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## Prologue

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Summer 2006

**T**he last thing Asten Moore-Rankin had wanted to do was accompany his parents to Cape Breton for the whole summer. His mom, Charlotte had married his stepdad Brian when he was nine, but he had always managed to get out of going to butt-fuck nowhere in July. Usually, his Aunt Lola or friend Mike offered their place as asylum, but Brian didn't ask for much and Asten knew things weren't great between his Mom and Dad.

His mother was a complicated woman to love.

She was more concerned about appearances and status, instead of the important things like family and love.

Charlotte Moore-Rankin had matured into the uppity bitch she had once criticized others of being and those who loved her suffered the most.

At nineteen, the deal Brian made Asten was too good to refuse. Brian knew Asten would rather spend his last summer before university clubbing and relaxing at friends' places than flying to Cape Breton and hanging with his parents. Truth be told, Brian didn't

blame him, but he really wanted Asten's company and he wanted to show him the place that was near to his own heart. Growing up, Cape Breton was Brian's home and The Beach, was a place where he had made most of his happiest memories. Sharing it with his son was something he just wanted to do. Brian promised he'd keep him in beer and fly him back to their Toronto condo at the first of August, if he really wanted to go. Brian even sweetened the deal, by promising to give him an allowance too, if Asten helped him around the cabin and gave everything a fair shot. The piss-poor internet and isolation didn't send his heart racing, but it was the right thing to do.

Brian only asked Asten to give it a month.

They'd fish, drink beer, and have campfires until dawn every night, Brian promised, hoping Asten would find the idea as exciting as he did.

To a city boy it sounded like a shit way to spend his vacation, but Brian never asked for anything so Asten agreed.

The first few years after his mother and Brian began seeing one another, Asten hated the ground Brian walked on. When they got married, it was worse. All Asten would refer to Brian as, was Asshole.

Brian tried everything to get him to stop, even picking a ridiculous name only Asten could call him to make the boys hatred of him less noticeable in public. In private, Asshole it was, but in public Asten began to relent, satisfied with calling him Lucy. It was still insulting to Brian, since he fully considered himself a heterosexual man's man, but sounded more polite to outsiders.

Asten felt in his own nine-year-old head he was winning, which really was all that mattered to Brian. Brian knew his stepson would come around eventually, and they'd have this amusing story to tell about how they managed to first get along.

"It's something to tell the grandkids." He'd laugh to Charlotte, when she'd get angry with Asten for refusing to call Brian

by his rightful name. Of course, Brian had been right and it did become a joke between them as Asten began maturing.

Brian was far from the villain that Asten first cast him as, in their family story. In fact, he was the only one to have Asten's best interests at heart. His own father didn't have time for him, and his mother was too into herself to put anyone else first, even her only child. It became abundantly clear that the only person who genuinely cared about Asten's welfare was Brian and their bond grew from there. Asten began calling Brian, Dad, as they grew closer, but occasionally he'd slip in Asshole or Lucy as a loving endearment.

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ASTEN'S BIOLOGICAL FATHER, Jimmy Moore owned a furniture chain in Vancouver and like most successful men, work had become his life.

Jim had wanted Charlotte and Asten for the photo opportunities that being a CEO required, not for family experience.

A good leader needed to be able to lead a family, and all that bullshit.

He pacified Charlotte with money and expensive gifts.

It worked rather well for a while. However, the nights alone because of late meetings and excessive traveling took their toll.

While Jim and Charlotte Moore seemed to be the picture-perfect couple on the cover of business magazines and newspaper ads, it was merely an illusion.

What they didn't put on a billboard or write about was what really went on behind closed doors. That was more of the story the public would have been interested in.

Jim was barely home and never spent time with his son. He was more into his mistresses and profits, pawning Asten off on nannies unless he needed a prop for a photo.

Even before the divorce, the only time he made for family togetherness was when it was involving things for business.

Soon as his relationship with Brian matured, Asten stopped pining for the dad who was supposed to love him as a son and allowed the one stepping up to claim the title.

Charlotte fell hard for Brian, after seeing the way he was with Asten.

Brian had been their family lawyer since before Asten was born. With his high retainer, and proven expertise at manipulating the system, Jim was in constant need of Brian's legal prowess. Brian wasn't an idiot; he saw what a shit Jim was. Hell, he even billed him more money because of it. It made Brian want to compensate with his own time. Brian stayed to help with Asten's math homework and basketball practice. He made every game, even on busy days that made him work later. Being at the same places as her son, and seeing them together, allowed a relationship to grow between the odd pair.

When Jim got caught up in a paternity scandal Charlotte was already in love with Brian and filed for divorce. It was just the push she needed to make the change. Brian had nowhere near the money that Charlotte was used to, but as soon as the ink was dry on her divorce papers, she disposed of the Moore name and married him anyway. Mrs. Brian Rankin didn't hold the power that Mrs. Jim Moore had, but for a few years Brian's charm outweighed Charlotte's desire for attention.

When Asten learned of his parents' break-up, Brian became enemy number one. Asten blamed him for not getting to see his father at all, not knowing that it was completely Jim's choice. Brian took Asten's anger, rather than disclosing the truth.

When Jim died, Asten had been thirteen.

There was a funeral, and Brian insisted they all go.

No one in his biological father's family acknowledged them beyond whispers and hateful glances.

No one was more uncomfortable than Brian, but he stood

there with his head bowed as if he belonged.

The woman Jim kept as his main mistress arrived with her bastard in tow. It was obscenely painful for Charlotte who made little effort to keep hold of her emotions, but Brian had said that Jim would always be Asten's father and for that sole reason they all needed to attend.

Only a few people were present at the graveyard for Jim, the day they buried him. The Reverend was the only person who spoke. Asten could tell by the description, the man didn't know his father, but then again Jim Moore didn't allow many the opportunity. Brian put a loving hand on the back of Asten's shoulders to give him silent comfort. Asten's aunt and grandmother refused to acknowledge their presence, which angered Brian.

Brian commented that he was proud of Asten, after they piled into their car to make their way home.

"I didn't do anything," Asten insisted, as he buckled up and made eye contact with his stepdad in the rear-view mirror.

Brian shook his head. "You're wrong, son. You proved to all those gathered that despite the poor choices your father made, his son grew up to have more character at his young age than Jim had living five times as long."

Asten sighed not really believing anyone noticed at all.

When Brian noticed the shrug from the backseat, he added, "Sometimes you don't need to say a word to be the better man. Sometimes our actions prove that all on their own."

The words really hit home with Asten, and he replayed them all the way back to their apartment. Brian was right, he finally concluded, realizing for the first time how blood didn't really make a family. Jim had never been a dad to him, but that didn't mean he didn't have one. For Brian's birthday, Asten gave Brian adoption papers and asked him to be his dad legally. With Jim dead and Asten being a minor, it took no time for the court to grant the decree.

Six years later, on June thirtieth, 2006, the family of three flew into Sydney, Nova Scotia for a summer that would change Asten's life again. This time, however, he had no control over the turn his path was about to take.

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THE BEACH WAS alive for the first of July.

Every cottage seemed to be in one big party mode, with people moving freely from cabin to cabin enjoying food, friends, fire, and beer. It was the craziest thing that Asten had ever witnessed.

People all knew one another and didn't keep to themselves like in the city.

They didn't keep their heads down as they passed, instead they smiled and said good morning or want a beer? For Asten, the comradery was a bit of a culture shock. However, he quickly adapted to the relaxed way of life the beach offered. The reality of the lack of internet sucked, but shockingly, didn't irritate him as much as he initially thought.

It was late in the evening when the multiple little parties all moved to one massive fire down on the private beach the residents all shared. It was strictly for the property owners after an old campground had closed and the owner got fed up with people leaving their trash everywhere. He owned a cabin down there too, right at the start of the lane that housed the small community of friends and family. A gate was erected at the roadway, and private property signs were hung to thwart any strangers from gaining access.

It was at the campfire when he first saw her.

Nat seemed to appear out of nowhere.

She was wearing black, tight, jean overalls that cut off above the knee into a short pair of shorts. She had a tight white t-shirt on and a ball cap that read *MCHS Marauders*.

It looked like a high school logo.

She was out on a raft in the pond that connected to the ocean a few yards away, laughing and carrying on with those around her. A few boys were swimming and splashing her, along with some girls who were bigger and slightly older than she looked, but all Asten could see was her. Her brown hair was pulled through the back of the cap in a ponytail and she was sipping on something in a red solo cup. He'd bet his left arm it wasn't water, despite her clearly being underage.

Sixteen?

Seventeen?

Asten doubted she was older than that.

He had just turned nineteen but was an excellent judge of girls' ages. The older one removed a flask as he watched astutely and sure enough, she topped them all off.

Taking a large sip of his beer he asked his new friend John who the girl was.

John was Brian's nephew and eighteen. He'd been going to The Beach since he was born. If anyone would know it would be him.

"Oh, that's Natalie, she's my cousin on my mom's side. Her mother Eileen and my mom are sisters," John answered.

John's Dad and Brian were brothers. It seemed the whole area was pretty much related.

"How old?" was Asten's next question.

John laughed taking a drink of his own beer. "She's gonna be eighteen, end of July. She and I are only six months apart. She looks younger though, eh. Good luck with her. The taller one Ashley is an easier mark if ya wanna get laid. Nat doesn't date. Book worm. Going into grade twelve this year at Memorial. They don't live far from here but spend the whole summer at the cabin."

Taking a drink again Asten smiled.

He loved a challenge.

Maybe this naturalist's paradise would be fun, even for a city boy?

A summer fling was something that could most definitely pass away the time he needed to spend in the woods.

A gasp had him devoting his attention back to the raft.

One of the wet guys had attempted to run at Natalie and she power bombed him onto the boards. Everyone was staring in awe, including Nat herself. If he hadn't witnessed it himself, Asten wouldn't have believed she could toss a guy bigger than her with such ease, but a sly appreciation made him grin. Other bystanders began to clap, as the embarrassed boy got up and charged at her for revenge. Skirting out of the way just in time, Nat avoided his playful attack and spun across the raft as he lost all balance and splashed into the water.

Giggling with her hand over her mouth, Nat knelt quickly taking hold of the rope that secured them to the beach and began to pull the raft to shore to escape any retaliation.

"Is she in wrestling or Taekwondo?" Asten asked John.

"No, I mean she watches wrestling a lot, but that was just a fluke. Kyle's gonna be pissed. He's on the hockey team at school and thinks he's the shit," John replied with mild amusement.

"Gonna get you back, Nat!" Kyle warned, with humour laced in his voice echoing over the water like a megaphone.

"Save your pride, Kyle, my girl will just kick your ass again." One of her companions snapped.

Kyle gave the girl the finger, as he swam around with the others in the water. Not bothering to follow the raft to shore.

Slapping John on the back Asten said, "Watch how this is done."

Walking up the hill he went straight to the rope and began to tug. With a gentlemanly hand he helped all the girls aboard, to the shore. Natalie blushed thanking him as the girls all crowded her to congratulate her on the incredible defensive move she



executed. Giggling from the alcohol she'd been sneaking behind the canteen, Nat sized him up.

Lanky, tall but his face was gorgeous.

He was Brian's stepson, she recalled.

She had seen him through the window at her grandparents' place.

"That was some move, baby girl," Asten complimented, his voice smooth as honey.

Nat blushed, realizing she had had more of an audience than she noticed during the playful fight.

"Thanks," she responded, a smirk raising one corner of her lip.

"So, do they keep all the pretty ladies indoors until dusk around here?" Asten made sure to look at all three girls. It was his experience you had to kiss up to the friends too or cousins.

It was very possible at this place they were all related.

Nat didn't say anything. She was just as unaccustomed to liquor as she was to compliments.

Ashley spoke up. "Oh, a charmer. Must be a city boy."

Asten smiled. "Country boys are usually the charmers, aren't they?"

Ashley countered, "True, so what does that make city boys?"

The other girl with them sized him up and answered, "Assholes and trouble."

Asten snickered, "Skeptics, I see." Looking right at Natalie he asked, "And what's your take? I now know these two don't want to go for a walk and show me around a bit. How about you?"

Nat blushed more, but the sun was almost down hindering the clear view of her pink complexion. "Umm..." She hesitated, giving him an opening.

"I promise I don't bite." Asten winked offering her his spare beer in his pocket. "And after what I just witnessed you do; I will do my upmost to keep from pissing you off."

Nat took it with a shy grin. "Okay." She replied hesitantly,

casting wary eyes to her friends and then John. John winked at her, knowing some how she needed someone to tell her it was okay.

Asten took a long swig of his beer and extended his hand to her. “Awesome, let’s go then, beautiful. I’ve been wanting a guided tour.”

Natalie rolled her eyes and smiled at his blatant flirting. The sparks flying between them were unmistakable, and Nat had to admit that she was intimidated by his attention and handsome appearance. Usually guys like him, didn’t give her the time of day. Yet, here in the comfort of the place she loved, she was suddenly the center of attention.

Giving him her hand, he clasped her fingers with his. “I’m Asten, Brian’s son, but you already know that don’t you?”

“I guessed as much,” she said honestly, “Not a lot of faces down here that I don’t know.”

Asten chuckled, advancing on the clearing that lead to one of the paths. “Yeah, I guessed that was the worst kept secret. I haven’t seen you around yet, I never forget a face, especially one as gorgeous as yours.”

Natalie rolled her eyes again with discomfort at the praise.

“Hey! That’s your second time rolling your eyes at me, sweetheart,” Asten stated pulling them to a stop and forcing her to face him. With a gentle hand he cupped her face to look at him.

Natalie felt her heart flutter with excitement, as she watched his gaze lower to her lips. She wasn’t experienced in kisses, but it damn sure looked like what she saw in the movies. Asten watched her breathing slow, as her doe like eyes stared up at him in wonder.

“I get the feeling you’re not used to a guy showering you with compliments, and that’s a shame,” Asten said quietly, dipping his head to come an inch from her pouty lips. “If you were mine, I’d make sure you’d grow accustomed to hearing how beautiful you are.”

## Sparks

Natalie gulped feeling him pushing past her personal space for the kiss that was surely coming. When she closed her eyes without a word of protest, Asten went for it.

A shot of heat bolted through both, as the darkness shadowed their intimate moment.

Sparks.

Undeniable, flickering, electric, sparks.

Singeing their lips as their tongues danced voraciously, both were amazed at the instant chemistry. It felt like they had kissed a million times and yet nostalgically like the first.

When Asten finally pulled back, he kissed her cheek softly.

Looking into each other's eyes, Asten said, "Wow! I'm fairly sure I just fell in love."

Natalie was recovering from the feeling of being punch drunk at the intensity of his closeness but grinned, as Asten pulled her closer. She didn't give any clue as to how it made her feel but walked alongside him as he continued toward the path.

Looking up at the whistle of a firework shooting to the stars, and the brilliant explosion of thousands of sparkly lights illuminating the sky, Nat pointed in awe of the show that one of the campers was providing for the area.

"Now I won't be lying if I said I saw fireworks during our first kiss," Asten cooed, knowing just what to say to make her blush. He was born with a natural charisma that made communicating as easy as breathing.

It was a gift he used to his utmost potential.

Especially, with the ladies.

"Yes, literally and figuratively, we both can attest to that," Natalie said as her brain began to work again.

Another loud shot broke their peaceful stroll.

"I know this sounds crazy, but will you go to dinner with me tomorrow night?" Asten asked, thinking this was as good a time as any to ask her.

Natalie hadn't been on a date, but as she considered how cute

he was, it didn't take her a lot of time to contemplate her decision. With more excitement than she meant to reveal, she responded, "Sure. I mean, I'd love to."

Then, in an afterthought she realized she had work. "The only thing is I don't get home until six."

"I can't see that being an issue," Asten replied, offering her his extended hand. Nat clasped it happily.

"I really didn't think I'd find much to be interested in around here. There is only so much to be said for the sunsets and surf." He sighed. "You, however, just gave me a reason to give this place a shot."

"Is that so?" she asked, trying not to let his words sink deep enough to mean something.

He gave her a smile in reply.

Changing topics Asten began to walk again.

"Think we should make our way back to the fire before they start talking?"

Natalie smiled. It was nice how he just fit right in at The Beach like he had lived there forever.

"Fine by me. Long as you don't mind being teased about our short excursion."

He draped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her to his side as an answer.

Nat leaned in like they'd been together forever, bubbling excitement that this gorgeous older guy was into her.

It wasn't something she was used to. Yet, when she was snuggled in under his arm or holding his hand it felt right.

"True, and we can't have that. Let's take our time," he said, slowing his pace, he twirled her back to face him and captured her lips again. "I always like giving people something to talk about."

AS A FEW WEEKS PASSED, Nat and Asten were inseparable.

Asten kept his promise to fish, have fires and help Brian but Nat tagged along at Asten's insistence. At the end of July, Asten told Brian he wanted to stay at The Beach until after the long weekend in September.

It came as no surprise to Brian or Charlotte.

They knew where one was the other was, which was odd for Asten.

He had never brought a girl home before Natalie. Which told them he had finally lost his heart.

They were right, but he never confirmed it with words. With his parents he remained tight lipped about affection.

Outward declarations of feelings were never something that came easy to him.

Yet, when they weren't around, he was willing to try with Nat.

Charlotte was mildly concerned that they were going too fast, but Brian was quick to defend the young couple.

He argued that Charlotte was just jealous that her baby boy now had a new leading lady in his life.

In part, he was right, but Charlotte would never admit it. Monitoring her own flaws wasn't something Charlotte did well.

Nat and Asten's relationship took another turn one night on the beach at the end of July the night before her eighteenth birthday.

Brian and Charlotte, Eileen and a few of the other campers had gone out to Louisburg for the Haunted Ghost walk.

No others were around on a Tuesday night. The Beach was more of a hotspot from Friday to Sunday.

Asten was grabbing a shower before meeting up with Nat for a fire.

She had texted and said that she was doing the same.

She had worked until six at the farm by her house. Three

days a week, was enough to keep money in her pocket and a little into a savings account that Eileen insisted she start.

University was just around the corner, and it was not free.

When Asten got toweled off, he read the text flashing on his phone.

*Meet me at the beach I have a surprise...*

A big smile flashed across his face.

Surprise?

Her last surprise was when she opened her top, revealing her red lace bra giving him an all access pass to her perfect C cups.

It was a great surprise he wasn't going to lie.

If her surprise was half as good as that, Asten was excited for whatever she had planned.

"Nat!" he called, wondering where she was hiding.

Dashing down the path, he looked around trying to find her, but she hadn't answered.

He looked left and right for any clue of where she'd be, but it seemed The Beach was deserted. No one was there.

Momentarily questioning the text, he doubted his memory and retrieved his phone to reread her text.

*Meet me at the beach...* just as he recalled.

Yet, as his eyes once more searched for any sign of life, no just over five-foot little bombshell appeared in sight.

Slowly approaching the sand, Asten stopped dead when he spotted her clothes in a pile on the beach.

Walking down the few steps to the sand, he began to piece together just what she was up to.

"Nat?" he called again.

That's when his head snapped in the direction of her voice. "Hey handsome!"

Looking out to the water, he stiffened as his temper flared.

She was naked and out way too far. Her shadowed form was barely visible as the moon lit the sea around her.

It was *entirely* too dark to be swimming, especially alone in the

ocean.

“Baby, are you out of your mind?” Asten called. “Get the hell in here, *now!*”

His voice was panicked, all business and no nonsense.

Games like this were too dangerous, and he vowed she’d never pull something like this again, when he got her feet on dry land.

He walked to the edge of the water, signaling with a frantic hand for her to come ashore.

Nat was too high with anticipation of swimming naked with him, to recognize it.

Humour decorated her voice as she yelled back, “You get the hell out here. Leave the clothes on the beach!”

“Baby girl, I’m going to count to three. If your ass isn’t back on this beach and I need to come get you...” Asten trailed off on a low whistle, preparing to undress to his boxers to go out if need be, by taking off his flip flops, watch and t-shirt. His hands restlessly pushed out his pockets as he waited for her to comply with his order. Feeling his cellphone, he discarded that as well.

No movement was being made on her part to show she was going to listen to his command to get out of the water, so he tried to mentally brace for the monumental fear he had of going into the ocean at night.

“Natalie, did you hear me! Get your ass back to shore, or I swear you’ll get a spankin’ you won’t soon forget!” He warned a second time.

This time he spelled out exactly what he would do if she didn’t get her butt out of there.

“Yeah, I hear you Mr. Cranky-pants. You’re no fun. Why don’t you come out and see if I can put a smile on that serious face of yours? I might even play a very bad girl, and let you give me that spanking you’ve threatened me with,” Natalie replied shamelessly. It was clear she was merely taking this as a joke, but Asten wasn’t laughing.

Shaking his head in disbelief of her gall, he held up his hand. “It is a lot more than a threat young lady. I’m not playing games. One!”

Natalie was used to his dominant tendencies. He had taken an alpha role from the start. Asten had threatened to spank her a few times, which had aroused her more than she’d ever admit, but hadn’t followed through with any thing other than a few playful love taps.

Honestly, they had turned her on more than dissuaded her from whatever behavior he disapproved of.

She mistakenly thought he wouldn’t ever really follow through with a real spanking.

One where she had no control over the situation and caused painful tears of repentance.

She was wrong.

Standing on the sand feeling his anger bubble more with each passing second she disobeyed his command, he played over in his mind what he was going to do to her in vivid detail.

Asten pictured her draped over his knee squealing from the top of her lungs as he plummeted his hand down warming her backside.

Each strike causing more and more tears to stream down her pretty, foolish cheeks as she begged for clemency he wasn’t about to give.

He planned on chastising her for her reckless behavior, before securing a promise that she’d never do something so dangerous again.

Then and only then, would the punishment stop with his comforting arms turning to solace, as she atoned for her sins.

Shaking himself from his romanticised vision, he signalled again to her, losing patience with each passing second.

The thrill of the game and chase, for Nat, made her enthusiastically curious to see if he would come out to her.

Taunting him by splashing about, casually gliding through



the water he watched angrily willing himself to do what he knew he was going to have to. The thought of putting her over his knee fueled his courage. When he got her, he vowed she'd never make the mistake of ignoring him again. She'd know full well what was going to follow direct disobedience, and he'd burn it into her memory as well as her breathtaking ass. His inside dialogue was disrupted, as she overconfidently yelled, "Two!" and dove under the water.

Asten stared waiting for her to rise again.

The stillness was too still for his liking, and what was no more than seconds felt like forever.

Double fuck, he thought. She still wasn't coming up.

*Fuck!* He hated the ocean.

His mind drifted to the facts. Wasn't there fucking Great Whites this time of year?

Jesus *fuck!* Asten cursed in his head a few times as he shimied out of his jeans and furiously kicked them aside.

He was going to sear her ass.

Little brat had no idea the world of trouble she was in with him.

Finally, he saw her surface laughing as she splashed. Her voracious kicking of water disrupted the natural quiet, making him grateful for her safety but incandescent with anger that she wasn't taking her safety into any account.

Asten admitted to himself that he had a brief second of panic as he psyched himself up to dive into the dark cool Atlantic to play the hero, before he heard her call, "Did you say three yet? I was indisposed."

On a laugh that wasn't a laugh, he took his first step into the crisp coolness of the water.

Even with just his feet submerged, he was already regretting the decision to get wet.

*Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!*

He repeated it over-and-over again in his head as the other

part of his brain said to go get her as quickly as possible, because he was going to be the one laughing when they reached the beach again.

She didn't know he took swimming as a kid.

He almost went pro.

Their little playful frolics in the water had never resulted in his disclosure of how good of a swimmer he was.

Asten didn't like to reveal everything about himself because it sullied the mystery.

The water was a lot calmer than many nights and that meant his strides weren't impeded by the waves. The moon was perfectly reflected in the dark horizon lighting the beach like a spotlight. A jellyfish Asten hadn't seen, in his desperate prayers to God that a lone Jaws wasn't in the vicinity, made him curse with the sting. It gave him the ferocity to push forward at record speed.

To distract himself from the fear, Asten focused back on what he'd do when he got his hands on her... he ran through a list of ideas distracting himself from the possibilities of being fish food.

Nat watched as he cut the water like an Olympian swimmer.

A bubble of nervousness fluttered her loins as he drew closer and she realized the expression on his face was fury. Before she had time to react, he snaked an arm around her in pure unmasked annoyance. Her naked tits did nothing to rein in his anger. He felt her panties rub him, as they started back to shore.

"Asten!" Natalie reprimanded, as his arm dragged her effortlessly behind him, but kept creating a wave with each stroke that landed over her face. She sputtered and fought to dislodge herself, but to no avail. His arms were rippled with muscles, clearly used to repetitive training. It would be like escaping a pair of handcuffs and she was no magician. The harder she pulled to attempt to loosen herself, the firmer he held her.

Wordlessly, he cut the water.

Each stroke Asten envisioned the sand being finally beneath

his toes again.

Even with her tucked under his arm he made it back to the beach like a shark was on their tail.

Stepping from the water, on a low growl, Asten snapped, “Get your stuff.”

Releasing her, he smacked her ass hard before approaching his own pile.

All he was in was his boxers, which was an impressive sight for her hopeful eyes.

Remaining terribly silent, Nat realized just how angry he was. Skinny-dipping was fun she thought.

She wanted to be the fun girlfriend.

Was he mad she hadn't taken off her panties?

She mistakenly asked him out loud.

Standing on the moonlit beach with not a soul around, he hissed, “Grab. Your. Stuff. Natalie.” And hauled back to swat her again.

Natalie gasped. That one hurt as it intended to.

“Asten, come on, ya don't wanna have a little fun on the beach? With me?” she asked lightly, trying to play it off like she meant it.

Playful fun.

Asten was enraged as he slipped on his discarded clothes and pocketed the personal items. Not trusting himself to speak yet, he merely responded by shooting warning glares her way, but Nat defiantly just stood there for a few seconds before donning the sundress and flip flops she had worn down to the water.

Hurt crept over her, as her wet and nearly naked form failed to sway him to a light-hearted mood.

A choked sob lodged in her throat as she thought of how badly she had unintentionally screwed up. Tonight, was *the night*. The night she was going to frolic in the waves and let him make love to her for the first time beneath the stars. How did it go so goddamn wrong?

Judging by his face, the night had shifted horribly.

Once they both were suitably dressed, he grasped her hand and nearly pulled her arm from the socket over the beach.

“Slow down!” she cried after nearly missing a step.

Swirling on her he threw her over one shoulder and kept striding.

One protective strong arm swung around her knees, to keep her in place.

“Stop! Asten, Jesus!” she hissed as up the bank they climbed. His wet flip-flops making the sound flip-flops do, when wet and full of sand.

Asten ignored her, he was too angry to risk speaking, yet. So, they bounced along in uncomfortable silence until they reached his cabin.

A light was on.

The light he had left on, and no vehicles were back to indicate that they didn't have the privacy this moment required. As he stepped up the deck stairs to the door and through it, she squealed as he lowered her, anchoring her to his side.

He checked all the rooms for any life, but they were indeed alone.

Satisfied, he finally released her, thudding toward the door to lock it.

Nat tensed, feeling the tension of his temper engulf the room. After a moment of facing the door and pinching his nose, he twirled on her like a venomous snake in full strike mode.

“Stunts like that get people killed, Nat!” he spat pacing.

Natalie grew cold, hugging herself to stave off the chill and embarrassment.

“I'm sorry, I thought it would be fun. For us... For us to go skinny-dipping. I mean I left my panties on!” she said shyly.

He glowered at her. “Your panties are about to be around your ankles. The last goddamn thing you had to worry about was your panties.”

Natalie shot him a horrified glare as she digested his words. What? *What?*

“Asten, I’m sorry I thought it was all playful and fun. I never meant anything...” she rambled as he continued to pace.

Grasping the bridge of his nose again to gather patience, he ordered her to the corner, “Go! There! Think about the risk you put us both in swimming alone at night in the ocean when God-knows-what was around us!”

Natalie looked at him imploringly for a reprieve that she had a gut feeling wasn’t coming.

“Go!” he barked again giving her a sharp crack, on her covered ass, and turning her in the proper direction.

Nat yelped, shocked even over the material at the sting.

“I need a few minutes to calm down before I give you the spanking you’ve been asking for. *And earned!*”

Her saliva even caught in her throat.

Was Asten serious?

Corner?

Spanking?

Fuck!

Her mind was a mess trying to digest his livid words.

“Asten, come on... I’m sorry,” she started, only to be met by his upturned eyebrows pointing to the corner he had ordered her to. Nodding fearfully, she turned to obey in a faint hope that with her act of compliance, he’d compose himself. That or someone would come home and interrupt them enough that she could make an excuse to go home.

Surely, he wasn’t serious, she contemplated.

No one had ever spanked her.

A mix of fear and weird arousal stirred her core.

Her panties were wet from the ocean but grew more so as her body instinctively reacted lubricating her for his cock.

She shifted, uneasy, as if he could somehow read what was happening to her, and the dirty thoughts consuming her mind.

Why did the thought of him doing something so painful to her, make her ache to have him more?

Asten had never shown this side of himself before.

He was all business and bossy. The usual playful demeanor never far from his face wasn't even hinting at existing. It was like a stranger had appeared in the similar form of her boyfriend.

Nat both loved it and feared it. Her nipples hardened as she replayed his stern face ordering her to the corner, knowing she would jump to obey.

She almost reached down to touch herself, longing to come and release some pressure.

It was their first fight.

It was the first time he had ever raised his voice to her, and she felt her mouth go dry at the sexy tone it had when he was mad.

Asten left her there a half hour.

He changed from his wet clothes and composed himself before walking back into the open space of kitchen and living area.

There she was dutifully.

Shifting a bit in her own awkward fear.

*Good.* He thought, unaware of her thoughts about this entire experience.

In his mind, he was thinking she should fear him a bit if it kept her from getting her goddamn legs eaten off or worse by some random sea creature.

*Stupid little fool,* Asten thought silently as the horny teenage male hormones raged inside of him. Instinctively for a moment, he was hypnotized by her perfectly covered heart shaped ass.

Nat heard him approach after a drawer in the kitchen area opened.

Her senses were on high alert.

He sat in the vicinity of the sofa and chairs, but without turning she wasn't sure which he chose.

“C’mere, babe!” he ordered more calmly.

Nat turned to look at him. He was on the sofa, out of the clothes he had on and in a pair of flannel pajama pants and black t-shirt, patting his slightly spread leg. She slowly started to walk to him, stopping only when she saw the wooden spoon by his leg.

“Asten, I’m sorry, really.” She mewed, suddenly realizing all his threats weren’t games. He meant he’d spank her just as he said.

Asten sat forward and crooked a finger. “Now.” He said firmly, letting her know by his tone he wasn’t interested in having a discussion.

Natalie shifted her eyes around the room trying to judge how quickly she could get somewhere for safety. Her flight or fight instinct on high alert.

Asten chuckled to himself. It was clear as day what she was doing.

He didn’t need to be a mind reader to know what was rattling around in her panicked brain.

“Think about running long and hard, babe, because I’m fast when I have to be and when I catch you, you’ll get double what you got coming.” He interrupted her focus with his warning.

Biting her lip, she didn’t heed his warning. Instead, it provoked her into action.

Without a second thought to overthink her decision she bolted to the screen door without a backward glance to check for his expected reaction, and with no clear idea of where she was fleeing to, she was running for all her worth toward the path to the woods.

*Shit.* Asten cursed.

He had no shoes on.

Dashing off the sofa Asten briefly paused to slip his flip-flops on before he chased after her.

She had a head start but he was confident he’d catch her.

Where did she really think she could hide and for how long? A part of him was a bit dumbstruck she had chosen to run from him rather than face the consequences.

Chastising her in his mind, he kept alert eyes searching for movement as he tried to think about her next move.

Running wasn't going to solve anything. Eventually he'd get her alone.

Did she think he'd have some coming to Jesus moment about not giving her a spanking, if she made him run around? Stubbing his toe on a rock, made him stop and jump in a series of loud curses. While it wasn't her fault exactly, it was her fault he was running in flip-flops. It further flamed his temper.

Silly girl. She was really going to get it now.

Asten fought through the throbbing pain of his toe and took off in the direction he could hear her.

Her feet had hit bushes hinting she had dashed into the brush, then the noise stopped. That was good, that meant she was at least in earshot.

When he got a bit further down the lengthy driveway, he stopped, short of breath and bent down from the waist to try and regain normal breathing in his lungs. Flicking eyes to see any hint of where she might be watching from, Asten firmly stood his ground.

"I'm going to give you one out, to get the spanking I was going to give you. If not, when I catch you it'll be a lot worse. It expires at the count of three. One." Asten called.

Crouched behind one of the cabins, Nat heard him.

Panic swelled in her breast, as her lungs struggled for air from the brisk run. She was hardly a runner, and she knew that Asten had been in various sports in high school. Swimming and running were not something she recalled, but he was certainly in better shape than she was. In her brief moment of reflection, she regretted running, but also didn't want to face him now. Asten was sure to be a lot angrier than he had been, and the thought



stirred her arousal again. Closing her eyes tight might somehow help. She debated her options.

“Two!” his voice cut the silence like a whip. Just as dangerous and lethal too.

Standing before she could think it all the way through, she surrendered, moving to the path ahead of him by no more than a few meters. “Okay. I’m here.”

Asten watched with irritation on his face as his willful girlfriend flung herself into sight. Natalie tried not to think too much about the fall out, as her eyes connected with his. In the darkness, she couldn’t see the heated look he was leveling her with, but his stance said it all.

There he stood, hands on his hips looking all sexy and pissed.

She didn’t want to feel the jab of arousal he stirred in her, but her pussy was throbbing with heat and need.

With two words he made everything worse.

“Cabin. Now!”

The arrogant bastard even turned around and started walking back toward his cabin expecting her to follow. She did, stomping along like a petulant child, silently cursing him the whole way.

Sitting in the same spot, he waited as she came through the door and wouldn’t make eye contact. Now as dread coursed through her, she followed to stand by him just wanting it over. He didn’t say anything he just lowered her down over his lap and secured her.

The vice like hold spoke volumes as she braced for the punishment he had been promising. She squirmed, making him toss a leg over hers to ensure she had no wiggle room to escape the position. This punishment was happening on his terms, and no amount of struggle was going to stop it before he was good and fucking ready.

“None of that,” he reprimanded harshly, catching a hand she threw back to attempt at covering her backside.

Lifting the hem of her dress to the small of her back, he fiercely pulled down her panties to the backs of her knees. Despite her protests he kept a firm arm around her and began to bring his hand down on her ass like rapid strikes of lightning.

She screamed.

Panic swelled in her chest at the realization that she couldn't move, and he wasn't showing any signs of slowing down. Pain exploded through her body as she tried to buck, tried to kick, but he had braced for each attempt of escape.

There was nothing she could do, she realized, but cry and beg him for mercy.

Asten was too lost in punishing to give credence to her pitiful pleas. When her upturned cheeks were dusted a nice shade of pink, he reached for the spoon. The first crack sent her into new frantic attempts to dislodge herself from his lap.

"Ow! Asten please," she screamed.

*CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!*

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Ow! Please," she cried.

When he did stop his voice was stern. He splayed a hand over her inflamed bottom, leaning down over her maintaining pressure to ensure she didn't move as he scolded. "When I tell you something for your safety, I expect you to listen. Clear?"

"Yes. Ow!" She sobbed, as the spoon once more found its mark.

"When you're face down over my knee it's, Yes, Sir," Asten said firmly.

"Yes, Sir." She quickly obliged.

She'd call him Jesus if he'd just stop whacking her with that hateful spoon.

"Now, you disobeyed me. You taunted me. You ran from me and made me get into the water like some bad *Jaws* movie. Right now, the only reason I don't put you over the arm of the couch and take my belt to your ass is because you showed an act of contrition and came out of hiding. If I had found you after I had

given you the option, you'd be in a lot worse pain. Do you understand that?" Asten felt his blood boil at the thought of going into that water and his toe throbbing didn't help her situation.

"Yes," she squeaked as he once more brought down the spoon, "Sir!"

"That's right," he said, praising her for using the word he told her to. Dropping his hand to massage some of the pain away he could smell her arousal.

Nat was a naturally submissive person, but he wasn't sure if she'd get turned on by a spanking or not. Now, as he had a perfect view, he could see she was indeed wet. Wet as fuck, actually. Rubbing her pinkened rear, he let his hand slip down between her legs and smiled at her deep intake of breath. Her body went stiff as he slipped one finger between her lips and slowly dragged it across her clit. Nat felt ready to jump out of her skin as she realized he knew that despite the horrible pain he had inflicted, she was totally hot for him.

They had fooled around a little, but tonight had been the night she had planned on giving herself to him. The plan had backfired miserably when he wouldn't join her for a naked frolic in the sea, but as the tears streamed down her cheeks, she wondered if maybe the night could be salvaged?

His fingers continued playing at her pussy.

That was encouraging.

"Open for me, baby," he ordered softly, removing the strength he had used to hold her firmly, confident she wasn't going to move while he pleased her.

Righting her on his lap, she let out a hiss as her butt made contact with the fabric of his pants. He ignored her discomfort and replaced his hand between her quivering thighs. The stiffness went out of her, as she threw her arms around his neck. Asten's kisses descended from chin to collarbone as Nat molded herself into him with a moan of pleasure.

The smell of her had made him hard, from the moment he

caught the scent of her over his lap. His cock bucked painfully in his pants. Asten didn't think he wanted anything in life as bad as he wanted to fuck Nat right now.

Meekly, she followed his lead as the kisses deepened and his mouth returned to savagely plunder hers. The pain of moments ago faded as desire stole her senses. She mewed as two thick fingers slipped inside of her. It was an odd feeling for Nat who had never gone this far with a guy before, but she had to admit he was making her feel rather good. Relaxing, Nat allowed him to freely roam her hormonal body.

"You been with a man before, baby?" Asten asked, confident that she was going to say no, as he reached the barrier confirming her virginity. "No, sir," she replied as he slipped his fingers out and focused more attention on her throbbing bud to reward her for using the name he craved to fall from her lips.

If he wanted her to come, he had to play there, he knew.

"I've been with two girls, just so you know," he confided. He was giving her the option of being pissed about his previous relationships now, so she couldn't throw it back at him later. He returned his mouth to hers, allowing seconds of intermission, as he pulled away to speak.

"Fuck, baby, you're so wet!" he said.

Her lips locked on his, as his hand continued to explore the treasure at the V of her thighs.

"I wanted tonight to be special," Nat mewed. "It's almost my birthday. I wanted you to make love to me under the stars."

Asten smiled at that. "I think you've got things mixed up, Nat. I'm supposed to be giving you the present."

Nat snuggled closer, brazenly kissing his neck. "All I want is you."

Feeling the heat from her ass and the sensations she was creating as she kissed him, Asten shifted her below him. His hard on was begging to bathe in her juices.

“Are you sure you want this, Natty?” Asten searched her eyes as she nodded.

Being older, and more experienced made him want to ensure she was making the decision she wanted without feeling intimidated or pressured.

Oh, she wanted it all right. She wanted him more than anything in her entire life.

Standing, she admitted she was disappointed as he walked silently into another room and didn't immediately call to her. Readjusting her clothes, she startled when he returned with a blanket. Her anger at the rejection was sparkling just below the surface until he reached for her hand.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“If you want me to make love to you beneath the stars, then that's where I'll do it,” Asten replied, guiding them from the cabin and down to a lower part of the property where they were hidden from view on the beach.

Her heart was beating wildly in her chest.

Did he mean it?

Was this really happening?

Spreading the blanket out, he pulled her to him.

“I love you, Nat,” he said honestly, “I'm not saying it because of this. I just...”

Natalie lifted off her sundress and unclasped her bra. “I love you too.”

The gentle sound of waves lapping at the shore and the view of the clear night sky was hypnotic. Caressing her nipples with his dry thumbs, Asten examined her face for a sign of hesitation. Abandoning his skilled massaging, he tilted her face up to him before lowering his lips to seal the deal.

“You're sure?” he asked, wanting to hear it from her that she really wanted this.

As encouragement he slowly kissed down her neck letting his hot breath create goosebumps on her exposed flesh.

He was odd for a man of his age, pleasantly enjoying the foreplay as much as she was.

Like a fine wine, he breathed in the aroma of her body and let it intoxicate his senses.

Her broken moans invigorated his actions, as Asten pled to whatever God above that existed, she'd not get cold feet.

He was damn near past the point of no return, when he finally gave himself the green light. Her delayed communication was answer enough, as he went for the bottom of his shirt to discard it.

"I want you to be my first." She mewled when his hands left her body for the briefest of seconds.

Asten removed his clothes, leaving his engorged penis to proudly present itself.

The only second of hesitation in her eyes, was when Nat locked on his bucking shaft.

He was *huge!*

The only ones she had seen had been little boys, when she babysat, not a grown man's.

Seeing her stiffen, and with a hint as to why, he reached for her.

It would probably hurt, but he wasn't sure if he should tell her that part or not.

Instead he wanted to make her come for him first, so she was too mind numb to even think of it.

They went down to the blanket in kisses.

"Last chance?" he cautioned, still praying to all that was holy she wouldn't have some flicker of doubt and they'd be forced to stop.

"I'm sure." Nat smiled, as his hand went to her clit again. She reached shyly to touch his hard shaft, but he pulled away.

"If you touch me, baby, this might be over before it even starts," Asten cautioned, doing his best to maintain some level of control.

On the verge of making love to someone he loved for the first time, even breathing was a challenge, but Asten forced himself to be the man she needed him to be.

Sliding down her body, he put his head between her legs and replaced his finger with his tongue. A squeak of shock came over her as her hand flew to his hair.

Nat couldn't believe what he was doing, as his tongue made circles around an area she never thought could be radiating with pleasure.

That was blissfully unexpected, she purred in her mind.

As Asten lapped at her folds, she let her legs spread further to give him complete access, feeling her tense muscles relax with the continued attention.

She felt so bad because it felt so good.

Moans escaped from her lips uncontrollably, as he seemed to know just where to touch to make her flutter.

Sliding his hands beneath her warm ass, he pressed her firmly to his face making sure he was in complete control.

Nat felt her legs begin to tremble, as her little cries became louder.

"I want you to come, baby. Come for me, just like this," he commanded softly. His words sent her into a weird spiral, as he continued finger-fucking her and sucking her clit.

"Asten!" she cried uncertainly, as the edge drew nearer.

"That's it, baby. Come on my lips. Let me tongue your pussy until you scream," he said, talking as dirty as he could to help her along.

At the word, pussy, and knowing what he was doing, she did just that. She screamed as the explosion of her first orgasm with another aftershock, rippled through her body. With the knowledge of Eve, she thrust her pelvis up in a silent command for him not to abandon her yet.

Asten darted his tongue over her sensitive bud, strangling every bit of pleasure from her that he could. Feeling her body

reacting to his turned him on more. Nat's small vibrating breaths were like a drug, as her orgasm possessed her body.

When she seemed to relax back toward the blanket, he rose on his knees and withdrew the condom from his discarded jeans.

Sliding it on quickly as she lay in ecstasy, her lazy smile was all the encouragement Asten needed. Lowering down slowly, primal instinct began to overwhelm his senses. His cock throbbed, bucking with anticipation as her wet heat beckoned him to dive into her depths of heaven and soar into an intoxicated bliss.

None of the others he had slept with had stirred emotion and tenderness.

It was just animal instinct need for release.

No love.

No prolonging, with thoughts about the weather or what hockey team would win the cup this year.

No sparks, hinting at how much he needed her besides the release hardening his balls.

That's how Asten knew she was special.

How this moment would be the moment he looked back on as one of the greatest moments of his existence on this planet.

Dropping soft kisses of pure enjoyment as he breathed in the delicate scent of her body, Asten trailed kisses up her shoulder blade and collarbone until, finally fusing his lips on hers.

Nat was shocked at the taste of herself on him.

The scent was arousing her again as happiness gave way to a gentle moan.

His hands roamed over her body before finally lowering his right hand to position himself for entry.

It was finally his turn, and there was no word Asten could credit, with the gratitude he felt for this moment.

He sucked in a hard nipple taking time to roll the other.

Natalie whimpered encouragingly, offering her body to satisfy his need.



Without thought of the verbalized permission, Asten put his mouth once more to her lips. His tongue entered her body first, with a pledge that he'd be gentle.

At the first slight feel of him entering her Nat enjoyed the sensation. The warm shaft filled her, and surprise danced in her racing hormonal mind.

His cock was commanding her.

Asten went painstakingly slow letting the head tease a bit before praying she'd forgive him.

Drawing his ample hips back he thrust upward firmly, ripping through Nat's virginal barrier.

She let out a piercing scream as he relaxed on top of her now shaking body.

Her body squirmed instinctively, attempting, at once, to squeeze her legs shut.

"Oh my god, Asten, it hurts!" she squealed on a caught sob.

The feel of his muscled torso molding her open reminded her that that wasn't how it worked.

He stilled letting her adjust to his size.

"I know, baby, it hurts the first time. I'll go slow," he whispered, thrusting gently.

It was a struggle.

He just wanted to listen to his dick and fuck the brains out of her, but love cleared the fog in his consciousness.

Breathing heavily into her neck, as he focused his attention to other parts of her body, he tightly closed his eyes.

"Do you want me to stop?" his whispered breath asked as he sucked on an earlobe and tenderly thrust again.

Desperately wanting to please him, she timidly said, "No."

Asten continued to move, almost ashamed that it felt so good for him, when she was in discomfort.

The more he continued to rock the wider her body responded to accommodate.

Gradually, the burning feeling began to give way to a tingle

of pleasure and he could read it with how she began to respond.

Her clit basked in the friction being created between his pubic hair and its moist, sensitive nerves.

Just as a match needs to be stroked across a sulfur stripe to ignite, he struck the flame of their passion with each long thrust of his cock.

Asten was doing his best to keep it slow, but when he lowered his hand to thumb her bud with more force again, she began to see what all the fuss was about.

“You okay?” he asked, fairly confident in her response.

Nat’s legs slid along his torso like she was on a slow climb on an elliptical machine, encouraging him to push himself to the limit as a non-verbal answer.

Her back arched to make sure he could touch her very core.

Asten smiled, relaxing and enjoying the act more now that he knew she was fully participating.

Increasing his pace, he gave thanks that he could now pump at a speed that would give him release soon too.

She panicked a bit when his thrusts got more intense but was surprised when they only seemed to increase her own pleasure.

The euphoric building of another orgasm changed her breathing.

Asten caught it with pleased acknowledgement and playfully bit her earlobe.

“Come again for me, baby. Come on my cock.” He followed his words with a passionate kiss on her parted lips, as Nat cried out in orgasmic bliss.

His fullness was becoming addictive and she knew in a weird way she’d miss it when it was over.

Finally, Asten let out a low growl as his seed started.

He emptied himself completely, then slumped against her soft flesh, stalling removing himself from her tight body.

Natalie looked up at him in a haze of delirium, curiously watching his face.

He didn't say much, and he almost looked in pain when he found his release.

She wondered for a second if that was how she looked during an orgasm.

It was odd, how pleasure and pain sparked similar facial reactions.

When he slipped himself out of her, he noticed the blood. Gently, he wiped her legs with the edge of the blanket and lay beside her. The sky was alive with a billion twinkling lights that seemed to be dancing just for them. Watching, as their breathing returned to normal, they both saw a falling star at the same time.

"Wow!" Asten said dropping a chaste kiss to her forehead as she cuddled next to him. "You were right to want to do this out here. I don't really ever think about the stars when I'm home," Asten said.

"It's pretty amazing," Nat replied as he took her hand and kissed her palm.

"You're amazing." He flirted, trailing kisses along her shoulder. Remembering they had been close to midnight before they came out, he reached for his phone and checked the time. 12:26.

"Happy Birthday, Princess," he declared.

A big goofy grin spread across her face.

To Nat, it was the best birthday ever.

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AS THE LAST days of summer rolled by it became harder and harder to think of leaving, however, everyone knew it was coming. They never really discussed much about what would happen when real life began again, which had Nat on pins and needles. Asten got distant whenever the date or mention of summer ending came up in their casual conversations. He never said a word, but often pulled her closer as if he needed reassuring, she was still there with him.

Nat knew she was in love.

She knew she wanted to try and do the long-distance thing. However, Asten offered no verbal communication about what he thought would happen come departure.

Nat's patience was getting lower as she began to feel the shift in Asten as days ticked by and they still hadn't discussed it. She had only broached the subject once, which sadly got her nowhere. In fact, all it did was start an argument that led to Asten emotionally pulling away.

What he wasn't telling her was how he had no idea how he was going to leave, when she was staying. What he wanted to do was beg her to wait for him when he left for college and assure her every second he could talk to or see her, he'd arrange to do so. However, with everything going on at home, he just couldn't make himself vulnerable to her rejecting him. Love wasn't something that lasted when people were together, so how on earth did he think long-distance would be?

Charlotte and Brian could barely stay in the same vicinity of each other, his living example of why love was a temporary word.

They too had been in love, and what a shitty way to end their relationship.

Foolishly, he began to talk himself out of making things with Nat work, and distancing himself when presented with the precious moments he was sure to miss when he finally boarded the plane.

Charlotte had declared to Brian that she and Asten were flying out Wednesday morning for Toronto.

That meant that Charlotte could see Asten packed and ready to leave for Calgary the following week when his classes started.

Brian had decided to stay. He needed time to think and contemplate what was coming next. With Asten off to start his own life, and the prospect of Charlotte and him becoming empty nesters, Brian's excitement for returning home was non-existent.

Downing beers early at the beach, both men were in poor

moods.

Nat had work so she had been gone all day.

Brian and Asten day drank with John on the beach in the heat all afternoon with a few of the other boys.

Brian didn't last as long as the others and went back to the cabin to rest as the alcohol caught up to him. Asten just wanted to be far away from his mother or Brian when they were together, so he nixed going back home until necessary.

Around three, he received a text from his mother that she had had enough. She had cancelled the tickets they had, and they were leaving for the airport the following morning.

Asten nearly flung his phone into the waves, as he tried to rationally process that the summer was over. Chugging his beer, he held in his anger as he contemplated where he and Nat could actually go, long-term. The sad reality was, he couldn't bear to have her leave him after a month or so apart. He couldn't give that kind of control to another human being, even the one he idolized.

His parents were headed for divorce. That was enough of a blow to his life.

They were once just like him and Nat, in love, happy, he contemplated.

No couple was worse than his parents! They used to show so much PDA, Asten was embarrassed to have friends over.

As the drinks continued, the more he talked himself into the worse decision of his life.

He had to break up with Nat, that night.

The liquid courage coursed through his veins, as he rationalized the reasons why it was in both their best interests.

"Love hurts," he cheered raising his beer.

"Love doesn't last," he cheered alone to the heavens again.

"Fuck, love," he lastly added, flattening the last of the liquid before rising on his inebriated legs.

They'd both be better off if he ripped it off like a band-aid.

HE MET her on the path around ten when he knew she'd be getting home. Natalie had never seen him drunk, but it was painfully obvious.

Lifting a brow at him, she knew it was going to be a long night alone by the looks of things. That hurt, since their time now was precious. As she approached closer, he looked serious.

Natalie slowed her advancing as he made a direct line toward her. It was more aggressive than he had intended, or she had been anticipating.

"Hey." She welcomed, trying to decipher the situation.

"Hey," he replied. "Listen, babe we needa talk." His words were slurred, but the message was clear as he stopped a few feet in front of her instead of welcoming her with the affection she had been used too.

She stood stock-still, *talk?*

Why did the way he said it, seem so awful?

"Okay," she replied, knowing that they had been fine last time they spoke, but he had ignored six of her texts today.

"Our plans have changed. I leave in the morning." He lowered his eyes as her bottom lip began to quiver, and the important part was still to come. "It's been a good summer, but long distance just isn't going to work." The last of it tumbled out rushed and shorter than he rehearsed, but he felt his own emotion growing at the gravity of his words and knew he just needed this to be over. Some words mumbled, but all she understood was his detached declaration of ending things, loaded drunk.

"Just like that? I'm leaving, nice knowing you?" she snapped angrily as tears pooled in her eyes. "And drunk? This is how you're seriously breaking up with *me?*"

Asten struggled to remain detached as her tears stabbed his heart.

It was an asshole move, he had to admit it, but there was no other fucking way out of this mess he could think of.

Asten swallowed down a sob and chastised himself to toughen up.

It came across angrier than intended, but anger was an emotion he could handle.

Nat stood there furiously hurt, looking beautiful, hands on her hips like a majestic deity, demanding answers.

Answers he didn't have. Shrugging was all he could manage as his head swam with all the crap he was dealing with. His parents were divorcing, he was moving across the country. Even though he loved Natalie more than he could verbalize, love was temporary. They had no hope of maintaining a four-year long-term relationship while he worked on a business degree in Alberta and she wasn't even out of High School yet.

"Nat, it could never work. Think about it. Let's not make this shittier than it has to be," Asten said running a hand through his hair.

"Right," she snapped back. "Wouldn't want to make you feel guilty. So, answer me this one thing, Asten. Was this the plan all along, have a summer fling? Tell me you love me, fuck me and fuck off once September got close so you wouldn't be bored all summer?" She paused biting her lip, as he shamefully shook his head. "Answer me!" she demanded crossly. "You owe me that at the very least!"

Asten's temper flared at that. In his drunken state of consciousness, he took her words as an attack.

He had never planned for things to end so miserably, but he didn't see much hope when his mom and dad were breaking up. They had been in love once too and look at them now.

Reaching in his pockets he angrily snapped, "Owe you? Owe *you*?" Withdrawing the change he had in his shorts he reached it out to her. "That's what I owe you. It's all I have on me. Take it."

Wrong words!

Horrified and hurt beyond anything she could imagine; Natalie drew back her hand and smacked him as hard as she could across the face.

This was the man she loved. This was the man she had given herself to, and he had the audacity to act like all they shared added up to less than a dollar.

“Screw you, Asten!” she hissed, watching his angry eyes look off in the direction her slap had turned him.

She had never hit another person, but now as the smack reverberated around the path, all she could think was she had to get away.

Nat had to put as much distance between them as possible, because she couldn't even bear to look at him.

Dashing down the path to her cabin, the dam broke inside her and hysterical sobs wracked her body. Her mother was at the Quigleys', so she headed straight for her room to saddle her pain alone.

A small part of her hoped in the morning he'd regain some common sense, apologise and they could talk rationally.

Another part focused on surviving somehow without him in her life if that didn't happen.

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ASTEN STOOD on the path alone, holding the side of his face with the understanding he deserved what she gave him.

Sobbing to himself in a drunken break, he wandered back to the beach and passed out by the ashes of the fire that had once been a source of such joy.

They were over.

He was leaving, and he was just as heartbroken as she was.

Life, they both concluded as their eyes shut, utterly fucking sucked sometimes.