

KRISTEN
HEITZMANN

A vertical needle is positioned in the center of the cover, with a tangled mass of red thread behind it. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of light colors.

INDIVISIBLE

A NOVEL

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INDIVISIBLE

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*To my precious family:
you guys are everything.*

One

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

—MARK 10:9, KING JAMES VERSION

Wrapped in a woolen throw, Jonah stared out through moon-silvered evergreen spires. He drew in the clean, sharp air of the rugged mountains, the piercing stars visible to an amazing depth, the sickle moon casting the clearing in stark relief. He had not expected to sleep—didn't dare with memories tugging so hard.

He shut his eyes and let the night enclose him. The chilled tip of his nose stung as he breathed the piquant scents of wild grasses, earth, and pine, a heady overlay with a hint of moisture condensing in the cold and dark.

The beam above moaned with the motion of the porch swing, a rhythmic counterpart to the rushing creek out of sight in the dark except for flashes of white where water struck rock. He felt something brush against his hand and looked down. A white, powdery moth fluttered at the lighted face of his watch. The fluffy *whoosh* of an owl passed, a silent shadow in search of a small, beating heart.

His pulse made a low throb in his ears. He moved the breath in and out through his lungs, filling his senses easier than stilling the thoughts.

Somewhere in the rocky crags a coyote yipped, one of the few predators that had enlarged its range in spite of human encroachment, a bold and canny cohabiter, bearing ever bolder offspring. A long howl sailed into the night, a territorial declaration, signaling roving males to stay away, any females to come hither. He pressed up from the swing and leaned on the rail, trying to get a bead on the coyote's location. After a time, he turned and went inside.

Piper loved morning, the brightness, the cleanness of a new day. But morning started with the sunrise, not when the sky was still black and the room shivery. She burrowed her feet deeper beneath the down comforter, avoiding the inevitable for one more moment. It was too brief a moment.

She crabbed her hand across the lace-covered bedstand and stopped the alarm on the cell phone before it could nag her. She would do her own nagging, as she had ever since she'd realized no one else intended to. Not that they didn't care, just that she was on her own when it came to responsibility, reliability, accountability.

She groomed, and dressed without shedding the film of sleep. Just a few years ago she could have slept all day—if she'd let herself. She slipped on her jacket and turned up the collar, switched on the iPod in her pocket and inserted the ear buds. Enya's "Only Time" accompanied her out the door.

The first gasp of cold air pierced her fog. She drew a flashlight from the other pocket and trudged behind the beam down the steep path, weaving through the pines. Even August nights lost the days' warmth to the thin mountain atmosphere, which the sun would heat once again.

Streaks of deep magenta broke through the black tree silhouettes, announcing dawn, but around her, darkness clung. Over the music, she detected the rushing of Kicking Horse Creek, which paralleled the main street through Old Town. Neither dark and muddy nor sluggish and green, the creek ran frothy white and clear down to the rocky bed.

She couldn't see it from the path even if the sun were up, but its voice carried up the stony crags as she picked her way down the steepest stretch of the path. Her nostrils constricted. She slapped a hand to her mouth and nose to block a putrid scent carried on the sharp air. She swung her light, and the beam caught a furry mound of carnage. She hurried past, gagging.

The path ended behind the Half Moon, but she continued on to the next door, unlocked the bakery, and let herself into Sarge's kitchen. Soon, warm, yeasty aromas tinged with almond, vanilla, and cinnamon banished the dead animal stench in her nostrils. She had memorized the recipes the first week, easy enough as Sarge had served the same eight

things since opening the bakery thirty years ago. After twenty years in army kitchens, he saw no need for variety in the mess.

She hadn't baked before, but she'd taken to it, and with a little freedom, the slightest leeway, she might shine. But three weeks into the job, she had yet to sneak a variation by Sarge or convince him to feature anything not indelibly written on the dusty menu board.

She lifted and folded the dough over the plump, rum-soaked raisins, tucking them in like well-fed babies under a fluffy blanket, then put them to bed in the nice warm oven. Down for their nap, just like yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that. Sweet little raisin rolls, just the way Sarge liked them.

She closed the oven, moved to the other end of the counter, and checked the measuring cup in which she had sprinkled yeast over warm water and whisked in sour cream and sugar. Cutting together flour, butter, and salt, she glanced quickly toward the door. No Sarge yet.

She combined the ingredients to make a coarse dough that when properly rolled and folded should bake into lovely light croissants—*not* something Sarge could envision. The back door banged. He came in, hung his red plaid coat on the hook, and turned his head like a vulture's on the end of his question-mark spine. She did hurt for him. The photo in the front of the store showed a strong, military physique. It couldn't be easy to curl up like a lemon rind in the sun.

"Good morning, Sarge."

"Humph." His sunken eyes peered down his long bulbous nose. Lucky he had rank or his moniker might have been Beak. Or Gonzo. Sarge fit, although he didn't look capable of any spit-flecked rants today. Lately his pain had been bad enough to reduce the rages to sarcastic skirmishes of parleyed insults she could swear he enjoyed. She'd even imagined a glimmer of relief, once or twice, that she was there.

"Are those the currant scones?"

"Already baking. The rolls too."

He toddled toward her, hands bent at his chest like a bald eaglet just out of the egg. He scowled. "What is it this time?"

She checked her surprise. "Gruyère and sun-dried tomato croissants."

“Not in my store.” He pushed through the swinging door to the front.

She stared after him. Progress. He’d asked what she was making, not accused her of stealing the ingredients.

Breathing the honey scent of beeswax, Tia lowered the candles into the clear amber liquid, curbing her natural impatience. Any pause or jerk would leave a flaw each ensuing dip would reinforce. She worked hard to keep her hand steady. Dipping tapers had trained her in self-control better than any scolding instructor.

She raised the wooden bar looped with six double wicks. As soon as the air touched the wax, it paled to ocher. She fitted the bar onto the side braces to cool the tapers before lowering them again, each plunge having the potential to reclaim with greedy heat what solidity the cool air had bestowed. The life metaphor struck her again. The destructive power of pain; the strength of endurance. She would give them all they needed to stand strong, even though their fate was to burn away, the glow and aroma of their passing a benediction.

A knock brought her out of her thoughts, and she wended through the dim shop where little by little she had replaced the former knickknacks with candles, scented oils, and hand-thrown melting pots. She looked around, satisfied that nothing she saw was made in China. “Just a sec,” she called through the door, tangling with the keys since she hadn’t opened yet.

“Try this.” Piper raised the drooping croissant.

Tia bit into the buttery, melted-cheesy pastry, savoring a chewy tang of sun-dried tomatoes and fresh basil. She leaned her shoulder to the door-jamb and sighed. Not all Piper’s creations worked, but this one. . . . “Mmm.”

“You like it?”

“Oh yeah.”

“You’re not just encouraging me because you hope I’ll get better if I keep trying?”

“No, it’s really—”

Piper snatched the croissant out of her hands, turned the bitten end

around in the parchment, and held it out to someone else. “Try something new?”

Tia leaned out far enough to see the person approaching. Lanky in jeans, mountain boots, and brown leather jacket bearing the police department emblem, he looked as ragged as a night spent with Johnny Walker, though she didn't smell it on him, had not, in fact, for years. Even so, every muscle in her hardened—a visceral reflex as automatic as breathing.

He said, “Excuse me?”

His features were edged, and in an instant she realized what day it was.

“The croissant.” Piper flashed her sunny smile.

“Oh. No. Thanks.”

“One bite,” Piper cajoled, a hypnotic maneuver she had mastered. “And your honest opinion.”

He took a bite and chewed slowly, the muscles rippling along his jaw. “What are the red things?”

“Sun-dried tomatoes.” Piper bit her lower lip.

“Taste a little fishy.”

“The gods speak,” Tia muttered.

“Fishy?”

“They're not fishy, Piper.” Tia folded her arms. “A little tangy maybe.”

His gaze flicked over, weighing, measuring her. He must have been doing something in his official capacity, but she didn't care what. Sometimes they went weeks without crossing paths, but every time the encounter arced between them like a chemical adhesion, the two parts of epoxy that did fine until combined, then interacted toxically.

“People who know sun-dried tomatoes will expect that flavor.” She spoke to Piper, but her eyes were locked with Jonah's.

“I'm sure you're right.” He held the pastry out.

“No.” Tia raised her hands. “By all means, finish it.” She backed into the shop and closed and locked the door, returning to complacent tapers that had forgotten the burn of the wax.

Jonah winced at the sharp report of the door. Tia. Turning, he caught the look of surprise on the young blonde. He had no intention of explaining. “Here.” He tried to return the croissant, but Piper shook her head.

“Do you like it? Would you buy it?”

“You can’t sell—”

“If you like it, you could tell Sarge. Maybe he’d let me try a different thing or two.”

Now he placed her—Sarge’s new baker. No wonder she had the look of a puppy afraid of getting her nose swatted but wanting to please all the same. “Okay.” He started past.

“So, hey. Are you a cop?”

“Chief of police. Can I help you?”

“Who’s responsible for dead things?”

Caught unprepared, his adrenaline surged.

“There’s something on the path between Tia’s house and shop. Who’s responsible for cleaning it up?”

Something, not someone. His chest eased. “I’ll take a look.”

Most days he battled the boredom of policing Redford. This wasn’t most days. He turned off the street and cut over to the path. Realizing he still held the croissant, he folded the tissue around it and shoved it into his jacket pocket, then turned upslope until he found what she was talking about by smell before sight.

A raucous white and iridescent blue-black magpie flew up as he stopped several feet from the carcass. A raccoon. But then he realized there were two, only...they weren’t.



Annoyed when Piper tapped once more, Tia opened the door less magnanimously.

“Oh...my...gosh.” Piper all but quivered. “Who is he?”

“Jonah Westfall.”

Piper searched her face. “What—did he arrest you or something?”

“Don’t be silly.” No surprise Piper had picked up on it. His mere presence had curdled her mood.

“There are cute guys in town, but he’s smokin’.”

No way was she having this discussion. “Does Sarge know you’re out here? I can’t give you the room for free, so I suggest you don’t get fired.” Tia started back to her candles.

“Oh, he threatens, but he won’t do it.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure. Sarge has never allowed anyone in his kitchen before.”

“I know.” Piper followed her. “He’s told me about a thousand times. But about Jonah—”

“I have four orders to fill before I open shop.”

“Come on, Tia. Tell me.”

Tia felt the tapers, then lowered and lifted them once more. “This is a delicate process.” One she had done so often she could do it comatose. A bachelor of science and a master’s degree, and here she was dipping candles.

Piper watched, then surveyed the workshop as she always did, her gaze roving over the shelves of glass bottles with herbs in oils, dried fruits and berries, blocks of wax and bolts of wick. “This is great. You must love what you do.”

“I enjoy it. I wouldn’t say love.”

“Well, what do you love?” Piper peaked her eyebrows like an imp. “A certain rugged lawman?”

Once again it surprised her how freely Piper barged in. They’d known each other what, three weeks? “You’ve gone from silly to ridiculous.”

Piper leaned her palms on the table. “Why? Is he married?”

Tia slid her a dark glance. “Did he look married?”

“Good point.”

Tia straightened. “Now I need to work. And you need to get back before Sarge declares you AWOL.”

“I’m going.” Piper pressed open the back door but called, “To be continued.”

“Or not,” Tia called after her.

Two

In the arithmetic of love, one plus one equals everything,
and two minus one equals nothing.

—MIGNON McLAUGHLIN

Breathing through his mouth, Jonah deposited the plastic-wrapped animals into the back of his Bronco. Department of Wildlife dealt with off-season poaching and protected species. Raccoons were neither, and if he'd left them, coyotes or cougars would have made quick work of them. Lucky the girl had seen them as soon as she had.

He closed the hatch and entered the side of the municipal building that was the police station. They had one interrogation room, one holding cell used only until they had enough staff to transport a detainee, no forensic lab, and the morgue was in the funeral home. Serious felonies went to the county court. Critical evidence, to the state lab. He had no critical evidence. He wasn't even sure he had a crime.

Passing reception and dispatch, he waved to Ruth, whose narrow head and slender shoulders bloomed into doughy arms and bosom, as though someone had mismatched her body parts. He found Adam Moser writing reports in the cubicle he shared with a second scheduled officer. With a force of five officers plus him, at least one position short in his opinion, they juggled twelve-hour shifts with additional hours on call and still had all the night and some day shifts with single coverage.

The top of Moser's head looked like a polished brown river rock rimmed by a dense black moss with flecks of silver. His long brown neck met straight shoulders, crisply uniformed. His handwriting looked typed. With features more Denzel Washington than Tyler Perry, Moser had it all together.

"Hey, Moser." Jonah gave him a nod.

"Morning, Chief."

"You get anything unusual last night?"

Moser pursed his lips. "Pretty much the norm."

"Nothing about kids playing at cult stuff?"

Moser frowned. "No. Why?"

Jonah told him about the raccoons.

"Two raccoons tear each other up, and why is that our concern?"

Moser asked in his measured elocution.

"Because they were connected."

"Tied up?"

"No." Jonah had squatted down and inspected the carnage at closer range than he would have liked. "The animals were sewn together."

"Sewn? With what?"

"Some kind of thread. Through skin and muscle."

"How'd they manage that on two live raccoons?"

Jonah shrugged. "Must have knocked them out. Then they woke up and went crazy, tearing themselves apart. I have them in the back of my Bronco if you want to see."

"I'm good." Moser shifted in his chair.

"I'm running them by the vet."

"Clinic's open again?"

"As of last month."

"I gotta get Marlene down for her shots."

Jonah nodded, unsure Moser had quite grasped the implications of the raccoon thing. People who made animals suffer didn't usually stop there.

He rolled down his windows and drove with as much wind in his face as he could manage while approximating the speed limits to the animal hospital at the outskirts of Redford. He had only heard last week that someone new had opened up, and he hoped they'd make a go of it. Not all the local population was as assiduous about pet care as Moser. Even those who didn't go in for torture.

He braked for a car pulling out of the clinic driveway and turned in. He'd be glad to get the rank package out of his vehicle. No receptionist manned the front desk. The vet would be lucky to cover costs without paying another wage.

He touched the bell on the counter, and a blond woman came out of the back room. Early to midthirties. Average height, decent looks. She appeared to have some kind of hip injury that caused an uneven gait, but she gave him a level appraisal.

“Can I help you?”

The name tag on her white coat read DR. LIZ RAINER. “I’m Police Chief Jonah Westfall. I was hoping you could have a look at something, but maybe...”

“Your horse threw a shoe?”

He pulled a smile. “Actually, my Bronco’s got tires.”

“Is something injured?”

“It’s a little past doctoring. And it’s...gruesome.”

She drew herself up. “I’m assuming we’re not talking human.”

“No, I have a coroner for those deaths.”

“Okay then.” She came through the gate. “Show me.” She preceded him out to his vehicle.

“You may want to hold your breath. They didn’t die fast.” He opened up the back, then, giving her a warning glance, tore open the garbage bag. The smell was a force, excrement and gore. He should have pulled the bag out of the car first. But he didn’t want her to have to bend to the ground to examine them. “Can you tell me what you see?”

She pressed her lips together, more sadness than repulsion in her eyes. “The damage seems to be to their sides.”

“Look closer. Where the fur is shaved. Sorry. If you don’t mind.”

“Stitching?” She looked up. Her right eye twitched. “Not a natural predator.”

He understood the effort it took her to stay calm. “Have you seen much cult activity with animals?”

“Not really.”

“But you’d know what to look for?”

“I wouldn’t look for stitching.”

He nodded. “That’s what I thought too. Well, thanks. What do I owe you?”

She shrugged. "Consider it a service, and pass the word that I'm here."

"I told an officer this morning. He'll be by with his pug, Marlene."

Back inside, Liz watched the police chief drive away. He'd seemed sensitive and trustworthy beneath his startling good looks. Most people would not get past the surface, but she always looked inside, searching for the best—and the worst. It was inside that mattered, the substance of a person.

"He's nice."

Though quiet as a ghost, Lucy seldom caught her by surprise, their bond so tight she sensed her before hearing her. Liz nodded without looking away from the window. Lucy was never fooled by appearances. The chief had substance.

"Would you like to meet him?" Liz murmured.

"Don't tease."

"Really." She watched the Bronco stop at the street, then pull out. She'd recognized in Chief Westfall an acquaintance with grief, lodged in the faint lines around his eyes, the creases beside his mouth. Maybe he would understand. "I think you could."

"Not like this. No one should see me like this." The pitch of Lucy's voice rose. "And I'm afraid. So afraid."

"You don't have to be." She turned at her soft crying. "It's all right."

"No," Lucy wailed. "How can it be?"

She hated it when Lucy cried, the way it tugged as though the sorrow lodged inside her as well. "Do you trust me?"

Lucy sniffed. "How can I not trust my own sister?"

How indeed? Raw emotion caught her. "You know I won't let anything happen to you."

She waited, but Lucy didn't answer.

Jonah drove with all the windows open to the office and left them open in the lot even though he'd recently cautioned Officer Sue Donnelly not to leave her vehicle unsecured. The smell would be deterrent enough for any thief. He went inside, and Ruth put a hand to her nose.

"Not to be rude, Jonah—"

"I know."

"Moser's on the clock. Why don't you go home and shower?"

He had intended to type his report while the details were fresh, but, as with the smell, he doubted they'd fade anytime soon. He turned around and drove home. The shower took the smell out of his skin and hair but didn't help much with the residual in his sinuses. He changed into a spare uniform and went back to the office.

Ruth sighed with relief as he approached, ending with a giggle.

"Yeah, yeah. Next time I'll let you all handle it."

"I must have heard Moser wrong," she called after him. "I thought he said the raccoons were sewn together."

He entered the office without answering. He'd like to keep that quiet for a while and figured there was at least a ten percent chance he could. He filled in the report and filed it in open cases, animal cruelty—the closest classification he could make.

After he brought his computer out of hibernation, he scoured all the local incidents involving animals, widening his region to include not just the county but adjoining counties as well. The incidents he found involved baiting or neglect. Unlicensed or out-of-season hunting. One wrongful butchering. None mentioned joining.

It could be nothing more than a sick prank, and he'd ignore it except for the eerie nature of the deed. Animal cruelty could indicate dangerous pathologies, and in this there had been intent and premeditation. There'd been surgical prep. The person who did this had not merely intended the creatures to fight but to tear their own flesh apart. He would have the thread analyzed and receive results in a month or two.

He looked up when Moser came in.

"Just letting you know I'm going home."

That time already? No wonder his back felt petrified. As chief, he

made his own schedule but often worked longer hours than the others. Determining the direction and strategic mission of the department, managing his people, coordinating assets, and allocating resources kept him plenty busy, but he still maintained hands-on interaction with his officers and the people they protected. He stayed abreast of serious crimes and handled many of them himself.

The raccoon thing was just weird enough to warrant his attention before passing it off. And it took his mind off the rest. The day was almost over, and it wouldn't be back for another year. His hands clenched. His nostrils flared. Not now.

He forced his focus back to the research, but there wasn't that much more he could learn, so he locked up and drove slowly through Old Town. The shops were closed up for the night, but he saw lights at the Half Moon. He parked and stared a long moment, then made his way around to the back and rapped his knuckles on the door. He heard shuffling, then her voice.

"Who is it?"

At least she was cautious.

"Me."

"Could you be more specific?"

"Open up, Tia."

She cracked open the door, frowning. "What?"

"Can I talk to you?"

"As Police Chief?"

"Partly."

She pressed her forehead to the door and pulled it open, the epitome of reluctance. A lambent glow from a dozen candles honeyed her mahogany hair and olive skin. Dark brows arched over onyx eyes, reflecting the flames.

He said, "I don't think you should be working past dark."

Her eyes narrowed. "You're giving me a curfew?"

"I just don't think you should stay here after dark and walk home alone."

"Why not?"

Because someone had ceremoniously slaughtered animals on her walking path? “I saw something that concerns me.”

“Something...”

He shook his head. “I’d rather not go into it.”

“Look, Jonah—”

“I’m just saying don’t be out alone right now.”

“But you’re not saying why.” She braced her hands on her hips. Even with her small frame and stature, no one could mistake her strength. “If you won’t give me more than your opinion, I can’t make an informed decision.”

“You could trust my opinion.”

She tipped her head back, forking both hands into her lion’s mane, and scrutinized him. “You look awful.”

“Yeah, well.” She knew what day it was. Because he’d kept up a good professional front, no one else had noticed, at least not commented. But this was Tia, who never withheld comment. “I’ll walk you home if you’re ready.”

“I’m doing my accounting.”

“You can do it in the daylight.”

Again the hands to the hips. “Tell me why you’re worried.”

“Can’t you ever just take advice?” He matched her glare, then backed down. He was probably blowing it out of proportion. Seeing her this morning had kept her too near the surface, a bad idea on any day. A worse one today. “Fine. Lock the door behind me.”

“Of course.” Just enough barb to make it sting.

He drove home to his cabin tucked away from both the new, sprawling mansions and the little, old Victorians like Tia’s. He removed his jacket and weapon belt, locked his sidearm and backup in the gun safe, then opened the collar of his shirt and entered the den. From the corner shelf he took the bottle of Maker’s Mark and rubbed its dustless surface.

He ran his thumb down the label, removed the stopper, and slowly passed the throat beneath his nose. The spirits rose up and constricted his nostrils. His taste buds quickened, saliva glands moistening with antic-

ipation. He imagined the fluid in his throat, remembered the heat like it was yesterday.

Today of all days that heat would comfort, fogging the memories that filled his mind in stark relief. He would welcome the fog, deep, deadening. The voice of desire whispered in his ears.

“You do not control me,” he whispered back, closed it up, and set it on the shelf.

In the bedroom he undressed and collapsed onto the bed. Almost over. Just a few more hours.



With Jonah’s uneasiness pricking her nerves, Tia made her way up the wooded path. Had he invented an excuse to see her alone, or was his concern real? He’d offered to walk her home, a troubling thought at the best of times. She jerked a glance over her shoulder when a pine cone fell from a tree, then expelled her breath.

She moved on, annoyed with herself as much as Jonah. She reached the side street and yelped, pressing a hand to her chest when Piper slipped out of the shadows beside her.

“Sorry!” Piper clasped her hands to her chest. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Her own fault for letting Jonah get to her. “What are you doing out here?”

“Going...home.”

Tia released her breath. “I thought you were inside already.” Rising as early as she did, Piper had been early to bed as well, like the bright-breasted finches that disappeared at sundown and popped up again with the dawn.

“A bunch of us were playing Cranium at Java Cava.”

“Oh.” Tia climbed the single porch step. “I guess I’m just jumpy.”

“Because of the chief?”

Tia stiffened. “What do you mean?”

“I saw him leaving the shop.”

Great. She unlocked the house door. “He doesn’t think it’s smart to be out alone after dark. He was cautioning people.” Except, it appeared, Piper’s crowd. Had she been personally targeted by whatever he saw? No, he would have told her that. It was his hypervigilance, and it made her crazy.

Piper followed her in. “Did he say what happened?”

“He didn’t give me any details, just said we shouldn’t be out. Would you like some tea?” She went to the kitchen and dropped several tight knots of jasmine pearls into two mugs, then put the kettle on to boil. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. Jonah had seemed genuinely shaken. As he’d stood across from her in the candlelight, she had glimpsed the rumple-haired boy in a trouble-hardened face.

Her first memory of Jonah was at the top of a slide, knees drawn to his chest, the other kids griping from the ladder for him to go already. His eyes had looked enormous until she realized the sockets from his eyebrows to his cheekbones were bruised purple. He’d looked at her and slid to the bottom, then sprang lightly to his feet.

“What happened to your eyes?”

“Mom stomped the brakes too quick. I hit the dashboard.”

“Didn’t you wear your seat belt?”

He shrugged. *“Why bother?”*

Years later she’d realized what he meant.

She shook herself. He’d delivered his warning, and she had passed it to Piper. She poured the steaming water over the pearls and handed Piper her mug. Lifting her own, she inhaled the exotic fragrance of the gray-green leaf buds unfurling in the cup.

She looked past her reflection on the window to the black night outside and remembered another blacker night. Lord, it had been grim, had tainted so much afterward. No wonder he’d looked so wretched today. Could she not have been kind?

She shook her head. If she gave him anything, showed any weakening, he would use it.

Piper came up beside her, ghostlike in the glass. “Are you all right?”

“Just tired. I guess I shouldn’t work so late.” She sipped her brew and savored the mellow flavor. She’d leave at a reasonable hour from now on.

“You could have played with us. I wish I’d thought to come get you.”

“I’m too competitive for big group games.” As a child she had won at a rate that endeared her to no one. “I prefer Parcheesi with a mug of tea and a fire crackling in the fireplace.” Purely the luck of the dice.

“What’s the scent on the waxed pine cones?” Piper’s eyes glittered.

Tia drew a breath, almost smelling it as she said, “Butterscotch.”

“Perfect.” Piper laughed.

Okay, it was nice having her, even if she pushed and pried. They sat and talked until Piper’s yawns grew contagious.

As Tia went up to bed, Jonah’s troubled face pursued her. What could have bothered him enough that he felt the need to warn her? She shouldn’t have been rude, not this day especially, but she couldn’t stop it. She blamed him for so much. And he deserved it.