Sam's Got Talent

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Summary

Samantha Hale gets the opportunity of a lifetime -- she's going to be a contestant on America's Got Talent. She doesn't count on the adoration of judges and audience alike. She certainly doesn't count on meeting the man of her dreams, Tom Hiddleston. She also doesn't count on winning, but she might make it.

Time to pinch herself awake and put on her game face. Sam is in the finals.
Chapter 1

It was a cool, spring night, and my friends dragged me to a local bar known for its karaoke night. The fact that it was my twenty sixth birthday didn’t help things any. I got dressed in my usual get-up: black leather jacket, black skinny jeans, red camisole, thigh high boots, black lace fingerless gloves, and my favorite silver chain necklace.

My best friend, Ashley, signed me up to sing “Stand by Me” by Ben E. King, even though she knew that I wasn’t comfortable singing in public yet. She knew that my favorite actor sang it before, so she wanted to “make him proud” or something like that. Yeah, like Tom Hiddleston would ever see me perform, much less hear me sing.

It had come time for me to go on stage, and the giant pit in my stomach held me down longer than I care to admit. I was about to stand, when my friend, Amanda, starts chanting my name. So, of course, that made everyone else chant, and made the pit grow even more. I got to the stage, took a deep breath, and closed my eyes. I imagined I was home, singing into my vacuum cleaner. As I sang, everything faded away, and it became just me. After the song was over, I slowly opened my eyes, and watched as everyone stood on their feet, applauding and cheering… for me.

The next day, I found out that Ashley had taken a video of me, and submitted it to America’s Got Talent as an audition… as well as YouTube! I watched the video, and little did I know, she turned the camera on herself and did a little “shout out” to Tom Hiddleston, hoping he would see it. Naturally, I chewed her out for it… but then I hugged her tight, thanking her for doing something that I never would’ve done on my own.

A couple days had passed, and there still wasn’t any word as to if I could go on AGT or not. I watched a couple other auditions that were posted, and they were either pretty good, or horrible.

Ashley had come over to keep me company, and to help calm me down. I had started freaking out, thinking they weren’t going to pick me. “Sam, seriously, how can they not pick you? You have the best singing voice I’ve ever heard.”

“You’re just saying that…”

“Hey!” She held my hand, a little tighter than normal. “Have you ever known me to say anything just to make you feel better? You know I say nothing but the truth.”

I smiled weakly, “Thank you… and you’re right.”

“Of course, I am. I always am.”

“I shouldn’t be sitting here, moping around.”

“Right.”

“If they don’t pick me, then it’s their loss. Not mine.”

“Exactly!”

“But… Tom hasn’t said anything, about my video.”

“Honey, he probably hasn’t had the chance to see it yet. Isn’t he with UNICEF in Haiti or something like that?”
“I think so, yeah. According to his Facebook page, he is.”

“Well, there you go. Do you really think they have easy internet access in Haiti?”

I chuckled. “You’re right, I shouldn’t be frantic.”

“You know, that never gets old, hearing you say that I’m right.”

“Oh, shut up! Why don’t we watch more videos?”

“Sure!” We barely started looking through more videos, when there was a knock at my door.

“Huh, I wonder who that could be,” I thought out loud. As I got up to check the door, Ashley ran back to my bedroom. I finally opened the door, to reveal the one and only Mel B standing on my front porch. I was so amazed, that I just stood in silence. Her chuckle brought me back to reality. “Mel B? Is that really you?”

“The one and only, love. May I come in?”

“Of course! Come on in.” I opened the door wider so she could come in, and she seemed pleased when she did so. “Um, so, what brings you to my humble home?”

“Oh, and a home it is. It’s amazing in here, sweetheart. So cozy. Your boyfriend must love being here with you, it’s almost like you don’t want to leave.”

“Um… actually, I’m single.”

She turned around, almost shocked. “No way, really? Such a beautiful girl like yourself, single?”

“Yeah,” I shrugged. “Just haven’t found the right guy yet. Hopefully I find him soon… So, what’s up? What brings you to Albany? You know, besides AGT.”

Mel chuckled, which made the butterflies in my stomach flutter a bit more than normal. “Actually, Sam, I’m here on official AGT business.”

“R-Really?”

“Mhm. Sam, the other judges and I watched your audition video, and we absolutely loved it. We would love it if you would come on America’s Got Talent. You don’t have to worry about the judge cuts, just come to the live shows.”

“Oh my god, I would love to! It would be such an honor! Heck, it’s an honor to have you in my house.”

Mel chuckled again, “Well, I consider it an honor to meet such a talented, young singer.”

“You think I’m talented?”

“I do. I truly do. So, see you at Rock City Music Hall?”

I smiled, “I’ll see you there!”

“Wonderful! Someone will get in contact with you soon for when to come down for the show. It’s a pleasure to meet you, love.”

“Believe me, the pleasure is all mine.”
Almost immediately after her departure, I called my friends to my house. As they arrived, I was practically jumping in place.

“Okay, so, remember how Ashley submitted the video of my singing at the pub to America’s Got Talent? So, I finally heard something today, from someone who actually came to my house, and I know you’ll never guess who it was!”

“Then who was it?” Ashley asked, a concerned tone in her voice.

“The one and only Mel B!”

Amanda screamed the loudest, making my ears hurt. “Oh my god! My hero was here??”

“I’m sorry, what? I think I’m deaf… yes, she was here.”

“And…?”

“And… I’m going to be on AGT! I’m going straight to the live shows!”

“Oh my god!” Ashley squealed, “I’m so happy for you!”

“I couldn’t have done it without you. Without either of you…” I couldn’t stop my tears falling down my face. Thankfully, they were happy tears. “I love you guys.”

Ashley and Amanda hugged me tight, saying how they loved me, too. I couldn’t believe it… I, Samantha Hale, would be going on America’s Got Talent!
Chapter 2

The next couple of weeks had gone by in what felt like a matter of days, and before I knew it, it was time to go for the live shows at Radio City Music Hall. Apparently, the butterflies in my stomach were more than excited to visit the Music Hall, because they had been fluttering since I had left my house that morning. My nerves weren’t so much as thinking I was going to mess up on my song, but more of thinking that no one would like me so I’d be sent home during my first week. I think my heart would’ve broke if that happened. What had kept my head on my shoulders was that Ashley and Amanda came along to support me. Unfortunately, they were told that they had to go into the audience before the show started.

I signed in, and saw that the other acts had already arrived. From the looks of things, there were a few singers, a dance group, and a couple magicians. I silently walked up to the other acts, and was immediately greeted by a young man I recognized as one of the magicians. “Hi! You must me Sam Hale. It’s nice to finally meet you. We’ve been hearing all about you all morning. The only one from the video auditions that made it to the live shows.”

“The only one?”

“The one and only.”

I giggled a bit, “Hey, you’re… Mat Franco, right?”

He smiled and chuckled a bit, “Good to know you’ve heard of me.”

“Dude, I love your magic! I saw your audition, and you blew my mind!”

We laughed and continued to make small talk until it was time to get ready for the show. Ashley and Amanda had already gone to their seats, so I sat with the other acts, meeting them all.

The thought of being the only video audition to go through kind of scared me. Would I have expectations to live up to? Just because the judges loved me, would America love me too? The thing with the live shows was, it wasn’t the judges who determined who stayed. The viewers of America voted.

A woman took me over to a little area with a camera crew, and had asked me to sit down. “I’d like to have a little interview, is that okay?”

“Of course, it is,” I smiled, “is this my little video that pops up before I go on stage?”

“Indeed, it is. You’ve seen the show before?”

“Yes, I have, and it’s amazing to see what talent that is discovered here. It’s the place where dreams come true.”

She chuckled as the camera turned on. “So, tell me about yourself.”

“My name is Samantha Hale, I am twenty-seven years old, and I’m from Albany, New York. I’ve been singing for most of my life, and I also play guitar, drums, and piano.”

“Oh wow! How did you learn so many instruments?”

“My music teacher in High School knew a lot of instruments so she helped me.”
“Very impressive. Did she help you find your voice, too?”

“No, actually. That was my chorus teacher in elementary school. She told me I had a pretty voice and as I got older, my high school chorus teacher told me I had a great jazz voice, but I love all genres, it’s hard to pick just one!”

“So true!” The girl giggled, “So, what song will you be doing for us tonight?”

“I’m going to be singing ‘My Heart Will Go On’ by Celine Dion. It’s a beautiful song, it’s my favorite.”

“Now, I have one last question: in the audition video, one of your friends asked for Tom Hiddleston to please watch it?”

I sighed, smiling. “She knows Tom is my favorite actor, and how amazing it would be for me to meet him. But, I mean, really? He’s an actor. I’m no one. Why would he want to watch anything of mine?”

After my interview, I stood backstage, waiting for my turn to sing. A young girl named Mara Justine performed before me and wow, was she good. Her voice was beautiful, and still so young. The judges loved her, and from the sounds of things, America loved her, too.

After Mara left the stage, I watched my introduction video play on the big screen. I giggled when I heard a couple screams when Tom was mentioned, and smiled as I went to center stage, listening to the crowd go insane. “Hello, Sam.”

I smiled when I saw who was talking. “Hello, Mel.”

“How are you feeling? You look pretty nervous.”

“Then I look how I feel.” I heard a couple chuckles from the audience and that helped me calm down.

I looked at the judges table, and saw that Mel B was joined by Heidi Klum, Howard Stern, and Howie Mandel. There was a look on Howard’s face that I couldn’t place, but I couldn’t really focus on whether or not that was just his face. “Are you ready, love?”

“Yeah, Mel, I think I am.”

“Then good luck.”

“Thank you.”

The crowd cheered, and I heard the familiar flute play the opening. I closed my eyes, and softly started singing. Once I started, all my nerves died down, and my singing became stronger, but still soft. As more instruments were added, my voice got louder and stronger. As I sang the chorus, everything else just drifted away. It was just the music and me. When I was done, I slowly opened my eyes, and saw the entire audience on their feet, cheering like crazy.

Nick came out onto the stage, clapping as well. “Oh. My. Goodness! That was amazing, Sam! So beautiful!”

I couldn’t help but blush. “Thank you!”

“Sam,” Mel started as she sat back in her chair, “I didn’t think it was possible… but you were so
much better than your audition video! You were just amazing, sweetheart.”

“Thank you so much.”

“Sam, I agree with Mel. You were spectacular, amazing, incredibly talented…” Heidi drifted off, then she smiled brighter. “I’m actually ashamed of myself, I can’t think of any other words to describe you, you were so awesome!”

“Thank you!”

My smile faded quickly when I saw it was Howard’s turn to talk. Howard on AGT was the equivalent of Simon Powell on American Idol. He shifted in his seat and my heart pounded. “To be completely honest, I wasn’t completely sold on the idea of you being on this show. The video your friend submitted for you didn’t really do you justice…” The audience booed and hissed, which gave me a little hope. “Hold on! Hold on… As I was saying, the video didn’t do you justice… because you are much better in person. Your voice is stronger, you look better under the lighting. In one performance, you completely sold me. You are meant to be here, and hopefully America feels the same.”

My legs gave out, but Nick was there to help keep me steady. “Thank you, Howard. I won’t let you down, I promise.”

Then there was something that was rarely ever seen… Howard Stern, was smiling. Smiling!

“Howie, do you have anything to add before we send her backstage?”

At first he wasn’t saying anything… just sitting there, with his hand under his chin. Ever so slowly, he got to his feet, and started a slow clap, which eventually got faster, to the point where everyone in the audience was cheering and applauding.

“Sam, even though I agree with Howard, it’s only for one part – the video that was submitted definitely didn’t do you any justice. Your voice is so much better in person. You, young lady, are one of the best acts I’ve seen tonight. I really, really hope that America votes for you to stay.”

I went to the back room (with help from Nick) and sat with the other acts. “Thank you, Nick. God, I must look like a mess.”

We sat in the back room while everyone watched the different acts that went through. Next thing I know, I got a text message on my phone from an unknown number. +Samantha Hale? +

+Who wants to know? +

+Luke Windsor+

+Yeah, right+

+Tom wants to meet you+

+Uh huh. Tell him to wait for the Queen of England first. Then I might be able to squeeze him in. +

+I’m trying to have a serious conversation with you+

+Oh. So am I. But I’m failing. And I’m sorry for that+

+You’re taking none of this seriously+
“Hey,” I was brought back to reality by a gentle hand on my shoulder, “are you okay?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah. I’m okay. Thanks, Mat. What did I miss?”

“It’s time to go home, and prepare for the news tomorrow.”

As we went outside, Ashley and Amanda hugged me tight, saying how amazing I was, and some of the whispers of praise around them.

Before I knew it, it was the next night, I was standing on stage with all the other acts, and my nerves were worse than when I actually had to perform. Mat had already gone through, as well as Mara. Finally, it had come down to Hart Dance Team – a twenty member, all girl, dance team – and me.

Nick had the card in his hand, and my heart was trying to escape its chambers to get to the floor. “America has voted… and the act going forward, is… Samantha Hale!”

My legs seemed to turn into ice, my shoes became glue. I couldn’t move. “I got through,” was all that ran through my head. “I got through.” I watched as the dance group started walking away, and that’s what helped me become unstuck. I ran after them, and hugged each and every one of them. After the hugs, I went over to Nick, my hand covering my mouth as tears flowed. “Is this really happening?”

“It’s really happening. You’re going to the next round!”


Chapter 3

I had a couple weeks before the next show, so I took a few personal days. Just sitting back, relaxing… and thinking of what song to sing next. This next one I wanted to incorporate my piano into, so I looked up a few songs on YouTube, as well as some songs that could be altered so they could be played on piano.

Once I had a song in mind, I took my laptop back to my music room, and was about to start practicing… but I had this burning sensation in the back of my mind, like I was forgetting something… I looked through my phone, looking at the messages from that Luke guy.

+ Tom will meet up with you next week, backstage +

+ Tom wants to meet you +

At first, I felt skeptical, thinking it was some prank. But the more I read the messages, the more I wanted them to be true… the more I believed them.

+ Hey, Ashley? +

+ What’s up? +

+ Could you come with me to the Music Hall? +

+ What for? +

+ Come over, and I’ll explain +

+ Be right there +

It felt like forever before Ashley finally got here. I looked out the front window to see she had brought Amanda, too. Once inside, I poured us some hot tea, and tried to explain my feeling as best as I could.

“Wait, so… some guy texts you…”

“Yes.”

“Says he’s Tom Hiddleston’s publicist…”

“Mhm.”

“And tries to convince you that Tom is going to meet you, backstage, at Radio City Music Hall… tonight?”

“Yeah.”

“And you believe him?”

I stared down into my cup, realizing that it sounded a bit ridiculous now that I have heard it out loud. “I mean, I want to believe him but, I just… it’s like a gut feeling, but not. It’s like, I don’t have any reason not to believe him, but it still sounds awful sketchy… you know?”

Ashley set her cup down and held my hand, “So, what are you gonna do about it?”
Amanda set her cup down, also. “You can either take the chance, meet the actor of your dreams or expose it as a total sham. Or… you can stay home, thinking about what might have been.”

“So? What’s the verdict?”

“I think… I need to go see if it’s him.”

The girls cheered as we got in Ashley’s car, and I couldn’t help but feel nervous. Was it going to be him? Or just some stupid prank by a hacker who got my number? I watched the world go by from the back of the car, and slowly became more at ease. If it was him, it was him. If it wasn’t, then it wasn’t. Either way, I was going back to the Music Hall, and seeing how the other acts were doing, first hand.

We pulled up and saw that there were more security guards than normal… especially since there normally weren’t any. Ashley had parked across the street, and thankfully the men hadn’t seen us just yet.

“What the hey is going on?”

“I have no idea, Ash.”

We slowly went up to the building, and almost immediately a very large, very muscular, very intimidating man, dressed all in black, with a cord coming out of his ear, and black sunglasses, came up to the three of us. “Samantha Hale?”

“Y-Yes…”

“You need to come with us.”

“Only if my friends come, too.”

“I’m afraid that’s not going to happen.”

Quickly, I got my phone out and texted the unknown number.

+ Either my friends come in with me or I don’t come in at all +

In a matter of seconds, the guard let out an aggravated sigh. “Fine. Three of you, follow me.”

We followed close behind the large guard, thankful that anyone watching the show was already in their seats. A young man in a gray suit stood at the end of the hall, smiling. “And you thought I was lying. Glad you finally decided to show up. My name is Luke Windsor.”

I blinked a couple times, not expecting someone so young. “Luke? The one who texted me?”

“The one and only. How’s the Queen, by the by?”

“Oh my god. Sir, I am so sorry, I really thought you were some punk trying to prank me.”

“Please, call me Luke, and don’t worry. It’s quite all right. He’s waiting, if you still want to see him.”

I looked back at my friends, my stomach unsure of what to do, but my heart knowing it wants to go into the room, whether my feet follow or not. It took a very enthusiastic push from Ashley to make me unglued from the floor. Luke opened the door then closed it behind me once I was in the room.

A tall figure stood in front of me, hood up, head down. Slowly, his head rose, and I could finally see his face, his wonderful smile that makes his entire face light right up. His beautiful blue eyes
that sparkled whenever he looked at you. I wanted to squeal in delight, I wanted to faint from shock… I wanted to hide from embarrassment. My shyness was winning, because all I could do was stand in awe of the beautiful man that was in front of me.

His hand on my shoulder brought me out of my daze. “Sam, are you all right?”

“Oh, um… yes? No? I… I don’t know, to be honest.”

“Um, why don’t we sit down? You can tell me what ails you. I mean, you can if you want.”

“Thank you.” He led me to a couch against the back wall of the room, and I almost fell into it.

“Wow…”

Tom sat next to me, his hood down so his black curls are showing. “What is it?”

“I just… I never thought I’d be meeting you in person… It’s been my dream to meet you. So… if you’re here… you’ve heard me sing?”

“Heard and watched, darling. I wanted to be here for your show last week, but I couldn’t get here in time. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, it’s okay. I understand, you’re a busy guy. Also, I bet Luke was kinda hard to convince.”

“Yeah, he was. I showed him the video of you singing in that pub, and asked to meet you. After a bit, he tracked down your number, and now we’re here. I watched last week this morning, and I love the video you made. You really play that many instruments?”

“I do. I’m going to play the piano next show.”

“Oh? May I know what song?”

I chuckled, he was actually sweeter in person. “It’s a surprise. Um, Tom?”

“Yes?”

“Would you ever want to see me again?”

“Darling, even if I have to sneak away, I swear, I will see you again.”

I couldn’t help but blush, “Really?”

He took my hand in his and kissed the back, “Really.”
Chapter 4

I sat on a park bench, taking pictures of the morning sun showing through the local trees, of the
dew on the grass sparkling like diamonds in the light, of a man in a baseball hat and shorts running
the trail… A man in a baseball hat?

I put the camera down and saw the familiar figure jogging towards me. He smiled as he slowed
down, taking his earbuds out. He placed his sunglasses on the brim of his hat. “Hey, Sam. Fancy
seeing you here.”

“Hey, Tom! How are you?”

“Eh, not bad. Just on my morning run, since I’m in town for a few more days.”

“Oh yeah? Then what’s next for the handsome actor?”

Tom chuckled his famous “ehehe” and there are no words that can describe what that laugh does to
me. “Oh, not much. I just have some voice work to do, plus a cameo, then that’s it for a little
while.”

“Yeah? Am I privileged enough to know what movies you’re doing them for?”

“Unfortunately, no. You’ll have to find out along with everyone else.”

“Well dang.”

He smiled, in turn made me smile more. “So, what does your day look like, Sam?”

“Nothing, really. Maybe, practice more for the show, or just take a personal day again. I’m not
sure.”

“Well, maybe you and I could hang out? Just you and me?”

I smiled up at him, “I’d love nothing more. Would you like some company while you go back to
your hotel?”

“How did you know I was staying at a hotel?”

“Oh, call it a hunch. Also, I didn’t think you would know anyone near here.”

“This is true. Sure, I’d love someone to talk to. Just, beware, people like to take pictures while I’m
out.”

“I don’t mind. I’m plastered on TV anyways, so I don’t think pictures would hurt.”

As we walked to his hotel, I felt his hand gently brush mine, and I could feel my heart skip a beat.
So, going with my gut, I wrapped my pinky around his, my cheeks immediately turning pink. I
watched out of the corner of my eye, as he smiled and intertwined his fingers with mine.

“So, Sam, tell me a little about yourself?”

“Um, sure. What do you want to know?”

“Anything, really. Like, what’s your favorite thing to do?”
“Oh, um… well, to be honest, I can’t be limited to just one thing. I love to take pictures, and I love to sing… but I think you already knew that last part.”

“I did, but I don’t mind hearing it again. Pictures, huh? What do you normally take pictures of? People? Buildings?”

“Nature, mostly.”

“That explains why you were in the park. Cool.”

“What about you?”

“Huh?”

I giggled a bit, “What do you like to do? What’s your favorite thing to do?”

“Does acting count?” I raised my eyebrow, and he laughed. “I guess not. Hm…I guess running. It helps clear my mind, and it helps me stay in shape.”

We got to the hotel and as he went in, I stood outside, by a bench under an awning. He was inside for about a minute, because he came right back out.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just thought that you wouldn’t want me to follow inside…”

“You can come in, I don’t mind.”

“But… what about Luke? What about all the guards that were there when we met at the show?”

“Oh, them? Yeah, don’t worry. They’re just there to intimidate people and whatnot. So, would you like to come in?”

I could feel the heat radiating from my face, I couldn’t help but start pulling at my fingers. “Um, yeah. Yes, I’d love to.”

He smiled and took my hand again, then led me inside. Thankfully he was only on the second floor, so no one really had the chance to stop us. Once we were in his room, he closed and locked the door behind us… then it hit me of where I was. “Oh. My. God.”

“What? What is it?”

“I’m… I’m in your room, why am I in your room? Should I even be in here? What if Luke comes in? Can he kick me out of your room? Why am I even in here?” The more nervous I got, the faster I talked. I could feel the air almost drain out of my lungs, my fingers were starting to hurt from me pulling on them. What finally stopped me was feeling Tom’s hands hold mine.


“I’m sorry. I just, I get so nervous, that, I just get carried away. I’m sorry.”

“Sam, it’s okay. I just want to make sure you’re okay before I ask you to dinner.”

“It’s something I’ve always done and I have no idea – what did you say?”
He chuckled with that intoxicating laugh of his again. “I said, I want to make sure you’re okay, before I ask you to dinner. Sam, will you do me the honor of joining me for dinner tonight?”

“I, um, I… I would love to. I really would.”

The day seemed to fly by, before I knew it, we were at the restaurant, enjoying our dinner. Tom set his fork down, and looked into my eyes in a way I’ve never recognized before. His eyes sparkled more than normal, and there was a small blush to his cheeks. There I was, spending the day with this man… and dinner was the first time I had actually studied his face. He tugged at his tie a little, and I couldn’t help but smile. “Sam, I must say, I’ve had a wonderful time with you.”

“Really? I feel the same way.”

“Hey, Sam? After dinner, I know of a place near here, where it’ll just be you and me. What do you think?”

“I think that sounds perfect.”

After we ate, we went to the edge of the forest. I felt a bit uneasy, unsure if it was caused by the food or being alone with Tom for so long. He sensed my distress, so he stopped, too. “Hey, are you okay?”

“I think the food is getting to me. My stomach is in an uproar…”

“Sounds more like nerves, to me. Sam, there’s nothing to be nervous about. I’ll be right beside you the entire time.”

“Tom, I think that’s what I’m nervous about… Tom, it feels unreal to even call you ‘Tom.’ I’ve been a fan of yours for so long, to go from a fan to friend, in such little time… it feels weird, but it feels natural, too. You know? Like, in a way, we were meant to meet, but it’s still a shock.”

“Sam… I don’t know if I can say I exactly know what you mean, but, you’re not alone in this. We just met, yes, but it feels like you’re an old friend who I haven’t seen in years. When we first met, I felt something. Yes, I felt the same old butterflies in my stomach, but I felt a spark, in my chest. To me, that meant that I had found the missing half of my heart. Please tell me if you felt the same spark?”

I remembered back to the day we met, backstage at the music hall. I did feel a spark in my chest, but I brushed it off, as being star struck. I nodded, my nerves dying down slowly. “I did. I felt it, too. Tom, I’m sorry for being such a nervous wreck all the time. I respect you, I like you, and I’m just…”

Tom took a step closer, taking my hands in his. “Just, what?”

“I’m afraid I’ll say something wrong and scare you off,” I softly sighed as looked down at our hands, how dainty mine looked in his. “It wouldn’t be the first time…”

“Sam, do you trust me?” I looked back up into his eyes, and nodded. “Then trust me not to run off? Have I done something to make you think such things of me?”

“No! No, not in the least.”

He smiled, and slowly walked backwards, into the forest, “Good. Now, trust me, and close your eyes. Just follow my voice, and I will lead you to where we have to go. Close your eyes, love.”
I took a deep breath, and closed my eyes, walking where Tom lead me. It felt like minutes before we stopped. I opened my eyes, and saw the beautiful night scene. The moon was high in the sky, its light shining down on the world, making the forest a dream come true. The stars sparkled bright, a beautiful background for the night. The breeze was light, just enough to make the leaves move in the trees, to create the soft music of nature.

Tom pulled me close, and he wrapped my small body in his arms, his baby blue eyes staring down into my darker ones. We started swaying to nature’s love song, then his hand softly caressed my cheek. “Has anyone told you that you look beautiful in the moonlight?”

“No, no one’s ever said that to me.”

“Well you should hear it more often. I should’ve told you sooner, Sam. I…”

“Yes?”

His lips slowly came closer to my own, his other hand on my lower back, pulling my body closer to his. “Sam, I…”

A loud, annoying, beeping sound, drowned out the breeze, the leaves, and Tom’s marvelous voice. My eyes fluttered open, revealing the bright sunlight shining through the curtains. I quickly turned over, and stuffed my face in the pillow. “Just a dream,” I mumbled.
“So, have you guys officially hung out yet?”

I let out a soft sigh as I held my cup of hot chocolate, “No, we haven’t. I don’t even think he wants to. We text all the time, but… no hint of wanting to meet up again.”

“You know, you never told me what he said to you backstage.”

I raised an eyebrow at that. “I didn’t? I could’ve sworn I did… Okay, I’ll tell you. He said he wanted to meet up again, even if he had to sneak away. He said he still wanted to see me but, I guess not bad enough.”

“Pfft. Men. Of course.”

“Ashley, I don’t know what he’s even doing.”

“But still! You don’t deserve to be the damsel waiting for the guy to call. You’re better than that.”

“You really think so?”

“I do. Now, let me see your phone.”

“Wait, what?”

“You heard me. Let me see your phone.”

“Um… okay, I guess.”

I set my phone on the table and slid it across the table to her. Ashley quickly set her coffee down and picked up my phone, tapping away at the screen. I would reach over to take it back, only to have her back further away from me.

“Okay, I give. What the hell are you doing?”

“Texting Tom for you.”

“What??”

With a satisfied grin, she slid my phone back to me, and took a sip of her coffee. I quickly picked it up and saw what all she wrote. “What the hell, Ashley?? ‘I’m not some toy you can set aside?’ What the hell!”

“What? You act like I sent him, ‘Tom, I want you to take me next time I see you.’”

“Dude.” I rolled my eyes as I quickly texted Tom. + Tom, I’m so sorry about that. My friend got ahold of my phone, I didn’t know what she was going to do. I’m sorry. +

“Sam, calm down, okay?”

I took a deep breath, let it out slow, and a smile crept across my face. “Yeah, you’re right. It could’ve been so much worse. That’s actually tame for you.”

“Yeah! So, chill!”
I smiled, “I’m sorry, Ash. Thank you for doing that, actually.”

“How about, no? Um… Ash? Can I tell you something? You’ve gotta keep it to yourself.”

“I’ll take it to the grave. What’s up?”

“Well… I’ve been having… dreams, about Tom. I don’t mean silly little dreams where he take me on some cruise or something. I mean, elaborate dreams, where I’m almost certain they’re real…”

“Oh yeah? Sounds spooky.”

“Like, last night, I had a dream that we spent the day together… and he treated me to dinner and I had the best night of my life in that dream…” I looked down at my warm chocolate, sad that my dream would probably never happen. “It was the perfect day, and it will never happen.”

“Hey… don’t think like that. It might not happen the way you want, but just because it’s a dream, doesn’t mean it won’t happen. Hey, see what Tom said back.”

I looked down at my phone, saw that I got more followers on Twitter, and saw a text message.

+ Sam, I’m so sorry. Your friend is right. I told you that I would do whatever it took to see you again, and I’m doing a poor job with keeping my promise. Since being in New York, I’ve been booked to the wall. How about this: tonight, meet me backstage at the music hall again, and we’ll leave together. I’ll treat you to dinner, or we can spend some time together either in my hotel room, or at your place. Is that okay? Also, sorry this is so long. I never quite got the hang of all that lol business and whatnot. +

+ Oh Tom, it’s okay. I understand, you’re an actor, you get busy. And it’s okay, I’m not much for acronyms too, but I can at least teach you ‘lol,’ if you’ll let me? +

+ You can teach me anything you want, love ;) +

“Um, hello? Earth to Sam! Don’t leave me in the dark, please? What are you guys saying?” I relayed the messages to her, and she laughed. “Atta girl! So, where will you guys go?”

“I’m not sure yet. I’m thinking my place, less paparazzi waiting at the door if one of us leaves.”

“Good thinking. I’m invited, right?”

“Um… well…”

“Sam, I think the word you’re looking for is ‘yes.’ So, I’m invited… right?”

I sat for a minute, thinking. Pros of Ashley going with us: make sure Tom was serious about hanging out, make sure I wouldn’t be some flame he could easily put out. Cons: Tom being won over by her instead of me.

“Yes, you’re invited.”

“I was wondering if you’d forgotten how to say yes. I’ll drive you home and he can follow. Sound good?”

“Perfect.” I texted back and forth with Tom, finally making plans to see each other again. Surprisingly enough, he was fine with Ashley joining us, saying something about meeting his girl’s
best friend. As we were texting, I looked up at the time on my phone. “Crap! I’m gonna be late!”

“Don’t worry, girlie, I’ll help you get ready.”

“Oh thank you! Are you sure?”

“Positive. Now get your tiny butt upstairs!”

One montage later, we finally got to the music hall, where Amanda was waiting outside. “Go! The first act has already started!”

Fortunately, I made it to the backroom, and was able to sit down. I had a few people ask me if I was okay, then Mat sat down next to me.

“Hey, are you okay?”

Yeah, I’m fine. Just, got caught up in something. I can’t believe I’m late.”

“Sam, it’s okay. You’re here, that’s all that matters.”

Nick Cannon called my name, saying that I was next. I had just stood up when I felt my phone vibrate.

+ Good luck tonight, love. I’m sure you’ll do great! +

+ Thank you, Tom! I’ll see you later! +

I slowly went onstage, my racing heart quickly calming. There, the piano sat, center stage. I looked out, not at the judges, but trying to scan the audience, to see if I could see Tom. With no luck, I sat on the bench, took a deep breath, and started playing the introduction to “Your Song” by Elton John. As I played, I could feel the audience staring at me, the judges carefully watching to see if I’d mess up. Confidently, I played the song without hitting any wrong notes, without singing out of key. As I played the last cord, I could hear the crowd cheer and applaud.

Nick came out on stage and stood with me, his arm around my shoulders. “Dang, Sam, you get better and better every time I see you! Howard, what do you think of Sam’s performance tonight?”

“It was amazing, Sam. It really was. I’m hoping America votes for you to stay, because I can’t wait to see what more you have in store for us.”

“Thank you, so much!”

I walked back stage, only to be enveloped in Mat’s arms. “Dude, that was amazing! It wouldn’t be fair if you had to go home.”

“I know, but I think you deserve this more than I do.”

“What do you mean?”

Mat was called to go on stage, and I watched him from the back room. He was so talented, I believed he could really win. During the other acts, I started texting with Tom, excited for what would come after the show.

Everyone had been dismissed for the night, so while everyone else went towards the exit, I went to the greenroom where I had first met Tom. I slowly opened the door, fortunately to be met with a tall man with gorgeous curls and a wide smile. “Hello, love.”
“Tom!” I hugged him tight, and he hugged me back. “Tom, I missed you.”

“I missed you too, love. I’m sorry – “

“Tom, you’re fine, I promise. Now, you’re ready to meet up at my house?”

“Lead the way, darling.”

I put my hand behind me as we started walking to the exit, Tom close behind. About halfway to the door, I felt something brush my hand. I smiled, coming to a stop. Without another word, I took his hand in mine, and lead him outside. I gave him another hug before watching him go to his car.

“Dang, he’s more handsome in person.”

“Yeah, he is. Come on, let’s go.”

It didn’t take long before we drove to my small home. Ashley and I talked with Tom a bit, getting to know him a little more. It was about an hour before Ashley left for her own home. As she went out the door, she gave a quick “thumbs up,” making Tom raise an eyebrow with concern.

“Um, love? What was that for?”

I shrugged, “I have no idea.”
“So, welcome to my humble home. Would you like anything? A drink? A snack?”

Tom smiled, “Do you have any wine?”

“Yeah, I actually have a red moscato, but to be honest, I was hoping to have that after dinner… if you want to have dinner with me. I mean, would you like to have dinner with me? I have a lasagna in the freezer that just needs to go in the oven, if you’d like some?”

“I would be honored to have dinner with you, love.”

“He said yes? He said yes! Oh my god, he said yes!!” My heart was doing flips, I wanted to dance from joy. He said yes… unfortunately, the heavy pit in my stomach and frozen feet kept me from moving.

“Great! Um, how soon do you want to eat? ‘Cause, I can get the lasagna out of the freezer at any time, and if you want we can have something else with it, like salad or soup, or whatever you’d like.”

“Sam? Are you okay? You seem to be talking a bit…fast.”

“Oh yeah, I, um, I do that a bit when I get nervous.”

Tom came and stood face to face with me. I hadn’t realized until then that my hair could easily tickle his nose if we ever cuddled. My face got hotter from the thought of cuddling with the handsome man before me. His finger lifted my chin to make me look into his eyes. There was sparkle, one that I had only seen once before…when we were in the green room at the Music Hall, when we met.

“I make you nervous?”

“No! Yes… maybe?” I sighed, still enveloped with his baby blues. “Yes. I mean, you’re this amazing actor. You could literally have any woman you wanted in the world, and yet, you’re here, with me, a babbling, nervous wreck, asking if you want lasagna as if we were at an Olive Garden or something. Yes, you make me nervous, because I don’t want to mess up anything. I’m nervous, I’m scared, I’m happy…”

“You’re scared? Come sit with me, love.” My feet didn’t want to move at first, but Tom helped me to my living room, where we sat on the couch. “Now, why are you scared?”

I sighed as I stared at my hands, watching as they started wringing out my fingers. “I have this fear…that, if I get eliminated from the show…you’ll stop talking to me.”

“Hey, look at me. Please?” My body turned so I could be face to face with him again. He held my aching hands in his, and he kissed the back of them. “Sam, I’ll be honest. When I started talking to you, it was because of you being on the show.”

“So now, when I’m off, you’ll be gone…”

“Please, let me finish?”

I nodded, scooting a little closer to him.
“Sam, you’ve become too big a part of my life to just let you go, whether you’re still on the bloody show, or not. No matter what tomorrow night brings, I’ll still see you afterwards, and every day after, until you tell me to leave. I won’t go anywhere until you tell me to. Love, you’re far more than just some fan that got to meet me. You’re one of my dearest friends.”

“I… I am?”

“Of course you are, darling. You don’t need to be nervous around me, okay?”

“Okay. Thank you, Tom.”

“It’s my pleasure, love. Now, shall we go get dinner ready?”

“We?” Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

While we ate, my body, my mind went from being a garbled up mess, to being more at ease. My heart stopped trying to burst through, the butterflies went to sleep, save for some who were still wide awake. My legs no longer felt like lead pipes, my feet no longer cement. The heavy pit in my stomach shrunk a little, but in the back of my mind, a little voice kept singing, “He’s gonna leave you… he’s gonna leave you!”

After the lasagna was packaged and put in the refrigerator, I poured a couple glasses of the red wine, and joined Tom on my couch. “Your wine, sir.”

“Why, thank you, miss.”

I sat next to him, smiling. “So, Mr. Hiddleston, tell me about yourself.”

“Oh? Like what?”

“I don’t know. What do you like to do for fun? Why do you go running every morning?”

He chuckled a bit, taking a sip of his wine. “Well, mainly I go to clear my head, you know? Life gets busy and next thing you know you’re being flown to places all over the world. Don’t get me wrong, I love my line of work. I wouldn’t change that for the world. It just gets a bit draining.”

“I can understand that.”

“For what I like to do for fun… reading, I think. I like to do all kinds of things, but reading would be my main thing to do.”

“Cool. What do you like to read? Other than Shakespeare.”

“Damn, you caught me. I like to read all kinds of things, mainly Shakespeare’s poetry, though. What about you? What do you like to do for fun?”

“Photography. I take pictures of nature and animals in their natural habitat, things like that.”

“Yeah? Hopefully you’ll let me see your pictures at some point?”

“Eventually, yes.”

I looked up at Tom and couldn’t help but notice the thoughtful look he had.
“I can hear the wheels turning, dude. Tell me what’s up before I start seeing the smoke come out your ears.”

“I was just thinking… what’s your favorite color?”

“What?” My eyebrow raised in curiosity. “Why do you want to know?”

“I’m just curious.”

“My favorite color… would have to be blue. Like the ocean, like the night sky. What about you?”

“Mine is torn between two colors. I love the color blue, but I love red, too. Like, a nice, dark red. It can be so beautiful when on certain things. A car, wine… a blush on a beautiful girl’s cheeks.”

I couldn’t help but blush as I stared at my empty wine glass. “You know, before, if someone had told me that I would be drinking wine with you, I wouldn’t have believed them. I always thought that I would be this lonely woman, watching her friends and her life go on without her. I never would’ve thought that I’d be here, sitting next to you. I think it’s safe to say, that I’m glad I’m here, instead of where I could’ve been,” I looked up at him, smiling. “I’m glad I’m here with you.”

Tom sat down his glass and looked down at me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. “I’m glad I’m here with you, too.”

Ever so gently, he pulled me closer, smiling in a way I’ve never seen before. My blush got darker when I felt his hand rest on my neck. My eyelids got heavy, making my eyes close when I felt the tip of his nose brush mine. I could feel his breath on my skin, the smell of wine filling my head. He was so close… his lips brushed mine, sending electricity through my skin…

A bright flash of light struck down across the road, a loud clap of thunder rolling through the clouds, making my entire house shake. My eyes opened quickly and I looked outside. The clouds were black, the leaves were going insane in the trees. Then started the rain, pouring as if someone turned on a faucet.

I sighed, “Gotta love Mother Nature.” I went off to close any open windows. “Screwing us at every corner!”

As the night progressed, the rain poured even harder, the thunder louder, the wine bottle emptier. I sat on the couch, watching it rain, when I saw Tom get his coat and shoes on.

“Hey, where are you going?”

“I want to get heading home before it gets too bad out.”

“‘Too bad out?’ Tom, it’s already too bad out. It’s the worst I’ve seen and I’ve lived here for years. I, I can’t let you go out there.”

“What do you mean?”

“Stay here. Please? Even if it’s just for tonight, I don’t want you to go out there.”

“Sam, I don’t –”

“You’re my friend, right?” He looked back at me, and nodded. “Then as my friend, you would stay here. It’s horrible out there, and I don’t want anything to happen to you. So please… stay?”

He stood there for a second, his hand on the doorknob. Slowly, he let go, sliding his shoes next to
the door, shrugging his coat off and hanging it in the closet. He looked back at me, and hugged me tight. “Thank you, Sam.”

“Of course, Tom. You’re my dearest friend. Come, let me show you to your room.”

I smiled as my fingers intertwined with his. I led him upstairs, down the hall, to the guest room. “So this is my room?”

“Technically it’s the guest room, but it can be your room, if you want. There are clothes in the closet, they should fit you.”

“I’d ask why you have men’s clothes in your guest closet, but I don’t judge, so I don’t want to know.”

“I’m going to get some sleep. Bathroom is across the hall, and you’re welcome to anything in the fridge if you get hungry or thirsty. Have a good night.” One last hug, then I went to my room, closing the door behind me. I quickly got undressed, and my head no sooner hit the pillow that I was asleep.
Meanwhile...

Tom stood in his room while he heard the door close further down the hall. He watched the storm continue to riot, throwing everything around like a child with a tantrum. His mind wandered, going back to earlier in the evening. He was so close to kissing his hostess, his friend. “Was it because of the wine… or the fact that I really do care for her…” Tom wondered. He envisioned her in his arms again, his hand caressing her face. Her big doe eyes looking up at him, and he smiled. He could still feel the electricity on his nose, his lips. “What if we did kiss? Would she have pushed me away? Or…would she have kissed me back? Oh, I wish we didn’t have so much wine. She’ll just blame the alcohol, I bet.” His vision faded away, as did his smile.

Tom sat on the bed, and saw a picture of Sam on the bedside table. “Could she just be using me? Using my fame to boost her own? She’s in America’s Got Talent, one of the largest shows in the nation. A talented singer like her, dating an actor, would make her in the spotlight of the press.” He held the frame in his hands, staring at the photo inside. She was sitting at a table, her blonde hair down, past her waist, and in a dark red sundress. Her smile, her eyes, everything about her was perfect to him. He couldn’t help but smile back at the picture. “It’s all in my head, I’m sure of it.”

He went to the closet to see just what clothes were there, and they were all suits that were too large or jeans that were too long. “I wonder who these belonged to. Ex-boyfriend, probably…” After looking further in, to see if there was anything he could sleep in, unfortunately, there wasn’t anything. Just the suits and jeans. “Damn. I can’t just sleep in my birthday suit. What if Sam walked in? She’d most likely throw me out. If she walked in…” His mind went so far into the gutter, it wouldn’t see the light of day in years… which only made his heart heavy. “Like she’d want me. Why would she want a scrawny bloke like me? But she’s so beautiful, and she does things to me that no one else ever has… and these trousers are getting too bloody tight. I’ll go see if Sam can find me anything. Wait… damn it, that’s right. She’s probably fast asleep. Or, she could still be awake.”

While walking down the hall, he kept willing his mind to come out of the filthy gutter, and for his trousers to get looser in any way possible. The door was open, so he walked into the room, and he froze, his pants cutting off circulation. With exception to the bedsheets covering up her belly button, she was bare as a newborn babe, her skin flawless, her hair beautifully spread out on her pillow. Her skin glistened in the moonlight, she started moaning in distress. “Must be having a bad dream…” Tom slowly came up to her side and gently brought the bedsheets up over her chest, his hand slightly brushing against her. “Please don’t wake up, please don’t wake up.”

“Tom…”

His mouth quickly became drier than the desert, beads of sweat running down his forehead. What should he say? He didn’t want her to know he was there, and yet, here she was, calling to him. Yes, it was a bad dream, but still. “Um… yes?”

“Tom… don’t go. Please, don’t go…”

“I’m right here, love.”

“Don’t go!”

He sat on the bed, next to her, and started petting her hair. “I’m right here, Sam. I’m not going anywhere. I promise. I’m staying right here.”
“What if… what if…”

“Sam, listen to me. I will never leave you. You’re my dearest friend, and… I care about you, in a way I’ve never known before. I’m not leaving. I swear it.”

She tossed and turned a little longer, then fell back asleep. Tom smiled, kissed her forehead, and then returned to “his” room, closing the door behind him. He no sooner took off his socks, when suddenly, the bedside light flickered, then turned off. It wouldn’t turn back on, even after Tom toyed with the switch and the plug. Another flash of light from outside, followed by a clap of thunder, reminded him that it was still raining outside. “Must be the power,” he thought.

He slowly got out of his shirt, sighing when he was finally rid of his trousers, and slid into bed, the sheet covering up to his chest with his arms free. He tossed. He turned. He sighed. “Why can’t I fall asleep?” He looked over at the bedside table, and took the picture. Sadly, he couldn’t see it with the limited light, but he could remember it. The low-cut sundress, the blonde hair half down her back, half down her front… the beautiful smile that made the photograph look even more astonishing.

The sheet was tenting in a place where it shouldn’t have been. One hand slipped under, doing things a gentleman shouldn’t be doing in a young woman’s home, but he wanted to be doing so much more…
“Sam, you’re going home!”

“You’re done!”

“You’ve been eliminated!”

“I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN!”

I opened my eyes, my pillow soaked with sweat, my blankets all over the place. I let out a soft sigh while slowly sitting up. “Ugh, next chapter I wake up in, I better be in friggin’ London or Paris.” I yawned while I shuffled to the bathroom to take a long, cold shower.

The butterflies in my stomach were trying to make a permanent residence, as I thought of the elimination later that night. “What if’s” were all that were running through my mind. What if I was eliminated? What if I wasn’t good enough? What if…

My phone ringing in my room pulled me out of my thoughts. “Who could be calling me at this time of morning?” I rinsed off, wrapped my towel around myself, and answered my phone. “Hello?”

“Hey, girlie. I just wanted to know if you wanted to hang out later today.”

“Um… I’m going to say ‘sure,’ because I have this feeling you’re already on your way.”

“You know me so well! I’ll be there in about fifteen minutes.”

“Okay, Ash. See you soon.”

I hung up, and I looked out the window. The clouds were grey, the leaves on the trees gently moving in the breeze, my kind of day. Something caught my eye, so I looked down… and Tom’s car was still in my driveway. With one eyebrow raised, I tilted my head, “Why is Tom’s car still here? Oh, duh! He stayed the night because of the storm, that’s right.”

I dried my hair and got dressed as I remembered the horrible storm that hit the night before. The sky was pitch black, wind fierce, and the rain came down in horrible sheets. I remembered that I had insisted that Tom stay the night so he wasn’t forced to drive in such unfavorable conditions.

Once in my sweatpants and tank top, I went down the hall to see if he was still in my guest room. My hand came up to knock on the closed door, but froze when I heard the snores inside. Curiosity was overwhelming me, so I opened the door, and saw what I had only come close to seeing in my dreams. Tom was naked, barely covered by a sheet, which was tenting in a very provocative place. He was all sweaty, he was bare, except some chest hair. He was perfect… I wanted to move, but I couldn’t help but stare. “Come on, go in.”

“I can’t. He’ll see me.”

“Maybe that’s a good thing.”

“Shut up, brain!”

“Don’t you want to touch it? It’s so big…and thick… he probably got it from dreaming of you…”

“Pfft. Now I know you’re lying. Like he would want me.” I returned to my room and sat at my
vanity, noticing the scar around my neck. “Like he would want someone as damaged as me.” A tear tried making its way down my face, but I wiped it off before it could pass my nose. I put my hair up in a ponytail, put makeup on my neck, and started for the stairs.

“Hey Sam?” I looked down at Tom’s room, seeing his head poked out a bit. “Um, I don’t suppose you have anything more… my size?”

“The clothes don’t fit? I’m sorry. If you want, there should be some sweatpants in the nightstand, second shelf.”

He disappeared for a second, then poked back out. “Um… I don’t know which nightstand. Could you come find them?”

“Yeah, sure. Just make sure you’re decent.”

“What does he mean, ‘which nightstand’? There’s only one…” I get to the door and knocked, immediately hearing shuffling on the other side.

“Come in.”

“I could always just barge right in, you know. It’s my house, and I could see you as bare as the day you were born.”

He quickly opened the door, completely naked… only a shoe covering his nether regions. His face was so red, and he moved out of the way. “Come on in. You said they were in the nightstand?”

“Yeah, this one. The only one in here. Nice shoe.”

He smiled, “Thanks. Um, I found it in the closet. I hope you don’t mind…”

“Don’t mind at all. It just looks a little… small, for you.”

“Yeah, just, I didn’t expect such a large man, to have such small feet. It sort of hurts…”

I smirked as I got the sweatpants for him. After placing them on the bed, I sauntered over to him, resting my hands on his chest. I said nothing as one of my hands went further down, further and further, until I reached the shoe. Slowly pulling it away, I kissed his cheek…then I flung the shoe out the door. I backed up, giggling as he quickly covered himself.

“Now I don’t know which hurt more, the shoe, or you teasing me.”

“Oh, definitely the shoe. Would you like it back?”

“Yes, please…”

“Then go get it.”

Hesitantly, he started walking towards the door, but I quickly went through and closed it.

“Put the sweatpants on, dude. I’m making breakfast.”

“I’ll be down soon.”

I took the shoe off the floor and tossed it into my room before going downstairs. After getting breakfast started, I heard Tom’s door open. I looked over to the stairs to see him coming down with the sweatpants on. “Looking good, stud.”
“Oh, hush. They’re still huge on me. At least these ones I could make tighter. So, what’s for breakfast?”

“French Toast with a side of scrambled eggs mixed with bacon bits.”

“That… sounds absolutely divine.”

“Could you help me set the table? Please?”

“Of course, Sam.”

I felt his lips on my cheek before he walked off to set the plates and silverware. “Tease…”

“All’s fair in love and war.”

As I finished up the bacon and started on the eggs, I felt a very…hard body, pressed against my behind. Two different glasses came around my sides.

“So, which glass did you want to use?”

“This isn’t… fair…”

“You said sweatpants, love.” He got a bit closer, pressing harder, my face even hotter. “Now, which glass?”

“Um…the left one.”

“Good choice. Now, orange juice, or milk?”

“How the hell can you make asking what I want to drink be so freaking sexy??”

“Call it a gift. Now, which?”

My arms struggled against the counter to keep me upright. “I… I have to f-focus on… breakfast. Please… move…”

One little thrust, then he was back to the other side of the kitchen, getting out both drinks. I fell to my knees, no longer able to keep me up. When I looked down at my lounge pants, I saw they were rather wet in between the legs.

“Tom… you suck.”

Slowly, I managed to turn the stove off, and wobble up to my bedroom to change. “Thomas William Hiddleston, you are such a jerk… but I want you… and you’re such a tease, that I don’t know if you want me, too…” I slid out of my sweatpants and slipped on some shorts. I rubbed my hand against the side of my neck, unsure of what to do…once I got downstairs. “We’re gonna have breakfast, right? Yeah, it’s just breakfast.” I went back down to the kitchen, and took the finished bacon off the stove, resuming with the eggs.

“So, you’re back… in shorts. You know that’s dangerous… Sam? What’s that on your neck?”

“What?”

He came closer, getting a better look. “On your neck, this line… is that a scar?”

“Um…”
“Ashley couldn’t have chosen a better moment to come through my door. “Hey, girlie. So, I hope you don’t mind, that I didn’t come in exactly fifteen minutes.” she kicked off her shoes by the door and came into the kitchen. “I stopped at the store to grab a couple things because, let’s face it, your cupboards are getting…” She trailed off, looking between Tom and me. “…bare. What’s going on?”

“Ashley, my room, now.” I grabbed her hand and we rushed upstairs, slamming my door behind us. “Ash… he saw my scar.”

“What’s Tom Hiddleston doing in your kitchen with a raging… he saw your neck?”

I nodded quickly, tears falling down my cheeks. “Ashley, he saw my scar, he knows I’m broken, he knows…” My legs gave out once again, this time on a much softer surface. I covered my face, sobbing uncontrollably. “He knows… he knows and now he’ll leave…”

“Hey, hey…” She knelt by my side, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. “Don’t think of it like that.”

“What other way is there to look?? Any guy I get remotely interested in, if they get one glance at my neck, they run the other way…”

“That doesn’t mean Tom’s going to run, too. If he cares about you at all, he won’t run. He’ll stay right here, by your side.”

I looked up at her, tears still stinging at my eyes. “How are you so sure?”

“Trust me, I’ve read enough romance crap to know, he’ll wait for you if he loves you.”

As if on cue, there was a soft knock on the door. Ash got up and opened it wide, revealing Tom with his notorious sad, puppy eye look. “Sam? May I come in?”

“Yeah, come on in.” Ash came back to me and helped me onto the bed. “If you need anything, girlie, just ask me, okay?”

“Okay. Thank you.”

Tom sat next to me, his hand gently resting on my back. “Sam? Are you okay?”

“No… well, yes, but… Tom, I’m sorry I ran up here.”

“Hey, shh. It’s okay. There’s nothing to be sorry for. I only ask, for one thing.” He started gently rubbing the makeup off my neck, revealing the scar in its entirety. “You never have to hide around me. This scar, no matter what it’s from, it means that you survived whatever hell you’ve been through. That makes you stronger than you realize. You survived. You’re still here.”

“So am I, dude. Don’t forget I’m still over here.”

Tom looked back at the smirking woman by my vanity set. “Don’t worry, Ashley, I know you’re still there, and since you’re here, you can help me keep my word.” I looked up at him with an eyebrow raised slightly. “Samantha Hale, I promise you, that I’m not going anywhere. I will stay with you, for as long as you want me. I will stay by your side until you tell me to go. It will kill me to leave here to work on whatever project they have me on next, but I will text you, I will call you, whenever I can, until you ask me to stop. I care about you, Sam… I care very deeply about you…”

My eyes widened, my heart skipping in my chest. “You… you do?”
“I do… and, even if you don’t feel the same-”

“I do, Tom. I care deeply about you, too.”

His hand caressed my cheek, his thumb rubbing just under my eye, and he smiled. “Love, will you be mine?”

I smiled brightly, not noticing the door closing behind us. “Only if you’re mine.”

His forehead was pressed against mine, my hand caressing the back of his neck. “Deal.”

Softly, he pressed his lips to mine, immediately feeling the spark run through my skin. My heart wanted to be closer to his, but my chest was in the way. His arm wrapped around my back, pulling me closer. Slowly, the kiss got hotter and more intense.

We parted just long enough to look into each other eyes. He was getting out of breath, and had the same smile as the night before. I got one of his curls out of his face, and he kissed me again, filling my head with him, and only him. In what felt like an instant, I was straddling his hips, and his hands were rubbing up and down my back.

“About time…”
“Places, please, for the elimination round.”

My hands were sweaty, my heart pounding, as I walked onstage with the other eleven acts. We took our places, and listened to Nick announce the show. “Welcome all to elimination night at America’s Got Talent. Tonight, only six of the twelve acts will go through to the next round. Tonight, you can go online to use your Snapple Save, to save one act from elimination. The acts in fifth, sixth, and seventh place, are… Blue Journey.”

A spotlight lit up over a three person group.

“Smoothini.”

Another spotlight was lit over a magician.

“And Samantha Hale.”

My heart froze and body went numb when the light surrounded me. It was coming time for me to go home. I was certain of it.

“Will the acts please step forward?” Nick’s voice was muffled in my mind, so it took a minute to register. I went to my mark, and my legs felt like Jell-O. “America, only you can save one of these three acts from elimination. Now, we’re gonna go to break. When we come back, we’ll see the first elimination of the night.”

“Four minutes until we return from break. Blue Journey, Smoothini, and Samantha Hale, please go to the back room.”

Mat came up and hugged me tight. “It’s not fair. I thought you would’ve gone through first. It’s…it’s not fair.”

“I’ve gotta go, Mat. I’ll be back.” I forced a small smile then went to the back room with the others. I felt my phone go off, so when I took it out, I saw it was a text from Tom.

+ Oh darling, I’m so sorry. Even though I’m in the back row, I could still hear your heart skip. I’m still here, and if it means anything, everyone in my immediate area is voting for you as their save. They want you to go through, just as much as I do. By the way, your friend Amanda is here. I just met her, and she seemed more star struck than Ashley was. +

+ Yeah, she’s like that. She really likes you ;) +

+ Well I really like you ;) Ashley told her about you and me. I had a wonderful time this morning by the way ;) +

+ You and me both. Is it bad that my heart is doing somersaults? +

+ It’s natural, love. Just try to breathe, and know that no matter what happens tonight, I’m proud of you that you even got this far. After tonight, it’s the finals, right? +

+ After this is the Top 12, it determines who goes on to the finals. That show’s next week, then the finals the week after. +

+ Okay. Why was Mat hugging you? +
He’s been my friend since I started this. Friend. Nothing more. I swear.

Okay, love. I trust you.

I looked around the room, to see the others looking quite nervous. I wasn’t alone in feeling hopeless, and they had most likely practiced harder and longer than I did. I felt they deserved to go through instead of me…but I really wanted to go to the finals.

Time seemed to go at a snail’s pace while we waited to go back to the stage. The television in the room showed us the live show, letting us see who progressed to the next show, and who had been eliminated. I was relieved when I saw that Mat had gone through.

Nick joined us in the back room, a camera man close behind. “Hey, guys. We’re gonna film in here for a minute or two before they show your performances from the last few shows. Is that okay?”

Everyone seemed to agree, so Nick sat in a seat between Blue Journey and me. The cameraman counted down from ten to one, the red light quickly turning on.

“Hey, guys! I’m sitting here with the three Snapple Save acts, who really need your votes to stay in the competition and go to next week’s show. So, Sam, with being the only act to get through from an audition video, how does it feel to know you might go home this week?”

I took a deep breath and let out a nervous chuckle. “Well, to be honest, it feels weird. Like I’m still in a dream but, I think it would be a dream come true if I could at least get to next week’s show. It’s America’s decision.”

“That’s exactly right, Sam,” he looked back to the cameraman, “Now, everyone, voting for the Snapple Save is closed. Soon we’ll see who you all voted for. In the meantime, let’s take a look at our Snapple Save act’s performances.”

The light turned off on the camera, and the guy gave a thumbs up. Nick thanked us, then left the room.

“We will return from break in four minutes. Blue Journey, Smoothini, and Samantha Hale, to the stage, please, for the Snapple Save.”

My chest was going to rupture with all the jumps and skips my heart was making. We went back to the stage, as the audience cheered. I could hear some people chanting my name. They liked me, they wanted me to go through. The cheers helped me relax a little, but I was still worried I’d go home.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Nick announced, “it’s finally time to see who won our Snapple Save. Blue Journey, Smoothini, or Samantha Hale? America has voted. The act going through, is…”

As a camera panned from act to act, the cheers grew louder and louder. The only sound I could hear was my heart pounding in my ears. I smiled and waved when I noticed the camera was pointed at me.

“Blue Journey!”

As Smoothini and I applauded and hugged the winning act, we were asked to stay on stage. Nick stood with the group as the judges congratulated them. My heart finally escaped my chest, only to be squished by Nick’s designer shoe. As Blue Journey exited the stage, Nick stood between Smoothini and me.
“Congratulations on Blue Journey getting the Snapple Save. Now, there’s two acts left, but only one spot remains. We get to hear each judge vote on which act they want to see go through to next week’s show. Let’s start with Howie.

“Of course you’d start with me. Um… well, you both are really good. Smoothini, you can do such amazing tricks with so little items. Sam, you have the voice of an angel, accompanied with that piano, or any instrument you’d bring with you next, I think you could really win this thing. I don’t really want to see either of you go, but I think I’d have to go with who I personally liked most, and that’s Sam Hale.”

My legs were becoming like Jell-O once again, my hopes rising when I knew it was dangerous. Howie wanted me to go through. “Mel B?”

“Smoothini, Sam, I have to agree with Howie. You both are very good. Just, Smoothini, remember to give Nick here his shoelace back. Sam, I can remember when I came to your home to tell you you’d gotten through. I saw your potential then, and I still do. You both can go places, do what you love to do, but, for one of you, it ends tonight. I have to go with my gut. My vote’s for Sam.”

“Howard?”

“Not Howard… please not Howard, anyone but him. Why not Heidi?”

“Both acts did well, but as only one can go through, I’ll go with the act that stood above the other, that won me over way back at the audition. This person did something I never thought was possible. They gave me chills when they performed. This act actually got me out of my seat to give a standing ovation. Mel B’s right with seeing potential. There’s so much more you both can do, but only one of you can stay. My vote goes to… Samantha Hale.”

My legs gave out and I fell to my knees, tears making their way down my face. Nick helped me up, and I quickly ran to Smoothini and hugged him. I was glad I had gotten through, but I hated it that he had to go home. He hugged me back, a bit surprised at first, but he relaxed and hugged a bit tighter.

“I’m sorry you couldn’t go through, too.”

“It’s okay. I’m glad you are. I’ll be voting for you, Sam.”

He smiled as he walked off stage, and I felt Nick wrap an arm around me, gently bringing me back to center stage.

“So, that’s it for tonight! Make sure to join us again next week, to see the top twelve acts compete to go to the finals. Have a good night, America!”
Chapter 9

I watched the world go by from the back seat, the street lights revealing the night owls walking around. The clouds would shield the moon from view then reveal its beauty once again. In the moments where the scene would stop, the leaves on the trees would wave at me. The clouds started to cry from the sheer beauty of the moon and her light. The water droplets hit the window, blurring my vision of the scenery.

I watched the water race to the bottom of the glass. I had to blink a few time, to realize that I was in my car, on my way home. My mind went through the events of the evening, being so close to going home… I was in shock, I had gone through to the next round. I still felt bad that other acts had to be eliminated in order for me to go through, to follow my dream.

It felt so unreal, as if I was still asleep in my room. I was getting closer to the finals of a show I’d wanted to be on for several years, my boyfriend is an actor that I’ve adored and respected for a couple years… I was tempted to pinch my arm, to see if I’d wake up at home, curled up in my bed.

A voice clearing their throat pulled me from my thoughts. I glanced up, slightly, and I saw a familiar smile in the reflection of the window. When I turned to see its owner, it was Tom. My Tom. It wasn’t until then that I had felt his hand in mine, his fingers intertwined with mine. I watched as my thumb rubbed the back of his hand.

“Hey, girlie, are you back with us now?”

I blinked a bit, as if waking up, and followed the gentle voice from the front seat. “Ashley… yeah. I’m here, I think.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m in one piece, I think. I know my body’s here, but my mind is worlds away… I don’t know just yet, if I’m really okay.”

Tom moved closer to me, our hands on his leg. “Just relax, my love. We’ll be to your house soon.”

I rested my head against his shoulder, and my heart swelled when I felt his head gently rest on mine.

My eyes closed for the rest of the ride home, wanting to think of what I could do next week that would impress everyone, that would put me through to the finals. All I could do was think of how to hold it all together until I got home. Slowly, my eyes opened when I heard the tires on the gravel of my driveway.

“Home. Almost home.”

Tom helped me inside, and closed the door behind the three of us. His arm was around my shoulders, his hand in mine, as he walked me upstairs to my room to sit on my bed. My mind couldn’t register that I was walking, climbing stairs, or that I sat down. I felt like I was merely a floating head; my mind was a balloon, its string barely dragging along the carpeted floor.

“Sam? Love, are you okay?”

“I’ll get her some water.” Ashley ran down to the kitchen while Tom stayed on the bed.

He lay down and pulled me with him so he could hold me. My head rested on his shoulder, my
hand on his chest. My fingers started playing with a button on his shirt, eventually undoing the top two buttons. Once the shirt was pushed back, I noticed his barely there chest hair. One finger played with his hair, feeling the warmth of his skin under my hand. I looked into his eyes, his sweet, blue eyes… and I lost it.

The tears that gathered in my eyes finally made their way down my face. I started sobbing into Tom’s shirt, holding him tight. He had turned so my face was in his chest, his arms wrapped around me to hold me close. He kissed my head, petted my hair, and hummed softly to me. No matter how hard I cried, how wet his shirt got with my tears, he didn’t let go of me. He held me as all the stress, all the fear, left my mind, and was replaced by the overwhelming feeling of relief.

Eventually, the sobs quieted down, the tears dried from my eyes. My throat sore and head pounding from all the crying. I looked up into Tom’s eyes once again, noticing his smile once again. His sweet smile, that seemed to make his eyes smile, too. The one I gave in return was rather weak. I looked around the room, seeing just how dark it was outside…and I noticed there was a third person missing.

“She went to the guest room, love.” I looked back into his eyes, thinking that he could read my thoughts. I never noticed when she had come back up, or when she had left again. “She’s worried about you, but I told her to get some rest, that you’d see her in the morning. I told her I’d take care of you tonight. Is that okay?”

I nodded, then gestured for something to drink. He handed me the glass of water, and I drank it until the last drop touched my lips. I set the glass down on my nightstand, and I lay back down. Smiling weakly, I snuggled close to Tom, smelling his citrus cologne. Listening to him chuckle helped me relax even further.

“Do you like my cologne, love?”

I nodded a bit, getting rather tired and very weak. “Mhm…”

“Why don’t we get you into your pajamas, sweetheart? I’m sure you’d sleep a bit easier.”

“Mhm…”

“Come on, then, love.”

“Mhm…”

I felt bad for Tom, having to take care of a limp noodle. He was so gentle, so polite. He helped me get undressed without any perverse comments, and he helped me get into my pajama shorts and tank top. After he helped me back to bed, he got into the sweatpants he wore earlier that morning, and wrapped his arms around me again. Once we were both in bed, I snuggled close to him again. I could barely manage to whisper. “I love you, Tom.”

I could feel his heart quicken in his chest, his silence making me doubt myself. He curled a finger under my chin and brought my face to his. He pressed his lips to mine, and the electricity spread all over my body. His arms held me tight, a sparkle in his eye that would put a star to shame. He smiled, and kissed me once again. “I love you too, Sam.”
Meanwhile...

His fingers ran through his sleeping angel’s hair. How beautiful she looked, no matter the time of day. Tom saw that her neck was still covered with her makeup. He brushed a little away, seeing her battle scar. Every time he saw it, he felt overwhelmed with different emotions. He was angry at the monster who called themselves a man for hurting her. Happiness was for her surviving such a horrid past. Sadness, from knowing she had to endure it to begin with.

When he knew Sam wouldn’t wake for a while, he rose from the bed, and went downstairs, taking the empty glass with him. His feet fell silent on the carpeted steps, careful not to wake his sweetheart and her friend. Once in the kitchen, he filled the glass with water, and he allowed his mind to wander. He smiled when he remembered the four words that were whispered to him back in the bedroom.

“I love you, Tom.”

“I’m in love… that’s definitely something I never thought would happen.” Tom turned around, and almost dropped the glass on the ceramic kitchen floor. “Bloody Hell! Ashley! What are you doing down here?!”

“I wanted to see just what you were up to, and why you aren’t still with Sam upstairs?”

“I came down to get her another glass of water, for if she got thirsty again. Now, I have to pour it again, and see if Sam has any other lounge pants that I can borrow, until I can dry these properly. What are you even doing down here? I thought you were fast asleep in the guest room.”

“I was, until I got out of the bathroom and saw you coming downstairs. I wanted to know what you were doing.”

Tom sighed, a bit aggravated. He quickly calmed down, realizing that she couldn’t possibly have known what he was doing. In his mind, all she knew was that he was leaving her best friend’s room quietly, trying his damnedest not to make a sound. “Well, now you know. Are… are you okay?”

She shrugged, then looked up at Tom with her big, brown eyes. The moonlight had revealed her tearstained face, her pink cheeks. “I had a bad dream. It was enough to make me cry… Tom, please, don’t tell Sam? I don’t want her to worry about me.”

He set the glass on the counter, and opened his arms wide. At first, she looked at him as if he has just come from a mental institution. Hesitantly, she stepped closer, feeling him pull her close. He wouldn’t admit it just yet, but in the couple months that he had known the girls, he was starting to think of Ashley as another sister, as another Emma. Silence filled the kitchen, then a couple sniffles were heard. He gently petted her hair, trying his best to comfort her.

“I suppose you wanna know what I was dreaming about.”

“That’s only if you feel comfortable enough to tell me.”

They stood in silence once again. Tom could almost see the wheels turning, almost smell the smoke.

“Come with me to the living room.”
He followed, momentarily remembering his soaked sweatpants. Ashley sat on the couch while he had sat to her left.

“You’ve seen the scar on Sam’s neck. Has she told you how she got it?”

His eyebrows furrowed a bit. What did Sam’s mark have to do with anything? “No, she hasn’t, nor do I care to know until she’s ready to tell me. Why?”

“Her ex-boyfriend, he and Sam split about a year ago. Jason was just the worst man you could ever think of. He would hit her, choke her… he almost killed her once. He took a wire, a long metal wire, and he put it around her neck, the ends wrapped around his hands…”

Tom sat in horror, watching the scene play in his head. A man, towering behind Sam, with the wire around her neck. He could only imagine how she looked. “She must have been so scared…” The wire tightened around her neck, her hands clawing at it. She tried to beg him to free her, to let her breathe, but it would only make him angrier, would only make the wire dig into her skin even further.

He watched in his mind, as Ashley described everything. He was brought back for only a minute, to think of how she could describe everything so perfectly. Then it hit him… “You saw it happen, didn’t you?”

She nodded fast, her tears falling down her face, racing to see which would reach her chin first. “I walked in on him… I walked in on him trying to kill my best friend… I begged him to stop, I hit him. I tried to make him stop. He only let go when I threatened to call the police. Then he turned his focus on me. He took one step toward me, and Sam hit him in the back of the head with a lamp.”

“That’s not what happened in your dream… was it?”

This time, she shook her head no. “In my dream, he killed Sam, then went after me with the wire. In my dream, he tried to kill me too… I screamed, I cried. I tried to get away, but he kept pulling tighter and tighter. Finally, I woke up. I ran to the bathroom to make sure that it was just a dream. I wanted to make sure I didn’t have the same mark…”

“Ashley, I’m so sorry –”

“You can’t tell Sam that I had that dream. Please, don’t tell her?”

“Ash, you know as well as I do that I can’t keep this from her…but it’s not up to me to tell her. If you don’t, I will.”

“Okay, okay. Fine.”

Tom stood up, a small blush creeping onto his face when he noticed that the pants had clung to him, leaving absolutely nothing to the imagination.

“Hey, Tom?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you, for letting me tell you all this.”

He smiled at her, one hand extended. “Don’t mention it. Now come on, let’s get back to bed.”
“One sec. I have something to do, first.”

Tom watched as she ran to the kitchen. After a few minutes, she came back out, and handed him a glass of cold water. They walked back upstairs, said their goodbyes, and he went back into the bedroom. Once the glass was back on the nightstand, he shed the sweatpants, then climbed back into bed. Almost immediately, Sam snuggled up to him, again.

He looked down at his sleeping angel, how beautiful she was while she rested. He saw the mark on her neck, immediately becoming overwhelmed with two emotions. Sadness, for the pain she was dealt. Pity, for the son of a bitch who would dare to go after his love again.
“How do you guys like your eggs?” I started for the kitchen, only to have a hand pull me back. I turned and looked into Tom’s eyes, a bit concerned. “What’s wrong, babe?”

He smiled down at me, and kissed me softly. “Why don’t we make you breakfast this time, love? You can rest in the living room while we do the work.”

I looked between Tom and Ashley, who stood behind him, both smiling rather oddly at me. “Sure… but first, tell me what’s going on. Both of you are acting really… weird.”

They looked back at each other, Tom’s pleading look having no effect on Ashley’s irritated one. Their silence wasn’t exactly reassuring, and my heart was starting to sink. Quickly, I pulled my hand away, tears already stinging my eyes. My heart and mind were thinking the worst, and no one was saying a single word.

“God damn it, will someone tell me what the hell’s going on?? Both of you have been acting strange this morning, and I think I deserve to know why!”

“Ashley has something to say with you.”

She was about to deny everything, but she saw my tears rolling down my face. After letting out a defeated sigh, she held my hands in hers.

“Sam, I… I had a nightmare last night.”

“S-Seriously? That’s it?? You two make me think the worst… over a nightmare? You were making me think you guys were sleeping together already!!”

“Sam… it was about Jason.”

As if in an instant, my anger died down completely, my face becoming quite pale. I hugged Ashley as tight as I could. “I’m so sorry. I’m sorry. Okay, so, Jason dream. What all happened in it?”

“It was about the day he went to jail, what he was doing to you when I came in. I still can’t get that image out of my head. Only, instead of us getting him to stop, he… he killed you, then tried to kill me.”

“Oh, Ash…”

“It was so real, so vivid… I could feel it around my neck.”

“I know… I know. Why don’t you sit and relax, while Tom and I make breakfast?”

“Are you guys sure?”

“Positive.”

Tom and I started on making waffles and eggs while Ashley went back upstairs. As I put the mix together, two long arms wrapped around my stomach, a chin resting on my shoulder. My head turned, to be met by a passionate kiss. One arm went up to my cheek, deepening the kiss just a bit.

“Mmmm, what a way to start the day. I could get used to this.”
“So could I, love.” He was silent for a little while, then he whispered in my ear, “I love you.”

Chills went down my spine, and a smile spread across my face. “I love you too, Tom.”

Tom made the eggs while I was finishing up the waffles. The food was just about done, when Ash came running back down, muttering over and over again. “We have to go. We have to go. We have to go, now!”

The food was quickly set aside to cool and we all met up outside, in my driveway.

“Ash, what’s going on? What’s happened?”

“Okay, so, while you guys were cooking, you know how I went upstairs, right? So, when I was up there, I was getting my stuff together so I could head home after breakfast. Guys… the window was open, and I heard someone clear their throat, from inside the closet…”

Within minutes, a police car pulled into the driveway. A young man in his uniform walked up to the three of us. His red hair shined in the sunlight, as well as his emerald green eyes. When he spoke, he had a bit of a Scottish accent. “Hello, all. I am Officer Henderson. What seems to be the problem?”

“There is a man in our house! He came in through the window and was hiding out in the closet… who knows how long he was there!”

“Okay, okay. Just, let me check it out, I’ll be right back.”

I volunteered to go inside, against the advice of my best friend and my boyfriend. I showed him up to the guest room, and stood in the doorway while he checked everything out. He opened the closet, only to see that no one was inside. Just the suits and jeans. I walked him through the rest of the house, to make sure he wasn’t hiding anywhere else. That’s when we saw the back door was wide open.

“Miss, was this open when you left?”

“No, it wasn’t. Everything down here was closed.”

“I’ll call for back up, we’ll search the woods back here. Now, do you have any ideas as to who this could’ve been?”

“Oh, I have one idea…”

I explained about Jason, and his year of stalking. I even brought up his murder attempt the year before. The officer looked a bit surprised when I told him everything. “Don’t worry, miss. We’ll do a thorough search. Do you mind if we get the CSI unit down here, too?”

“CSI? Like the show?”

He chuckled at that. “No, miss. CSI – Crime Scene Investigation. They dust for fingerprints and collect DNA samples, things like that. They won’t make too much a mess, I promise.”

“Whatever gets this all taken care of, I want it done.”

“Yes, miss.”

We went back outside, and I was quickly enveloped in Tom’s arms. “I’m fine, sweetheart. He left out the back.”
Officer Henderson called for another squad car, then he went to the back yard. I followed, Tom and Ashley stayed behind to watch for the other car. Henderson and I went to the back door, and saw foot prints, in the grass. They led to the woods behind my house.

“Yeah, miss, he took off. Do you have anyone you can stay with for now?”

“Um… Ashley might let me stay with her. Tom has his hotel room, I might be able to stay with him… How long will all this take?”

“Shouldn’t be more than a couple days, miss.”

“Thank you, Officer.”

The new squad car brought two new faces, both in the same uniform as Henderson. They went to the back and followed the prints to the woods. From there, they split up, searching for the intruder.

It felt like ages had gone by before the officers came out from the woods. My heart sank when I saw their faces, they all had defeated looks to them. Officer Henderson came up to us, “I’m sorry, miss. We lost track of the prints, and there’s no sign of him. We’ll set up a larger search party, but I can’t guarantee we’ll find him. I’m sorry, miss.”

The three of us got dressed, helped pack up my essentials, covered the waffles and eggs, and took off. Tom drove while Ashley sat in the back with me. I couldn’t believe it was all happening again. I’d have to move away, to somewhere Jason would never think to look for me. Tom’s voice brought me back from my thoughts.

“So, where are we going? Where do you want to stay, sweetheart?”

“I, I don’t know. If I stayed with you at the hotel, I know I’d be in the way.”

“My love, you wouldn’t be in the way. I swear.”

“And Ashley…”

She forced a small smile, as her hand rested on my shoulder. “Don’t worry about me, girlie. I’ll be okay.”

“Are you sure? You don’t look very… convinced.”

“I’ll call you if anything happens. I promise.”

We stopped off at Ashley’s apartment, and had our breakfast. No one really had much to say, so it was a quiet brunch. It was starting out as such a good day, too.
“America has voted…”

I was brought back by the sound of Nick’s voice. I was on the stage, looking into the audience. Ashley, Amanda, and Tom, were all in their seats. They seemed to be happier than I was.

“The next act, going to the finals next week, is…”

I looked down at the judges, Howard looking a little concerned when he saw me. “I wonder why…”

“Samantha Hale!”

My eyes widened. “I’m going through??” I hugged the other act as they went offstage. I forced a soft smile as the judges talked, but I couldn’t focus on what they had to say. I thanked them, took one last look at the audience, and went backstage. I sat in the greenroom, unable to comprehend what had just happened.

“I’m going through to the finals… Jason’s still out there. What if he was in the audience? He could be watching me at any given moment… and I wouldn’t know it. Or… or it could just be some person who was trying to steal something. An inexperienced burglar. Yeah, that’s it. That’s all it was.”

My phone dinged, someone had texted me.

+ Darling? Love, where are you? We’re waiting by the exit for you. +

+ I’m sorry, Tom. I’m in the greenroom, just, trying to comprehend everything. +

+ We’re on our way +

I curled into a ball, waiting. Waiting for my rescuer… waiting for everything to come crashing down around me. There was a knock at the door. When the person came in, it wasn’t my love, it wasn’t my friend. It was a judge.

“Howard? What are you doing here?”

“I was told you came back here, and I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“Um… yeah. I think so.”

“Do you mind if I sit with you?”

I was more than curious when Howard sat next to me on the couch. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but I knew him from somewhere. Not on TV or anything like that. Like, he was an old friend that I hadn’t seen in ages.

He chuckled a bit, “You’re staring.”

“I’m sorry. It’s just, I know you from somewhere… I don’t mean that I’ve seen you on TV.”

“Well, that’s a relief. I was starting to think you’d completely forgotten me.”
“What are you playing at??”

“You almost didn’t get on this show.”

“I know, you thought my video was shit enough for you to want to see me in person.”

“That’s not it…” He took his glasses off, and rubbed at his nose. “Family of the judges aren’t allowed to audition.”

That…that caught me off guard. I was quiet, unsure of what to say. “Family of the judges? What on Earth is he getting at??” I was about to chew him out, about to confront him of just what he meant. I wanted to freak out. Before I could get out a word, his hand raised, cutting me off.

“You probably want to know what I mean by that, don’t you?” I couldn’t help but nod as he cleaned his glasses and put them back on. “You look just like your mother. Such a kind soul, she was. It’s a shame she’s gone. Your father and I had a bit of a rivalry, seeing who would win her over. Two guesses on who won.”

“Who… who are you?”

He looked down at me, and he smiled at me. It wasn’t the same smile that he gave when he watched me sing. It was almost like…a smile a proud father would give their child. “Sam, when you were born, you were just the tiniest little thing, but you were such a beautiful baby. You had your mother’s features, but what really stood out, were your beautiful blue eyes. Just like your father.”

“That’s where your wrong…he had brown eyes. Mom had green. I always assumed I got my eyes from my grandmother or some ancestor.”

He took his glasses off again, and looked me dead in the eye. My heart stopped when I noticed the color of his eyes. “Blue eyes…”

“I asked Karen to marry me, more than once. Every single time, she said no. She loved Jim. She made me promise to be around as much as I could, to be there for our daughter… Sam, I’m sorry for not being around as much as I wanted to. There really isn’t any excuse for my shitty behavior. Is there any way you could forgive me? I want to make it up to you. I want to be the father that I know Jim couldn’t be.”

“I just… I have one favor.”

“Anything. Absolutely anything you want. Just name it.”

“Pinch me.”

“What? Why?”

“I know I’m dreaming now… What about your wife? Does she know about me?”

“Are you kidding? I couldn’t shut up about you once I saw your audition. Sam, I thought…” He stared at his hands while his voice shook. “When your father died, I thought he took you with him. I was, so scared, that I lost you…”

I looked up at him, and something in my mind clicked. I knew he wasn’t lying, no real man would shed real tears for a joke. I got a tissue and handed it over. He nodded as he took it, drying his face. “Prove it.”
“Hm? What?”

“Prove to me that you’re who you say you are. I mean, more than the eyes. Prove that you’re… my father.”

He quickly got his wallet and pulled out a picture. It was of a baby, wearing glasses like what Elton John would be seen in. My little black one piece, reading “Music’s In My Blood.”

“I’ve seen this picture. I saw it in my attic, the day I moved out of my old house. I, I thought my dad bought that for me, because he played the guitar… It was you?”

“Yeah, it was. Now, I understand, if you don’t want me around. I wasn’t around to watch you grow up… I was hoping, however, that you’d join me for lunch tomorrow? I’d love to catch up with you.”

I thought on that for a bit. Howard Stern was my father… “I’d love that. I really would. Just let me get you my address…Damn, I don’t have a pen, or paper. Could I have your number? I can text you the address.”

We exchanged numbers, and I hugged him tight. Everything about it felt right, like it was what was missing for so many years. A light rap on the door made me remember, we were still in the Music Hall. I opened the door, to see the Three Amigos on the other side.

“Hey, guys. I was starting to wonder what would take you so long. Hey, guys, come in here. I want you to meet my dad.”

The girls were a little concerned. They knew that my “dad” had passed away a few years prior, so they were a bit curious. Slowly, they came into the room, and saw Howard standing there. The smile he gave was a little awkward, as if he had no idea what to say. Ashley and Amanda were freaking out, Tom was trying to keep them calm.

It took everyone a minute to realize what was going on. The sound of their jaws hitting the floor reverberated off the walls.

“Guys, I want you to meet my dad, Howard Stern.”
Howard and I met up at a café in Queens that he always went to when he was younger. We talked, we laughed. Tears were shed. It was nice to meet up with him again. It felt so unreal, that I was with him, that we were so friendly.

We would reminisce about my mom, how caring she was. He told me stories about their childhood. It turned out I was more like my mom than I thought. She loved animals, she would’ve adopted every pet if she could. She loved to stay home, so any adventures they had, they definitely were Howard’s idea.

After lunch, I went back home, to find a letter on my bed. With it was a little black dress, black pumps, and a little black box. Before I read the note, I opened the box, to see a beautiful silver necklace, with a silver heart, embroidered with diamonds. I had never seen anything so enchanting before. I finally took a look at the letter.

My Dearest Love,

Tonight, I want to properly celebrate you going to the finals. We’re going to dinner, at Piccola Cucina. I hear it’s the best in the city for Italian food, and you only deserve the best, my love.

On the bed, you’ll find a dress I found specifically for you, and with help, I found you matching shoes and clutch. I’m out getting a proper suit, and I want you to be in this dress when I return.

I can’t wait to see you, darling. I know you’ll look beautiful as always. I’ll be home soon, sweetheart.

I love you,

Tom

I sent him a quick text that I was home, and quickly tried on the dress and shoes. Luckily for Tom, they were a perfect fit. The dress hugged my curves rather nicely, and again, lucky for Tom, it showed off my breasts, too. Then I went to my vanity, sitting on the bench. I touched up the makeup on my neck, and put the necklace on. The light in my room made the diamonds sparkle and shine, and I fell in love.

I put my wallet and phone in the clutch, and went downstairs to wait for my date. I kept looking out the window to watch for his car, and I watched the clock to count the minutes until he should’ve been pulling into the driveway. My heart was imitating the butterflies in my stomach. My first date with Tom. Our first real date. My fingers toyed with the diamond covered heart on my necklace.

Finally, I watched the Jaguar pull into the driveway. I quickly went to the kitchen, tugging at the skirt of my dress. I was so nervous, but so excited. There was a soft knock on the door, and I couldn’t help but smile. I turned the knob, opening the door, to see a handsome gentleman. He had a black suit, black tie, and a bouquet of red roses. He had the cutest blond curls, too, and the biggest smile.

“Hello, my love. You look beautiful. I’m sorry I’m late, I wanted to pick these up first. For you, my lady.” He handed me the bouquet, and kissed me sweetly. As I put the flowers in a vase, he wrapped his arms around me. “Read the note, love.”
I saw a little white square still attached to the wrapping. “I will love you, until the last flower dies.” Sweetheart, that’s beautiful.” I turned around and hugged him tight. “Thank you, sweetheart. Everything you found is beautiful. How did you know my sizes?”

“Ashley.”

“Ah. Okay. So, let’s go.”

Tom put his arm out, and I wrapped mine in his, after locking the door behind us. He escorted me to his car, opening the passenger side door for me.

“You are quite the charmer, aren’t you?”

“You caught me. I really just wanted to have dinner with you, for our first official date.”

“I can’t wait, baby.” I kissed him sweetly before getting in the car. As we drove off, we made small talk, Tom mainly asking if everything was to my liking so far.

We got to the restaurant in no time. Tom and I went inside, and I heard so many gasps, I swear the air could fill a hot air balloon. We were lead to a table in the back, and given a complementary bottle of wine.

“I almost forgot I was dating an actor.”

“Well I’m dating a famous singer.”

“Oh hush, I’m not famous.”

“Your audition for the show is the most viewed video of the year on YouTube. You’re pretty famous, love.”

“Oh wow…” I could still hear the whispers of the guests in the rest of the restaurant, all in awe of the famous actor with an aspiring singer. I could feel my face get hotter by the minute. Tom reached over and held my hand, smiling.

“My love, don’t worry about them. You’re here with me, and I couldn’t be happier.”

We made small talk, the wine was delicious, and dinner was divine. Tom paid and escorted me out, when suddenly, a man came up to us, wearing a baseball hat, glasses, and phone in hand.

“Tom! Tom! When did you start seeing the up-and-coming singer, Samantha Hale?! Are you two an item yet?? Why have you been keeping her from the media’s eye?? Are you embarrassed to have fallen for a singer??”

“Come on, Sam. Let’s get going.” He helped me into the car while the guy was still screaming questions at us. Quickly, Tom hopped in and drove off. “He was a bloody nuisance, wasn’t he?”

“Tom, who was that?”

“Some paparazzi guy. Please, don’t let him get to you.”

“Are you embarrassed?”

“What?”

“Are you embarrassed to have fallen for me?”
Quickly, he pulled off into an empty parking lot, shut the car off, and stared me in the eye. “Sam, how could I possibly be embarrassed? I’ve known you for quite some time, and believe me when I say that I’ve been falling for you since the minute we met. Why else do you think I was so nervous when we met? Samantha Hale, you are the most beautiful, talented, funny, perfect woman, that I’ve ever had the privilege of meeting. To say that I’m embarrassed to fall for you is to say that a cat is embarrassed to give itself a bath. I’ve fallen quite hopelessly in love with you. Please, believe me…”

My eyes were wide, jaw almost in my lap. “You... you’re not just saying that?”

In that moment, time was still, as he pressed his lips to mine. His hand held my head, his lips moving in time with mine. My skin was on fire, my toes curling in my shoes. He pulled away just a bit, and looked at me.

“Sam, you do things to me that no other woman has ever done. I need to be touching you in some way, or else I feel separated from you. I need you, Sam, in more ways than just one.”

“I need you too, Tom. I love you, too. You’re my world.”

“And you’re mine.”

He drove us back home, and we got back into our comfy clothes. I kissed him again and again, more times than I care to count. He popped a movie in, and I pulled a blanket over us while we sat on the couch. We snuggled close as we watched the movie, and he kept whispering sweet nothings in my ear.

“You’re my world, and I’d scream it from the rooftops if you wanted me to. I’d do anything you asked me to.”

“I’d do the same for you, Tom.”

“Promise?”

“I promise, love.”

“Would you marry me if I asked?”

The movie was forgotten as I turned to look at him. His eyes were sparkling more than normal, a loving smile on his face. I kissed him ever so gently, and I smiled up at him. Normally, my heart would have been going a million miles a minute, but not then. Then, my heart was calmer than it ever was. I nodded as I felt him slip a ring onto my finger. “Yes.”
“Do you have a song picked out yet?”

I sat at my desk in my music room, one hand holding my head up, the other searching the internet for sheet music that I can play on my guitar. Quite aimlessly at that.

Officer Henderson had called that morning. A fellow officer was injured and the suspect ran further into the woods, escaping successfully.

“Yo! Sam!”

“Hm? Huh?” I blinked myself awake, pulling myself out of my trance. I looked up at the owner of my personal alarm clock. “What?”

“I asked you if you’ve got a song picked out yet. The finals are in two days.”

“Yes, Ash, I’m fully aware of this.”

She sat next to me at my desk. In an instant, my phone went from being on my desk to being in her pocket. “Sam, why is this so difficult? You love to sing, you love to play your guitar. Why is picking a song so difficult for you?”

“You try making a decision that can either make your life perfection or a living hell. Then, ask me how this is so difficult.”

“Hey! You cut the attitude, now. I have been trying to help you this entire time! You got the chance of a lifetime. You got the man of your dreams. I have asked for nothing while everything worked out right for you. I’m not about to start. Now, let me help you again. Okay?”

“You’re right… Ash, I’m sorry. I appreciate you greatly. Anything you want, it’s yours.”

“I want you to give it your all, and win this thing. Okay? Now, what’s a song that you love to sing the most?”

“That’s easy. Begin Again, by Taylor Swift. Her choices, I’m not fond of. I still like her music, though.”

“Girlie, you don’t have to explain it to me. So, you like that song?”

“Yes.”

“You feel confident singing it?”

“Pretty confident, yeah.”

“What about guitar?”

“I could play it in my sleep.”

“Good. Play it for me.” I raised an eyebrow at that. “Imagine you’re on the AGT stage, and play the song for me.” I got my guitar, sat on my barstool, and played one cord, before Ashley stopped me. “Nope, nope, nope. I mean, really envision that you’re on stage, and I’m the judges.”
“Is this to make me ready? Or is this for you to try out your impressions?”

“It can’t be both?”

“Ash, you know I love you, but your impressions suck.”

“Jason said your singing sucked. Did that stop you? So go ahead, tell me they suck. I won’t stop perfecting them. So, tell me about yourself, as if we were filming the video for before your performance.”

“Okay… I’ve been singing for-”

“No!! Sam, you have no imagination, do you?”

“Apparently not.”

“Try again.”

“Okay…Hi, my name is Samantha Hale, and I’ve been singing for about 20 years now. I didn’t start learning how to play the guitar and piano until I was about 12.”

“Keep it going.”

“Um, when I started on the show, I didn’t think I’d go very far. I thought I’d be voted out within the first few weeks. No, that’s not true. I thought I wouldn’t even be given a chance.”

“Has anything changed since starting on America’s Got Talent?”

“Yeah, actually. Since my audition, I’ve made a lot of new friends, and I met someone. He saw my audition, actually. That’s how we met. It truly was love at first sight.”

“Does this mystery man have a name?”

“He does, but I think he wants to keep things quiet for right now, and how did I actually get sucked into this? You’ve got me acting like this is a real interview.”

“Yeah, and look at how well you were doing! Okay, enough with the interview. Introduce your song, then sing for me.”

“You’re such a goof. Okay, so, this song is called ‘Begin Again,’ and I chose this song, because of my relationship with my now fiancé. My ex-boyfriend, he put me down at every turn, discouraged me all the time. With my fiancé, he thinks I’m talented, funny…beautiful… so this song is dedicated to my fiancé. He’s shown me that I’m more than just a waste of space. I’m Samantha Hale, I’m a singer, and that’s something that no one can take from me.”

“Beautiful! Now, sing for me.”

I played the cords, waiting to be interrupted again. I sang for her, and when I saw tears in her eyes, I stopped. “Ash?”

“Why am I alone, Sam? Why does no one want me?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re getting married, while I have an online dating account that no one likes. No one wants to date me... why is that?”
“Because I’m a woman and you’re straight? I don’t know. How much have you had to drink today?”

“I may have had a shot of your tequila.”

“I don’t own tequila.”

“You do now.”

“Well then. Why don’t you just wait in here for a sec? I just wanna call Tom quick.”

I finally managed to escape my music room, and went up to my room, dialing Tom’s phone on the way. “Tom? You’re still out, right?”

“Yes, actually. I’m about to make the quick trip home. Why?”

“Do you have any single friends that would be perfect for Ashley?”

“Ashley? Seriously? She needs help finding a guy.”

“Yes! Do you have any single friends or not?”

“Well, there’s my mate, Ben. I don’t know if he would be her type, though. Why? Are you playing matchmaker?”

“Maybe.”

“I love you, you know that?”

“Oh, trust me. I know. Now, call your friend, and have him meet us at Le Bernardin, at 7 o’clock tonight. Okay?”

“Bloody Hell, love, we’re treating them to the most expensive restaurant in the city?”

“Yeah…”

“Alright then. We’ll meet you at 7.”

“Good. I’ll see you then. I love you.” I went back down to the music room, only to find my very valuable acoustic guitar being plucked and pinged like a two year old pulling at rubber bands.

“Ahem.”

“Oh. Hey there.”

“What are you doing?”

“Playing.”

“Yes, I can see that.”

“Then why did you ask? And how’s Tom?”

“How did you…”

“You always have a bit of an English accent after you talk to him. I could see the brakes when you stopped yourself from saying ‘Bloody Hell.’ So, how’s Tom?”
“He’s well. He and I are going to treat you out to dinner, at Le Bernardin.”

“What?? Sam, I couldn’t possibly… you’re absolutely sure? Both of you are?”

“Of course we are. Now, come on. We can raid through my dresses and find something that’ll fit you.” I took her upstairs, and of course, the first dress she’s drawn to, is the black one that Tom got for me for our date. “Um, no, I’m wearing that one. Find a different one.”

“But-”

“No.”

“BUT-”

“NO.”

“Fine. What about this one?” She pulled out a red, spaghetti strap, cocktail dress, which sparkled in the sunlight from my window. “Can I try this one on?”

“Of course. Let me help you into it.”

It took little effort to get her into the dress. It hugged her nicely, showing off her curves. The neckline was cut a little low, enough to show off her cleavage but not enough to show everything she has. I curled her hair and helped with her makeup, and she could’ve been a star. I sat her in front of my vanity mirror, and she covered her mouth.

“Is… is that me?”

“That’s you, girl. You look beautiful.”

“What’s all this for? Not once in my life have I gotten this dressed up before. What do you have planned?”

“Oh, fine. You caught me. We’re setting you up on a blind date. Tom and I will be there, so in case anything happens, we’re there.”

“Tom’s friend?”

“Yup. His name’s Ben.”

“It couldn’t be Cumberbuddie, could it?”

“Huh. I don’t know. It’s possible. Okay, now, help me into my dress.”

“Sam… I don’t think I can do this.”

I sat next to her on the bench for my vanity, and wrapped an arm around her. “Ashley, who is it that’s always kicking my butt into gear? Telling me that if I didn’t do anything, then I’d never know how my life should’ve turned out?”

“Me, but Sam, I…”

“Ash, if you don’t go tonight, you could be missing out on the biggest opportunity of your lifetime. Are you going to sit here and do nothing, forever wondering how tonight would’ve gone? Or, are you going to go, and make the best of it?”
“Good to know I’ve been rubbing off on you, girlie. Let’s get you dressed, then let’s meet the boys. I might need a shot of your bourbon.”

“I don’t own any bourbon.”

“You’re lucky I restocked your cupboards.”

“Why do you insist on buying me alcohol?”

“Because wine isn’t strong enough, now get into the dress!”

As soon as both of us were ready, we hopped in the car and went to the restaurant. On the way up, I had received a text from Tom to meet us outside. While we sat in my car, Ashley was fiddling with the hem of her dress. I never saw her more nervous than how she was that night. Sweat was almost dripping off her forehead, her mascara threatening to run. I held her hand in mine, and gave her the best reassuring smile that I could give.

It didn’t take long for us to see Tom’s car pull into the parking lot. Ashley and I stood behind my car, while we watched Tom get out of his with his friend. I should’ve known, Ash was right. There, at the opposite end of the parking lot, stood Tom Hiddleston, and Benedict Cumberbatch. From far away, he looked as nervous as she was.

We walked up to the boys, and I couldn’t help but notice Tom taking out his phone for a brief moment, then tucking it back in his suit coat. I hugged Tom tight, and his phone was still vibrating. I looked back to see Ash staring at the pavement, Ben rubbing the back of his neck. One arm wrapped around her shoulders, I smiled up at the nervous man. “Ben, I’d like you to meet my best friend, Ashley King. Ash, this is Tom’s best friend, Ben.”

Shyly, she waved, her voice small and soft. “Hi, Ben.”

He nodded and put his hand out to shake. His hand was shaking worse than a Chihuahua watching a snowflake hit the ground. Her hand wasn’t too still when she placed it in his. He took her hand and kissed the back, looking deep into her eyes. “It’s an honor to meet you, Miss Ashley. Tom’s told me a lot about you, but now I see that he’s hardly done your beauty any justice.”

“You’re such a smooth talker.”

Tom pardoned himself to go answer his phone quick. “I wonder if it’s Luke trying to get him to do an audition for another project.” Once Tom rejoined us, we all went inside and sat, drinking glasses of red wine. Apparently, wine is strong enough to help Ben and Ashley loosen their tongues a bit. They talked happily amongst themselves, and I rested my head on Tom’s shoulder.

“We did well, my love.”

“That we did, Sam. It was your idea, though.”

“I know, but you helped greatly.” I looked at my ring under the lights, and watched it sparkle. “I love you, Tom.”

“I love you too, darling.”

His phone buzzed yet again, and I was getting more than a little curious. “Who is that, babe?”

“Some random number, love. Don’t worry about it.”
“It’s not Luke?”

“Nope. Solicitor, most likely. Don’t worry about it, sweetheart. It’s nothing.”
Meanwhile...

Tom looked at his watch, noticing the time. Sam was supposed to be doing her dress rehearsal already, but she hadn’t arrived yet. No one had heard from her, which was highly unusual of her.

“Where could she be?” Tom was pacing around outside Radio City Music Hall, Ashley and Ben doing the same. “She should be here by now… Ash, did she say anything to you?”

“No. The last I heard was that she was on her way, but that was a little while ago.”

“Maybe I should go look for her.”

“Mate, listen.” Ben put his hands on Tom’s shoulders, looking him in the eye. “I’m sure she just got snagged in bad traffic. She’ll be here. Don’t worry.”

“How can you tell me to not worry when my fiancée is out there, somewhere?”

Tom’s pocket vibrated a bit, just enough to get his attention. He took it out, and saw a nasty looking text on the main screen. He broke out in a cold sweat, his phone slipping in his hands.

“I told you to stay away, but you didn’t listen.”

“Oh dear God, he has her.”

“Who does?”

“I can’t explain. I have to go.”

“Who has her??”

“I have to get back…”

Ashley stood in his path, her face almost red with anger. “Thomas, you will tell us what you know or so help me I will tear your balls off and shove them down your throat. Now, what the hell is going on?”

“It’s him. It’s Jason.” In an instant, Ash’s face was drained of all color. “He’s been messaging me and calling me the past couple of days. I didn’t think he’d actually do anything. I thought he was all talk.”

The boys watched as Ashley started shaking, the red returning to her face, and steam practically coming out of her ears. Tears rolled down her face, as she ran at him. “YOU BASTARD!” She started hitting Tom’s chest, tears running down her face. “YOU LET HIM GET TO HER!! YOU LET HIM GET HER AND NOW SHE’S GONE!!!”

“We, we don’t know that. We don’t even know if it was in fact him.”

“You don’t know Jason! He’s a maniac! He has a way to make everything seem like just a natural cause… This is your fault. It’s all your fault! Because you couldn’t tell anyone that he’d been talking to you, Sam’s in danger. All of us are in danger! All because of you!!!” Ben held her back as she kept throwing punches. Slowly, she started sobbing more and more, her arms too weak to punch. “It’s all your fault…”

“I’ll go find her. You two, stay here, in case she shows. Call me if she gets here.”
Tom ran to his car, speeding off toward Sam’s house. Ashley was right. It would be his fault if she was hurt… or worse… No. No, he can’t think about that. He has to focus on the road, on getting his Sam. His Sam… his soon to be wife. He had to focus on getting her safely. There’s no sense putting both of them in danger.

He pulled into her driveway, seeing her car was gone. Tom ran inside, calling out her name, to hear silence answer him back. He noticed the roses he got her, how all were wilted, except one. One rose looked as beautiful as the day it bloomed. He let a small smile slip, he wasn’t about to tell her that he had gotten a fake rose to put in the bouquet.

“*I’ll love you until the last rose dies.*”

There was a soft thud, upstairs, in her bedroom.

“Sam? Sam, is that you??”

He climbed the stairs two steps at a time. Once at the top, he noticed her door was ajar. He raced inside, to find that his Sam wasn’t there. His phone buzzed in his pocket. When he checked, it was Ben, saying that Sam had arrived and was on her way inside. “*But, if Sam was already gone… then who, or what, made the noise up here?*” One look in the vanity mirror, and he saw a tall man, with a sinister smile, and with a turn, a fist comes in contact with Tom’s face, before all he saw was darkness.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself in the living room, his wrists and ankles tied to a kitchen chair, with a splitting headache nonetheless. When he looked at the telly, he saw it was on America’s Got Talent. Once his ears were done ringing, he heard the voice of an angel. His angel.

“Hello, my name is Samantha Hale, and I’m a singer. When I started on this show, I honestly had no idea that I would make it this far. I mean, I’m at the finals! I could actually win this thing!”

“She’s beautiful, ain’t she?” A tall man came up next to Tom. The man’s hair was black and slicked back, that sinister grin had never left his face. When Tom looked down, he noticed how small the man’s feet were. “The bird that escaped her cage.”

“You won’t win.”

“Oh I will, don’t you worry. She’ll come flying back, you wait and see. But first, let the little bird sing her heart out. The highlight of her life, until she comes back here. All she’ll find, is your corpse, still tied in that chair.”

Tom remained staring at the television, thinking how beautiful his angel was.

“I want to dedicate this final performance to Tom Hiddleston. Thanks to the show, we were able to meet, and we fell in love. He just proposed the other day. Call it a whirlwind romance, if you want. It was love at first sight.” She stared into the camera, making Tom think she was staring into his soul. “Tom, thank you, for everything. You taught me that I’m more than I give myself credit for. You helped me realize that I’m actually worth loving. Thank you, Tom. I love you.”

“I love you too, Sam. I promise, I will get out of here, and I will get back to you. I swear it.”

Immediately, he started moving in his chair, trying to loosen the binds in any way possible. Before he could find a way to free himself, he felt a hand on the back of his neck. It pushed him down, and all he could do was watch the carpet get closer and closer to his face.
“Ladies and gentlemen, since tonight is our grand finale, we’ll be doing the eliminations tonight as well. So will each act please return to the stage?”

Each of the remaining six acts walked back onto the stage. Mat stood to my left, while another singer, by the name of Emily West, stood to my right. The audience was going insane, cheering while they waited to see who won.

Nick announced fourth, fifth, and sixth place, and they went off stage. It was down to three acts, and all three were waiting to find out who won. I stood in the middle, Mat to one side, Emily to the other.

“The act coming in third place is… Emily West!” The three of us hugged, and she waved while walking off stage. Mat and I moved closer, only to have Nick go between us. “We’re down to our two finalists. Mat Franco…”

The crowd cheered louder and louder.

“Samantha Hale.”

I was surprised to hear everyone cheer louder for me than for Mat.

“The winner of season nine of America’s Got Talent, receiving one million dollars, and their very own show in Vegas…”

We waited for Nick to announce the winner. I looked throughout the audience, but I couldn’t see my friends or Tom anywhere. “They’re probably in the far back,” I thought.

“SAMANTHA HALE!”

Time froze, my eyes were wide. I watched the audience get on their feet, and cheer like crazy. “I won?” I looked over at Nick, seeing that he had taken a step back. Mat ran over to me and hugged me tight, making me blush just a bit.

“I knew you could do it, Sam. Congratulations.”

“Thank you. You deserved to win.”

“Let’s agree to disagree on that.”

While he walked back, Nick and I were talking. All I could really focus on was finding my friends. Once the show was over, I went to the lobby, where we’d normally meet after a show. No one was there that I recognized. I felt my phone buzz in my pocket.

“Ashley? Where are you?”

“I’m outside with Ben.”

“What about Tom?”

“Just come out here, and we’ll explain.”

“Ash, what are you not telling me??” I rushed outside, seeing the pair by my car. I looked around,
seeing if I could spot him somewhere, but he was nowhere to be found. “Where is he?”

“We…” Ben rubbed the back of his neck, looking at the pavement. “We don’t know.”

“What? What do you mean? Where did he go?”

“The last we saw him was before the show, when he went to look for you. We haven’t seen him since.”

“You mean to tell me, that he’s been missing for two hours, and neither of you have gone out to look for him?? ARE YOU KIDDING ME?? Fine. You two won’t do anything, I will.”

I quickly got in my car, not caring what Ben and Ashley had to say, and I drove off. I tried to come up with different places of where he could’ve gone. They said he was looking for me, and the first place Tom would’ve gone was… “Home.”

I pulled into my driveway, seeing that Tom’s car had beaten me there. I cautiously went inside, seeing Tom’s shoes by the door. I heard a pained groan come from inside, so I hid as well as I could. Once I peeked out of the entranceway, I saw Tom, tied in a chair that looked to be from my kitchen table. I made my way towards him, and noticed the blood running down his face.

“Tom…”

“Nnnngh… Sam? Love, is that you?”

I went to him and started untied his feet from the chair. “Yeah, baby. It’s me. What happened?”

“It’s him. He’s been calling me and messaging me. I didn’t think he would do anything, I thought he was all bark and no bite. Sam, I’m so sorry, I should’ve told you sooner, and now I’ve put us all in danger.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Tom, slow down. Who are you talking about?”

“Jason. He knocked me out and… Sam, look out!”

I turned around, only to be met by a palm smacking my cheek. Eventually, I looked up at him, the monster who haunted my dreams, who made my life hell for a year. He had his normal scowl, his face unshaven, his eyes bloodshot.

“Just what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

I said nothing, while looking at his disheveled look. I smirked, shaking my head as I realized that he really wasn’t all that terrifying.

“What are you smirking at, you wench?”

“Just looking at what a year of stalking has done to you. Trying to grow a beard? Something has to cover up the… lacking area, don’t you think?”

His face was redder than a ripe Empire apple. While his hands went for my neck, my foot went for his pants. No matter how lacking he was, it still dropped him to his knees.

“You really think I’m still afraid of you? You, who made my life a nightmare, is no more than a little girl, obsessed with her favorite star. You want me so badly, and you let yourself go. You hurt me, Jason. So, this is for the pain you caused!” I kicked him hard in his chest, knocking him backwards onto the floor. “This is for the nightmares!” My foot stomped on his groin, watching his
pants get darker and wetter. I went up to his face, staring him dead in the eye. “And this is for trying to ruin my life.” Just as I heard my front door open, I kicked Jason across the face.

Officer Henderson came into the living room, armed and protected with a vest. He saw Jason on the ground, and put his gun away. “You knocked him out?”

“I did, yeah. It felt good.”

I untied Tom from the chair while EMT’s came in with a stretcher. Ashley and Ben helped me into the back seat of her car then followed the ambulance. I just wanted to be with Tom. I wanted to be by his side, to know he was okay. My worry was showing, apparently my tears weren’t a dead giveaway. I started sobbing in the back seat, praying that my love was okay.

Once to the hospital, after Tom was rushed into the ER, another doctor took me into an examination room. My blood was drawn, my blood pressure checked, which wasn’t the best thing to do. Especially for a panicking woman. I was alone in the room, my brain going through worst case scenarios. My Tom. My poor, poor Tom. I prayed to God to let him be okay, I begged for him to be healed.

The doctor told me that I was fine, just to try to calm a bit, so my blood pressure wouldn’t be so high. I left for the waiting room after tearing the poor man a new one. Ash held my hand, Ben had one arm wrapped around my shoulders. I just wanted my love to be okay. No one said a word as we waited to hear any news.

A young man in a white coat came out, stethoscope around his neck. “Mrs. Hiddleston?”

“Yes?” I walked to him, my stomach deciding that there wasn’t a better time to start doing flips.

“Tom sustained multiple head injuries, a broken nose, and he has ligature marks around his wrists. Fortunately, his wounds will heal, and he’ll be fine in no time.”

“Can I see him?”

“You may, but he’s still unconscious. The nurses will get a room ready for him, I expect him to stay here for a few days, at least.”

“Thank you, Doctor. Could you lead us to him? Please?”

The young man led us inside, showing us a battered and broken Tom, lying in a hospital bed, hooked up to wires and fluids. I thanked the doctor once again before sitting next to the bed, holding his limp hand in mine.

“When do you think he’ll wake up, Doctor?”

“I’m not sure, Mr. Cumberbatch. Only time will tell.”

I kissed Tom’s fingers, the back of his hand, then his palm. “I’m not leaving, baby. I’m staying right here until you wake up. I… I will love you, until that last rose dies.”
Chapter 15

“Come on, Tom. Wake up.”

My hand caressed his cheek, feeling the stubble against my palm. It had been a couple days, and my love wasn’t showing any signs of waking up. I looked over at Ben, who was on the other side of the bed, seeing that I wasn’t the only one that worried. He had a bit of a disheveled look to him, like he hadn’t gotten any sleep since Tom was admitted.

Ashley walked to the foot of the bed. “Guys, standing here isn’t going to do us any good. It’s certainly not going to make Tom wake up any faster. So, why don’t we go to Sam’s place, get some showers, some sleep, and something to eat? I’m sure he wouldn’t mind.”

“I can’t leave. I don’t want to leave him alone.”

“Then, how about one of us stays with him, while the other two get some R&R?”

Ben reached over and held my hand. “I’ll stay with him. You two go. I’ll text Ash if he wakes.”

I hugged Ben, kissed Tom’s forehead, then left with Ashley. I couldn’t help but worry more and more with every step I took. My fingers were hurting from the constant pulling, but I didn’t care. My love wasn’t waking up, and my deepest fear… couldn’t come true.

It, it couldn’t. Everything was a blur as Ashley took me home. I went upstairs and took my shower. As I washed my hair, I thought I felt another pair of hands in place of my own. They were gentle, careful, and they were bigger compared to my dainty ones. I shook my head, trying to bring myself to reality. The owner of those hands was in the hospital, in bed, asleep. I rinsed my hair and started washing my body. I felt those hands again. Running over my skin, caressing my body as only he did. A tear just barely escaped, when he brushed it away.

“What is it, darling? Why are you crying?”

“I can’t lose you, Tom. I just can’t. I don’t want to be alone again.”

“But my love, you’ll never be alone,” one hand went over my heart, “not as long as I’m in here. Keep me in your heart, love, and I shall be with you forever. I promise.”

“I love you, Tom.”

I turned around to hug him, to kiss him, but I was alone in that shower. I rinsed, turned the water off, and just stood there. My heart was breaking, and no one was there to help catch the pieces. I slowly went to my room, and put on my dark red sundress, with a black choker. I sat at my vanity set. With each brush of my hair, I sank deeper and deeper into depression. Something caught my eye in the mirror. When I looked up, I saw him. He was smiling, his eyes were sparkling. He was beautiful. I held my face in my hands as I sobbed. I wanted him to wake up, to be okay, but my heart already believed him to be dead. A hand was placed on my shoulder. I looked behind me, to see it was Ashley. She said nothing as she sat next to me and held me close.

Once I calmed down, she held her phone out to me, showing a text from Ben.

+ He’s stirring a bit, moaning too. Whether that’s a sign that he’s gonna wake soon, or if he just senses that Sam’s not here anymore, I have no clue +
“After I take my shower and get dressed, we’ll head right back up, how’s that?”

“Thank you.”

While she got ready, I sat on my couch, looking at my ring. If he was stirring, then there’s still some kind of brain activity. He could still wake up. He could still be okay. I put on my shoes as Ash came down. She drove us back, and my mind was wandering more than normal. I remembered his proposal, how happy he was that I said yes. Then I remembered the fun we had on the couch afterward.

When we went back to Tom’s room, I saw what Ben meant by stirring. Tom’s head was moving back and forth, his forehead was all sweaty, a look of distress on his face. I went back to next to his bed, and I held his hand, as Ben was going to get a nurse.


“Sssasaaaaaaaaaammmmmm…”

“I’m right here, Tom.”

His head slowly stopped, his face relaxing, too. His eyes fluttered open, and he started looking around.

“Tom?”

He looked towards me, and his eyes opened more as he regained his focus. “Sam? My love, is… is that you?”

“It’s me, baby. Oh Tom…” I kissed his hand, his fingers, as tears once again made their way down my face. He caressed my cheek, brushing away a tear.

“My love? What is it? Why are you crying?”

“Oh Tom, I was so scared. I thought I’d lost you. You weren’t waking up.”

“Sam, nothing in this world could ever make me leave you. I’m afraid you’re quite stuck with me.”

“I couldn’t be happier, baby.”

The nurses and doctor looked Tom over, making sure he was really okay. The young doctor said he was surprised Tom was awake that soon, and that he had to remain there until all Tom’s tests came back. I properly apologized to the doctor before he left, and I lied in Tom’s hospital bed.

“Are you okay, my love?”

“I am. Oh I am.”

I held him close, and my heart swelled when he tucked my hair behind my ear. I looked up into his eyes, and the idea of losing him was pushed to the back of my mind.

“I love you, Tom.”

“I love you too, Sam. Until I take my last breath, and so on.”
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