

*Summer 16*

**B**ROKEN HEARTS AREN'T *supposed to hurt this bad.*

At least I never really thought they could. Tate wasn't supposed to die first. He promised me he wouldn't, anyway. I told him I never wanted to live a day without him, and he told me he'd never let me. It was a sentiment I took as gospel, not realizing how far beyond his control it was.

The last thing he said to me was he loved me, and he'd be back soon. His hands cradled my face and I smiled into a kiss as he pressed his lips against mine. They tasted like citrus—familiar and sweet.

We were out of butter. That was why he died.

After our first date sixteen summers ago, we started an end of summer tradition making berry cobbler and the crumble on top was never complete without the richness of butter melted with brown sugar. I asked him to run to the store for me—a simple, mundane errand that turned my life into a complete tragedy.

He never made it to the store.

For the first hour he was dead, I was mad at him. Charlie, just six-months-old, was hoisted on my hip and I was irritated because Tate

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was late—it shouldn't have taken that long to run to the store for one thing. I assumed he started wandering the aisles, buying unnecessary snacks for the kids. Or maybe he dropped off in the book section and started reading. Words always distracted him. Sucked him in after the first sentence and he couldn't stop until he read the last whimsical and poetic line. It was an endearing quality, but I tolerated it more than I loved it. Especially in that moment, during Charlie's witching hour when I really needed Tate home to hold him so I could finish the dessert before bedtime.

An hour after he left there was a knock on the front door. I opened it in an irritated frenzy, swinging the door until it hit the wall in the entryway. Once then twice. I started to give an apology for my unintentionally aggressive welcoming, but the breath left my lungs as soon as I saw the police chaplain on my doorstep with a uniformed police officer. I was so confused I barely muttered a hello.

"Are you Tabitha Jones?" the chaplain asked.

I read his lips as he said my name, but I didn't hear the sound. My eyes narrowed on their solemn faces, and I glanced down at the chaplain's hands.

He was holding Tate's wallet.

My feet and hands went numb. Fear and shock drenched my entire being.

*Not him. Not my Tate.*

But I knew.

It didn't matter what the chaplain said because I knew Tate was gone.

At first there was silence. A quiet so loud it screamed in my ears as I tried to make sense of what was happening. I walked around hollow and numb, nodding at the news, letting it sink into my skin until I wore it inside every inch of my being. My chest was tight, and I didn't want it to release for I knew it was closely holding the most delicate and sacred part of me.

Then finally my throat hitched, my heart dropped, and a cry escaped my lungs. It sounded like my entire life shattering like glass.