

Never Gonna Give You Up (An Excerpt from)  
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We're no strangers to love  
You know the rules and so do I  
A full commitment's what I'm thinking of  
You wouldn't get this from any other guy  
I just want to tell you how I'm feeling  
Gotta make you understand

Never gonna give you up  
Never gonna let you down  
Never gonna run around and desert you  
Never gonna make you cry  
Never gonna say goodbye  
Never gonna tell a lie and hurt you

We've known each other for so long  
Your heart's been aching but  
You're too shy to say it  
Inside we both know what's been going on  
We know the game and we're gonna play it  
And if you ask me how I'm feeling  
Don't tell me you're too blind to see

Never gonna give you up  
Never gonna let you down  
Never gonna run around and desert you  
Never gonna make you cry  
Never gonna say goodbye  
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Never gonna let you down  
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Never gonna make you cry  
Never gonna say goodbye  
Never gonna tell a lie and hurt you

I push the fork into the back of my hand, happy for the pain and for the tiny pinpricks of blood. Somehow, it makes the screams lighter, fading them into the background of the cafeteria. It would've been so easy to leave with him, it'd been what I wanted, but instead, I am here. I put up with Cassie Goodman's bullshit and now she's dead. And so is he.

My boyfriend is dead.

I let go of the fork and hear it clatter as it hits the ground. The screams are bright and loud again like buzzing hornets in my head. They echo around the school's cafeteria, the anguish of the injured, the moans of the dying. There are new sounds now. Shouts of men in uniforms, the acrid smell of metal and death.

There isn't a choice anymore.

I pick up the gun from the cafeteria table. It still has his blood on it, but somehow that gives me the comfort I need. For a moment, I can see Dylan's face from our last night together, the look of calm easing his features one last time. He told me he loved me then when he came inside of me.

I love him, too. Forever.

"Never gonna give you up," I whisper to no one.

I place it in my mouth and pull the trigger.

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Dylan's eyes twinkle with mischief as he gazes at me. We are out back in the garage, of course, our own slacker's paradise. He passes me the joint and I inhale just a little although I'm not very good.

“Deeper, Holly,” he says, gently pulling the joint out from between my fingers. “You’ve got to take it into your lungs and hold it there.” Dylan places the small misshapen joint between his lips and breathes deeply. Little smoke escapes while he holds his breath - his face goes red, but he doesn’t cough. He’s like an old pro at this and as he tries to pass the joint back to me, I push his hand away. I don’t want it anymore. It’s not the reason why I come to the garage anyhow. I come here to be with him, but he’s not aware of that. Not yet at least.

I shift my weight on the worn out plaid recliner. It came out of his grandmother’s house before his mom got remarried to Mr Asshole. Dylan sits on an old army trunk toking on his spliff. He seems happier than usual today.

“What’s up with you?” I scuff my converse sneakers across the concrete floor and play with the tiny frayed threads of my jeans. My dad’s girlfriend would be pissed that I ripped the knee out of another pair of jeans, but I hated her anyhow.

“I got a text from my brother.” Dylan’s eyes are alight with happiness. “He’s out for good in another few weeks. He says I can live with him. How cool is that?” He’s practically tapping his feet with wild abandonment.

I didn’t know a lot about Dylan’s brother. He had been a lot older than us when we were kids, but I knew he had joined the army to escape Mr Asshole. That hadn’t been good for Dylan, who then became the focal point of Mr Asshole’s anger. We’d been ten at the time, that’s when Dylan started to flee to the garage. And that’s when I had, too. That had been six years ago. And here we are, the same, but not.

I didn’t expect to fall in love with him.

“Oh yeah?” I don’t have a better reply and the shock is slowly working its way through my system. He’s leaving. I can feel the pain in my stomach and it threatens to call up the tears, but I won’t let it. I’ve learned how to mask the pain so instead I toss my inky black hair over my shoulder and look at the chipped purple nail polish on my fingernails.

“What?” There’s a slight edge in his voice.

I gaze at him for a minute. My eye follows the edge of his spiky hair and continues to travel down past his vivid blue eyes, the smattering of freckles on his nose, and further still down his face to where his frown sits ugly on his chin. He isn’t classically handsome – boyish would be a better description. Tall and boyish and immature, but mine. At least he was until two minutes ago.

“Nothing.” I look away from him.

I stare around the garage and look at all the things that have been collected in our private little space. Dylan’s brother’s old ‘80s band posters that Dylan put up, boxes of old car parts, a workout bench that no one ever uses, and more cans of paint than any one garage should have. Still, I like the smell of the place and the comfort of being here with Dylan in the dim, dirty light filtering through the broken window pane. It feels like home.

“No, it’s not nothing. What’s the matter?” he asks. Dylan stubs out the joint in a hideously orange ashtray and gets up from his perch on the army trunk, sauntering over to me.

I can’t handle my emotions. It’s all high highs and low lows and right now I feel low, but not catatonic. It’s a frenetic sorrow that I know he won’t understand because I’m just a stupid girl. A stupid teenage girl in love with her best friend who can’t even see her. It’s pathetic. I look down at the silver rings on my fingers, chewing on the ridge of my thumbnail.

“Holly, stop,” he says angrily as he rips my thumb out of my mouth. He can get like that sometimes – gentle one moment, furious the next. He holds my wrist and yanks me to my feet. I feel awkward and panicky and refuse to look him in the eye. It just makes him more frustrated and he transfers his hold from my wrist to my shoulders, but it doesn’t hurt. Yet, the damn tears still come.

“Aww, come on, for fuck’s sake, what is the problem already?” he asks. And then it’s like a light bulb goes off and he changes, his ire fading away with each passing second. He looks crestfallen, perhaps apprehensive. “Did I hurt you?” He takes my wrist in his hand and rubs it between his palms. “Tell me.” Concern flits across his face, but it’s more than that. He looks scared.

I want to rip my hand out of his and be petulant. I can feel the hormones kick in, and I want to hurt him, but love him at the same time. I want him to feel what I feel, but don’t know how to make him. It all seems so futile, but he’s looking at me. His eyes are so blue and round and nervous and I can’t help what I do. I place my hands on his shoulders and kiss him. Tentatively.

Dylan turns his head aside. A simple, small movement that has big consequences. My kiss lands awkwardly on the side of his mouth and I am horrified. Whether he means to or not, he has spurned me and my heart crashes to the floor and splinters into a hundred fragile pieces. A sob twists out of my chest, startling him.

“Wait!” he says as I stumble towards the garage door, but I don’t listen. I have to get out. I wrench the door open and escape out into the bright sunshine, slamming the door behind me.

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Most days I like Cassie, but today, not really. I’m trying to avoid the discussion of Dylan at all costs, but it’s not working. That has more to do with Cassie than me. She is driving me crazy and I want

to tell her to fuck off, but I'm afraid if I do then she'll know that I like Dylan more than I should. And that would go down like cancer because Cassie likes him, too. Yet, she knows something is up, that's why she's bugging me. She needles me in a roundabout way that isn't vicious but still stings. Her short blond hair is tousled with hair wax in an Emo sort of way. Cassie wants to be Emo, but she couldn't be if she tried. She's far too perky and annoying. I drag a French fry through a puddle of ketchup, trying to shut Cassie's voice out.

"I don't know what's gotten into you two." She sips her Diet Coke. "You've known each other for so long now . . ." she's trying to suck up, but that's not Cassie's style, "I mean what did you do to him anyhow?" She continues to fish for details as she takes another swallow of her drink.

I shove a handful of fries into my mouth. The salt and grease soothe me, unlike Cassie. She is bugging the shit out of me. "I didn't do anything, Cassandra." I emphasize her full name like it's a venereal disease that I don't want to catch. "I don't know. I mean he just gets like that sometimes, doesn't he?"

Cassie isn't buying it, but she isn't sure how much farther she can push me before I snap. "Look," she says eyeing me up. I can see her brain working furiously. "You're too shy to say it, but we both know what's going on, don't we? I mean inside, we both know he's playing the game, right?" I have no idea what she's talking about and I look at her like she's lost her mind. My confusion seems to give her confidence.

"Did he ask you a bunch of stuff about me, but you wouldn't tell him so now he's off somewhere sulking?" Cassie presses on like an idiot, running her hand through her hair before playing with her earring.

"What?" I sit shocked unable to process what she's just thrown at me.

“You don’t have to worry about me getting mad. If he asks, tell him whatever he wants,” she says non-chalantly, but I can tell she’s excited. Her voice has raised an octave and her eyes have darkened as she looks off over my head probably looking for Dylan.

“Fuck this,” I utter under my breath low enough that she can’t hear me. I can’t take anymore of Cassie’s crap so I get up from the table without another word. If my actions surprise her, I can’t tell because I have my back to her. I toss my black messenger bag over my shoulder and storm down the hall towards my next class.

Damn it.

I have sat through three periods, cursing Cassie, but at the same time, worrying about how Dylan might feel about her. It’s not like he’s ever done anything to egg her on, but boys could be stupid like that. Could it be possible that he likes her? The thought eats at me until I feel like I’m going to scream out loud. I almost ask Mr Petersen to excuse me from class, but the bell rings and saves me the embarrassment. I can’t get out of English fast enough.

I am so pre-occupied that I don’t see Dylan in the parking lot at school until he’s right on top of me. By the time I see him, it’s too late to run away. He strides towards me with purpose in his step and although I am relieved to see him, I am also anxious for where this will go. He comes up beside me, his face a mixture of annoyance and trepidation. He has a cut on his cheek and what appears to be a small bruise forming underneath it.

The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them. “What happened to you?”

He nods his head but doesn’t say anything as he keeps walking, his stride matching mine as we reach the side of my beat up Grand Am. He takes my bag from me and gets into the passenger side

of the car. I stand at the driver's door unsure what to do, but decide to get in. It only takes five minutes to get back to his house. We are just as silent as we get out of the car as we were in it. I have a million questions to ask him, but I know it has to wait until we reach the safety of the garage.

Dylan storms in through the door and before I can register what he's doing, he drops my bag on the floor and reaches out for me. In a move that takes me aback, he kisses me with an urgency that makes me feel like I'm on fire. I don't hesitate. I kiss him back. And one more time to make sure that there is no mistake about where we are heading. He groans into my mouth and hugs me tightly.

"I thought I had blown it," he whispers into my ear. He's wearing his favourite AC/DC t-shirt and smells of cigarettes and fabric softener, a confusing combination, but it hardly registers. I feel light-headed as I lay my head on his chest.

"Me too." I'm still nervous, but becoming less so in his arms. "I thought you blew me off. I didn't know what to do."

He shakes his head. "I still don't understand what happened. Why did you run off like that?"

I don't know how to tell him. I know it's selfish to want him to stay, but it's all I can think about now. "If you go live with your brother," I say before breaking off, the lump in my throat making it hard for me to talk.

I don't need to say the rest, he knows. It's etched in the frown lines on his face and in the rigid posture of his spine. Dylan squeezes me tighter, but I can tell he's torn. He sighs before letting me go. I don't want to hear the words, nor see the uncertainty that I know must be in his eyes, not after finally getting to this point. So I do the thing that I'm good at, I try to distract him.

"Did you hit a door or something?" I ask as I run my finger over the cut on his face.

He shakes his head and grimaces. “Rick.”

Mr Asshole.

“That God damn fucker,” I fume. “I hope someone cuts his dick off. What happened?”

“Same old shit. He hates my guts, but he only got one good one in before I knocked him on his ass. Debbie’s gonna give me shit about it later, but fuck her, too.” Dylan never called her mom. He clenched his hands into fists by his side.

I rubbed his arm. “I’m sorry.”

“Yeah the sooner I get away from that douchebag, the better,” he says, but Dylan sees the look in my eyes and stops. “Hey, it’s gonna be okay. We’ll figure it out.” He pulls me in under his arm and I promise myself that I won’t think about it anymore. I just want to be like this, close to him.

“So,” he places another kiss on my mouth, “Does this make you my girlfriend?”

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I am ridiculously happy. Nothing has really changed except for the physical stuff. Dylan’s not my first, but he’s my best. Best of everything: friend, lover, confider. The intimacy feels real and raw – an intensity that I never would’ve imagined possible. It’s like being blind and then seeing color for the first time. It’s startling yet beautiful, almost sublime and makes me want to cry. I just want to be with him, to sit around watching every move he makes, every smile, every chin scratch, the glint of light making his eyes go bluer then darker. It sounds clichéd, but something has shifted in me. It’s like there is no one else in our world, it’s just him and me and then there’s everyone else. Us and them and I don’t care. Well mostly.

Except for Cassie. God damn Cassie.

She is a pain in my ass. She rolled over much quicker than I'd anticipated which kinda threw me off. I had expected her to put up a fight when the rumors going around school about Dylan and me turned out to be true, but she took it in stride. And now she sits across from us, drinking her stupid diet drink and simpering and playing with her hair. I don't trust her as far as I can throw her, which would be pretty far since she's stick thin.

And I can't simply get rid of her. It's not as easy as you would think. When you've been frenemies for as long as Cassie and I've been, it makes it complicated. Unlike what most people think, High School is a precariously balanced structure that you just don't fuck with. Yes, there's the jocks and the popular kids, and the beauty queens, but for the rest of us, you stay in your place, in the natural order of things. If you deviate from it, there are ramifications that you don't even want to think about. Everyone buys in; we're all in for all that we've got - even the kids who think they're rebelling. They're just part of the system, too. Checks and balances. Don't fucking get out of line. They're all in on it. No matter what you do, the faction puts you back where you belong. And Cassie hasn't done anything wrong so she can't simply be pushed out as irritating as that is for me.

I put my hand on Dylan's knee before leaning into him. He's a little self-conscious since we're at school, but it doesn't stop him from wrapping his arm around me. Take that Cassie Goodman.

"So what are you two up to this weekend?" trills Cassie. She waves to someone on the other side of the cafeteria.

"Dunno," says Dylan shrugging his shoulders. "My brother might be here, but there's a big party that supposed to be happening over at the old feed and seed store. I'm thinking it might be cool to go to that if you guys wanna go."

“Oh wow. That would be cool,” enthuses Cassie. “I’d be totally up for it.”

I turn and look at Dylan. He glances away before removing his arm from around me. It’s the first I’ve heard about his brother coming into town, and I can’t help feeling paranoid. When was he going to tell me? I don’t say anything because I don’t want Cassie to know that he hasn’t told me. And that’s another thing, we don’t go to parties. We hang out in the garage. Sometimes with Cassie, a lot of times without.

I try to change the topic.

“There’s this zombie movie on down at the multiplex. It’s probably gruesome, but it’s supposed to be pretty good,” I offer up.

Cassie and Dylan look at each other and I don’t like what I see. She still has that big plastic smile on her face, but there’s something more like she’s just humoring me. Dylan clears his throat before squeezing my hand. “Yeah, I’m sure it’s cool and we should go see it, but the party is like this weekend only. I think it’d be nice to go hang out somewhere other than the garage.”

I’m finding it hard to control my anger. I give him a tight smile and pull my hand out of his grasp. “Since when do we go to parties? Those people are lame.” I state it matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, but it’d be something different, wouldn’t it? I mean we always go to the movies.” He looks at me this time and doesn’t look away first. He’s irritated.

I am not prepared for this. I am overwhelmed with anxiety and partly suspicious. It’s two against one and although this is our little group, the rules still apply. Don’t fuck with the majority. Go with it.

“Fine.” I’m exasperated because there’s nothing else I can say. “Can we go now?” I’m tired of being around Cassie and I want alone time with Dylan before the bell rings.

He seems unsure, but he nods his head. I feel relief. “Yeah, let’s go to the parking lot. Catch you later, Cass,” he says. Dylan gets up from the bench and waits for me to gather up my things. Cassie isn’t about to let us go without getting the last word in.

“It’ll be fun, Holly. You’ll see.” She gives me another one of her big beaming fake smiles. I want to reach across the table and slap her, but I can’t. I take the resentment and push it way down inside and match her smile with a fake one of my own.

“I can’t wait,” I say as I grab Dylan’s hand and head down the hall.

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It isn’t working. Something’s wrong. It’s not the condom - it feels like all friction and nothing else. It doesn’t exactly hurt, but it doesn’t feel good either. I straddle Dylan’s lap on the crappy old plaid recliner, my black skirt pushed up to my waist. It’s just the two of us, our sweating bodies and unfulfilled desires. I don’t know whether to lift myself up off of him or stay put. He’s trying, I can tell, but it’s not working for him either. His face is wet with his exertion, but it’s like he’s on Viagra – all push and no release. I wouldn’t even mind if he came first, but not coming at all is another thing entirely. I feel the dread deep down in my belly.

“What’s wrong?” I settle on him, stilling my hips. I try to run my fingers through his hair, but it’s almost too stiff with gel so I give up.

“I don’t know.” His words have no conviction.

“What?” I ask with more force this time. I expect him to pull me off his lap, but he doesn’t. He runs his fingers lightly over my bare hips, the action unconscious as he thinks hard about what he wants

to say. I should find the gesture reassuring, but it's just short of the mark. I wonder why he's taking so long to say something.

"You never ask me how I'm feeling," he states simply.

This surprises me.

"What do you mean?" I move my hands to my legs and keep them there.

"You gotta understand . . . You know the rules and so do I and what we've got is *not* normal high school shit."

"What?" I don't want to be on his lap anymore with him pushed inside me. I try to get up, but he grabs my arms, keeping our bodies connected.

"Wait," Dylan says. "Hear me out for once, don't just run away. You wouldn't get this from any other guy."

It's like a flip has switched and I'm pissed. And humiliated. And angry. It's like our first kiss so many months ago, and it hurts just as much, maybe even worse. I trusted him with everything and he can still crush me with just a few words. Asshole.

"Go fuck yourself," I snap. I struggle with him to get off his lap.

"Holly, stop!"

"Why so you can rub it in? I'm the freak, right?" I'm practically yelling now. And I'm slapping at his arms.

“Jesus Christ, Holly, cut it out,” he growls before he picks me up and pushes us back into a box of paint cans. One topples out with a clanking thud, but doesn’t bust open. He shoves my ass onto the top box and the box softens under my weight and I think I’m gonna fall, but I don’t. He holds me there.

“Listen to me, will you.” He’s right up in my personal space. His face is within inches of mine and he’s shouting. It makes me flinch. “I’m never gonna give you up. And I’m not gonna run around or desert you for fuck’s sake! You scare the crap out of me sometimes because you’re way too intense and it freaks my shit out, but I’m never gonna say good bye. Just tone that shit down some. Don’t be so insecure.”

“I don’t believe you,” I spit at him. I don’t want to cry.

“Holly, baby, don’t be too blind to see it. Deep down you know it’s true,” he says urgently as he pulls my face towards him and forces me to kiss him. I don’t want to kiss him, but he keeps at it.

“Listen,” he says when he finally lets me breathe, “I want you to come with me. If I go to live with my brother, I want you to come, too. I’ll get my GED and get a job. John might be pissed at first, but if I help out, he’ll come around. I’m serious, Holly.”

He looks at me like he can see right through me and it makes me shiver. His gaze is delicious and so earnest that it ignites something in me. The doubt is evaporating with the intensity of his stare. He waits for my answer.

“Okay,” I say, nodding my head.

“I’m never going to let you down,” he murmurs as he starts to move his hips again.

“I love you,” I whisper, letting the backwash of tears fall.

“I love you, too, baby.”

I close my eyes and sigh.

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I don't want to go to the party especially after our marathon sex session. It just feels wrong somehow. Why would I want to be around all those bullshitters and fakers after that? I didn't need any of them, just Dylan. Dylan is all that's important and I know that now. I know that he loves me and I love him. All the rest doesn't matter. And we're going to be together. School's out in just a few more months and Dylan's brother will be out of the Army. It'll be a new beginning, a new start for us away from all the bullshit of this school and this dumb ass town. My dad won't even put up a fight, he'll be happy that I'm out from under his roof. He probably wishes that I'd left a long time ago, but still, I'm going now. With Dylan. That's all that matters. If he wants to go to some stupid party so be it.

We pick up Cassie and she's all chatty. I don't listen as she drones on about some new band that she likes and then talks about who is going to be at the party. It all seems so mundane and irrelevant. Why do I care who's going to be there? I'll never see them again soon enough. If she wants to play nice with a bunch of assholes who am I to stop her? She rattles on and Dylan smiles and engages. He's good like that. He'll talk to anyone and even though secretly I know she is still into him, I don't let it bother me because I know what's going to happen and it's not going to include her. I smile to myself as I pull up to the old feed and seed store.

As Cassie predicted, the place is packed with high schoolers – metalheads, jocks, nerds, the hipsters, the gays . . . they're all here. A party is the only time you'll see them all together in one place. It's the only time that the boundary lines get blurred. I mean they won't talk to each other and the jocks will still bully the kids that can't defend themselves, but they can stand in close proximity to one another and be okay with that. It's hypocritical, but then so is most of high school.

Dylan grabs a beer from some guy with dreads. I know that he's probably sold the guy pot so the beer is some form of payment. I don't mind. Dylan pops the top off the beer and hands it to me before placing a kiss on my cheek. He's baked and has already had a couple of beers. He's got that fool ass grin on his face and he's grooving along to some beat being blown out of a pair of speakers in the back of a suped up truck. He's the happy stoner - it could be the pot or the alcohol or maybe both, but I don't care. His groove is infectious and it makes me smile. I give him a full blown kiss on the lips and he smiles back at me, pulling me close as he moves in time with the bass line. I grin and push him away, but he knows I don't mean it. Seeing him carefree and happy makes my heart swell even if it's just because he's at some stupid party.

He saunters up to me and pulls me close, leaving a kiss on my neck. "I gotta piss," he says a bit too loudly. "I'll be right back."

I take a sip of my beer and roll my eyes. He kisses me one more time for good measure and staggers off towards the entrance of the dilapidated feed and seed store. In typical high school fashion, the party is in the parking lot where people can hang out of cars and pump up the music, and traipse around with their friends. The store is too confining, too cut up and small for the size of the crowd.

I lean back against my Pan Am and watch the small nuances of each clique as they flirt, argue, fight, and make out. It's like a dance. Each partner knows the steps by heart and they change partners almost unconsciously. One guy stops and talks to some girl, but she blows him off. He shrugs it off and walks away as her girlfriends arrive, giggling, wanting to know the story. By now, he's off talking to another girl who's more receptive, but her boyfriend shows up. His friends intercede before it culminates in a fight, but he still has time to preen and strut around like a cock in a henhouse. The

girlfriend drags her boyfriend away. And the dance continues. Another group, another waltz of teen angst and drama.

I don't know what's taking Dylan so long, but I start to get uncomfortable. I'm by myself and if there is one thing that stands out more than anything else, it's a loner. No one wants to be the loner at the party - it's like a death sentence. They stare and whisper and I can feel my face flush. I think about getting back in my car, but there's no point since I can't go without Dylan. And I'm not going to hide like some pathetic loser. Lifting my head up just a bit higher, I look around defiantly, challenging anyone to say something to me. No one does, but a short brunette girl that I don't recognize catches my eye and then looks away quickly. Her group breaks out in giggles and for some reason, it really pisses me off. I drop my empty beer bottle in the grass and stride towards her. She backs away, but she's holding her ground. She's with her friends and that gives her courage.

"What the fuck is your problem?" I yell as I get within shouting distance of her. Multiple heads turn and watch the scene unfold. Nothing is more exciting at a party than a girl fight.

"Nothing," she says shrugging, but I know she's lying. She turns her back on me and her friends watch me and smile.

For some reason, her smug dismissal gets to me. There's something afoot and I don't know what it is, but she does. And she knows it. It pushes my anger over the edge and I erupt as I storm over and push her, causing her to careen into her friends, but she doesn't fall to the ground unfortunately.

She's not as brave as her friends think she is and her push back at me has no effort behind it. It's more of a defensive move than an offensive one, and I can tell she doesn't want to get physical. She just screeches at me and what she says stops me in my tracks.

“It’s not me you should be mad at.” She yells so everyone can hear. “Where’s your boyfriend, goth girl? He’s the one I’d be worried about.”

I look around me at all the strange faces, but no one will make eye contact with me. Even the jocks look the other way and it’s then that I know. I pray for it not to be true, but it’s been there in the back of my head the whole time. The nagging doubt, the fear that it’s all too good to be true. I feel the panic well up in my chest and I run towards the feed and seed store, not caring about the whispers behind me and the overly loud thumping music.

Please God don’t let it be true, I plead.

I hear Dylan before I can see them. He’s never been a quiet moaner and now is no different. His moans are loud and echo around the hallway. There are others in the shadows sucking and groaning, but he’s the loudest of them all. No one pays attention to me as I stumble down the hallway zeroing in on the sounds my boyfriend normally makes for me, for my body and my hands. Each moan slices through my chest, another piece of my heart cleaved away. There is no doubt what’s going on and everyone knows it. Even me.

I come to the last door on the right and push it open slowly. I don’t want to, I want to run as far as possible from the door, but I know I can’t. Everybody knows. I can’t pretend like it’s not happening. I push the door a little harder and it swings up in one giant long squeak just like in a horror movie.

I cover my hand over my mouth to keep from sobbing. Cassie is on her knees in front of Dylan, her head pumping in time with each one of his thrusts. His hands are gripped in her hair and his head is tilted back, his eyes shut as if he’s concentrating. He’s so caught up in Cassie blowing him that he doesn’t even register that I’m there. And then it’s like an out of body experience for the next few seconds.

I rush in and grab Cassie by whatever hair I can grasp and pull her to the ground. I am on top of her and punching her as she tries to defend herself. There is no feeling now, no sadness, no remorse. Just pure white hatred. I rip an earring out of her ear and she howls and shrieks but it's not good enough. I want her to scream more, I want it to hurt like nothing has ever hurt before. I want her pain to be like mine, but a million times worse.

It's Dylan who pulls me off her. I am biting and scratching and spitting, but he doesn't let go. Cassie scuttles back from me, blood pouring from her nose and her ear. She doesn't yell at me or try to fight me. She's petrified. She scrambles to her feet, wiping her arm across her mouth before darting out the door. I can hear the commotion out in the yard, but I don't care. I don't care about anything anymore. I feel dead inside . . . almost.

I turn and look at Dylan, the fury barely concealed beneath the surface. My heart is dying, but it's nothing compared to this moment. Dylan is pale and shaken; the last few minutes have sobered him up. He rubs his hands across his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose before he tries to reach out for me, but I push him away. He doesn't know where to begin. He looks at me and starts to speak then stops, but there is nothing he can say that will make this okay.

"It's not what you think," Dylan begins.

Why do they always say that?

"So that bitch didn't have your dick in her mouth?" I ask, the rage bubbling up in my throat.

"I sold her some pot and she didn't have any money. It's payment. It doesn't mean anything," he replies coolly. When he says it, it doesn't even sound like him, not like my sweet Dylan. It's someone else. Someone distant and uncaring.

Sweet Jesus. Betrayed over a dime bag. Is this really fucking happening?

“You fucking destroyed what we had for some God damn drugs?” I want to cry now. It seems so cruel - something so stupid and insignificant could have such disastrous effects. I have lost everything over something that would be smoked and discarded, ancient history, by the time the sun comes up. Just like that.

But I will not cry. Not now. Not until it’s all over.

“Holly, seriously it wasn’t anything. I’m not into her.” Dylan tries to cross the space in between us, but I back up, swallowing the unshed tears and the pain. “Please,” he pleads. “It doesn’t change anything. I want you, not her. We’re getting out of here.”

Something inside me breaks. It’s not my heart. My heart was broken the moment I opened the creaking door. No, this is something more profound, something more complex. It is like I have broken through some glass ceiling and I am floating up where no one can hurt me. I have become detached from my body and I don’t care. I don’t care about myself, or the people outside or even Dylan anymore. It all seems so pointless. Nothing matters. There is no reason left for living . . . except for the rage, that is. The rage keeps me tethered to the here and now. Even if I wanted to let go, I can’t. The rage won’t let me. It gives me strength and resolve.

My voice is unbelievably calm when I finally speak. It’s so much easier when you let go of caring, and there is no purpose other than the rage. The rage is the comfort, the reason for staying . . . for now at least.

“We’re never leaving this town,” I say to Dylan letting the cheery tight smile creep onto my face. I hardly feel it. “Thank you for making me see that now.”

He looks at me like I've gone crazy, but he doesn't try to touch me this time. It's like he knows something has broken inside of me, too. I don't say another word as I turn and walk out the door.

We'd be back at school soon enough.