" He was teasing. His impish smile made my pulse patter in little giggly bursts. He reached out again. This time, he cupped my elbow and dragged tingly fingers down my arm until it almost felt like he was holding my hand. It was like being surrounded by bubbles. Sexy bubbles that made my blood heat. I couldn't really feel his skin, but I could totally tell he was there. The unbelievable sensation made me tremble visibly. I closed my eyes for a second.

"You don't like that?" He looked disappointed.

"No, I do. It feels incredible. I can't even describe it." It made me want to touch him too. I reached out, but my hand dropped straight through his arm to my comforter below. He gave me a sad look.

"You can't touch me. I can't *really* touch you either. Just what I've been doing." I thought of something.

"Jamie, do you think you were ever, you know...*with* a guy before you died?" His head dropped to the side like it seemed to always do when he was considering something. *God, the things I'd love to do to his neck with my tongue!*

"I think I probably was. I mean, it seems really familiar, the idea of holding someone. Of kissing and touching him. I know I wouldn't get that strong of an imprint from just seeing it."

Okay, here goes the next part, I thought.

"So, I found your picture tonight. In the old house photo albums. You were always next to a guy. Grayson Turner. I was wondering if he may have been..." I stopped talking when I saw Jamie's already pale face turn ashen. He faded quickly, turning more and more translucent.

"Gray..." He whispered, then all of a sudden he was gone.

It was two days before I saw him again. I was starting to wonder if he was gone for good. The thought was a little depressing, somehow. I was up late studying for a math test when he appeared, coming from the general area of my closet.

I jumped a little, startled because I hadn't expected him.

"Cameron?" He sounded hesitant, like I may be angry with him.

"Hey Jamie. Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm really sorry about the other night. It was just a shock to hear that name again. When you said it, so many memories came flooding back. It was just too much effort to try to stay here."

"Who was he?" Jamie's face looked pained.

"You were right. Gray Turner was my boyfriend."

"Tell me about him." I could see how hard this was for him. He wrung his hands together. I wished I could reach over and comfort him. Obviously impossible.

"Gray and I got to be friends freshman year, when we were both rushing Sigma Ep. His family was really rich, I think they had originally been logging barons or something. Anyway, all the houses on campus wanted him. I was just this quiet guy on his floor in the dorms. He kinda dragged me along and convinced me to join with him." I waited quietly, not wanting to interrupt.

"It didn't take me long to figure out Gray was like me. There were little things at first, touches, looks. Then one night we were sitting in the dorms talking about some party we had been to the week before at the house. He just leaned over and kissed me. I was stunned but so happy. I figured because of his family that he would never do anything about the attraction between us."

A little surge of jealousy hit me again right in the gut. I wanted to know what it was like to kiss a guy I liked. I wanted to know what it was like to kiss Jamie.

"Anyway, after that we were basically a couple. We made a pact not to tell anyone, because of his family, because of the way things were. I would have never broken my word." Jamie's face clouded.

When he said that, I started to get a general idea of how it probably played out. My stomach turned.

"Jamie, what happened between you and Gray? How did it end?"

"You know, I have no idea. I do remember us asking to be roommates here at the house. None of the guys thought anything of it cause, publicly at least, we were best friends. I was elated that I could be with him every night. God, I was so in love with him. I do remember that." I tried to ignore the fact that it made me ragingly jealous to hear Jamie say he'd been in love with Gray Turner. Even if it was fifty years ago, I still hated it.

"You don't think he had anything to do with your death, do you?"

"I don't know. I remember loving him, but now when I think of him I just get angry and sad. I don't know what happened, but I don't think it was good. Cameron, he's got to be part of it." I had already decided the same thing.

"I think he's important too. I'll see what I can find out."

We couldn't do much more that night to help the situation, and Jamie seemed to be genuinely upset when he thought of Gray. I decided to drop it. Besides, I really did want to get to know more about him than how he died.

"Hey Jamie," I started. *How do you ask a ghost to hang out with you?* I was nervous like we were on a first date.

"Yeah?"

"I can't really do much about your situation tonight, but..." I hesitated. I hoped he couldn't see my face turning red. "I don't want you to go." I kinda spit that last part out nervously. He smiled, and reached across to do that ghostly finger-trailing thing that made my stomach so weak.

"I don't want to go either." My heart thumped happily. I couldn't remember ever having a crush this strong.

Jamie and I talked for hours. We had abandoned the topic of Gray Turner, but there so much else we could learn about each other. I told Jamie how I realized I was gay, and how I ended up at Sigma Epsilon instead of where I wanted to be, which had been basically anywhere else. He asked me if the brothers knew about me, and I laughed. Things in the world had changed so much, as far as acceptance goes, but in the world of fraternities, it may as well have still been nineteen fifty-nine.

Jamie told me funny stories about some of the brothers who had lived in this room over the years. I laughed at stuff that I would be totally embarrassed by if anyone knew them about me. Then I thought about what I had been doing in the room since I had moved in. My face turned red when I realized exactly how much he could have seen. It made me wonder how often

anyone was really alone. People would think a lot more about their actions if they knew how many invisible eyes were on them!

I finally fell asleep around four in the morning, glad that it was the weekend and I didn't have to work. Jamie sat next to me as I fell asleep, trailing his fingers around my face and neck and arms to help me relax. That tingly bubble feeling turned me on like hell, but it was also comforting. I felt myself drifting off. As I did, I felt what seemed like a half-kiss, gentle on my forehead.

"*Night, Cameron,*" He whispered.

"Jamie?"

"Yeah?" He answered. But he seemed to already know what I wanted.

That same half-kiss, soft and cool drifted across my lips. My body erupted in blissful shivers.

"Wow," I whispered. A ghostly chuckle drifted across my bed. Jamie was gone.

The next day I went to the library. It was one of those rare beautiful crisp fall days when the sun shining through the orange and yellow leaves made everything into a dappled autumn paradise that was meant to be experienced. I longed to be out in the fresh air with Jamie, on that gorgeous autumn Sunday. He had barely left my thoughts since the first time I had seen him. I'd had a few crushes in high school, but nothing like this before. Nothing where the guy flirted back. No matter how improbable the whole situation was, it still made me happy. That butterfly in the stomach giddiness was so new to me. I loved it.

I wished I could spend more time with him. I hated that he could never leave the tiny room in our fraternity where he had probably spent his last minutes. It made me want to help him even more. I didn't really feel like being inside, but I knew I would have the library to myself on a day like this. It was the perfect opportunity to do a little digging.

Armed with the discs that held campus and city newspapers from the time around Jamie's death, I sat down at one of the library computers. I started with the campus papers, not sure of what I was going to find. Turned out to be quite a lot easier than I had expected.

Jamie had actually been kind of famous. Well, after the fact anyway. There were quite a few articles about the events surrounding his death.

According to the earliest papers, it was a suicide. His roommate had come home to find him dead with a rope around his neck, no note, no anything.

It was really weird, reading about the death of the guy I was getting to know so well. I imagined that a suicide victim may end up as a ghost with unresolved problems, but for some reason that explanation didn't ring true. It didn't seem like Jamie.

I scanned the articles, in the papers, which varied from football coverage, to a description of the fall formal. After the first few weeks, where there had been tons of sensationalistic articles about frat boy suicide, Jamie disappeared. *That couldn't be it. Jamie didn't kill himself!* I didn't know how I knew, I just seemed so wrong.

I got to the last disc, which held papers from December and January. I had basically given up, but was checking for any possible follow-ups. I was shocked by the big heading splashed across the first page.

ALLEGED FRATERNITY SUICIDE TURNS TO... MURDER?

I read on, fascinated. It turned out the police had gotten an anonymous call with information surrounding Jamie's death. The case was re-opened. Turned out the investigation had been badly done all around. The coroner's report, which had been mostly ignored, stated the bruises on Jamie's neck were definitely not from a rope, and actually looked more like fingers.

The fraternity brothers were questioned again, more closely this time. Eventually someone must have cracked. In the end, the police judged that James Douglas's death was a tragic accident, a Halloween prank gone wrong. Whoever ended up confessing said the guys had covered it up with the fake suicide scene because they were afraid of what would happen if they were found out.

What did happen was ridiculous, in my opinion. Since no specific brother could be pinned down as the actual "accidental" killer, they all got off with what was basically a slap on the hand. Some community service and a bad reputation. Not a whole lot else. The fraternity charter was suspended indefinitely, but that didn't even last very long as soon as the whole mess blew over. I wasn't even the victim, but I was totally enraged. How could they get away with something like that? *No wonder Jamie's ghost was still in the house. I'd haunt their asses forever if it was me. I doubt I'd stop at moving shit around the room either!*

I shook my head, unbelieving. What fraternity prank ends up in someone being strangled to death? It was horrible, but I thought there was probably still something more to the story. Something even the guy who cracked wouldn't tell. I printed the articles. Hopefully when he saw them, Jamie would remember. I felt horrible. Who wants to remember the day they died? This was probably going to be awful for him.

As I put my stuff away and headed for my room, I thought about the anonymous caller. It had to be Gray. There was no other explanation. He wouldn't have wanted Jamie to be forever known as the kid who killed himself. That still didn't explain why Jamie felt so angry towards him...unless he was involved. The idea that Gray Turner could have had a hand in getting his boyfriend killed made my stomach turn.

I fell asleep on my bed waiting for him. He showed up at midnight, right on time. I was so happy to see him, I grinned. My pulse did a crazy little dance, and I could feel myself getting hard just remembering that gentle little brush of a kiss last night. I wanted so much more! Jamie seemed happy to see me too. I hated to ruin his smile with the copied articles that I had hidden in my backpack. I knew he'd get upset, and I didn't want him to disappear again.

I couldn't do it though. It was too important to him. As much as I wanted to be selfish and enjoy my time with Jamie, I knew I had to help him solve his own mystery. That meant showing him the articles.

"So..." I began, wanting so desperately to hesitate so I could see his gorgeous smile for just a few more minutes.

"You found something, and it's not good," He finished.

"Am I that easy to read?"

"Let's just say I've had some practice lately." He reached out gently and caressed my cheek and neck. The violent surge of heat in my belly distracted me. I spun for a second, lost in pure sensation. "Cameron." The sound of his voice cleared my head a little bit. "Tell me. I can handle it."

Reluctantly, I went to my backpack and got out the printed articles.

"First they said you tried to kill yourself." I placed the earliest article on the bed in front of him. The one that said Gray found him with a rope around his neck. I could see him getting angry.

"This is ridiculous. You know how as soon as you said Gray's name, lots of stuff came back?" I nodded. "Well, it didn't happen this time. I have no memory at all of wanting to kill myself."

"That's because you didn't." I put the second article in front of him. The one with the big splashy title. I watched him read for a few minutes, his expressive face changing from hurt to anger to sadness as he scanned the sentences. I could see the exact moment when he got to the part about there being fingerprints on his neck. The awful memory dawned in his eyes and his entire face changed.

"Jamie?" I whispered it, afraid to talk. I knew he remembered. He looked so very angry. It was the first time I had been even a little bit afraid of him since that first night when I could only hear his voice.

"Cameron. I need to go. I don't want you to see me right now." I could hear in his voice that he was trying to control a towering fury. He needed to get away from me.

"Go, Jamie. But come back when you can tell me. We need to figure out how to fix this for you." He relaxed a little, and looked at me

"I will. Thank you, Cameron."

"Cam." I told him.

"What?"

"No one who knows me calls me Cameron...except maybe my grandma." That comment wrung a small smile from him, which was what I hoped for. Then, just like the last time, he disappeared.

* * * *

It was five long days until I saw him again. Five days in which I tried to concentrate on class, tried to lose myself in the hectic monotony of work. All I could do was think of Jamie and hope he was okay.

I knew he must have been thrown by those newspaper articles. By his memories. By the people who betrayed him. I doubted that the killing was an accident. Even if those boys hadn't meant to kill him, they sure as hell meant to hurt him badly. It's not like they were playing touch

football and he accidentally got strangled. I wished there was some way I could get to him, to let him know that I cared and still wanted to help him. I had an awful feeling that I would never see him again.

It was Friday night. The house was full of the noises of guys getting ready to go out, playing video games, drinking, laughing. I wondered if any of them knew what had happened here all those years ago. The reality that Jamie had actually lost his life in this house was overwhelming to me. He seemed so real and so present that the thought of him laying on my floor dying was horrifying.

A couple of the guys had invited me to a party at the Kappa Pi house, but I lied and told them I was coming down with something and felt like shit. The last part wasn't really a lie. I did feel horrible. I hadn't slept well in days, always waiting half awake for Jamie to return. I was exhausted and my body ached.

Around nine thirty, I locked myself in the bathroom and took a really long shower, hoping that the heat would calm me down. I really needed to sleep. I spent the entire shower thinking of Jamie. Wishing I could see him again. Not only because I wanted to know he was okay, but because I wanted...well I wanted him. I wanted to be near him, to hear him laugh. To look at his amazing blue eyes and see the attraction that I hoped I hadn't imagined. *Jamie...where are you?*

Afterwards, wrapped in a towel and feeling slightly better, I flopped down on my bed. I meant to lay there for a minute or two then get up and dry off so I could really go to sleep. I must have been more exhausted than even I thought. The next thing I knew I was awake. And not just awake but tingling all over. My eyes popped open.

Jamie! He was there, sitting on my bed, his hand hovering over my chest. He looked a little guilty, like he had been caught in the cookie jar. *He could have my cookies any time he wanted!* I was so happy to see him, I almost jumped on top of him before I remembered that I would end up face planting on the floor.

"Jamie, I'm so glad you're okay. I missed you!" I didn't even think before I spoke. Afterwards, I felt kind of stupid. That was until I saw his shy returning smile.

"I missed you too, Cam. I wanted to make sure I was ready to talk about it rationally before I came back to you." While he was talking he started stroking my chest again, running his bubbly soft touch all over. When he brushed against my nipples, I let out a sigh.

"That feels nice," I mumbled. I must have had a goofy smile on my face because Jamie laughed quietly. His face turned wistful.

"I wish I could really touch you," He murmured. I was slightly surprised.

"You do?" I had assumed our little *thing* was mostly one sided. I mean, he kind of flirted, but I didn't think he meant anything by it.

"Of course I do. I mean I guess people are more open about what they want now. But couldn't you tell?" He leaned forward and brushed his lips across the same nipple. I shuddered.

"I thought it was just me." He shook his head.

"Not just you. Lay back." His voice was smoky and a little breathy. I did as he asked, not even caring when my forgotten towel slipped open.

Jamie looked at me with awe in his eyes. His hands were reverent, tickling me with that half touch that made my stomach all trembly.

"You're so gorgeous," He whispered. I blushed, but my embarrassment was lost in the swirling rivers of sensation he was causing. I was getting harder by the second, marveling at how turned on I was. I moaned and arched my back slightly, closing my eyes. *Was this really happening?*

I felt Jamie's hands move lower, testing the muscles in my abdomen. I giggled a little as the sparkly feeling engulfed my stomach. A second later, I forgot that I had been laughing. I forgot about everything.

Jamie sighed, as he used both hands to surround my already hard shaft. I lifted my hips into the feeling, part of me wanting to feel the pressure of a real touch, but so amazed at the hot and cold chills that I barely missed it. My hips started moving, and I groaned out loud. Jamie leaned over and kissed the tip of my shaft gently. *Oh my god.* This had to be the most erotic moment of my life. He stuck out his ghostly tongue and licked me from my base, all the way around the head. I thrashed against my bed.

It only took a minute or two for me to loose it. Between my wonder at this first time experience, and the glory of the feelings he was causing, I couldn't hold back the rapids that were crashing through my body, taking control of everything. I shoved a pillow into my mouth when I came, stifling the scream that wanted to come out.

I fell back against my pillows sweaty, heart pumping. I had just had the most explosive orgasm of my life and no one had actually even touched me. It was amazing.

I lay there silently for a while, letting my breathing calm. Jamie continued to trail his fingers over me in a relaxing sort of otherworldly massage. This gentle touch was almost as amazing as what had just happened. When I was finally calmed, I sat up and reached down to the floor for a pair of track pants.

Jamie looked slightly disappointed when I covered up, but grinned when we connected eyes. I didn't even know what to say.

"That was..." I began.

"Nice," He finished. "It feels good for me too, you know. Not like really touching you would feel. Or having you touch me. But it's still good." He sighed, and I could literally see him picturing us actually touching each other. *God, I wanted that too.*

"Jamie?" He reached out and brushed his fingers across my nipples. I shuddered.

"Yeah?"

"I don't want to, but we probably need to talk about the newspaper articles." He grimaced.

"I know. It was so nice for a while to pretend we didn't have to." I nodded agreeing, then waited for him to say something. When he didn't, I prompted him.

"What happened that night? We can't do anything about it until you tell me."

Jamie took a deep breath and began.

"We had been back at school for a little over a month. I was so happy, living with Gray, being a part of the fraternity. Everything seemed perfect. I didn't mind keeping Gray and I a secret as long as I had him. We were vigilant, making sure that no one ever saw any touches, any looks." He looked around at the walls. "We slept together for the first time in this room. We had never had the opportunity before. There had always been other people around." I tried to control my jealousy. I hated Gray Turner for having Jamie first.

"I thought Gray loved me as much as I loved him. That he would do anything for me. Put his life on the line for me. I would have done it for him." Jamie's face twisted in a bitter smile. "Turns out he didn't love me nearly as much as I thought."

I wanted to comfort him, to pull him into my arms. It was so frustrating to only be able to sit there and listen.

"On the night of Halloween, we came back from a party a little drunk. We usually were careful about locking our door before we went to bed, but that night we must have forgotten. Anyway, we started making love, and I guess because we weren't totally sober, we forgot that we had to be quiet. One of the guys heard us, and he must have thought we were fighting. He got a few other brothers and burst into the room, ready to break up the fight. I'm sure you know what he found." My mouth opened in horror.

"Oh, Jamie," I whispered. I didn't know what else to say.

"Gray jumped up immediately. I thought he was going to defend me, to make up a story about how we were drunk or something, but I guess he panicked. He told the guys I jumped on him and started kissing him when he was asleep. He said he wanted me to get the hell away from him. That I was disgusting. I was so shocked I just stood there in silence. I didn't even think to defend myself." He was trembling, and he looked even whiter than usual. I felt awful.

"Hey, do you want to stop? We can talk about this another night."

"No. Let's get it over with." He looked determined. "So I think you can guess the ending. After he stormed out, I sat in our room by myself, heart broken and terrified. It was about midnight when they came for me. I still don't know if it was an accident, or if they really meant to kill me, but they came at me shouting horrible names and telling me I was going to hell. The last thing I remember seeing is Gray running into the room shouting at them to stop.

The next time I came to, I was like this, and the room was empty. All of my stuff was gone and so was Gray's. He never came back." Jamie had tears running down his cheeks. I hadn't known that it was possible for ghosts to cry.

There were about a million emotions battling in my body. I felt awful for Jamie, I wanted to be this avenging angel and go after the people who had done this to him, but more than anything I ached to hold him and tell him that everything was going to be okay. That I would never do anything like that to him.

He hiccuped and smiled softly.

"You know it actually felt good to tell you about it. It helped to have someone like you to listen." The trust in his eyes melted my heart.

"Now all we have to do is figure out what you need for closure. I need to know who they were."

Jamie listed the names, and I wrote them down. I planned to look them up in the photo album that I had put back downstairs, and then start my hunt. Everyone who hurt Jamie was going to have to pay somehow. Including Gray Turner. Especially Gray Turner.

It was actually pretty easy to figure out what happened to the three guys who attacked Jamie. In the weird way the universe worked, they had all kind of paid for it in some way. The first guy, Peter, the one who had actually killed Jamie, kind of went crazy after that night. Who knows if it was the guilt, or if he had always been unbalanced. He ended up in the mental hospital, where he stayed until he died sometime in the eighties of cancer.

Neither one of his two accomplices fared much better. Brian, Pete's roommate, had gone to Vietnam a few years later, having never really finished enough credits to graduate. His helicopter was bombed out of the sky somewhere outside of Da Nang. No one survived. Mike, the last guy, didn't have a particularly violent death. Just a slow decent into oblivion. He ended up as a used car salesman at some seedy lot out on the highway. He drank himself to an early grave about five years ago, leaving behind a sour wife and a few kids.

I felt a little thrill of vindication when I finally dug up the details on the last guy's life and death. They deserved to be miserable. They deserved every thing they got.

To Jamie's credit, he didn't cheer and holler when he found out the fates of his attackers. It showed how amazing of a person he was that he could still feel some pity for people who had done something so awful to him.

The one mystery was Gray. He had left the fraternity the night of Jamie's murder and never returned. There wasn't any record of him graduating from the college, no record of him getting married, dying. Nothing. I had thought that he would be the easiest to find, since his family was so rich and well known. That turned out to be the opposite of the truth. I really hoped he was still around. I knew I needed to find him if we had a chance of resolving Jamie's issues.

* * * *

After that, Jamie started coming to my room every single night. I'm sure, looking back, that the other guys in my house probably wondered what the hell happened to me. I spent every night holed up in my room 'talking on the phone'. I had made up some bogus story of a long distance girlfriend, so they wouldn't think I was in there talking to myself. They must have thought I was the biggest lovesick whipped loser in the whole world. I just didn't want to spend any more time away from Jamie than I had to.

We had so much fun together, talking for hours, watching movies, playing games (the brat was amazing at chess!). I felt like I had a real honest to goodness boyfriend for the first time. I loved it. I knew in the back of my head as soon as I found Gray it would be over and Jamie would be gone. I tried to push that fact to the furthest back corner of my brain.

There were other nights like that first one too, when he would touch me with his hands and his lips until I was biting my pillow and coming so hard I nearly blacked out. I loved those nights too. It was hard to say what my favorite part of Jamie was. I didn't want to admit it out loud, but I was falling in love with him.

Of course I should have known It was too good to last. Of course.

I don't know if it was bad or good, but through some twist of luck, I eventually did find Gray Turner. I guess it had less to do with luck, then with me running into one of the Kappa Pi girls who loved to flirt with me. Turned out she worked at the alumni association, and was more than happy to help. I felt a little guilty for using my status to get what I wanted, but then I figured most of the guys did it all the time. And I really didn't know how else to find him.

For a moment, when I was standing in the alumni office with his current address and phone number on a slip of paper in my hand, I thought about pretending I hadn't found him so I could keep Jamie. I felt horribly selfish, but I honestly didn't know what I was going to do without him. The thought made me sick to my stomach. The part of me that was happy for Jamie fought against the part of me that wanted to cry out in pain. Gray Turner meant Jamie's departure.

In the end I couldn't do it. I couldn't be yet another person who betrayed him. I carried the hated slip of paper home with me and waited in my room, chest aching queerly, for Jamie to get there.

The news that I had found Gray didn't hit Jamie like I expected it to. He was a little bit happy, like I thought he'd be, but he also looked a bit crestfallen. Like a kid who lost their favorite toy. I hoped that look meant he would miss me as much as I was going to miss him. He thanked me, and sat next to me for a long time that night. We talked quietly about mostly nothing. Neither one of us wanted to predict what was going to happen when he finally got his chance to confront the man he had loved. We didn't even want to think about it.

* * * *

It took a lot of nerve, but I decided to it would be best visit Gray in person instead of calling him. I had one hell of a crazy story to tell him, and I had no idea how he was going to take it. I waited until dinnertime, figuring my best shot was to get him to agree to come with me tonight. I definitely didn't want to give him the chance to sleep on the whole thing!

I was lost for a while before I managed to find the swanky apartment building he lived in. It was in an affluent area of downtown, close to designer boutiques and markets selling fancy imported food. I had never really checked this area out. I decided that I didn't really like it. Who wants to feel like they're getting the sidewalk dirty just because they're not walking on it in *Manolos*?

I spun some story for the security guard at his building about being from the Sigma Epsilon historical committee or some crap. I hoped Gray Turner believed it long enough for me to get into his apartment. I was going to have to do some fast talking. My only saving grace was being armed with details about Jamie that only he would know. I had no choice but to make him believe me. It was Jamie's only chance.

The man who opened the door to the spacious pent house apartment had to be seventy years old but was still handsome and well kept in that classic American good looks way. He

looked like he could have stepped out of one of those Ralph Lauren ads where they show those big disgustingly beautiful families lounging in their perfect cape cod surroundings. Yeah. I still hated him. But I had to be nice and get him warmed up before I hit him with the big bomb. I still didn't know how I was going to bring that up.

"Hi, Mr. Turner. My name is Cameron Tate. I'm working on the Sigma Epsilon house history project. We're talking to all the alumni who still live in the area." He looked a bit wary.

"I'll have to be honest, son. I was only in Sigma Ep for a year. I withdrew from the college after that." I struggled to keep my questions light. Just get him talking.

"That's okay, sir. Any little interesting details would be great."

We chit chatted for a minute, but I could see that he wasn't quite buying my story. In fact, I could feel the subtle shift towards the door. I knew he was going to try to get rid of me soon. I had to stop it, or the next thing I knew I'd be out in the hallway and no closer to helping Jamie. I took a deep breath.

"Mr. Turner, I haven't been one hundred percent honest with you." I didn't want to pause very long and give him a chance to kick me out, so I pushed through. "I am in the Sigma Epsilon house and I am doing some research, but there is no historical project. I'm here on my own."

"Kid, you aren't here about the Halloween murder are you? I've been telling people for fifty years that I don't want to discuss it." He looked angry. The subtle push towards the front door became much more noticeable.

"Mr. Turner...Gray. The truth is, I'm here because there's someone we both know, and love, who desperately needs your help." He froze.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Jamie." He didn't even hesitate.

"I think you need to leave," He choked out. Even hearing the name seemed too much for him.

"Mr. Turner, I know this sounds crazy but I'm serious. I know Jamie. He's real. I can prove it to you."

"Jamie Douglas has been dead for fifty years."

"Fifty years tomorrow," I confirmed. His face twisted. I imagined that Halloween must not be his favorite day. He started pushing me towards the door. I had to act quickly.

"Jamie's favorite song is *I only have eyes for you*. He said it used to remind him of the way you looked at each other." I blurted out. "And you went to see Ben Hur at the Egyptian theater on your first real date. You told him Stephen Boyd was one of the first guys you ever had a crush on." He was starting to believe me. I hit him with my ace. "The first time you kissed him was at the dorms, when you guys were talking about your first big Sigma party. *Come softly to me* was playing on the radio." I hoped to hell he remembered that.

I could see Gray's eyes widen. He remembered. He also knew there was no way anyone but him and Jamie had known those things. Gray walked over to a chair in the entrance and sank into it. I was kind of afraid he was having a heart attack or something.

"Jamie," He murmured. The pain was so obvious in his face. Whatever bad choices Gray Turner made, he had loved Jamie. Probably still did.

"Mr. Turner. Jamie needs your help. Will you come with me?" I could barely believe it, but he nodded. "Thank you so much for believing me. Let's go."

* * * *

We were sitting in my room waiting for Jamie, me on my bed, Gray on the armchair in the corner. I could tell he hated being in the house, even more in this room. He kept looking at a spot on the floor. I was pretty sure that's the last place he had ever seen Jamie, but I didn't want to even think about it.

At midnight, Jamie appeared as usual. He smiled a big sunny smile and said, "Hey Cam," before reaching out to brush my cheek in what had become an achingly familiar gesture. He froze when he heard the shocked intake of breath that came from my easy chair. Jamie turned slowly. He wavered for a second before becoming solid again.

"Gray?" The man was obviously older, but there was no mistaking that classic face. Jamie's mouth dropped wide open. Gray looked like he was having a hard time breathing. He opened and closed his mouth a few times before he finally spoke.

"Oh, God, Jamie. I'm so sorry." He had tears running openly down his cheeks.

"Why did you do it, Gray? Why did you say those things?" Jamie was crying too. Gray reached out towards him, but Jamie flinched away.

"God, babe, I don't know." I cringed at the endearment, hating it. I wanted to tell Gray that Jamie was mine now but I knew that would sound insane. "I panicked. I was so insecure and I didn't want the guys to think less of me, so I just put the blame on you and took off. I had no idea they would do what they did." Jamie was getting angry.

"You had to know, Gray. That's the way things were then. They weren't just going to leave it alone." Gray looked down at the floor, shame filling his face. He was crying openly now, reliving the guilt and horror of that night.

"I was coming back to apologize, to tell the truth. To tell you and anyone else who wanted to hear that I loved you. When I got to the room and saw Pete on top of you I started screaming at the top of my lungs, trying to rip him off of you, but it was too late. You were gone."

Jamie shook his head slowly, processing what Gray had told him. Gray looked a little desperate.

"Jamie, you've gotta know that I have thought about that night every single day my entire life. I loved you. That's the truth."

Jamie's face was filled with pain.

"I know you did, Gray. I loved you too. I guess it just wasn't enough."

Jamie started walking towards the door to the room. As he walked, he slowly disappeared.

Oh my god, was that it? Was I never going to see Jamie again? I started to panic, but then realized I had an emotional old man sitting in my room crying, and I needed to get him the hell out of there so I could break down in peace.

"Mr. Turner?" I whispered, afraid to upset him more. "Mr. Turner?" I repeated. "Thank you so much for coming. It was important for Jamie to see you." He wasn't responding to my words, so I went over to him, and put my arm around him, shuffling him to the door.

He sat in my car, eyes glazed over and hands trembling.

"Mr. Turner? Gray? Are you all right?" I knew he wasn't, but I had to say something. Finally he replied.

"You know, I think I might be. I've been waiting to apologize to him for fifty years. It felt good to finally be able to say it." I honestly didn't care about Gray Turner's feelings, I just didn't want to be responsible for him having a massive stroke or something.

"I think it helped Jamie to hear it, too." He smiled a half way smile.

"I hope so. If I can do even one thing for him, then maybe I can earn a little bit of forgiveness." I didn't say anything. What can you say to someone who has felt the guilt of his actions weighing him down for fifty years?

By the time we got to his building, Gray was better and I was in a near state of panic. I needed to get back to the room to see if Jamie was really gone. I didn't want him to be gone, but I knew it was the best thing for him.

I drove way faster than I should have on the way back to the fraternity. Slamming my car door, I sprinted up the front stairs and into the house. I had to control myself while I walked through the house so the guys didn't think I was stranger than they probably already did. Heart pounding, I unlocked my door terrified that I would find nothing on the other side.

I nearly cried with relief when I saw him sitting there waiting for me.

"Jamie," I began, but he put his finger on his lips to shush me.

"Just lay down next to me. I want to watch you fall asleep."

I had a million things to say and was nowhere near sleep, but I did as he asked. I wanted to make him happy. I took my shirt and my jeans off and lay down on the bed next to him. He caressed my skin, relaxing me with his touch like he always did. As impossible as I had thought just minutes earlier, I found myself slowly falling asleep.

* * * *

I woke up to the delicious sensation of an incredibly warm naked man surrounding me. I could feel his breath bathing my neck. My back was cuddled up against his strong chest, his legs and fingers were tangled in mine. My heart was chirping happily even though I didn't understand what was happening. I couldn't understand. The last thing I had seen the night before was Jamie. Jamie who I wanted more than anything, but could never, ever touch.

Jamie who had finally gotten what he needed.

He had found closure, or dealt with his unfinished business. Whatever you want to call it. I didn't know how on earth I was going to get over him.

"Mmmmm, you still smell nice," came a sexy sleep-growly voice from behind me. *His* sexy sleepy voice. I nearly jumped a foot.

"Jamie!" I wasn't sure if I had shouted out loud, but in my head I was screaming. How was he still here? Did we get it wrong? How could I feel him? My frantic exclamation must have woken him all the way. He sat up in bed.

"Cam?" He seemed surprised, too. "How is this...?" He reached out and traced a gentle questioning finger down my chest, barely grazing the skin. That one simple touch made my insides liquefy.

He looked as if he couldn't believe it was real. I knew I didn't get it.

"Jamie, how is this happening? It's daytime. I can see you. I can *touch* you. How...?"

He cocked his head to the side in that familiar thinking gesture, then he gave me an equally familiar wicked grin. I felt like I knew him so well.

"Do you really care how it's happening? All that matters is that it *is* happening." With that he sank his fingers into my hair and pulled my face to his for my first real kiss.

I couldn't believe how it felt to finally touch him. This thing I had been dreaming of, yearning for, for weeks-something I thought I'd never ever have, and here it was. Here *he* was. In my arms.

The feel of his satiny soft lips smiling against mine made me groan. I wanted to laugh out loud from pure joy, love him all over, make him feel every single tingle and shiver that he had made me feel over the past month.

Jamie ran his tongue over my lips, delighting in the sensation of taste, of finally feeling again.

"Your lips are so unbelievably soft," He whispered. "I want to feel every part of you." I shuddered, and opened my mouth, tasting him and pulling him closer. Jamie's tongue explored my mouth tentatively, as if he were afraid I'd disappear.

I wasn't so shy.

I rubbed his tongue with my own, loving his taste, his textures. Wanting to make him moan, I traced his back with my fingers, scraping my nails lightly over his spine. It worked.

Jamie arched into me, his groan low in his throat. It was the hottest sound I had ever heard. That combined with the warmth of his skin made heat melt like lava in my belly. I slipped his leg between mine, and draped my calf around his hips. Writhing and pulling on him, I tried to get him closer. It wasn't close enough. My frustrated little whine made Jamie smile.

He laughed gently and squeezed me in his arms.

"I know. There is no close enough, is there? I want melt into your skin." His words made me want to pounce on top of him. I was frustrated. I didn't think I'd ever get enough of him, but I couldn't believe this new Jamie was here to stay.

"Jamie, what if today's it?" I began. His face clouded, and he put his finger on my lips. But I needed to say it. "Really, Jamie, what if there wasn't some miracle, and today is our only day. I want to be with you, if only this one time."

"Why would today be it? I mean I don't understand..." but then he stopped. "It's today isn't it? I lost track of the days because I was having so much fun getting to know you. Today's Halloween." He looked heartbroken. As if he finally understood what was happening.

"Yeah, it's Halloween. And I thought last night we finally gave you what you needed. I figured you'd be gone by now, but you're still here somehow and now I don't want you to go. I know it's selfish. I'm just going to miss you so much."

"Cam, that's not selfish. I don't want to go either...at least I don't want to leave you. But I can't stay stuck in this room forever, and you can't spend your life talking to someone who isn't really there." He sighed. "I thought seeing Gray would be it. I guess we're back to square one." I was feeling a desperate. I didn't want to spend another second trying to help him go away.

"Jamie, you can't go. Don't you know? I'm falling in love you! I don't care if no one else can see you. You make me happy." I couldn't believe I had actually said it out loud.

"You love me?" He looked incredulous.

"Yes, I love you." I was almost angry and I felt a little irrational. "Do you want me to go shout it in the street, cause I will. I'm not Gray. I'll tell everyone I'm in love with a beautiful ghost, and he's the best thing in my life." I started to get up, but Jamie held on to me, laughing.

"I love you too, my amazing, gorgeous, lunatic." He kissed me with little nibbly kisses all over my lips and nose. "Please don't go running around telling people you're in love with a ghost. I don't want my baby getting carted off in a straight jacket."

I laughed along with him, so happy that it was easy to forget my worries...at least for a minute. Until I felt them tapping on my brain.

"So what if today is it, Jamie? What if we only get Halloween cause you're strongest on the day you died, or it's like international ghost day or something. What if tomorrow you go back to the way you were? Or if we did the right thing and you disappear forever?"

Jamie smiled a bittersweet smile, worried like me, but obviously thankful for whatever he could have. He leaned over, and scraped his teeth along the rim of my ear.

"If I only get this one day, then I'm going to spend it doing exactly what I want. Making the man I love scream for mercy," He breathed into my ear. That one sentence was enough to make me hard.

"Only if I get to make you scream too," I managed to choke out before Jamie sank his teeth into my neck.

We melded together desperately, rubbing our bodies against each other in every place we could manage. His legs were tangled in mine, his hands exploring all the places that made my body want to launch into the solar system. I couldn't have even imagined the sensation. It was even better than the bubbly tingles his touch usually caused. It was insane. I was moaning and shivering. Jamie was panting these sexy little words in my ear.

"Give me more, Cam. I want you closer."

I reached between us and wrapped my hand around both of our leaking erections. I loved that he was so turned on because I was nearly about to explode. I shoved my hips into my fist loving the feel of our slippery shafts rubbing against each other.

“*Fuck.*” Jamie’s eyes rolled back in his head as he swore quietly. I didn’t even think he knew that word, but it sounded so hot when he said it that I nearly came. I anchored my free hand into his unbelievably soft hair and pulled a little roughly.

“Jamie,” I whimpered, to get his attention. I needed his mouth. It was a matter of survival.

His lips came down on mine, his tongue staking out territory. I was his and only his and that was fine with me. I stroked his tongue with mine, matching the rhythm of my hand on our twitching cocks. Between the slick hardness of us pushing together and the heat of our tongues claiming and tasting, I started to lose control. The rush started low, building to an unbelievable crescendo that threatened to explode. I tried to wait for Jamie, but it was futile. I couldn’t take it any more.

I came on a strangled sob, vision going black. It seemed to last forever, the pulsing thunder that was pounding through my body. Jamie arched his back and cried out, hands clutching at the pillow, the blankets, me. Anything he could grab onto. The last thing I remembered was the sensation of his release flooding between us, mingling with mine.

Finally, I came to, panting and grinning, with Jamie’s blissfully exhausted face only centimeters away from mine. He laughed softly and planted a sweet kiss on my bruised lips. Then he gathered me in his arms and pulled me close.

I felt myself drifting to sleep, so exhausted by my explosive orgasm that I could barely keep my eyes open.

“I told you I’d do it,” Jamie whispered.

“Do what?” I replied sleepily.

“Make you scream,” He answered. I could hear the grin in his voice. “But don’t worry if you can’t remember. I’m going to make you do it again.” Even in my exhaustion, his words made me tremble. “Go to sleep for a little while, babe. You’re going to need your energy later.”

He was true to his word.

* * * *

When I woke up an hour or so later it was to the feeling of gentle, slippery fingers massaging the skin around my entrance. All the thousands of little nerve endings in that so sensitive area were singing. I spread my legs and arched my back, giving him more room to play. Jamie chuckled softly.

“My baby wants more,” He murmured, then began to tease me mercilessly, always circling, testing, brushing softly over my eager opening. Never quite giving me what I all of a sudden needed so bad. He kept it up forever. It could have been minutes, it could have been hours. All I knew was he was driving me completely insane.

“Please Jamie, *inside!*” I finally begged. He let me have my way, tenderly slipping one finger into me as he leaned over and sucked on my ear. I cried out and bucked up against him. His hands were such a potent brand of magic. But they were sweet candlelight when I needed a

raging inferno. I reached behind me and pulled him closer, aching to feel his thick hardness replace the teasing softness of his fingers.

He added another finger, stretching my body in the most pleasurable painful way. I had wanted to know for so long what it would feel like to have a man inside of me. I hadn't dared to experiment, but now I knew. It felt fucking amazing. I pushed into his fingers, humping against them. I whimpered, not knowing how to ask, but wanting more. He must have misread my cry.

"Baby, does that hurt? Do you want me to stop?" I made a panicky little noise.

"No, don't stop," I forced out, breathing hard, rolling my hips against his fingers. "I need more...*take me*." He trembled, and pulled his fingers out gently, wrapping me in his arms from behind.

"You sure?" He whispered. I could feel him, hard and hot, dripping onto the small of my back.

"Yes," was all I could manage to say.

I rubbed my slick crack up against him. His breath hitched in his throat, and I felt him reach for the lube he must have found earlier. He popped open the lube, and rubbed it all over himself before adding to the slickness around my entrance.

I rolled completely onto my stomach and pushed up on my elbows, spreading my knees so he could get between them.

"Oh, God Cam," he whispered, dragging a wet finger down the center of my spine before delving into my hole one more time to ready it for him. Then I felt his head pushing inside of me.

He came into me in one slow stroke. Pain, pleasure, and love combined, strong enough to make me cry out. I pushed against him and clenched the muscles inside of me. His moan sounded heavy and slightly out of control.

"Wait, baby. Let me get used to it," He said in a hoarse voice. The white heat swirling through me nearly made me miss his request. When I did, it made me laugh.

"Isn't that supposed to be my line?" My laughter made him moan again, and he shifted his hips, pushing further into me.

"You feel so..." He broke off with a groan. "I just don't want to lose it too quickly," He moved again, rubbing against the spot he had hit when he first came inside of me. I convulsed, and reached behind me to drag him as far in as possible. Then I started to move my hips in circles, grinding him against that amazing spot again and again and again. *Ohmygod, ohmygod...*

He was breathing hard and pumping in little strokes in and out of me, adding to the intense friction. Every time he pushed up against me, I got closer to that edge, but never quite close enough. I sobbed in ecstasy and frustration. Jamie seemed to understand.

Wrapping his hands around my hips and dragging me to my knees, he started pushing harder and faster. I pushed right back, slamming my body into his. At the same time, he reached around to grasp my aching cock. He stroked it while he slammed into me again and again. There was no more of the gentle candlelight. This was definitely fire. And it was going to burn me to the ground.

I only lasted a minute or two more before I came, muscles spasming and head thrown back. Jamie followed me in just a few strokes, forehead resting on my shoulder blade as he cried out his release.

I whimpered softly in protest when I felt him slip out of me, but he pulled me down under the covers and wrapped me in his strong warm arms. I floated there in a pool of bliss, barely able to feel my body, or Jamie's strength around me.

"That was unbelievable," He whispered in my ear, chewing softly on it. "I've never felt anything like it."

"I thought you and Gray had...?"

"We did." Jamie confirmed. "But he was always holding just a little bit back. He never *really* gave me his entire self, body and soul, like you just did. This was the first time I really felt...loved." He looked at me in wonder. I reached up to hold his face and kiss him.

But something funny was happening. His cheek, which had felt so real just seconds before, was kind of tingly and translucent. My eyes widened in horror.

"Jamie, no!" I exclaimed. He mirrored my expression. But mixed with the fear was understanding, dawning slowly.

"I get it now. You're what I was missing all along, Cam. I didn't need you to help me, I just needed you. I needed to feel what it was like to really be loved with no conditions. You did that for me."

He was fading quickly, not even as solid as he had been when we first met. His face looked a little panicky. I felt like I was dying. How could the universe do this? Find someone for me to love and have that love be the reason they left forever? I wanted to scream at the stars.

"Cam, I don't want to go!" Jamie sounded distant. He reached out to touch me, but his hand slipped right through my body. He was nothing more than a slight glow.

"I love you!" I cried, even though I couldn't see him at all. I knew he was still there, if only for a second more.

"*I love you, too.*" It was a far off whisper, barely discernable in the air.

And then there was nothing.

* * * *

The late November rain was chilly and penetrating. It seemed to seep through all my layers of clothes, right to my already too cold skin. It seemed impossible these days to get warm enough. I was trudging to work on a regular Tuesday. I felt dark and gloomy. I had felt dark and gloomy every single day since he had left.

Every day when I woke up, I thought *maybe today*. Maybe today I'll feel better. Maybe today I won't miss him so much that my chest aches. Maybe this will be the day it'll all be okay. So far that day hadn't come. Obviously three weeks wasn't going to cut it. I felt barely alive. I went to class, sort of ate, and slept a lot. Most nights I woke up, sweating, but there was never anyone in my room. Never anyone whispering my name.

I found myself looking for little clues, hoping for a sign that he was still there. Moved mail, a neatly made bed, that remembered feeling that he was watching over me. I desperately wanted to feel it, but honestly there was nothing. He really was gone. I was glad that I had made him finally feel loved but I wished that my consequence wouldn't suck so much.

I hung up my raincoat in the back room of the coffee shop, and wrapped my green apron around my waist. I sighed, not looking forward to a long shift on a dark wet night when the place would be dead. I tried to avoid situations when I could spend too much time thinking.

As predicted, the first two hours of my shift crawled by at the speed of evolution. I think I may have had a total of ten customers. Not exactly the kind of night that was a good distraction from my general sad and awful mood.

I had actually gotten one of my textbooks out and was studying when I heard the bell go off signaling a new customer. Finally, something to do! I put down my book, and looked up at the customer coming in. He had that newbie look. The ones that are intimidated by all the foreign words and too many choices.

"Uh, can I have a hot cocoa?" He asked. Poor kid. He looked so nervous. I wondered what was wrong. He was cute. Maybe eighteen or nineteen, sandy hair, looking at his toes like he'd like to disappear. I felt sorry for him.

"Sure thing. What size?"

"Uh, medium?" I chuckled. I hoped it didn't sound mean. I held up two cups and he pointed at one of them.

"Grande it is." The boy smiled shyly and lifted his head to look at me.

It was the first time I got a good look at him as well. I stared frozen for a second then I literally dropped the cup I had in my hand, not caring about the milk that splattered all over the floor.

It was *him*. Different face, taller, light hair...I didn't care. It was still him. It had to be. There was something in his eyes. They were a soft caramel brown instead of blue, but they seemed so achingly familiar. Was I finally going crazy from missing him so much?

"Jamie?" My voice shook. If I was wrong this kid was going to think I was nuts. He'd probably be right. The kid hesitated for a second, wringing his hands together. Then he smiled, looking relieved. My heart filled so quickly, I could feel it in my chest.

"They call me Justin now, but yeah it's me. I had to find you." He reached out and laid his hand on mine where it lay trembling on the counter. *Oh my god.*

"Shannon, can I take my break please?" I managed to squeak out. My manager was looking at us with a curious grin. I could tell I was going to get grilled to hell and back the next time we were alone. I gave her a pleading look.

"Go ahead, Cam," Shannon answered. She looked Jamie up and down and then raised her eyebrows. At least one part of the story must have been painfully obvious. I could almost hear the closet door slamming open, but honestly I didn't even care. I'd jump out of it with both feet. Somehow, by some crazy ass miracle, Jamie was back.

I dragged him into the break room, not caring what rules I was flagrantly ignoring. The first thing I did when we were alone was pull him into my arms. Even though the body was different, it felt perfect. Like coming home after the longest, most awful day imaginable. He

cupped my face in his hands and kissed me. The long weeks since he left seemed to shrink until they disappeared. Finally I pulled back. I had to know.

"How?" Jamie took a deep breath.

"To make an enormously long story short, Justin," He gestured at himself "killed himself." I couldn't help but raise my eyebrows at the irony. Jamie made a face as if to say 'I know, huh?' and then he continued. "The doctors were reviving him, but the kid honestly didn't want to go back. I had made a big enough pain in the ass of myself trying to get them to let me come back to you that they decided I could go in his place. Apparently it's almost never done." There were so many questions I had. I decided on one of the easier ones.

"What about his parents?" He chuckled softly.

"They think their son is a bit, um, different after what he went through."

"I'll say," I shook my head. I couldn't even begin to wrap my brain around what he had just told me. I decided it was something I'd just have to take on faith.

Instead of delving into what happened in the great beyond, I asked another easy question. "How old are you?" I gestured at his body. He chuckled.

"Nineteen. Funny, huh?" I nodded, a tentative smile cracking on my face. It was literally like Jamie got to start where he had so violently left off. Poetic justice if I'd ever heard it.

"And you're here to stay?" Jamie (who I'd never think of as Justin) grinned.

"I'm here as long as you want me."

At that moment I realized any other questions were irrelevant. I pulled him back into my arms. I wanted him there forever.

M.J. O'Shea has been writing romance since algebra class in sixth grade (when most of her stories starred her and Leonardo DiCaprio). When she's not writing, she loves listening to nearly all types of music, painting, reading great authors, and on those elusive sunny days in the Pacific Northwest, she loves driving on the freeway with her windows rolled down and her stereo on high.

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