

“For what?”

“That’s for telling Nana on me.”

“What else was I suppose to do? You wouldn’t return my calls.”

Ricky howled with laughter.

“So you had to call in the big guns, right?” She asked.

“It worked, didn’t it?”

“My word! My young people sure are feisty tonight.”

“It wasn’t me, Nana!” Ricky imitated a preschooler.

“Well, dinner’s served. Let’s eat while it’s still hot. Join hands so we can say grace.”

TARA



“So what does this remind you of?” Dorian asked.

“What are you talking about?” I replied.

“You know. Our washing dishes together after dinner.”

“I don’t know. That we both grew up with home training?”

“No, silly. Doesn’t this remind you of back in the day?”

“We did spend a lot of time at each other’s house.”

“Yeah, that was a click ago. We were inseparable back then.”

“Tell me about it. You were over my house so much that my mom started buying that ice cream you like. What was it? Ice cream sandwiches . . . No, it was those bomb popsicles, right?”

“Yep.”

“You still eat those?”

“Had one last night.”

“Man, are we a creature of habit or what?”

“Guilty as charged. You know what else I remember? I remember—”

“Alright people. I’m outta’ here.” Ricky came in and pronounced his departure.

“So, Cousin, you’re not going to help us clean up?”

“Can’t. Nana told me to get my butt home because Pam and I had an argument. She says a husband and a wife should never go to bed angry, so we’re just going to bed. Ha-ha!”

“Now that I remember!” I joked. Both the guys look confused. “You know, Ricky always had some excuse for why he couldn’t help out.”

We all laughed.

In his best S.W.A.T. announcer impression, Ricky says, “Ms. Stevens! Put the hater-ade down and back away slowly!”

“You’re not funny. Not even a little bit,” I snapped at him.

“Anyway, I’m out.” Ricky hiked up his belt with both hands, adding, “Duty calls.”

“Dorian, it’s a trip seeing your cousin in that grown up body act like the same kid.”

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“Speaking of funny things from high school, you know what I remember?” he asked.

“What?”

“I remember dressing alike when we went to school.”

“Ooh, I can’t believe you’re bringing that up.”

“Yeah, you remember, don’t you? Same parachute pants and psychedelic cross-colors shirts. If we were going somewhere fancy, we wore matching Raider jerseys. Oh! And if we’d just made up after an argument, we broke out the piece d’ resistance—matching white softball tee shirts. The ones with his and her name on the back.” He gazed into thin air, as if relishing in the remembrance.

“If I were you, I wouldn’t go around broadcasting how bad you dressed. The statute of limitations haven’t expired yet. I hear the fashion police still have warrants on both of us.”

I smiled. It was a cute memory. You really had to be in love to go around dressed as court jesters.

He laughed and handed me the last plate. “You know you liked it.”

“Yeah, well, if you tell anyone else about that I’ll kill you as a matter of ‘national security.’” As I handed him the dishcloth, our hands touched. We lingered momentarily. “You know what my favorite memory is?”

“What?” he asked

“Graduation Day.”

“Why Grad Day?”

“Because we were all dressed up. Even Ricky & Christian looked nice. We were all so happy.”

“Yeah,” he laughed. “That was a good day.”

I nodded my head in agreement. “That was when we thought we could conquer the world.”

Sensing the change in my mood, he continued. “Ummm, do you have other plans for the rest of the night?”

“No, not really. What do you have in mind?”

“I want to take you somewhere.”

“Let’s go!”

TARA



“I can’t remember the last time I’ve come here”, I told Dorian. Here was the Boardwalk at Shoreline Village in Long Beach. The path stretched along the water and ran parallel to the Queen Mary. At night, lights from the path, boats passing through the channel and the tourist ship were very romantic. Downtown Long Beach had undergone a major renovation. The “Pike” Entertainment Center was probably a bigger draw now, but for two kids discovering love for the first time back in the day, this was a favorite haunt.

“That’s good. You’re not supposed to take other people to our spot.”

“So you’re saying that you haven’t taken other women to places we’ve gone?”

“No, but I haven’t brought anyone here. This was sacred ground.”

“Sacred? Why?”

“This is where I realized I loved you.”

“You never told me that.”

“I gotta’ tell you everything?” He brushed my cheek with the back of his hand. “I’ve missed you, Tara.”

“I’ve missed you too.”

He took my face into both of his hands and kissed me on the lips. Soft and slow.

The first time Dorian kissed me was during a high school football game at Mohican Stadium. We went to the opposite side of the stands, away from the entrance. A few other couples similarly lingered nearby in search of a little privacy. Dorian put those same gentle lips on me that night. I’d never French kissed, so I had to lean back on a rail when the sensations of tasting love for the first time overwhelmed my poor, little naive knees. From that moment on, I thought that I’d die if I were ever denied that sweet nectar. Now those same lips once again covered mine.

I pushed back from him and coughed away wooziness. *Where did that come from? I hadn’t felt like that in forever.* So much time had passed. So many things had happened.

“What’s wrong?” Dorian’s face was filled with compassion.

“I’m just not trying to get caught up in something serious.”

“Tara, I thought we were just enjoying each other’s company.”

“I don’t know. I get the impression you’re trying to rekindle some kind of old flame.”

“That’s impossible,” he answered almost immediately.

His snippy response caught me off guard. I hadn’t intended to care either way. It just came out. “What?”

“I said, ‘that is impossible.’”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Resentment crept into my tone.

“I can’t rekindle any fire because mine never went out. I’ve always been carrying a torch for you.”

Color me surprised. I hadn’t expected him to say that either. “Dorian, I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything.”

For the next hour, we walked the shoreline. He held my hand. We recalled the good times we’d shared. So many occasions, there were too many to count. They all ended with some funny story. I couldn’t express it then, but I liked Dorian because he was charismatic and fun. He was still these things. They were just wrapped in a finer package now. *Much finer!*

It occurred to me that I was a better version of myself when we were together. Or, maybe I was motivated by his love to be that version of me. It was interesting how good some people can make you feel . . . about them, about yourself. What the heck? *All aboard the reunion train!*

TARA



The view from Dorian’s living room was spectacular. I probably shouldn’t have come here, but we’d slid into a natural groove tonight. Things flowed so smoothly, it didn’t seem right to end the night on a handshake or a hug.

Besides, our fun couldn’t come to a close just yet. Dorian’s desire for me oozed from his every pore. It felt good to be wanted. Every now and then, a girl needed her ego fed.

“Nice place, but I’m sure you hear that all the time.”

“What’s that suppose to mean?” He feigned ignorance.

“You know what it means. Your job title. The ride. This place. It’s all foreplay.”