Private and Secretive
by ellaaa25

Summary

You could lose everything in a day and no one would ever know. One day she would tell them, she wouldn't have much of a choice. But that wouldn't be for a while. It still hurt too much.

Tobin struggles through a horrible loss at a young age and her foster family and neighbours help bring the light back into her eyes.

AKA - Tobin moves in with baby Mal and next door to Christen at age 13. Cue hormones and adorableness.

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Notes

I only own the mistakes, nothing else. I am not tagging this, but it isn't happy to start with.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Watch your whole world go up in smoke

September 11th, 2001 – UCLA Medical Centre

Her eyes were trained on television. She watched as the planes crashed into the Towers and tears were streaming down her face.

The nurse checking on her gasped and tried to turn it off, but the girl wouldn’t let her. She had to watch it, she had to know for sure.

Her parents were flying from Boston to be by her side. They had gone across to the East Coast with her three siblings for a high society event and were meant to be flying back today. They hadn’t wanted to leave her, but it was the one event of the year they were unable to miss.

She was the youngest at only 13 and her family had kept her out of the spotlight. No one even knew her name. They wanted to protect her from the scrutiny they had gone through and let her have her a childhood.

But she was pretty sure she had just watched their plane fly into the side of a building.

They weren’t going to protect her now.

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September 12th, 2001 – UCLA Medical Centre

The girl cried when the police officer walked into her hospital room. The look on his face said everything it possibly could.

“I’m very sorry Miss. No one on that plane survived. Your parents and siblings are gone.”

He gave her time to cry and didn’t object when the girl hugged him for comfort. He just held her like he did his daughters and tried to stay strong. Nothing he said would help that girl feel any better.

When she started settling down, pulled back and smiled at her softly. “This is probably the last thing on your mind, but a social worker will be coming to see you next week and we will try and work out what happens next.”

The girl sat back and wiped her eyes. “I’m stuck here anyway. I have another month with my leg in this cage.”

The detective had been given a brief rundown on the youngest Montgomery’s life. A promising soccer player, the girl had bucked every tradition the high society had, and her parents had encouraged it.

She had gone to public school under a fake name, played soccer with the boys and had a carefree childhood. She didn’t have a lot of friends but lived to have the ball at her feet.

Until two weeks ago and her leg was broken horrifically in a tackle. Both her tibia and fibula had broken through the skin near her knee and two surgeries had been required to reset them. Her kneecap been fractured as well. She had been stuck in hospital ever since and it was the only reason she hadn’t travelled with her family.
“I heard the doctors say it was healing well and that they thought you would be able to get back to soccer after Christmas.”

The girl shrugged. “Doesn’t matter now.”

The detective sighed. “I can’t imagine what you are going through right now, but the social worker, myself and the doctors will do everything we can to help you.”

“They were meant to be here today.” The girl mumbled before she looked at the detective. “Can you stay with me when the social worker gets here? I don’t want to be alone.”

He smiled. “I will be here as long as you need me to.”

“Thank you…” The girl frowned. “I don’t know your name.”

He laughed and held his hand out. “Press. Cody Press.” He tried to put on a British accent to be like Bond, but he failed. However, his ultimate goal was to make the teenager laugh, which was a success.

The girl was grinning when she shook his hand. “Montgomery. Tobin Montgomery. But everyone knows me as Tobin Heath.”

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September 15th, 2001

NY TIMES Headline: The Montgomery Family Victims of Terror Attacks

Cindy and Jeff Montgomery (both 57), as well as their three eldest children, Perry (29), Katie (26) and Jeff (24), all perished in the 9/11 attacks. One of the oldest, wealthiest, most charitable and most secretive families in the United States has been decimated by this attack. The only member of the Montgomery family left is the youngest child, an unnamed daughter (13) who has been kept out of the spotlight. We hope the child gets the support she needs in this trying time for all Americans.

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September 21st, 2001

The social worker was kind and Tobin felt at ease with her and Cody. Tobin just laughed when she found out it was Cody’s wife, Stacey. Stacey knew the situation was unprecedented, but it was why she had been chosen for the case. They were keeping the number of people who knew her true identity to a minimum.

Not only was Tobin bed ridden with a horrific leg injury, she had just lost her entire family in a terrorist attack. Said family was one of social elite and they had money, property and companies that Tobin was now the sole beneficiary of.

The media, big business and other families that knew the Montgomery’s would be coming for her. They would want to know her and manipulate her. Stacey and Cody were not going to allow that to happen.

“Tobin, occasionally a will gets contested and is dragged through the courts. However, your parents left everything to you and your siblings. As they are all gone and you are the only one left, your family lawyers talked me through what is happening and what they wanted to happen.”

Stacey made sure Tobin was listening and engaged. Cody was sitting quietly and holding her hand. He had come to visit her everyday and the girl trusted him.
“Everything related to your families’ businesses and holdings will be locked up in a trust. From 21 until you are 35, it will slowly be released to you. You can put it straight back in the trusts hands, or you can work with it. Your parents didn’t manage any companies or business, letting them run themselves. It allowed them to continue their charity work. You have a trust fund that will be topped up every month, your medical care is covered, and your college expenses will be paid for. Anything you need can be accessed through the lawyers and the trust. All the family properties are in the trusts name, but it is all yours Tobin. Everything your family owned is yours.”

Tobin didn’t care for any of it. She never had. She just wanted to play football and hang out with her family.

Stacey continued. “I had a look at your parents wills in regarding their wishes as to what would happen to you. Essentially, they believed your siblings would be your guardians and didn’t have a plan beyond that. You aren’t old enough to look after yourself. You have to be in someone’s care until you are 18. Because you are in hospital and need further care when you are released, we have stricter guidelines.”

“I don’t want to live with someone I don’t know. I just want to be normal and be in a normal household.” Tobin grumbled.

Stacey smiled at Cody and the detective nodded. The pair had discussed a potential solution but didn’t want to pressure Tobin. She had enough going on.

Cody made sure Tobin was looking at him. “We know a lady who is a registered foster parent. She has a three-year-old daughter and she would love to have you stay with her.”

Tobin was astounded. “You already know someone I can stay with?”

Cody nodded. “She knows the whole story. We approached her about it when it became apparent you had nowhere to go. She is our next-door neighbour, Karen Pugh. Her little girl is named Mallory.”

“Will it be a permanent thing?”

Stacey shrugged. “If it goes well, yes. If not, we can try something else. We live just next door and we have three girls around your age. I am sure they would love to be friends with you.”

Tobin sunk back into the bed and frowned. Cody put his hand lightly on her leg. “How about I bring Karen and Mallory to visit tomorrow? And maybe my daughters at some stage as well. We can see how it goes and then you have a couple of weeks until you are released to decide.”

Tobin nodded and Stacey moved the conversation forward. It was the last thing they had to talk about, and it was probably the hardest.

“Your families funerals… The government and the old families are pushing for a State memorial service in Washington.” Karen stated.

Tobin scoffed. “They would hate that. They wouldn’t want a big fuss. They didn’t do anything for publicity. They just wanted to help people. Why can’t it just be a private one?”

Stacey smiled sadly. “It could, but that would attract more questions if it didn’t happen. You don’t have to go, but I would recommend allowing it to go ahead. All of their friends can go to that and you can have their funeral when you get out of hospital. Do it your own way, they way they would want it.”
Tobin nodded and told them to let it go ahead. She knew enough about politics that it almost had to.

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**October 12th, 2001**

Once Tobin was released from hospital, she went with Cody to his house because Karen was still at work. She had met the eldest and youngest Press siblings, Tyler and Channing, but she had yet to meet Christen. The middle child had been unable to come to the hospital as she had been sick and didn’t want her first meeting with Tobin to be like that.

Tobin was nervous but Cody and Stacy assured her that it would be okay. Karen would be there soon, and Tobin was welcome at their house whenever she wanted to be there.

Tobin was most looking forward to seeing Mallory. The three-year-old made her feel better and she made her smile, and Mallory loved Tobin.

Once Cody parked, Tobin crutched up the driveway and was in awe of the house. Yes, she had lived in some awesome places, but she loved the homey feel she got just from looking at it. It was lived in; it was a bit beat up, but it was a home.

Cody grinned and opened the door for Tobin. She made her way in slowly and found Stacey standing there with the most beautiful girl she had ever seen.

Tobin froze and her jaw dropped. Stacey smiled at her and moved to hug her lightly. When she pulled back, Tobin had pulled herself together but was blushing. “Tobin, this is Christen.”

Christen waved at Tobin with a shy smile. She hadn’t expected to feel this flustered when she met Tobin. “I’m really sorry about your family.”

Tobin smiled sadly. “Me too. Are you feeling better?”

Christen nodded. “I had the flu and couldn’t shake it. Do you want me to show you to the lounge room? You look uncomfortable on those crutches.”

Tobin nodded. Her leg was casted straight, and she was unable to move her whole leg. It would be a bitch to shower with. “Yes please. It isn’t going to be fun to deal with.”

Christen led her through to the lounge room and helped her settle. She put pillows under her leg so it could be propped up and Tobin did her best not to stutter or blush.

Christen sat across from her and smiled. “Do you know when you can go back to school?”

Tobin shrugged. “Your mum and Karen are looking into it. I can’t go to my old one because it isn’t in this district.”

“Maybe you will go to my school? It is pretty good. What grade are you in?”

“8th. My birthday is really late in May, so I am young for my year.”

Christen smiled brightly. “Me too! I skipped a grade, so I am the youngest by far at Chadwick. My birthday is in late December.”

Tobin looked at her nervously. “We could go to school together? That would be rad. I’d finally have a friend.”
“Even if we don’t go to school together, we will be friends. I can tell, we will be fast friends.” Christen blushed at the end of her statement, embarrassed at how it had come across.

Tobin grinned at the confidence in her voice. “That sounds pretty neat to me.”

February 17th, 2002

“Mallory, what are you doing?” Christen was exasperated and Tobin was laughing her head off. The three-year-old had joined Tobin and Christen to play soccer and the kid was good. Sure, she was a three, but she was brilliant. Christen was helping Tobin get her touch back after getting out of the cast and doing all the rehab. Tobin was hesitant in her tackles but Christen was helping her though it. She had got most of her confidence back.

Mallory had grown tired of the teenagers training and had sat on the ball when it came to her, refusing to move. “You not play. This no fun. I bored!”

Tobin pouted and walked over to the little girl. She sat down in front of her and got her to look her in the eye. “What do you want to do then Mal?”

“Score shoots!” Mal threw her hands up and lost her balance, toppling backwards off the ball. Tobin picked her up and giggled.

“Do you mean score goals?” Mal nodded. “Run to Chris and tell her.”

Mal bolted across the field as fast as her little legs would take her. “Mama Press we shoot goals!”

Tobin burst out laughing at the look on Christens face. She was shocked and gobsmacked. Christen shook it off and scooped the running toddler up. “What did you just call me?”

Mal grinned. “Mama Press. You always take cares of me when Ma working.”

“Tobin does the same thing. What is her name? If I have one, she has to have one.” Tobin narrowed her eyes at her friend, knowing that Mal could come up with anything.

Mal thought long and hard which allowed Tobin to come and stand next to them. Mal gasped and grinned. “Papa Tobi!”

Christen laughed and Tobin grinned. It could be worse. “Sure, I’ll be Papa Tobi. Do you want to have some shots now?” Mal nodded and wriggled her way to the floor before she ran towards the goal. The two teens just shook their head in disbelief.

“Sounds like we are the parents to a toddler. You are stuck with me now Heath.” Christen nudged her friend in the side.

Tobin grinned at Christen before kissing her on the cheek. It made them both blush, but she didn’t care. “I wouldn’t have kids with anyone else.”
June 1st, 2002

Tobin was pacing in front of Karen and she looked stressed. Karen just waited her out, well aware the now 14-year-old was probably still processing her thoughts.

Tobin stopped and sighed. “I really liked Chadwick this year.”

Karen smiled. “I’m glad. It is a very good school and you have done well there. You and Christen were tied for top of your class. High school should be good too. Tyler loves it.”

“All want Mallory to go there to. She would love it and she would thrive.”

Karen closed her eyes. There it was. “Honey, come here and sit with me.” Tobin slumped across and plopped on the lounge. “I agree with you. And I would love her to go there as well. That is the plan.”

“Then why haven’t you accepted her position? I saw the papers on the table. She could be enrolled for next year now. Other kids already are.” Tobin didn’t understand.

“Because I am still waiting on their response to my application for financial aid and payment plans. It is an expensive school and while I do have a very good job, I am a single Mum. It would be tough to swing if I had to pay it all, or all at once. Once I hear how much aid I am approved for, I can start moving the money around. I only expect to wait another week. She will be enrolled before the end of Summer for 2003.”

Tobin still didn’t get it. “But you are paying for mine?”

Karen’s heart broke. “I wish I was honey. Your family trust is paying for your education. I only have access to your allowance, and I give it all too you on the first of the month.”

“I thought the trust only paid for college?”

“No Tobin. It pays for everything you need, which is an education. Chadwick is the best school around, and they were happy to pay for it.”
Tobin frowned. “Oh.”

Karen put her arm around the teenager. “Mal will go to Chadwick Tobin. It is just taking a bit longer to get sorted out.”

They were quiet for a few minutes. Tobin was thinking hard.

“My allowance is big. But I don’t spend it. I don’t need anything, and you always said to come to you if I did. It is just all sitting there.”

Karen nodded. “It is very extravagant, but I think your parents wanted to make sure you didn’t want for anything while you studied. Make sure you didn’t have any distractions or worries. When you get to college, it gets even bigger.”

“I want you to use it for Mal.”

Karen turned to see a very serious Tobin looking at her. “No Tobin.”

“But it isn’t doing anything! I don’t need it and I don’t use it.”

“And if one day you want to but something really special and you don’t have the money, what are you going to do? You can get your learners permit in 18 months. You could buy a really good car. That money is yours and it is for you to spend.”

“No, that money isn’t mine. It is my families. My family had money, but I didn’t. I happily stayed out of it. I rode my bike to school; I wore clothes with holes in them as long as I was allowed to. The most expensive thing I have ever bought was a new pair of boots and that was only because my other ones had the bottom ripped off. I don’t need all that money. I don’t want it. I just want my family to be happy.” Tobin was stubborn.

Karen sighed. “I love that you aren’t someone who needs money Tobin. Or someone who needs possessions. But I can’t let you do that. I can pay for her schooling; it will just take some organising.”

“But-“

“No, Tobin.” Karen was serious and Tobin had never seen that look on her face before. “That is your money, and you are entitled to all of it.”

Tobin dropped her head. “I just don’t want Mal to miss out.”

“And she won’t. Chadwick has financial aid for a reason, as well as payment plans. She is going to Chadwick Tobin. Don’t worry about it.”

“What is the point of having money if I can’t help the people I love? Mal deserves the world.” Tobin whispered.

Karen pulled her close. “Just being you is more than enough for us. We love you for you, no other reason.”

“But I want to help.”

Karen kissed her on the temple as she held her. “You do help. Mal is happier than ever with you being her sister. You are her favourite person and being here will do her more good than any school will.”
Karen was unsurprised when she found some money on her pillow that night. She just put it back in Tobin’s bank account the next day. It would become a monthly tradition for the pair and Tobin just shrugged whenever she saw the money was back. It was a gesture that would always be there. If Karen ever needed to use it, Tobin would smile happily.

September 11th, 2002

Tobin didn’t come out of her room at the Pugh’s house. She refused to go to school, she wouldn’t let anyone in, not even Mallory. The four-year-old was devastated that ‘Papa Tobi’ (it had stuck) wouldn’t talk to her, but Karen soothed her. She didn’t know how to explain what was happening, she just held her close.

Karen walked over to the Press household with a teary Mallory and knocked on the door. Cody answered it and as soon as he saw her, he knew. “Tobin?”

“Won’t come out of her room. Won’t open the door and is refusing to go to school.” Karen sighed. Tobin had been her foster kid for almost a year, and she wanted to adopt her. They had started the process and ensured that it would not get out that the last Montgomery was being adopted. They didn’t want the media attention, so they kept it as a permanent foster placement until it was official. She was planning on surprising Tobin at Christmas.

“We knew it something would happen. She has been getting moodier and sadder all week.” Cody sighed. “Do you know if Tobin told Chris why she was in foster care?”

Karen shook her head. “She hasn’t, and I know Chris wouldn’t ask either. But she is the best one to send to bring her out of that room. Tobin shouldn’t be by herself.”

Cody was going to respond when one of the teenagers in question came to the door. Mal leant forward to go Christen with an upset exclamation of ‘Mama Press!’ It made everyone giggle when they heard it.

“What’s up kid?” Christen held the upset girl close, waiting for her to talk.

“Papa Tobi won’t play with me.” Christen frowned. That was unlike Tobin. She turned to the adults to explain.

“She has locked herself in her room and refuses to come out.” Karen explained, very briefly.

Christen nodded and then walked past the pair and across the lawn with Mallory. The toddler looked at her in awe. “Are we getting Tobi out?”

“Yeah. We are getting Tobi out.”

Christen got to Tobin’s room and knocked on the door. She was surprised to hear a very angry exclamation of ‘GO AWAY’. Mallory whimpered and Christen soothed her.

“Tobi. Can you talk to me please? You are scaring me and Mal.”

Christen heard footsteps and then the door opened an inch. She saw Tobin had red-ringed eyes and she looked exhausted. “I’m sorry.”

“I know. But can we come in? We can just be together and hang out. You don’t have to say anything to me, but we want to help you.”
“Help Tobi!” Mal exclaimed, which made the older teen laugh. She opened the door and let them into her room.

Tobin’s room was pretty spartan and neat. She didn’t have a lot because she didn’t need a lot. The bed was a queen and it comfortably held the three girls. Mallory cuddled up to Tobin by lying on her chest and closed her eyes. It was a tried and true way that the four-year-old could calm Tobin down. It also often sent the toddler to sleep, so they were unsurprised when she started snoring.

Christen let Tobin be. She was happy to lie there and wait it out.

Tobin lasted 30 minutes before she spoke. “My family died one year ago, today.”

Christen didn’t say anything. She just rolled over and placed her hand across Tobin and the sleeping Mal, holding them close. Tobin could tell her when she was ready.

“I was in hospital with a broken leg, otherwise I would have been there with them. Instead, I watched it on the television. Their plane went straight into the South Tower. I watched them die and I couldn’t do a thing.”

Tobin cried silently for the family she lost and Christen held her. She soothed her and cried with her.

“I don’t talk about them. It hurts too much. I feel guilty because I am happy, and I have a normal life. I have you, which is all I ever need.” Tobin looked at the girl lying next to her. “I lost everything and in less than a year, I feel like I have a little bit back. But I feel guilty because they aren’t here. I don’t even use their name. I am Tobin Powell Heath here, but I was born and am proud to be Tobin Heath Montgomery. But I can’t because everyone will be following me, and I will lose my privacy.”

Christen spoke for the first time. “Your family want you to be happy. They want you to live your life to the fullest. All they want is for you to be you, to be happy. Are you doing that?”

Tobin shrugged as well as she could with a toddler asleep on her chest. “Kinda. There is something I want that would make me really happy, but I don’t deserve it.”

“You deserve everything Tobin.” Christen was serious and Tobin nodded.

“I want to kiss you. But I want to do it when I am not crying, and my little sister isn’t lying on my chest.”

Christen chuckled and leant forward to kiss Tobin on the nose. “I’ll wait as long as you need.” Tobin wiped a few more tears from her eyes and Christen smiled. “Tell me about your family.”

Tobin took a breath and spilt the beans. She told Christen everything. About her, her family, her past. Christen just listened and asked questions at the right time. She didn’t judge or comment, just nudged Tobin along and let her talk about the five people she missed most in the world.

Christen and Tobin went for a walk to the soccer field that afternoon. Tobin needed to get out of her room.

There weren’t many people out, but the pair found a private corner that they knew was very rarely used. It had a pair of benches and a few trees in an enclosed area. Tobin needed a place she could remember her family and the beauty and simplicity of the park drew Tobin in.
Christen sat on the bench as Tobin found the perfect spot. The Montgomery’s had a public memorial in Washington which Tobin had never been too. Tobin had had a private funeral for them on the beach after she had been released from hospital, but Tobin wanted a place she could get to quickly if she needed to talk to her parents.

The soccer field was her place. It seemed poignant.

They were there for three hours.

Tobin yelled and screamed and cried and grieved.

Christen let her do it out and was there just to support Tobin. She felt honoured to be allowed to see this side of Tobin. Even if it was broken and pained.

The older teen never let her pain show and she could see how much she had been struggling for the last week. As soon as the calendar flipped over to September, Tobin slowly got sadder. Christen was glad she had found a place to let it out.

Christen believed Tobin would slowly put herself back together over the next week or so. But September would always be tough for the teen who felt everything so deeply.

And September 11th would always be the worse day of the year.

September 24th, 2002

Tobin had snuck out after curfew. She felt bad about it, but she needed to do something, and she wasn’t waiting any longer.

Besides, she was only going next door.

Christen’s room was on the ground floor and her window faced the Pugh house. Tobin saw she was still awake and swiftly knocked on her window. She chuckled and grinned when Christen jumped, which led to an eye roll. Christen opened the window and Tobin crawled through.

“What are you doing? Curfew for both of us was an hour ago!”

Tobin just stood there and rocked on the spot. “I’m done waiting.”

Christen was bemused. “For what?” Tobin surged forward and tried to kiss her. Unfortunately, Christen moved to lean in and they smacked heads.

“Ow.” Both girls groaned. Tobin was quick to check on Christen but she just giggled. Tobin was mortified but Christen just shook her head and leaned into kiss Tobin.

It was chaste but it was intimate. Christen pulled back with a shy smile. “Is that what you were trying to do?”

Tobin nodded with a goofy grin. “Yea. I couldn’t wait anymore.”

Christen just pulled Tobin in for another kiss. They spent 10 minutes alternating between kissing and smiling but eventually common sense came through.

“You need to go home Tobi. If we get caught, we are both dead.”
Tobin pouted. “But they love us!”

“We are making out in my bedroom at 11pm. We need to actually date before we get caught doing that!”

Tobin stood up straight. “Christen Annemarie Press. Will you go to the soccer field with me tomorrow for a picnic and a kick around?”

Christen rolled her eyes at Tobin’s idea of a date. It was such a Tobin thing to think of.

Christen was happy she had the date regardless. “I’d love to.”

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October 12th, 2002

Stacey, Cody and Karen were standing in front of the two teens. Mallory had been sent to play with Tyler and Channing at the park so they could have a proper chat.

The three adults were trying to keep stern faces but struggling. The two teens were sitting a foot apart and refused to look up from the floor. Cody sighed and took the lead. “Do either of you want to tell us what’s going on?”

Tobin and Christen looked at each other, blushed and then looked straight back at floor. Tobin shook her head and mumbled and no but Christen didn’t say anything.

“Christen?” Stacey voice was soft but there was a warning behind it. No more games.

The younger teen sighed and looked at her mum. “Yeah?”

“Explain please. We want to know what’s happening.”

Christen knew they were caught out. “Tobin asked me out a few weeks ago and we were talking about it.” Christen mumbled but they all heard it. She was trying to stall as Tobin slid further down on the couch, blushing fiercely.

“We know that. You told us that as soon as it happened. And you have spoken about it a lot. But that doesn’t explain why the two of you were out after curfew and at the soccer field.”

“We were just hanging out.” Christen protested.

“I find that highly unlikely.” Stacey was not impressed.


She shook her head furiously and Karen sighed. “We don’t want to get you into trouble. We just want an explanation as to why you broke curfew. You know you are meant to be in one of the houses by 7pm and in your rooms by 10pm. You didn’t come home until 9pm.”

“We lost track of time.” Tobin’s voice was barely a whisper. “We were talking, and I forgot to set an alarm. It is my fault. Don’t punish Christen.”


Tobin took one look at her foster mum’s unimpressed expression and slumped. “We may have been kissing.” She mumbled.
“Tobin, shut up!” Christen hissed. Tobin just shrugged. They were busted.

The three adults smiled, happy to get the full story. They just wanted honestly. “Thank you for telling the truth. But you are both grounded for two weeks.”

“What?! But it was my fault that we were late, not Christen’s. I was in charge of the alarm. You can’t ground her.” Tobin exploded. She was protective of what she had and those she loved, and refused to let anyone hurt them. She had tried to take the fall for all of their shenanigans in the past and this was no different.

Cody raised his eyebrow at the teen. “You BOTH broke curfew. That means you are BOTH grounded. You come straight home after school or practice. If you follow the rules for a week, we will see how long that second week of grounding lasts. It could get shorter or longer. It is up to the pair of you.”

Tobin knew there was no point in arguing. Cody had his detective voice on, and she knew her last outburst had probably ticked him off. Christen on the other hand, wasn’t giving up. “Can we hang out together at home? We always do our homework together and practice at home together. And Mal always hangs with both of us. This punishes her too.”

“Not for the first week. Sorry girls, but those are the rules.” Stacey went and hugged the pair. “Mal will be fine, and we still have dinner together most nights anyway. This is probably the loosest version of grounding we could give you. Suck it up.”

Cody sent Christen too her room and Karen sent Tobin back next door to hers. They both slumped off and went their separate ways. Once they were out of earshot, the three adults started laughing.

“Those two are adorable. We are in for an interesting few years.” Karen stated.

“Try lifetime. If those two split up, I’ll be shocked.” Stacey rubbed her temples. “Tobin is protective. She will not let Christen get hurt and would take the fall for everything and anything.”

Karen nodded. “She does the same with Mal. She doesn’t want to lose anything else. She wants to give those that she loves everything.”

“Tobin loves her?” Cody asked. Karen and Stacey looked at him like he had two heads.

“More than anything. And she wouldn’t have risked their friendship if she didn’t.” Karen stated.

“What about Christen?” Cody needed to know.

Stacey smiled. “I think she was in love the moment they met.”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think? Aiming to update this once a week or so.
The Press and Pugh families had Christmas together. They had so for years, but this one was different.

Tobin and Christen had been dating for three months and were inseparable. The only time they weren’t together was when they were grounded for breaking curfew (it had happened again) and when they had separate family dinners. They weren’t allowed to shut the door when they were both in a room together and everyone had walked in on them kissing. Neither cared and took the chastising and teasing well, with only a slight blush. The only one they didn’t like to see them kiss was Mal.

For Christmas, the two were sitting together on the single armchair and cuddled up together. Channing and Tyler rolled their eyes but secretly thought it was sweet, while Mallory was sitting on both of their laps. The three were their own little family group and the adults thought it was absolutely adorable.

They had all been given their gifts, but Karen and Mal had one more for Tobin. Karen gave the envelope to the toddler on their laps and she turned to give it to Tobin.

Tobin was confused but opened the envelope. It was thick and looked like legal documents. She briefly read the top page and gasped. “Adoption?” She looked up at Karen who was smiling with tears in her eyes.

“I went through your family’s lawyers. They have no issue with it and drafted those papers. It is up to you, but we’d love if it was official.”

Tobin nodded and wiped tears from her face. “That would be sweet.” The whole room laughed at the low-key response. It was classic Tobin.

Mal poked her in the side and Tobin looked down at her. “Does this mean you’re my sister?”
Tobin nodded. “Yea. Is that okay?”

“No. You Papa Tobi!” The room giggled and Tobin smiled at the pout on the girls face.

“I can be both. I can be your sister and you can still call me Papa Tobi. How about that?”

“Okay!” Mal hugged her tight again and Tobin kissed her on the top of the head. She had a family again, and this time she didn’t feel guilty about it. Her family would want her to be happy.

Tobin looked across to Karen and smiled. “Does this mean my name changes?”

Karen shrugged. “Legally you are still Tobin Heath Montgomery. It is just hidden until you either turn 35 or decide to step out into the public. But we can change the name you go by if you want to.”

Tobin nodded. “Tobin Pugh Heath?”

“If you want, we can get that organised too.”

“That would be great.” Tobin then tucked herself into Christen and tried to contain her emotions. Christen just held her and didn’t say anything. There wasn’t much she could.

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January 26th, 2003

Christen was holding an icepack to her girlfriends shoulder. Tobin was fuming but she knew exploding at Christen wouldn’t help anything. “Why can’t they just leave us alone Chris?” It was quiet but Christen heard the pain.

“I don’t know babe. They are ignorant assholes. We just need to ignore them.” Christen smiled sadly.

“The teachers don’t believe us Chris. They push us around and say mean things. We aren’t hurting anyone. We are just dating. Who cares if we are both girls?” Tobin didn’t understand it.

Christen sighed. “We just have to keep reporting it. They will get what is coming to them Tobin. We can’t react otherwise it will just get worse. The teachers know and they are keeping an eye on it. There are cameras around the school as well.”

“They already hurt me. Lockers hurt when you are pushed into them Christen!” Tobin tried not to raise her voice, but her shoulder hurt, and she was pissed.

Christen dropped the ice and straddled her girlfriend to make sure she was looking at her. She put her hands on either side of her face and spoke quietly. “I know. And it could get worse. But they are a lot bigger than us and they could really hurt us. We need to keep our heads down and believe the teachers will step in. Mum and Dad know, Karen knows, Tyler knows. We can’t react otherwise we get in trouble. I love you, and I need you safe. Starting a fight because you are mad won’t help. It will hurt us.”

Tobin nodded with a frown and pulled Christen close to her. She buried her face in Christens curls. “I’ll do my best.”

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March 14th, 2003
“Look who we have here. The freshman gays who think they are top shit.”

Tobin groaned and Christen swore under her breath. They were eating lunch on the quad and four players on the football team found them. They had been giving the couple shit ever since they decided they weren’t going to hide their relationship.

The pair had been very private about it, never saying much, but their actions spoke louder than words. They always held hands, kissed each other on the cheek when they had to separate for class and Tobin always carried Christen’s books. The couple had gotten a lot of support, especially from their teammates, but a few students didn’t like the idea of them dating.

Mostly four idiotic jocks on the football team.

Tyson, Grayson, Magnus and Mitch were Juniors and had been picking on the pair since they had come out. It was mostly verbal and occasionally they were pushed into lockers, but it hadn’t escalated past that. There were too many people around. Most notably, teachers.

Today there weren’t any teachers around.

Grayson walked right in front of them and kicked their books over. Tobin tried to control her breathing while Christen held her hand tight. “What do you want Grayson?”

The junior smiled darkly. “I’ve been trying to figure out how the orphan loner landed you. I mean, her family didn’t care about her, they dropped her in foster care. I am sure they are much happier without the quiet freak.”

Tobin was vibrating with anger and Christen frowned. “It isn’t any of your business. Why don’t you leave us alone?”

The four boys laughed. “Why would we want to do that? We want to hear from the orphan.” Magnus pulled Tobin to her feet and shoved her against the wall. He held her there by her shoulders.

“Come on freak. Tell us the truth. I’ve seen you talk before. Don’t be shy.” Tobin kept her mouth shut. She never said anything to the bullies. She spoke with Christen, the teachers and a few of her teammates at school and that was it. She was a quiet person and talking back would just hurt her.

Tyson smirked at Christen who had stood up when Tobin was ripped from her side. “What? Your loner girlfriend can speak for herself.”

“Let Tobin go and leave us alone. We haven’t done anything to you.”

The four guys laughed, and Mitch shoved Christen. She stumbled back and looked around for help. The whole quad was just watching. She prayed someone was going to get a teacher.

Christen came forward again, and she was shoved back again. “Stop it.”

Before the bully could reply, a voice screamed out her name. “Chris?!”

Magnus let Tobin go from the wall in shock thinking it was teacher and Tobin took the chance to scramble across to stand in front of Christen. Christen was shaking in fear and Tobin refused to let her get hurt if she could help it.

Tyler bolted across and got in between the groups. “Leave my sister alone Tyson. Take your cronies and leave.”
“Or what? You can’t do shit. The freaks deserve everything they get. Flaunting their scam of a relationship in our faces. The only way your sister would go near that spaz is if she had something. And we want to know what.”

“Tobin is the nicest person ever and Christen has been smitten since they met. Your just pissed two girls are happier at 14 than you will ever be.” Tyler refused to hear anyone say anything negative about Tobin.

Grayson and Mitch rolled their eyes while the others laughed. “Happy? You think they are happy? They walk around here looking like someone died. Maybe that is why the freak is in foster care?” Tyson looked Tobin dead in the eye. “I reckon it is your fault they are dead. I reckon everything is your fault.”

The bullies kept talking and insulting Tobin, but she closed her eyes and tried to block it out. Tyler and Christen were defending her staunchly but she was going to snap soon if she didn’t get out of there.

“The freak will hurt your sister one-day Tyler. Get far away from her. Her family did. The only way they knew how, and they dumped her with you. You’re idiots if you think any good will come from associating with the freak. She is only using you and you are idiots if you think otherwise. Your sister is stupid for even being close to her.”

Tobin spoke. “Don’t call my girlfriend stupid.” Her voice was strong.

Tyson cackled and shoved the girl. “It speaks! Tell me how she isn’t then. She hangs out with you. That is proof. She could be so smart if she just got rid of you. Your family did.”

He shoved her again and she fell into the brick wall behind her. “Your family is dead because of you freak! No one wants you.” Tobin had enough.

Tobin charged.

The bully wasn’t expecting it, and neither was Christen or Tyler. Tobin got three good hits in on Tyson before the three others helped him out.

Christen and Tyler did their best to pull them off, but they weren’t stronger than four high school line-backers. They took a few shoves and Christen landed heavily on her wrist before other students finally came across to help, but it was too late. Tobin was getting hit.

When the teachers started arriving, the footballers bolted. It was stupid, because there were security cameras but they weren’t known for being smart. Tobin was on the floor curled up and Christen ran to her. Tyler got her phone out in full view of the teachers and called her parents and Karen.

They would need to be here very soon.

“Tobin are you okay?”

The older teen groaned as Christen helped her sit up with her good hand. “Peachy.”

“Why did you do that? The teachers weren’t far away.” Christen pushed her girlfriends hair off her face with a frown. Tobin looked like shit and was in pain.

“They called you stupid and pushed you. I was protecting you. I won’t let anyone hurt someone I love ever again. I am not losing anyone else.” Tobin explained. Christen could tell she didn’t think
she had done anything wrong.

Before she could say anything else, Tyler came across. “Come on you two. We have to go see the principal.” When she got a proper look at the state of Tobin she sighed. “And the doctor. You are a mess Tobin.”

The beat-up teen tried to shrug but it hurt too much. “I’d take it every day to protect Christen.”

“TOBIN PUGH HEATH. GET YOUR BUTT DOWN HERE RIGHT NOW!”

Tobin groaned and pulled the icepack off her face. She knew delaying would just make Karen angrier, so she made her way downstairs. Stacey had been the one to take her to the hospital while Cody and Karen stayed at school with Tyler and Christen. They must have just gotten home and Tobin knew she was in trouble.

The teen was unsurprised when she saw Tyler and Christen sitting on the couch across from Cody and Stacey. She frowned and Karen answered her unasked question. “Your sister is with Channing since they were the only two who didn’t get in a fight today.”

Tyler weakly protested but one look from her mother shut it down quick.

Tobin sat gingerly on the edge of the couch and refused to look at anyone.

Stacey sighed. “Did they tell the principal exactly what happened?” The two adults who were in the room with the girls had heard the recollection firsthand.

Cody nodded. Their story was backed up by the security footage. He had given his wife a quick rundown of what had happened when they got home. The adults were shattered that the girls had to hear things like that, and Tobin had to hear things so horrifically vile and untrue about her family. But they were glad they hadn’t left anything out.

However, they reacted badly to the situation. Or rather, Tobin did. And Tobin didn’t think she had done anything wrong.

Which was the problem.

Tyler and Christen were protecting Tobin when they jumped in, but Tobin had escalated it.

“Why did you react Tobin? You were ignoring it and waiting for a teacher. Why didn’t you continue with that?” Cody asked.

Tobin actually spoke, which surprised everyone. They thought she would ignore it. “He pushed Christen. He called her stupid. He said my family died to get away from me. He called me a freak. I didn’t want to hear it anymore. I’m not going to apologise for protecting my family.”

The three adults groaned internally. Tobin wasn’t remorseful. She felt she was in the right. Before anyone could say anything else, the teen continued.

“They have picked on us for months because we are dating. They have pushed us and shoved us, knocked our books over and tripped us up. No one did anything to help. Why should I wait for a teacher when all they have ever done is let it continue?”

The adults turned to Tyler who gave further explanation. Tyler explained what she had heard the bullies say and that the school hadn’t done much about it. They generally kept it away from the
teachers and out of sight, and whenever the girls complained it was two freshman girls word against four junior jocks. They never got the benefit of the doubt. The teachers couldn’t do anything without physical proof, which they now had.

The adults had known this, and they were upset nothing had been done about it before hand. But now the girls looked bad and were in trouble as well.

Stacey rubbed her temples. “I have always said to stand up for yourselves. But picking a fight against four 17-year-old boys who weigh 200 pounds isn’t smart. Tobin, you have busted ribs, a broken cheekbone, broken hand and a black eye. Christen, you have a sprained wrist from the fall. Tyler, you can’t even stand up straight without wincing because you hurt your back. You three are very smart, but this was very dumb. Christen and Tyler, I know you were helping Tobin. But Tobin, starting it in the first place wasn’t the right thing to do.”

Cody took over from his wife. “The four boys were expelled for bullying. This was not their first offence. They were on probation and now they are gone. They are very lucky they aren’t being charged with a hate crime. You may not have gotten the benefit of the doubt for the last few months, but this time it was clear and obvious and in view of over two dozen students. They would have been in trouble. You did not need to react.”

Tobin had been unaware the boys had been expelled. She relaxed slightly but winced because of her ribs.

“Tyler, can you please go and find Channing and Mallory? The principal gave you a week worth of detentions and we believe that is enough of a punishment.” Tyler quickly left and left the two 14-year old’s alone with the adults.

“Tobin, you were suspended for a week. I decided not to appeal it.” Karen was speaking quiet.

Tobin blew. “But I didn’t do anything wrong! I was protecting Christen and my family! This isn’t fair! THEY HURT US FIRST!”

“THAT DOESN’T GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO PUNCH SOMEONE!” Karen yelled. “You may think you were in the right, but you were not. You were getting bullied, I know. And they pushed you into a wall. They held you there and threatened you. They said horrible things about you, your family, Christen, everything you love. I get it. But until you punched them, it wasn’t a violent situation. No one had been physically hurt and it was all on camera. You had witnesses and Tyler was there. Four dumb boys were being really stupid, and they were expelled the moment they shoved you and held you against the wall.”

“So I am meant to stand there and listen to them say that?!” Tobin was floored.

Karen nodded. “If it is going to keep you out of a hospital room, yes.”

“But-“

“No buts Tobin.”

“But-“

“Tobin! You could have been seriously hurt! More than you are now!”

“They said it was my fault my family was dead!” Tobin blurted out with tears in her eyes. The adults froze. Tobin hadn’t said this before but she hadn’t been with the group who met with the principal. “So I hit him. And I am not sorry about it. Because it was true, and I didn’t want it to be.
They were only flying back to LA because I was here. If I wasn’t, they would still be alive.”

“It wasn’t your fault Tobin. In no way was that your fault honey.” Karen said softly. “You can’t listen to bullies like that. He found the one thing that would make you snap, even if he didn’t know it.”

Tobin shook her head. “I hurt everyone I love. I wasn’t letting them hurt Chris and Tyler.”

Karen knew Tobin wouldn’t listen to her, not right now. Christen was sitting quietly with tears in her eyes. She was the only one who Tobin spoke to about this.

The three adults knew they wouldn’t get much further, so they dished out their punishments. “Tobin, you are suspended all next week and are going to be looking after Mallory while I am at work. You are also grounded for two weeks. Christen, you have detention for one week like your sister. Now go upstairs.”

The two left, upset and tired. The adults heard a door slam and they sighed. Karen turned to Stacey and Cody. “How much trouble could Tobin get into if she keeps reacting like this? She is in an openly homosexual relationship in high school. People are going to say stuff.”

Cody shrugged. “I have a feeling she will get into a bit of trouble, but she will think it is justified. She needs a new outlet and probably a psychologist to talk to. Her life has never been smooth sailing and it is just getting bumpier.”

Tobin spent the next week talking to Mallory and Christen while ignoring the rest of the world. She had broken her right hand so she was able to complete the schoolwork brought to her and if Karen asked her to do something, she did it quietly and without complaint.

When Karen handed her the appointment card for the psychologist, she didn’t immediately scrunch it up. “You need to talk to someone about everything Tobin. You can’t keep it all in. Otherwise things like this will keep happening and you may not break your hand this time. You love playing soccer, right? What if you broke your leg and couldn’t play? How much would that hurt you?”

Tobin looked up at her foster mum with tears in her eyes. Karen was getting through to her. “This lady will help more than I can. Her name is Anna. You have been through so much and keeping it all in will not help you in long run. Chadwick is good for you and you have such a bright future.” Karen kissed her eldest daughter on the top of the head and then let her be. Tobin needed space.

Chapter End Notes

First update of the new 'Rough' schedule. I am hoping to stick to it as well as I can but it is a busy time of year. I have put it below so everyone is on the same page.

P.S.
Rough Update Schedule if you are reading the other stories.

Not Just Any Soldier - Twice a week. 1 weekday, 1 weekend. (May change when we get further along - will let you know.)

Private and Secretive - Once a week. Early Weekday
Protected Species - Once a week. Mid-Weekday

Match made in College - Once a week. Late Weekday
(Hoping to finish soon. Not a long-long story)

Let me know what you think! Kudos and Comments are amazing to get! They make my day.

eellaa25 xoxo
What does my kid need?

Chapter Summary

A meeting with Anna (the psychologist), a plan and some snapshots.

Chapter Notes

Mental health is referenced and spoken about. I don't think it needs a TW, but a heads up is here.

I own nothing but the mistakes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

April 25th, 2003

Karen was waiting for Tobin to finish her fourth appointment with Anna. The young teen had originally been hesitant to see the psychologist but after the first session Tobin had realised that talking to a stranger about her worries and fears was almost easy. There was no judgement and Karen could see she looked lighter whenever she came out of the room. Tobin never spoke to Karen about what happened, but she was sure that Tobin told Christen all about it.

Tobin came out of the room with a small grin on her face while Anna rolled her eyes. The psychologist smiled at Karen and asked her to come in for a quick chat. Karen looked to Tobin, not for permission, but for approval. The teen shrugged. “I’ll hang out with Mal.” Karen was sitting with a sleepy Mal on her lap and the four-year-old smiled dopily at her sister.

“Papa Tobi cuddles!” It was slurred but it was happy. Karen gently placed Mal in Tobin’s arms and joined Anna for a quick chat.

The lady smiled. “Everything that I tell you today is with Tobin’s permission. She wants you to know, but she doesn’t know how to tell you herself. I know she has told Christen what’s happening, but she has asked if I could talk to you about what is going to happen next.”

Karen breathed a sigh of relief. She was worried about Tobin and wasn’t sure how to help her. “What’s going on with my kid?”

Anna smiled. “The last two years have been tumultuous for Tobin. She lost everything in one day, and she hasn’t gotten over it. On top of that, she is terrified she will lose what she has found.”

“The incident at school was the boiling point. She saw someone she loved being hurt and she snapped. She heard horrible people saying horrible things and she lost it. She was so wound up and she didn’t have an outlet. Everything was leading to an incident and unfortunately that led to her get quite badly hurt and suspended from school.”

Anna sighed. “Tobin is depressed. She is anxious and worried. Her whole life, Tobin has known
that eventually she will be announced to the world as a Montgomery and that carries a lot of pressure. After her whole family died, it is just her and she is feeling it more. She is craving normalcy and anonymity.” Anna grabbed a piece of paper and handed it to Karen. “All Tobin wants are the things written on that piece of paper. She wrote them in our first session.”

1. Make sure Mal is safe and happy.
4. Play soccer for USWNT.
5. Keep my privacy and my family name safe.

“Her first priorities are looking after everyone else. Which is cranking up her anxiety when that can’t happen. When she gets quiet, she is probably worrying. She has high expectations of herself and I am very sure she could reach them. However, she has to find a way to safely express those emotions and feelings.”

Karen was thinking deeply. She was sad her daughter felt that so much was on her shoulders, but she also knew why. It was quite clear. Tobin wanted to protect what she had. Even if it hurt herself. “What can we do to help?”

Anna explained. “I have a few ideas. They do not include going to a psychiatrist for medication. Tobin made it very clear she hates taking any painkillers or medication and would like to try and manage it without going down that route. If what we try doesn’t work, we can revisit it, but I believe Tobin is ready to work on this.”

“What are you thinking?” Karen was curious.

“Tobin thinks one idea in particular is spectacular, but it needs to be cleared with you first. Others aren’t as highly regarded by Tobin, but she is willing to try. Routine will be one of the best things for Tobin. Ensuring it is stable and predictable will help her not have to worry. Doing the same things will keep her anxiety down and help her manage the depression.”

“Tobin needs a physical outlet that does not include soccer. She loves it, but it also makes her anxious and occasionally angry. We came up with two suggestions. The first one was yoga and meditation. The second one was surfing. Two sports and activities that would get her out of her head and doing something different. If she was able to create a routine and fit them into it, she could keep herself settled and calm.”

Karen nodded and smiled. “They both sound like excellent ideas. I am assuming Tobin was most excited about the surfing?”

Anna grinned. “Not at all. There was something else that we found, and I believe it would be great for Tobin. My aim is to ensure she is able to manage and cope with her depression and anxiety without medication, and I believe this is one of the best ways to do it.”

Karen cocked an eyebrow. “What is it?”

“How do you feel about dogs?”

Karen threw her head back and sighed before she grinned. “This is why she has been asking about Labrador-Retriever for the last couple weeks?”

Anna nodded. “I think it would be very beneficial for her. A constant companion, except for when she is at school, that would help keep her calm and relaxed. Something to care for and look after. It
would take the stress of always having to be there off yourself and Christen, even Mal, and it would give her something to focus on and take responsibility for.”

“How long would it take for Tobin to get settled into that? Or even just finding a puppy?” Karen asked.

Anna shrugged. “Getting a Labrador-Retriever isn’t too hard. I am sure Tobin has been looking up breeders for them since I mentioned it. Let Tobin find the one she loves and she can train him from a puppy. Maybe wait till Summer to get it so you have a few months to adjust, but I think it would be great for Tobin.”

“So, Tobin needs routine, a physical outlet and a puppy?”

“In the most basic of terms, yes. I would still like to see her every couple of weeks, especially while she is still at school. Tobin is a good kid who has had a shit go of it. Between us all, we can get her back on track and in a routine she is comfortable with, she will be better for it.” Anna explained.

Karen nodded. “Okay. I have a lot to think about then, don’t I?”

August 31st, 2003

“Mal, you have to go. It is your first day of school.” Karen was trying to get the five-year-old in the car.

“NO! I want Tobi and Chrissy!” Mal was losing it.

Karen texted her eldest daughter and she stumbled out of the Press house with Christen two minutes later. She had stayed the night before and the pair must have just been woken up. They came across and spoke to the upset child.

“What’s going on Mal?” Tobin asked as she jumped into her arms. Christen stood and rubbed her back, trying to soothe her.

“Don’t want to go to school without you. You take me to everything. You take me too school.”

Christen sighed and Tobin smiled sadly. “Why didn’t you tell me? I didn’t know. Chris and I start tomorrow and are taking you every day on the bus, so I thought you wanted it to just be you and mum? It was going to be your special time together.”

Mal shook her. “Can you take me today too? I’m scared.”

They looked at Karen who shrugged. She just wanted to get Mal to school and get to work. Coming back via the house wouldn’t be too hard.

Tobin went to put Mal down and she started kicking and screaming. Tobin shushed her and wiped her tears away. “We are going to get changed, and then we are coming back here. Get in your seat and we will be back in five minutes. I promise.”

Mal nodded and let her mum strap her in while the two teens ran to change. Karen just smiled at her youngest. “You have a good sister there.”

Mal grinned. “I have a good Papa Tobi and a good Mama Press. They both my sisters.”
Karen grinned and got in the drivers seat. She watched as the two teens came out in soccer shorts and old t-shirts, holding hands. She already knew they were going to last a while, and she was very happy for that. She half expected a proposal to come before they finished high school, but she had time.

Right now they were just happy being together.

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*September 9th, 2003*

**NY TIMES - Where is the Montgomery Heiress?**

_The Montgomery estate has been unwilling to comment on the now 15-year-old. The family lawyers have said she is happy and healthy, growing up in loving family. Almost two years since the tragedy that struck America, this mystery continues to add layers. Family friends of the Montgomery’s have approached the estate in an attempt to speak with the girl, to no avail. All business enquiries go through the estate and the lawyers._

_We have been advised that the business and family holdings are run by the trust until the 35th birthday of the Montgomery heiress, unless she decides to take them on earlier. Will we have to wait 20 years to get a glimpse of the last member of the Montgomery family or will she be found before then? Every other Montgomery child was introduced to the world on their 21st birthday. Will we see the last Montgomery then?_

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*November 13th, 2003.*

“This is the car you want to spend your money on?” Karen was bemused. She was surprised that she was surprised. This was exactly the type of car Tobin would want, but she half expected her to go for the luxury model. She could afford it.

Instead she got the model that suited her needs perfectly. The navy blue Jeep Grand Cherokee had everything that she could need.

“Yes! It can fit all my surf gear in it, the yoga stuff, my football gear, school stuff and Ollie!” Tobin grinned. Ollie was her 8-month-old Labrador Retriever which went everywhere with her and Christen. He was decently trained but Tobin was always looking to teach him more tricks and to be well behaved. It gave her something to focus on and love, while the dog also helped calm her and settle her. It gave her a constant companion even if Christen was around all the time. Anna, her psychologist had recommended it to them, and they had all seen a difference in Tobin. She was slower to anger, but could still lose it if constantly picked at. Her protective instincts were still high, but no one had really been brave enough to test them. Students at school had stayed away from the couple after the incident in March but neither girl cared. They had each other which was enough.

Karen smiled at the excited teen. She was due to get her learner’s permit soon and they wanted her to learn to drive in the car she would drive in by herself.

“What are you going to fit Mal and Christen then? That is a lot of stuff Tobin. And what about your friends?”

Tobin rolled her eyes. “I will need a booster seat for Mal. All the other stuff fits in the boot or on the roof. I can take it out if I need to. And you know I don't have any friends.”
Karen nodded, letting the comment go. “Okay. Let’s get this car then.”

Tobin beamed and hugged Karen tight. “Thanks Mum.”

Karen kissed her on the top of the head and didn’t say anything. Tobin rarely called her mum, but she always meant it and it was always emotional.

They stayed like that for another minute before Tobin pulled away with a watery grin. “Let’s go!”

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**January 14th, 2004**

Tobin had a pretty solid routine set out to help manage her life. She was comfortable in it and she didn’t like to vary from it. She had been a wanderer before she lost her families, never wanting to do the same thing twice. Now, she was happy with her routine and knowing what was happening. She didn’t like surprises.

She was so happy Anna had helped her get it organised.

Until she got her license in May, her routine required help from family members to maintain, but the Pugh’s and Press’s were happy to help.

Every morning she would wake up and take Ollie to the beach. Tyler drove them down every morning and they would walk and play and train. Tobin would then do yoga with Tyler or go for a surf, depending on the weather. It got her day off to a happy start and it got her outside.

They would get home and get ready for school. Tobin would keep her head down and out of trouble, even if someone started picking at her. Only once had she reacted since the incident and she had quickly found herself grounded and grumpy.

(Karen had been waiting for the explosion and wasn’t surprised that it came when someone was picking on Christen. Tobin knew that Christens old friends didn’t like her originally and they had turned on her when they started dating officially. They had been mean to her before that but they turned into horrible homophobic bitches when they came out. Tobin’s protective instincts turned into overdrive when they attacked Christen and she was disappointed in herself for reacting. She had been doing so well. Anna said it was normal but Tobin got really down about it. She had worried Karen, gotten in trouble, made Mal upset and Christen was sad.

Almost everything she wanted to ensure didn’t happen, happened and she was in a dark hole because of it.

Mal was her saving grace that next day. She crawled onto her bed when she didn’t go to the beach with Tyler and pouted.

"Tobi. Ol needs to see the water. You always take him to see the water."

Tobin had rolled over and pulled Mal down with her. ”I don’t feel like it today kid. Ollie will understand.” She tried to end the conversation there and thought she had succeed when Mal wriggled out and ran to her room. She didn’t expect her to come back with her swimmers on and towel dragging behind her.

"Ol wants to got to the beach with me! You need to take me because Ty says she won’t look after a kid and a dog!"

Tobin groaned and dragged herself out of bed. No matter how shitty she felt, she would always put
Mal first. And Mal getting her into her routine, even though she didn’t want to, was the best thing that could have happened. It got her body moving and Tyler even convinced her to do some yoga while she entertained Mal. Ollie stayed by her side the entire time and cuddled in.

That morning got her out of her funk and out of her head. When she told Anna, the psychologist smiled and stated how proud she was of Tobin. It was hard facing the world when your mind is in a dark place. She had done so and realised that the world wouldn’t burn down.

After school, if it wasn’t a training day, she would head straight to the soccer fields with Christen, Ollie and Mal. The older girls would play with the dog and the young girl who loved nothing more than to play with her sisters. They could train and have fun at the same time.

Once Ollie was puffed and Mal was complaining about being tired, they went home for dinner and to do their schoolwork. They would sit at the kitchen table and work quietly, making sure they kept up to date.

After dinner, Christen and Tobin would retreat to one of their bedrooms, usually Tobin’s, until curfew. Whether they were doing more homework, extra credit work or just hanging out, it didn’t matter. Their parents trusted them. Occasionally they stayed the night and the girls closets were a mixture of clothes from both teens.

When Christen had turned 15, the adults had allowed them to close the door while they were both in a room. They were getting older, had been together for over a year and they had already discussed getting married (much to everyone’s delight and worry). Their parents weren’t stupid, and they didn’t want the kids to be taking risks when they knew what they were up to, or were close to getting up to. They were safest in their own home.

Christen’s 15th birthday had included a very awkward conversations between Karen, Stacey, Tobin and Christen. (Cody had taken Mal out for icecream with Channing and Tyler). The mothers found out that the girls hadn’t slept together because they weren’t ready and they weren’t rushing it, but they knew it was getting closer. The new guidelines had come in and the pair was bright red but happy about it.

Tobin’s room was slowly becoming their room and they expected by Senior year they would be practically living together. It was a massive room and on the top floor of the house. Karen and Mal’s rooms were at the other end of the house on the bottom floor. They had privacy and their own space. It had an en-suite and walk-in wardrobe which was the envy of Tyler and Channing. It was a safe space and they were happy there.

Tobin was settled and everyone could see how much happier she was. It was a very beautiful thing to see. Her routine and Anna had greatly helped her manage her own thoughts and troubles. It would be a lifelong process and balancing act but Tobin had everything she needed.

A loving Mum and sister.

The love of her life who she was hoping to convince to marry her before the end of high school (Tobin knew she had to face Cody, Karen and the terrifying Stacey for permission for that dream to come to true.)

A soccer dream to fight for.

A future to mould herself, even if the Montgomery estate would be apart of it. She had a choice. Her legacy was waiting for her to mould.
A furry companion who loved cuddles and belly rubs.

She could sort it out. There would be setbacks and bad days, but she had everything she needed.

Chapter End Notes

Please do not be insensitive to the mental health aspects if you comment on it. I love them, but please constructive in your criticism. Someone could read it and get upset.

That being said, please let me know what you think! I am sorry it took so long but life has gone to crap in the last little while. I hope this was worth the wait and I am planning to keep updating weekly. Work will settle after Christmas so I will have more time.

Love you all and if I don't update before Christmas, Happy Holidays!
Chapter Summary

Tobin and Christen make a new friend at school

Chapter Notes

First, i love this chapter. It is fluff and I sometimes struggle with it. But I am happy with this.

Second - Right - Part of the reason this took a while.

I went back and edited the last chapter. Ollie is going to be an adorable puppy and that is it. I looked into the Service Dog bit and I came to the conclusion that I could not do it properly and do it justice.

A MASSIVE THANK YOU To TwinofSarah for all the information she put into the comments (Have a look, it is so interesting!) I couldnt get it right and i didnt want to understate how much people went through. It was a lot of information to go through and right now, it would stress me out to try and get it right. For my anxiety, Ollie is going to be a puppy. Thank you TwinofSarah. Thank you.

Another thank you to dacb972 for their comments. They are so detailed and helpful. I really do love them on all my stories.

Everyone who has commented , thank you. I love them

Everyone who has read this, Thank you. I hope you all enjoy.

Mistakes are the only thing i own .

(There is another note which is long but does explain the lack of updates)

ellaaa25 xoxox

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_February 25th, 2004_

Tobin groaned when she sat at the table in the lunchroom. She was tired from training the night before and the classes had been a drag. She just wanted to go home and snuggle with Ollie and Mal while they watched Disney movies.

She was waiting for Christen so they could eat lunch together when a guy sat across from her with a thunk. He was skinny and Tobin had no idea why he had chosen to sit with her. “Can I help
Tobin wasn’t rude, she was just confused. Her tone was harsher than she meant it to be and the boy flinched. “Sorry. It’s just only my girlfriend and I sit here. Everyone else seems to ignore us if it isn’t soccer season.”

He waved it off. “It’s okay. I just sat here without saying anything which wasn’t polite. I started here on Monday and I noticed this was one of the quieter tables. I don’t want to start anything. I really just want to get settled before I can try out for the school soccer team next year.”

Tobin smiled slightly. “You’re a transfer? What grade?”

He nodded. “Sophomore. My family moved up to LA from San Diego because I got a scholarship here. They said it was our chance to make it. All of us.”

“I had to transfer into the middle school. My girlfriend and I are sophomores too. Maybe we are in some classes together.” Tobin asked, slightly optimistic this guy wasn’t an asshole. Karen had been tentatively encouraging her to make some friends and he had literally plopped down into her world.

He cocked his head questioningly. “May I ask why you transferred? Was it for a scholarship?”

Tobin froze. She had no idea how to respond. The boy seemed to recognise that and backtracked. “You don’t have to say anything. You don’t even know me. I shouldn’t have—”

Before he could continue, Tobin felt an arm wrap around her waist as Christen sat down. She smiled kindly at the boy before she kissed Tobin on the cheek. “Hey babe.”

Tobin smiled. “Hi. I missed you. I hate that you are in Chem while I am in Bio. Why couldn’t we be in the same classes?”

Christen rolled her eyes. “Because that isn’t how it works babe.” Christen turned and put her hand out across the table. “My lovely girlfriend here loves to complain. You learn to live with it. I’m Christen.”

The boy grinned and then laughed at Tobin’s stuttered defence. “I am sure I could learn to live with that. I’m Servando.” He shook hands with Christen and then turned to Tobin. “I totally just realised I never introduced myself, which is super rude.”

Tobin rolled her eyes and then shook his hand. “Neither did I, but I’m not going to complain because apparently I love to do that and I want to change that narrative.” She grinned. “I’m Tobin. You want to figure out what classes we have together?”

Servando nodded. “That would be sweet. I haven’t made any friends yet but you guys seem really cool.”

Christen shrugged. “No one else seems to think that.”

He scoffed. “I think you will find that more people here like you than you think. Or at least, they admire you.” Seeing there looks of disbelief, he elaborated. “I may have only been here for three days, but people talk and you hear shit. I have heard your names more than most, and lots of it is really positive. Some is about soccer and stuff, but a lot of it is about how brave you are. I think you may have more people coming to you to be friends than you’d expect.”

“We have been ignored for almost a year since the football players got expelled.” Tobin was incredulous.

Servando shrugged. “I’m just saying what I hear. The names Tobin and Christen came up more
than anyone else’s. And it wasn’t bad stuff.”

Tobin and Christen let it go, choosing to spend the rest of their lunch hour chatting and getting to know Servando. No one knew it in that moment, but it would be the start of a long friendship between the three.

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*February 28th, 2004.*

Servando was nervous. After their lunch on Wednesday, he had spent every spare moment with the pair. He felt comfortable with them and the girls were cool and kind. He had two classes with Tobin, one with Christen and three with them both. Very rarely was he in a class without them and it helped him settle in. He didn’t tell them that he was asked by a few students about them. He only said they were kind and funny, nothing else.

It was now Saturday and Servando had asked his mum to drop him off at an address that Christen had given him. He found himself in front of a nice two-storey house that looked well loved. He plucked up his courage and walked to the front door. He knocked and waited for about 10 seconds before a kind looking woman opened the door. She smiled brightly at him. “You must be Servando!”

Servando felt at ease at once. The woman just exuded peacefulness and happiness. “Yes, ma’am. It is a pleasure to meet you ma’am.”

She waved him off before she ushered him inside. “None of that. I’m Stacey, Christens mum. She and Tobin are out the back with Ollie and Mallory. They are about to head to the park.”

Servando smiled. “I can’t wait to meet them all.”

Stacey grinned. “Be aware of Mallory. She is the one you have to get to like you if you want to have any chance of being a good friend of Tobin and Christens.”

Servando blanched. “Oh. Any hints?”

Stacey shrugged. “Nope.” She directed him out the back and he stepped out into the bright sun. He looked around, expecting to find two teenagers that he didn’t know and Christen and Tobin. What he saw was Tobin playing tug of war with a dog and Christen braiding a kids hair. Thoroughly confused, Servando called out to the pair. “Hey!”

Tobin, stunned, accidently let go of the rope which sent Ollie flying backwards into a heap. He jumped up and when he realised that he still had the rope, went on a victory run around the back yard. Tobin shook her head and grinned. “Hey Servando. You ready to play soccer?”

He nodded. “Yea. Definitely ready to kick you’re a- butt. Kick your butt.” He quickly realised he probably shouldn’t almost swear in front of a young kid and saved himself.

Tobin chuckled. Christen finished fixing Mallory’s hair and they made their way across. Tobin whistled and the puppy came sprinting across the back yard. “Servando, this is my puppy Ollie and my little sister Mallory.”

Servando could see the inquisitive look Mallory was giving him and with Stacey message in mind, knelt to her level and stuck his hand out to shake. “How do you do, Miss Mallory?” He used the poshest voice he could think of and Mallory giggled.
“You’re silly.” Mallory, not realising that he was looking for a hand shake, slapped his hand with a grin.

Servando shrugged. “I got you to laugh, which means it was worth it.”

Mal grinned again. “Are you coming play shoots with us?”

“If you want me too, I’d love to.”

Mal spun to the girls. “Serdandoo be on my team!”

Tobin and Christen couldn’t keep their laughter in at the butchering of his name. Neither could ‘Serdandoo.’

They played for over an hour before Ollie dropped out. He found himself a shady spot on the side and fell asleep. The puppy loved running and loved naps. He was adorable and Tobin loved him to bits.

Servando and Mallory made a good team, but he was in awe of the talent displayed by Tobin and Christen. They were a seamless team and knew where the other would be without asking. But they also joked around and had fun. It wasn’t stressful or a chore. They were good and it and they loved it.

That was rare to see.

Mallory eventually went to lie down with Ollie and the older three played keepy-ups. They chatted casually and asked questions to get know each other better. It was light-hearted and happy.

Servando didn’t want to break the mood, but he had a question that could change the mood, but he was curious. “How did you two get together?”

Tobin kept juggling away with a slight smile while Christen chuckled. “Short version? Tobin had hinted that she liked me for ages. Honestly, we were kind of together without being together for months. She snuck into my bedroom at 11pm one night and told me she was done waiting. Next thing I know, we have bumped heads because she launches forward to kiss me and I moved the wrong way in confusion from what she had just said. Tobin goes bright red and gets nervous, so I end up kissing her. That was almost a year and a half ago.”

Servando just bursts out laughing. “Remind me to not ask Tobin for any tips then.”

“Hey!” Tobin exclaimed after she dropped the ball while Christen laughed. “She has gotten better, I promise. Her goofiness is endearing.”

Tobin pouted and Christen kissed it away. “It’s true babe. It’s cute.”

“You’re lucky I love you.” Tobin kissed her back softly and smiled.

Servando rolled his eyes, secretly thinking it was sweet. Before he could say anything, Mallory called out. “Papa!”

Servando was terribly confused when Christen chuckled and pushed Tobin to Mallory. AS she was jogging away, he turned to Christen with a question clearly shown on his face. “Papa?” He was incredulous.

Christen chuckled and sat down, patting the grass next to her for Servando to join her. They
watched as Tobin re-did Mal’s laces and then took her across to the playground to go on the swings. “When Tobin first went to live with the Pugh’s, Mal was only three. Karen is a single Mum so she couldn’t take a lot of time off to look after them during the transition. Tobin was on crutches and loved hanging out with Mal, and we were really fast friends, so we looked after her a lot at our houses. Picked her up from day care, played with her, cooked. All that stuff. One time we were at the park and Mal accused us of not being any fun. She told Tobin she wanted to ‘score shoots’ and sent her across to me. Mal called me Mama Press and asked to shoot. I insisted Tobin needed a name as well if I was Mama Press. Mal got this adorable look of concentration and came up with Papa Tobi. She was so proud of it. They have stuck for two years.”

Servando was speechless. It took him a minute to process the information. “Firstly, that is adorable. Secondly, Tobin is adopted?”

Christen nodded. “It isn’t my story to tell. But yes.”

“I won’t say anything.” Servando vowed. “I didn’t want to assume anything, but Tobin and Mal don’t look much alike at all. She looks more like you.”

Christen chuckled. “We know, we have the same frizz. She is basically my little sister too, but Tobin is her favourite by far. She likes my sisters well enough as well, but if something is wrong, she wants her Papa Tobi more than anything.”

Servando laughed. The pair sat in silence for a bit, watching the sisters muck around in the playground. Mal was laughing at something while running away from Tobin. Tobin caught her and swung her around in circles, cackling while Mal squealed. Ollie woke up at the sounds and ran across to join in, barking and chasing his tail. The three were joking around and it brought smiles to the pairs faces.

Tobin sat Mal down with a massive grin. “Did you have fun today?”

Mal nodded eagerly as she patted Ollie. “It was awesome. Serdan is cool.”


Mal pouted. “That’s hard name. I can’t say Sertantoo.”

Tobin chuckled. “Do you want to ask him if he has a nickname? He is our friend so you will have to call him something.” Mal nodded and Tobin grinned. “Go on. I’ll race you back to Chris!”

Tobin took off and Ollie followed. Mal gasped and turned to chase the pair. “No fair! You cheat!” Tobin laughed and slowed enough to allow Mal to catch her just as they got in diving range. Mal jumped into Christens arms and knocked her over as Tobin came sliding into the side of them. Ollie launched his puppy body at Servando and the teen grinned as he went down in a pile of fluff. Everyone was laughing and grinning when they settled themselves. Mal was flopped in Christens lap and Tobin was pouting because she had ‘lost’.

Mal whispered in Christens ear and the older girl grinned. “You can ask him. I am sure he will say yes.”

Mal looked across to Servando who was patting Ollie. He smiled at her. “What’s up Princess?”

Mal blushed. “I can’t say your name.”
Servando shrugged. “That’s okay. It isn’t easy. What do you want to call me?”

Mal frowned in concentration. They let her think, wanting her to be comfortable with anything that they came up with. Her thinking of it would help that.

Mal turned to the girls. “I call you Tobi and Chrissy.” She stated.

“And Papa Tobi and Mama Press. What are you thinking kid?” Tobin asked softly.

Mal looked to Serv. “Can I give you two?”

Servando nodded. “Of course.”

“Serva?” Mal was quiet when she asked.

“I love it. Serva sounds brilliant. What about the second one?” Servando really did love it.

Mal shook her head. “Not telling yet.” Mal was a cheeky one.

Servando grinned. “I guess that means I have to come visit more often then.”

Mal grinned. “Cool.”

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Mal was turning six the next day and they were having a family dinner that night to celebrate before her birthday party on Saturday. Servando had been a constant in the Pugh and Press households over the last two months and had been invited. Almost every day he was there, whether it was doing homework, training or just hanging out. He was part of the family now.

He had bought the young girl soccer gear and things to play with as a gift and he was terribly excited.

He gave her the gift after dinner and the whole family was watching. Cody Press terrified him, but everyone insisted he was a teddy bear. He hoped this went well.

Mal ripped the paper off and gasped when she saw the ball and gear. It was shiny and new, and she could get Tobi to take her to the park to play with them. Before she could get distracted, Karen nudged her to say thank you.

Mal launched herself into Servando’s arms and squeezed his neck tight. “Thank you Unca Serv.”

Mal screeched it out but everyone understood what it meant.

Unca Serv.

Servando had gotten the Mallory seal of approval.

Stacey grinned at the blushing teenage boy after Mal had let him be. He was very moved and very happy.
Stacey found him a bit later and put her arm around his shoulder. “The Mallory seal of approval. Not many get that. Don’t take it for granted.”

Servando stood tall. “I won’t hurt any of them.”

He was part of the family now. He protected his family.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoy. Some fluff and adorableness for you all. Let me know what you think - i love them.

I know you guys aren’t some who push for updates (i really shouldn’t have put out a schedule - my bad) but i havent just been ignoring it.

Some of the reasons i havent updated since before New Years (and Christmas for this one in particular).

I live in Australia. In New South Wales. And it is currently in the midst of horrendous fires. It is a natural disaster. I am safe where I am in Sydney, but we have had family evacuate and come live with us for almost a week. It has been crazy and I have had no time to write.

I also spent time volunteering to raise money for breast cancer (anyone who follows cricket should know the Pink Test in the Australian Summer.)

I was hired as a Christmas casual and was doing everything I could to get kept on as a proper casual employee (I DID!) so i was running around for that.

My mum just got out of hospital and I have been caring for her.

I went back to uni for Summer school and I will be studying for that too.

So, between the three stories, I am hoping for an update a week. If i can get a chapter a week for every story I will, but if not I will hopefully update the one which has been waiting the longest.

Love you all and sorry for the big notes. Hope you love the chapter. I do.
Chapter Summary

A big day with some big news

Chapter Notes

I do not own anything except the mistakes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

May 29th, 2004

Tobin hid her grin and kept her eyes closed. She could hear Mal trying to be quiet but bouncing in excitement and Karen shushing her.

“Mal! Shush honey or you will wake her up.” Karen whispered.

“But it’s her birfday! I has to wake her up for pancakes!” Mals whisper was much louder than necessary and Tobin had to bite the inside off her cheek to stop from smiling.

“We are waiting for Chris to come back before you can wake her. Just a few minutes kiddo.” Karen explained.

Tobin kept her face neutral and listened as her mum and little sister argued ‘quietly’ about the plan. Her birthday fell on a Saturday this year and school was almost finished, so Christen had been allowed to stay over the night before. She had tried to sneak out earlier without waking Tobin, but the midfielder had noticed the lack of curls in her face and half woke up. Christen had just tucked the covers under her chin and left with a chuckle.

Tobin heard light footsteps but only knew it was Chris when she heard Mal squeal out “COCO!” and an oomph. “Mal too tight kid! And why Coco?” Chris exclaimed.

“Can I wake Tobi now?” Mal whisper shouted, not answering the question.

Karen chuckled. “Go for it.”

Tobin heard little footsteps coming towards her and then there was a dip on the bed next to her. She felt Mal stand on the bed and heard her exhale.

“HAPPY BIRFDAY TOBI!” Mal launched herself onto Tobin’s chest with a squeal.

Tobin grunted and ‘woke’ up. “Mal?”

The six year old grinned. “It’s your birfday! You have to get up. Mum has plans!”
“Does she?” Mal nodded eagerly. Tobin chuckled. “But what if I just want to sleep?”

Mal frowned. “But we always have birfday pancakes. And there’s a supwise!”

“Oh, if there are pancakes I have to get up. But do you remember what happens first?” Mal shook her head. Tobin grinned and started tickling the kid.

There was squeals of laughter from both parties and Karen was looking on with a big smile. Christen was videoing it and letting the siblings have there moment. It would be a big day and she couldn’t wait.

After a few minutes of tickling her sister, Tobin plopped back down on the bed with her sister laughing on her chest. She looked across at Karen and Christen with a grin. “So… pancakes?”

Tobin was sitting at the local café with the Pugh’s, Press’s and Servando after her birthday breakfast. The pancakes had been brilliant and Mal was hyper on the sugar. The only way she would stay calm was if she was sitting on her ‘Unca Serv’s’ lap and talking his ear off. He was happy to distract the hyped-up girl so the surprise they had for Tobin could go off without a hitch. It wasn’t something any of them could give her, but they wanted to be there when she found out.

Tobin was fiddling with Christen’s fingers when Karen cleared her throat. The big group looked at the woman and smiled knowingly. “Tobin, a few days ago I got a phone call. Actually, I got two. They told me some news and said the letters would be in the mail by the end of the week.” Karen slid two thick A4 envelopes across to Tobin with a smile. “I’m not going to tell you what is in them, but I think we all would like to see your reaction when you open them.”

Tobin was confused but did as she was told. She looked at the two envelopes in front of her and her eyes went wide. “What?” She looked up at her mum with wide eyes. “Mum?”

Karen smiled with watery eyes. “Open them Tobin.”

Tobin took a shaky breath in a picked up the first envelope. Christen put her hand on Tobin’s thigh in support, grinning all the same. Tobin exhaled before she opened it.

There were pamphlets and leaflets inside, as well as paper work. But the only thing Tobin was interested in was the first sheet of paper. She read part of it out loud so everyone could hear.

“Dear Miss Heath,

The University of North Carolina has been a powerhouse in women’s soccer for many years. Our scouting department and our coaching team are always on the lookout for talented players to join our program, even if they are not currently seniors.

You may not be aware, but we have been following your progress and play with Chadwick, travel soccer and your work with the youth National Teams over the last two years.

The University of North Carolina would like to extend to you the offer of an athletic scholarship for
the women’s soccer team starting in 2006. It is a full scholarship and will cover all tuition and most expenses. All the information is included in this packet.

If you have any questions, concerns or worries, please do not hesitate to call.

I very much hope to see you in Carolina Blue in two years Miss Heath.

Regards,

Anson Dorrance

Head Coach”

Tobin looked up and grinned. “Holy shit.” The table chuckled and cheered. They all offered her congratulations and Tobin was shocked. “I didn’t even know they were looking at me.”

Karen and Stacey looked at each other guiltily. “We did. But we didn’t want to tell you and put more pressure on you. They aren’t the only school, but they were looking very closely at the pair of you.”

Tobin nodded. “Thank you. I would have freaked.” The whole table laughed at that comment.

Mal was the one who brought Tobin’s attention back to the second envelope. “What’s the other one Toto?”

Tobin looked quizzically at her sister. “Toto?” Mal just squirmed away from Servando and launched herself into Tobin’s arms from across the table.

“Papa Tobi too long. Toto is easy as shit.” Mal stated clearly.

“MALLORY!” The adults exclaimed, while the teens tried to contain their laughter. The tiny six-year-old had no idea what she had said that was wrong and had got that reaction.

Tobin just grabbed the second envelope and tried to save her sister (and herself) from any trouble. “Want to help me Mal?”

Mal nodded and found the edge of the envelope and opened it carefully. Tobin pulled out the first page and quickly scanned it. Her jaw dropped. “NO WAY! The 17s!?” She looked towards her mum for clarification.

“The U17s have a 3-week-long camp in July. They want you there, not with the 16s.”

Tobin glanced back down at the paper and was beaming. “It’s in LA too! And games at the end?! This is awesome!”

The table started chuckling at the teen who was vibrating with excited energy. She just kept talking
and rambling. “You can all watch and I can play with older players and I don’t have to stress. Holy fucking shit this is amazing!”

Mal had moved across to Karen and was happy her sister was happy, but she had no idea why. “What’s going to happen Mum?” She asked quietly.

Karen looked down at her youngest. “Tobin gets to go play with some really good players this summer. And she got into a really good school for college if she wants to go there.”

Mal nodded and was looking thoughtful. “Can I go with her to play soccer?”

The table heard the question and quietened. Karen sighed. “Oh honey. It is a camp for big kids, but we get to watch her play games at the end.”

Mal frowned. “But I always go with her to play soccer. I really good! Tobi said so!”

“Mal, I’m sorry but it is just for Tobin. Not even Chris gets to go.” Karen tried to explain but the little girl didn’t understand.

“THAT’S NOT FAIR! I ALWAYS PLAY WITH TOBI!” Mal screamed before bursting into tears. She pushed her way out of her mums arms and jumped into Tobin’s. “TOBI! Tell Mum I can come!”

Tobin just held her sister tight and sighed. “Maybe you can come and visit with Chris and Serva? Because they don’t let little ones into camp. I wish they did because I would love if you were there the whole time.”

Mal cried and sniffed. “That’s mean.”

Tobin chuckled. “I know. One day, you and me will be there together and playing together. But you have to grow just a little bit to get there.”

Mal looked up at her sister. “What about Chrissy?”

Tobin looked at the girl who was sitting quietly next to her. Christen wasn’t sure if soccer was her path but she was definitely good enough if she wanted to try. She just wasn’t confident she would get there. “Maybe. That would be the dream.”

Christen, Tobin and Servando had walked down to the beach once they had gotten home from the café. The three teens promised to be back by lunch time and just wanted to walk off the pancakes.

They were joking around and just having fun. Servando was giving the couple shit for being so cute while they ignored him and teased him for being jealous because he was single. It was all light-hearted fun and anyone watching could see the great connection the friends had.

Servando ran towards the bathroom and left Christen and Tobin alone for a few minutes. He could tell Tobin wanted to ask her girlfriend something and she was getting antsy.

The pair sat on the sand and were watching the waves in silence. Christen just held her hand and let Tobin think.

“What do you think about UNC?” Tobin asked.

“It’s a great school and a great program.” Christen said.
Tobin just sighed. “It is.”

Christen shrugged. “Nothing is decided Tobi. We have two more years of high school left before we even start college.” Christen turned and could see her girlfriend was thinking hard. “What is it that is on your mind?”

“Montgomery’s have always gone to the Ivy’s.” Tobin explained. “I was always allowed to against the grain for school and sport, but it was expected I go to one of the Ivy’s.”

Christen didn’t know that. “Oh.”

Tobin chuckled darkly. “Yeah. My parents went to the same high school and got married the Summer before college. They both went to Harvard. Perry went to Brown, Katie loved Princeton and Jeff was at Columbia. I’ve been to most of them and they are great schools. But…”

“You don’t want to go to one of them.”

Tobin nodded. “Tobin Montgomery could be an Ivy League student and live in that world. But I want to be Tobin Heath.”

Christen sighed. “That’s a lot Tobi. But you have time to think about it. You don’t have to accept anything straight away.”

Tobin nodded. “I know. The only thing I know about college is I don’t want to go anywhere without you.” Tobin looked at Christen with a small smile. “I love you and one day I am going to marry you. We know that already and I think our families know that. I refuse to spend four years on different sides of the country for college when we are both smart enough to get into any school we want, and we are both talented enough to play soccer wherever we want.”

Christen smiled softly. “I get that. We can do this together. Maybe it is at UNC, maybe at an Ivy or maybe somewhere on the West Coast. We have time.”

“That sounds good.”

The pair sat in silence until Servando came back. He plopped down with a sigh. “You two look dreary.”

Christen chuckled. “Just talking about college.”

Servando cringed. “Fun times. But UNC is a good school and has an even better women’s soccer program. It would be perfect for your soccer career Tobin.”

“I know. But soccer isn’t the only thing in my future.”

Serv frowned. “What do you mean?”

Tobin sighed. “My family has a business thing I am meant to take over. They had expectations and a legacy I am meant to live up too. College, post-grad stuff, business. I was expected to go to an Ivy.”

“That’s heavy shit.”

Tobin chuckled. “Just a bit.”

“What did your family do?” Servando asked. “You don’t talk about them much.”
Tobin sighed. “My family died in 9/11. They were on one of the planes. Every few months they come up on the news about how much they are missed and all that crap. The family trust and lawyers keep me out of it all, but college brings a new challenge.”

Servando eyes went wide in realisation. “You’re the last Montgomery they keep talking about.” It was a statement and while he was surprised, he wasn’t overawed.

“Yeah.”

Servando nodded. “That’s a tough hand to be dealt.”

Tobin shrugged. “I just have to figure out how to play it.”

“We will help you.” Christen said. “Always.”

They got back to the house with an unspoken agreement to not talk about what they had on the beach. It was there’s to figure it out.

Servando had said that he thought UNC was a good academic school and they would help her along with football as well. If she was going to do post-graduate studies, then she could do those at the Ivy League school and still fulfil that legacy. Tobin liked the thought of that but knew she and Christen had a lot of research and talking to do before they made their final decisions.

Tobin and Christen did talk to Karen briefly. Tobin basically said she wouldn’t accept the UNC scholarship until she had looked into all her options. Karen had smiled slightly and nodded.

“I’m going to make an assumption. You two are going to make your decisions for college together. Am I correct?” The pair nodded. “I understand that. But you two need to be brutally honest about where you want to go, why you want to go and what is best for each of you. I know Tobin has her plans with soccer and then her families businesses for afterwards and she is very lucky with that. Christen, I have never heard you say definitively what you want to do. Whether it is soccer or business or medicine or whatever. You guys need to realise what you want to do and where it is best for you to do that. That may not be at the same college, but you could get pretty close together. I don’t want one of you sacrificing what you want just to stay with the other.”

Tobin and Christen looked at each other and nodded. Christen spoke quietly. “I think soccer is probably a part of my future, but afterwards I want to have options. I want to help shape the world and shape the future. I think a business degree or something along those lines will help me. But I don’t know yet exactly what that is. If soccer doesn’t work or I don’t make it, who knows what will happen. I need something that will really set me up for success.”

“So, an academic school before a soccer one?” Tobin asked quietly.

Christen shrugged. “One that has both would be great, but we have to do our research. Maybe it is UNC, maybe it isn’t. But we will find it.”

Karen smiled. The pair were way to grown up, but she was happy they were talking about it. “You have a while to figure it out. Don’t stress. Now go and see Mal. She is still mad she can’t go with you in a few weeks Tobi.”

The pair laughed as they left the kitchen. They found Servando mucking around with Ollie and Mal, making them laugh and being crazy. It was funny and it was sweet.
Tobin grinned at her sister and ran to join in but Christen paused. Mal was a factor they hadn’t thought about. This three week camp would be a good indicator of how both Tobin and Mal would manage the separation. They hadn’t been apart for more than a weekend since Tobin had come to live with them.

This would be interesting.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it has been a while but it's been crazy town here. Let me know what you think about this update. Took me a lot longer than i wanted and i'm not totally happy with it.
June 6th, 2004

“Mum?” Tobin knocked on the door to Karen’s room lightly.

“Come in Tobin.” The teen entered slowly, and she looked pained. Karen put her book down to give Tobin her full attention. “What’s up kid?”

Tobin was shaking and leant against the wall with a sigh. “I don’t think I can go to UNC.”

Karen was startled but tried not too show it. “Why’s that?”

“My family always went to the Ivy’s. I am meant to as well.” Tobin’s voice was quiet but pained.

Karen patted the bed next to her and Tobin quickly shuffled across and lay down. “Tobin, please don’t take this the wrong way, but I don’t think you going to the Ivy’s is a good idea. You hate that world and your parents knew that. That’s why they kept you out of it. They sent you to a public middle school in California, not a private New York prep school, for a reason”

“I heard enough about the schools and their dreams for me to follow in their footsteps. Trust me, they expected me to go to one.” Tobin voice was flat.

“Was that before or after you came to LA for school?” Karen asked softly. Tobin didn't answer and Karen sighed. “Forget about all that and just think about where you want to go. None of this legacy stuff. Do you want to go to UNC? Do you want to go to UCLA? Do you want to go to Harvard? Penn State?” The questions were asked slowly and quietly but firmly enough that Tobin needed to answer.

Tobin sighed. “I want to go to a school which is great with soccer and great academically. I don’t want to go anywhere near the North-East. I haven’t been back there since they died, and I don’t want to spend four years somewhere which will upset me.”
“That rules out the Ivy’s then Tobin.” Karen smiled slightly.

“But they all went there, and they did so well. They all went to different colleges, but they were all Ivy League. If I don’t go, am I betraying them and their memory?” Tobin’s voice broke and she started sniffling. Karen pulled her close and held her tight.

“No. They would never want you to do something that would make you this upset and this conflicted. They would want you to be happy. What makes you happy?”

“Mal, Chris, you and soccer. Being with my family.” Tobin stated as she wiped her runny nose.

“Then make your decision with those in mind. UNC is a pretty good academic school and its football program is first class. What is the other reason you don’t think you can go there? It isn’t just that it isn’t an Ivy, because you know in your heart that you don’t want to go anywhere near them.” Karen asked.

Tobin frowned. “Plane rides would make me anxious. That would be the only way I’d be able to get home quickly.” Ever since the 9/11 attacks, Tobin had needed to take a sleeping tablet to get through the short flights she had needed to board. It was the only medication she ever took willingly.

“Okay. That’s fair enough. And no one would begrudge you of being scared of planes or flying. But if you become a kickass soccer player, you will be on planes more than you think. I think you could look for colleges out this way, but don’t reject the offer from UNC because you don’t want to fly. It is an amazing opportunity that you shouldn’t dismiss just because it is a long way away. You need to wait until you have all your options laid out.”

Tobin shrugged into her mum’s shoulder, accepting the point but not conceding it. “Can I sleep here tonight?”

Karen nodded and kissed Tobin’s forehead. “Always kid.”

June 10th, 2004

Stacey went out to grab the mail like she always did, not expecting anything out of the ordinary. When she found what looked like a very thick acceptance and scholarship packet to USC addressed to Christen, she almost squealed. But then she froze, and her eyes went wide.

Rather than take the mail back to her home and put it on the table to wait for Christen to open, she walked quickly across to the Pugh home and let herself in. “Karen?” Stacey called.

“Kitchen!”

Stacey quickly walked across to the kitchen and found Karen pouring over notes. “Work come home with you again?”

Karen groaned. “I don’t know why I decided to be an engineer. My firm just keeps sending me home with more shit to do because no one else seems to be competent. I keep being sent work from the branch on the East Coast because they keep fucking it up. I don’t know how you and Cody do it when you bring your work home.”

“Between my social worker stuff and Cody’s police work, the girls are banned from entering either
of our studies. Don’t want them seeing anything they shouldn’t be.”

Karen chuckled. “Luckily, nothing I have is sensitive and I don’t have to lock myself into a room to work. Mal just thinks it is funny drawings and fancy words. Tobin actually understands half of it, which is amazing. She has actually found me work-arounds I never would have thought of.”

“That girl should go into visual arts, or even architecture. She has the skills and creativity for it. Her work is amazing.” Stacey exclaimed.

“She is thinking about it, but she wants to wait until she gets more college offers and sees what Christen gets before she decides. I think she will do economics or business and have all that as a backup. Economics for the Montgomery Estate and that legacy she feels bound too, and art just so she can dip her toe into that world.” Karen shook her head in disbelief. “If her family hadn’t died, she wouldn’t go near economics, or already know she should do an MBA afterwards. She wouldn’t have that pressure to fulfil a legacy that should be on four sets of shoulders not just one. She could just do what she loved.”

They were quiet before Stacey spoke again. “I need to show you something. Any chance I can take some more of your time? Time that isn’t part of rant against familial expectations.”

“Oh God yes. I need a break.” Karen pushed her papers to the side and pushed her glasses on the top of her head. “What’s up?”

Stacey plopped down in the chair and handed the envelope over to Karen. “Look familiar?”


Stacey chuckled. “Yea. But now I’m worried.”

“Why? This is an amazing school and if she got a full scholarship there, why wouldn’t she go?”

“Tobin.”

Karen went to respond but paused. Eventually she sat back and crossed her arms. “You don’t think…”

“That one of them would give up a scholarship to go to school with the other so they aren’t apart for four years?” Stacey was incredulous. “Karen, I’m honestly surprised Tobin hasn’t come to Cody and me to ask for our permission to marry Christen. Of course they would do that!”

Karen snorted in laughter. “Tobin wouldn’t ask. She’d probably get super wound up, pace for ten minutes and just blurt out ‘I marry Christen!’ before going bright red and using Mallory as a shield. But I get what you mean.” She ran her hands through her hair before she stood and walked across the kitchen to grab some water. She turned and leant against the counter before she spoke. “Tobin’s family all went to the Ivy League schools. Tobin thought it was her legacy that she goes there as well. She had a bit of a meltdown about it the other day.”

Stacey scoffed. “Tobin would hate all that stuff. That girl would go to school in track pants and a hoodie everyday if we let her. We are lucky to get her wearing shoes.”

“I know. And she knows that, but it’s her families memory so she isn’t really rational when it comes to that. A lot of tears and fears later, she came to a realisation. Well a few. She doesn’t want to go anywhere near the North-East. Too much history and stress she isn’t ready to face. And she told me that she would struggle with UNC because of the plane rides to get home.”
Stacey through her head back. “That sounds exactly like Tobin. But if she plays soccer professionally, being away from home and travelling on planes will happen a lot. I know saying she isn’t a fan of flying is an understatement, but if she makes it as footballer, she won't have a choice.”

Karen chuckled. “I know and so does Tobin. And UNC is perfect for her football. But I was thinking about why her siblings all went to the Ivy’s. I actually think part of the reason was so that they stayed close to home. Tobin would have been a toddler when they were looking for colleges. From what Tobin says about them, they were always around and playing with her, a lot like Tobin is with Mal. They lived in New York so going to the Ivy’s allowed them to see Tobin grow up. Anyway, she started looking at other options because she doesn’t want to leave any stone unturned. Want to guess where most the schools were located?”

“California?” Stacey asked.

“Anywhere within a day’s drive. Most of the West Coast schools with a decent football program and good academics. That way, she can drive to get home when she needs to, she gets a good education and good football. But she won't rule out UNC.”

“Do you think she will want to be as close to home as possible?” Stacey asked.

Karen shrugged. “It will depend on Mallory and Christen more than anything. She would put them before herself everyday of the week and twice on Sundays. She won’t want to be too far from either of them. If you are worried about Christen choosing a school for Tobin, don’t. The kid who would drop the scholarship for another school would be Tobin. Besides, they have two years of high school left. Plenty of time for things to change.”

Stacey opened her mouth to respond when the front door banged open and they heard laughter from Christen. The mothers jaws dropped as Tobin came running through with Mallory held right in front of her. They were both covered in mud. “I promise I’ll clean her up!” She bolted up the stairs with Mallory wriggling the entire time.

Christen stopped in front of Karen and Stacey with a massive grin. Karen’s eyes were wide. “What the hell happened?”

Christen laughed again and shook her head. “We were at the park and Tobin was mucking around with Mal. Tobin picked her up then they started chasing me. Tobin stacked it in this massive mud pile while carrying Mal. I don’t know who looked more ridiculous.”

Before they could respond, they heard a crash and a curse from upstairs. “Mal! Stop hitting me with the shoe! I said I was sorry!”

The three women downstairs burst out laughing. Christen sat next to her mum with a grin once she had settled down. “What’s up with you?”

Stacey just pushed the envelope across to Christen. “This came for you today.”

Christens eyes went wide. “Oh.” She quickly opened the packet and read the first page before she smiled slightly. “Full athletic scholarship.”

Stacey hugged the teen tight. “I’m proud of you.”

Christen shrugged. “I have time to decide.”

Stacey rolled her eyes. “I know. But I am still proud of you.”
“Thanks Mum.” She smiled deviously before she turned her head to the stairs. “HEY TOBIN?”

“YEA BABE? MAL STOP SQUIRMING! I need to your muddy shirt off!”

Christen shook her head in disbelieve but continued. “I GOT A FULL SCHOLARSHIP TO USC!”

“REALLY?! THAT’S AMAZING!”

“FUCK YEAH! GO MAMA PRESS!” The high-pitched voice of Mal was unexpected.

“MALLORY!” Tobin exclaimed. “You promised you wouldn’t say that again!”

Karen’s eyes went wide before she excused herself. “I need to go talk to my children.”

Christen and Stacey chuckled lightly before they settled down. They could hear the lecture Karen was giving the sisters. “You don’t seem to excited about USC.”

Christen sighed. “I have two years. It is a good school but there is a lot to factor in.”

“Like what?”

“Academics, location, soccer, reputation, Tobin. It’s an athletic scholarship, not an academic one as well.”

“You’d rather an academic scholarship?” Stacey was slightly surprised.

“It would depend. There are so many options and this is the first offer. Same with the UNC one for Tobin. We are two of the top students in our school regardless of the grade and both spectacular footballers. Tobin has been pulled into camps for US Soccer, I’ve been told I’m on the bubble. We need to wait a while before we decide anything. We’d be stupid to take the first thing we were offered.”

Stacey sighed. “Would you go to UNC? It’s a good school.”

“The location is far away but everything else fits. But I’ll wait until I have more information to make a decision.”

“Okay. I’m going to go into Mum mode. I don’t think I need to say this because you have a very sensible head on your shoulders, but I will anyway. Please don’t make the decision purely around Tobin.” Stacey voice was firm. “I love that girl and already think of her as a daughter, but you both need to think about yourselves first. I don’t want one of you to regret picking a school just because the other wants to go there.”

Christen nodded. “We know. We have already spoken about it. Tobin doesn’t want to go to separate schools because we are smart enough and talented enough to go wherever we want to, and I don’t want to either. But I also know that what’s best for me may not be best for Tobin. I don’t want to be on opposite coasts, but I know it could happen. We both know going to the same college may not be feasible, but we will try our hardest to do so. But only if it is the best thing for both of us. And while we might not be together physically, we will stay together. If we both make it as footballers, it will be unlikely we will be playing in the same state, let alone for the same team.”

“And in these conversations, are you going to college as Christen Press and Tobin Heath? Or Mrs and Mrs Montgomery?” Stacey asked with a slight grin.

Christen blushed scarlet before she started stammering. Stacey just chuckled. “You know we won’t
mind. We know you are very young, but you guys are stupidly mature for your age and honestly made for each other. We have all heard Tobin talk about her dream of marrying her soulmate early like her parents did. As long as you don’t elope on your 16th birthday. We want to be there.”

Christen nodded with a small grin. “Tobin will put her adorably dorky stamp on it I’m sure. She keeps talking about how her parents got married straight out of high school and that her siblings never found their person. I think she is worried she will lose me.”

Stacey sighed. “Tobin has some fears of abandonment, and rightly so. You can see it with how tight she holds on with the people she lets in, but it doesn’t happen often. I couldn’t imagine going through what she did and come out the other side as well as she has.”

“Tobin knows and she knows she needs to not be so private, secretive, suspicious and closed off with new people. She talks to Anna about it a bit. She also said that she’d be stupid not to marry me as soon as she can. According to Tobin, she could never do better and would regret every day she wasn’t married to me. She isn’t great with words, but her actions show so much. She always carries my bags, opens the door for me, pulls my chair out. She holds my hand, kisses my cheek, listens to everything I say with such attentiveness and a slight grin on her face like she can’t believe it. She treats me like a queen and while she may be slightly worried she will lose me, I don’t think she would marry me unless she was sure it was forever.” Christen looked wistful and had stars in her eyes. Stacey could see how much she loved Tobin and knew they would do everything they could to stay together.

Before Stacey could reply, a butt naked Mal ran grinning down the stairs with a towel dragged behind her and straight into Christens arms. “Mama! Papa getting yelled at by Mum!”

Christen just beamed. “Oh yeah? What for?”

“She teach-ed me to say fuck! It a bad word. Mum’s not happy! I didn’t tell her you and Unca Serv says it too!”

Christen just shook her head as Stacey snorted. “Thanks. And where are your clothes?”

“In my room. Mum said to ask you to find them.”

Christen stood and through the 6-year-old over her shoulder. “Should we find you some of Tobi’s clothes to wear for fun?”

“Fuck yeah!”

“MAL!”

“Shit. Sorry.”

“OH MY GOD! We need to have a chat about your words before your Mum kills one of us.”

Stacey couldn’t contain her laughter at the look on Christens face. “If you two ever have kids, it needs to be a reality show. The Montgomery Mummamas or something.”

Christen just rolled her eyes and carried Mal to her room. “How did a conversation about college turn into us getting married and having kids?”

Stacey called out after her daughter. “Because you two are doing everything quickly. I give you ten years!”
Christen just groaned as Mal laughed from her place on Christen’s shoulder.

Once the door shut, Stacey sat back with a small grin. She was still a bit worried, but her daughter had a good head on her shoulders and as much as Tobin followed her heart, her head was good at pulling her back in.

They would figure it out eventually.

June 17th, 2004

Christen woke up at the crack of dawn with a smile on her face, Tobin’s head on her chest, Mal tucked under her arm and Ollie lying across her legs. She was a bit hot, but she would deal with it.

This was her found family, and she was very happy with her family. The only one missing was Servando but he was visiting family this week.

Mal always seemed to know when she woke up and only took a few minutes to join her in consciousness. The six-year old’s hair was wild and fuzzy and she looked adorably bleary-eyed at Christen. “Coco? What time?”

Christen chuckled and smiled. “Early kiddo. You can go back to sleep. I won’t go anywhere.”

Mal looked across at Tobin sleepily. “Toto still asleep?”

Christen and Tobin had gotten no explanation about the Coco and Toto nicknames they had been given in the last month, but they Mal roll with it. She still called them Mama Press and Papa Tobi occasionally, but always looked like she had done something wrong when she did. When she was ready, she would tell them.

“Yea, Tobin is still asleep.”

“But she has to take Ollie to see the water. They always go see the water.” Mal had shut her eyes and put her back down on Christen’s shoulder, so the words were slightly mumbled.

“She will go in a little bit. We can all go today if you want to.”

Mal nodded. “Otay.” Those were the last words Mal spoke before she dropped back off to dreamland with a slight snore. Christen just held her close and sighed.

“Why is my sister so fucking cute?” Tobin murmured into Christen’s chest.

“Cause she is related to you. And you swearing while you’re sleepy is cute, but it’s teaching Mal bad words.”

“I’m not cute. I’m adorable.” Tobin countered with a grin, even though her eyes were still shut.

“You’re a dork. My adorable dork.” Christen said quietly but with a smile.

“Yea? Well you’re my queen. You got my heart and my everything.” Tobin opened her eyes slightly. “I did some research on USC the other day.”

Christen quirked her head quizzically. “We haven’t made our minds up yet babe.”
“I know. I was comparing the academics between them and UNC. Neither school is in the top 25 academically. Soccer wise UNC is ahead.”

“Oh yeah? What do you think about that?”

Tobin turned her head to look up at Christen. “You could do better.”

Christen chuckled. “Oh yeah?”

Tobin nodded. “Way better.”

“Do you think you could do better than UNC?”

Tobin paused. Then she frowned. “Not soccer wise. Academically it isn’t as intense as some, but they have a really good business school. It kind of hits both of my needs on the head. It just sucks it 3000 miles away.”

Christen kissed Tobin on the forehead. “We have time.”

Tobin smiled. “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

THoughts? - I'll Get back to you guys in a day or so, back to the notes... I'm screwed for this exam. Wish me luck

Also, I find children swearing hilarious.
July 1st, 2004

“Mal kiddo, you have to let go of your sister.” Karen was bemused. They were dropping Tobin off at the U17s camp and Mal had not let her go since she had gotten out of the car. Right now, she was hanging onto her back like a monkey in the foyer.

“NO!” The word was muffled by Tobin’s shoulder, but you could clearly hear the distress in her voice. “Tobi not allowed to go!”

Tobin just smiled sadly. “I don’t want to leave you either Mal. But I have to.”

Mal sniffed and shook her head. “Stay with me?”

Tobin’s heart broke. “I’m sorry Mal. You get to stay with Serva, and Christen will be at home when you get there.” Servando had come with the family to drop Tobin off because Christen was at her own football camp for the day.

Mal popped her head up and tucked into Tobin’s neck. “But they aren’t you Toto.” It was barely a whisper, but Tobin heard it. She spun her sister around and held her close in a tight hug.

“You will see me in three weeks. I’ll call every night.” Mal just whimpered. Tobin looked at her Mum with a pleading expression.

Karen just put her hands up, unsure of what to do. Tobin just sighed. “What if you come in with me and you can meet some of the people I’ll be staying with? That way you can stay with me a bit longer.”

Mal nodded quickly but still held her sister tight. Tobin smiled slightly. “Okay.” She led their little group into the room they were meeting at. The camp was held at UCLA and the U17s would be staying in one of the dorms.

They found that there were a fair few groups as big as there’s, but no other player had a Mallory attached to them like a barnacle. The four of them settled in the back corner and Tobin sat with an
upset Mal in her lap. Karen and Servando sat on either side of the sisters and they were just quiet. Mal was still hiccupping slightly after her sobs from earlier. Karen left the trio and went across to the woman in US Soccer gear to check Tobin in and briefly explain what was happening.

Karen came back with a slight smile on her face, which eased everyone’s nerves. “Should be starting in about five minutes.”

Tobin nodded and sat back in her chair with a sigh. “You going to let me go anytime soon Mal?”

Mal just shook her head and burrowed herself back into Tobin’s neck.

After waiting about ten minutes, the coach of the U17s spoke from the centre of the stage. “Welcome everyone. I’m just going to do a quick roll call and get the players up on the stage to sit so we can get this camp started. There were only 16 spots for this camp, and ages will range from 14-17.” Once she was sure everyone was listening and ready, she called the first names out.

Tobin zoned out a bit and just focused on the upset kid in her arms. She could still hear the names but didn’t fully put her attention back on the group until they went passed ‘H’. She turned to Karen, worried. “What name am I down under?”

Karen’s eyes went wide. “Should be Heath. It’s what you’re known as and signed up with. But I did have to put your legal name down as well.”

“Sydney Leroux.”

“Alexandra Long.”

“Alexandra Morgan.”

“Alyssa Naeher.”

“Kelley O’Hara.”

“Amy Rodriguez.”

“Tobin Pugh-Heath-Montgomery.” The coach’s eyes scrunched at that. “That’s a long name.”

Tobin was stunned and didn’t get up immediately when her name was called. Servando had to nudge her and get her up, so she didn’t bring more attention to herself. Unfortunately, Mallory didn’t let go so she joined her sister up on the stage, much to the amusement of all.

So much for under the radar.

There were another couple of names after Tobin, but she didn’t hear them. She was still stunned her full name was used. It honestly felt weird hearing it out loud.

Once the 16 players and one barnacle called Mallory were on the stage, the coach turned to speak to them. “You will be bunking in two of the bigger dorms. 8 players per four room apartment, two per room. This is to build chemistry and get you all to know one another. Hopefully, we see you all on the big stage soon.” The coach looked directly at Tobin and Mal with a small smile. “Little sister?”

Tobin nodded and Mal tightened her hold on her waist and neck. “Yeah. She isn’t happy I get to play soccer without her.”
The whole roomed awed, which cause Tobin to blush. The coach just chuckled. “Is that right?”

Mal, not wanting to be left and seeing her chance to try and stay with Tobin, pulled her tear-streaked face out of her shoulder with a pout. “Tobi says I the bestest! I want to stay too!”

The two girls standing next to Tobin absolutely melted while the rest of the room was endeared to the child. One of the girls spoke directly to Mal. “I reckon you are! But I think you have to be a bit taller to stay without you Mum.”

Mal turned to the girl who spoke and gave her the patented Pugh pout and added the puppy dog eyes. “But I want to stay with Toto. She can look after me.”

Tobin just held Mal tighter as she turned back into her and started crying softly. She just asked the coach to continue her speech as she tried to soothe her sister.

“Right, as I was saying, rooming in pairs but staying in an 8-person dorm. Room A will be Cheney, Leroux, Long, Morgan, Naeher, O’Hara, Rodriguez and Pugh-Heath-Montgomery.” The coach stopped herself again and looked back at Tobin. “Do you go by that normally?”

Tobin just shook her head. “I normally go by Heath, but my legal last name is that long.”

“Okay. We will figure that out later.”

The coach continued to go through the breakdown of what would happen on camp and when family and friends could come and visit. It was a twenty-minute speech and by the end of it, Mal had almost fallen asleep. She was still holding on to Tobin tightly, but the emotional day had almost caught up with her.

The coach gave them ten minutes to say goodbye to their families before they found their rooms. Servando was quickly up on the stage to help Tobin with Mallory. They didn’t notice most of the group watching them as they went around their business.

“She asleep?” Servando asked.

Tobin shook her head. “Almost but she still has an iron strong grip on me. I don’t think we are getting her off me without a tantrum.”

Servando looked determined. He crouched down and spoke to Mal softly. “Hey kiddo. You have to let Tobi go now.”

Mal just shook her head. Servando smiled. “Yes, you do. I know you are going to miss her, I will too. But you know what we will have that makes the time go faster?”

Mal pulled her head out of Tobin’s neck and looked interested. Her grip loosened slightly. “What?”

Servando grinned. “We have Ollie, Chrissy, the park, the beach, games and all this fun stuff. We can do something different every day! I can teach you to skateboard like Tobin too!”

“But what will Toto do?” Mal’s voice was quiet.

“I’ll be missing you guys so much I won’t know what to do.” Tobin said.

Mal looked inquisitive. “We can do all that stuff? And talk to Tobi every night?”

Servando nodded. “Yea.” He then bopped Mal on the nose. “And you know you have a very important job while Tobin is away.”
“I do?” Mal looked shocked.

Servando nodded. “You have to help me look after Ollie and Christen, and we have to look after your Mum.”

Mal’s eyes went wide. “Mumma?”

“Yeah! With no Tobin, you have to be a big girl and look after Mum! And there is one more thing, but I have to whisper it too you.” Servando said with a devilish look. Mal took the bait hook line and sinker, jumping out of Tobin’s arms and into the his.

“What?! What is it Unca Serv?” Servando grinned and leant forward to whisper something into Mal’s ear that made her laugh so hard he almost lost her grip on her shaking body. Servando held her tight while she laughed, only putting her down once she could keep her feet. Once she calmed down, Servando spoke again.

“We can only do that if you let Tobi stay here with no more tears.” Mal nodded and wiped her eyes.


Tobin just smiled a watery smile. “I’ll miss you too.”

Mal pulled back and jumped into Servando’s arms. She needed her strong Unca Serv for a minute.

The trio weren’t standing on the stage by themselves for very long. A few of the girls from the team, probably the ones who would be rooming with Tobin, came across and spoke with them.

“Hey Tobin, right? I’m Kelley. We were just about to go check out where we would be staying for the next three weeks and pick roommates. When you are ready, we are. Just have to say goodbye.” It was the girl who had spoken with Mal earlier.

Tobin nodded. “I’ll just go and say bye to Karen. I’ll be back in a second.” Tobin walked off by herself, leaving Serv and Mal with the seven soccer players.

She quickly went across to see her Mum, and they spent a few minutes talking and Karen soothed Tobin’s fears and worries. The hug was long, but Tobin took all the time she could.

Serv started some small talk while Tobin was with Karen. The group seemed nice and he hoped they would treat Tobin well.

“How do you know Tobin? She your girlfriend?” One of the girls, Lauren, asked.

Servando just chuckled when Mal screwed up her face. “Ew. No way. That’s gross!”

The team looked at the kid in shock and she took it as an opening to explain. “Unca Serv is her friend. Tobi loves Christen. She gets gooey eyed and they kiss all the time. It’s weird.”

The girls laughed at the kids explanation while Servando just shrugged. “She’s my best friend. Her girlfriend couldn’t make it today.” Servando checked over his shoulder and saw Tobin was still with Karen. “Look after her. She can be an absolute nightmare and her pout is as good as Mallory’s, but she hasn’t really been away from home for a few years. She could struggle.”
One of the girls, Alex, nodded at Servando. “We will keep an eye on her. Anything we need to know except that she has a killer pout?”

Servando was about to reply but Mallory had heard the question about her sister and turned in Servs arms. She had all the answers. “Tobi needs cuddles and her book before bed. She always sees the water in the mornings. AND her favourite snack is peanut cups for when she is sad.” Mal was giving all her sisters secrets away.

Amy just smiled at the girl. “Anything else we need to know to help your sister?”

Mal got a look of deep thought on her face and didn’t speak for a bit. Servando whispered something in her ear that made her grin devilishly.

“Tobi is –“

“Right next to you so don’t say anything else to embarrass me you little devil.” Tobin had snuck up on the group with Karen and stopped Mal from saying anything incriminating. The group of girls groaned. “And it’s peanut butter cups.”

Mal pouted. “I was just going to say you need coffee or you’re a meanie.” The group giggled and Serv was so proud of himself.

“That’s not true.” Tobin protested.

Karen and Servando, in unison, disagreed. “Yes it is.”

“Honey, we love you. But if you don’t have coffee before you do anything, even Yoga, you are a bloody nightmare.” Karen stated before she kissed the girl on the cheek. “Own it.”

Tobin rolled her eyes but turned into her mums arms once more. The hug was tight and very strong. The words whispered were only for them and no one heard a thing. Tobin nodded a few times but after a minute or so, pulled back and nodded. “I love you.”

Karen smiled. “I love you too. You should get going.”

Tobin nodded and turned to her sister and Serv. She hugged Serv first quickly before she grabbed Mal and spun her around in circles. The formerly teary child was now giggling and happy. Tobin put her on the floor next to her family before she faced the group of players who would be with her for the next three weeks.

She took a deep breath. “Okay. Let’s do this.”

Tobin quickly settled into camp life, but she did have her moments. Her roommate for the camp was Alyssa Naeher and Tobin thanked God that the goalkeeper was such a calm person. She could hear the trouble some of the others were creating and she knew she wouldn’t cope with the drama until she was settled.

The keeper was quiet off the field but on it she had a presence that would take over games. She never pried but Alyssa did steal Tobin’s phone and show all the girls the lock screen. The photo was of her, Christen and Mal at the beach, smiling and laughing. The girls joked about how they couldn’t believe that Tobin had such a got girlfriend but made sure that she knew they had no problems with it.

Tobin felt a weight fall off her shoulders. While she was out and proud about it, she was still
private. It wasn’t a secret, it was just personal and she struggled letting people in. Having their easy acceptance of the relationship made her smile and she naturally opened up just a touch.

The girls saw a pureness in Tobin. There wasn’t a malicious bone in her body. If she let you in, you weren’t ever being let go. She would go to the ends of the earth for you without hesitation.

The girls would get snippets of information about Christen but it would just be part of the conversation. Once, Sydney was complaining about her neighbour and the girls all told about things their neighbours had done. Tobin just grinned and said Christen was her neighbour before they moved on.

It was a new feeling for Tobin, but she felt that she could talk to any of them about Christen with no judgement and only love. She rarely took them up on it but she the fact she could was a blessing.

They trained twice a day, every day. They had gym, recovery and pool sessions and were always ensuring they did what they needed to at the highest level.

At night, the girls were allowed to do what they pleased most of the time. Curfew was 10 and they couldn’t leave the campus, but there were plenty of places to explore in the meantime.

The first Friday night was designated bonding night, and Tobin was dreading it. She wasn’t the open up and bare her soul type of person and that looked like what was going to be expected of her.

The eight girls hadn’t invited the other dorm. They didn’t really want more people to join in and over the last week, none of them had seemed invested in each other’s lives. They were only focused on themselves.

Allie Long had snuck chocolate and lollies in, including peanut butter cups for Tobin. The quiet teen just blushed and murmured her thanks.

The group had a lot in common, but they also had a lot to learn about each other. Some were already committed to colleges; others were just starting out in high school. Tobin was the only one in a relationship and was peppered with questions about it, much to her horror and embarrassment.

Tobin was guarded, and the girls could see that. She was fighting an internal battle that no one could help her with.

Alex was the one who finally broke through her tough exterior. It was an innocuous question, but it opened a big can of worms.

“Where did you live before LA? Your accent has multiple levels too it.” Tobin stiffened and Alex backed up. “It’s all good if you don’t want to answer T.”

Tobin shook her head. “Sorry. I’m just not used to people being genuinely interested in my life and being open about it.” Tobin took a deep breath.

It was time to stop being so private. So secretive.

“Originally I’m from New Jersey but I lived in New York until I was 12. I went to Middle School in LA before I moved up to PVE when I was 13.”
Alex smiled. “Cool. Your accent sounded New Yorker-ish but has a bit of the California swing to it. I was curious.”

Tobin just nodded and smiled. She was happy with what she had given until Cheney piped up. “Your sister is adorable. She looks so much like Christen though in that photo on your phone.” All the girls agreed with Cheney and Tobin scrambled for an answer.

What would Christen do? Tobin asked herself.

_Just tell the truth Tobin…_ Tobin could hear her voice as clear as day.

Tobin inhaled deeply before she huffed. “Um, I was adopted when I was 13. It’s why I had to move again. Mal is biologically not my sister, but she is still my baby sister.”

There was pain in Tobin’s voice and the girls could see it in the tenseness of her body.

Sydney tried to break the tension. “That’s why you’ve got that long ass last name then? I’m not surprised you go by Heath.”

Tobin chuckled with the rest of the group. “I’ve gone by Heath for a long time. Pugh is Mal and Karen’s name. I take it as my middle name normally.”

“And Montgomery?” Kelley asked.

Tobin shrugged. “I don’t suit it. Too posh for me. Heath was my Mum’s last name and it’s just easier.” She gestured to her cookie monster t-shirt, soccer shorts and chocolate stash with a grin. The girls just laughed it off and moved on with the night.

Tobin breathed a bit of a sigh of relief. She had spoken about her past without a panic attack, crying, running away or freaking out.

Progress…

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*July 20th, 2004*

It was game day and Tobin was flying. She had seen her family twice since they dropped her off and she was happy to hear Mallory was taking her being gone okay. Servando and Christen had been lifesavers apparently, and Channing and Tyler had done their part entertaining the girl while Tobin was away.

Tobin had started in left midfield and was killing it. She was meant to play a full match, injuries permitting, and she was enjoying herself. She could hear her family cheering and Mal’s high pitched TOTO was glass shatteringly loud, but it egged her on.

Tobin got the ball in space on the left, so she took it. One defender was no challenge, so she skipped past her and was soon in behind the back line. She was hurtling towards the goal when she saw an opposition player bearing down on her. Tobin stopped on a dime, let the player run straight past her, before she cut inside and took a shot into the top right corner.

The net bulged and Tobin through her hands up in celebration before she was hit from all sides by excited teammates. The whistle went to end the match and the US17s won 3-0.
After they had shaken hands, the team split off to find their families. While Tobin had heard her family, she had made sure not to look for them so she didn’t get distracted.

Thank God she did.

Mal, Servando, Christen, Channing and Tyler were all there decked out in US Soccer gear. They had managed to get her number 12 on their gear as well which was impressive. Tobin didn’t even know she would be number 12 until the week before.

What the cause of her shock and her teammates laughter was the massive sign they had made. Obviously Mal had been the one to say what would be on it, because the grammar and spelling was horrible. The art work and colours were spectacular.

**TOBI IS THE BESTEST!**

Tobin burst out laughing at the sign but without her glasses on, she didn’t realise that there was more underneath it until she got really close.

In much smaller letters underneath the first message was this:

**BUT MAL WILL BE BETTER**

Tobin grinned widely and jumped into the stands to hug her family. They swamped her and she was happily sandwich in a family hug. Mal squirmed into Tobin’s arms and was beaming. “You did so good Tobin!”

“Thanks Mal. I love the sign!” Tobin exclaimed, with no hint of sarcasm. “And do you want to know what I really like the best?”

Mal’s eyes were wide and she looked mesmerized by her sister.

“Every single word of it is true.”

The smile on Mallory’s face would have lit up New York City.

*July 22nd, 2004*

Tobin had been home a day and Karen decided it was time to sit her daughter down and show her some things. It wasn’t just her, but Stacey and Christen would be there as well. It was about college and their plans and as Christen had been home for the last three weeks, she knew what was happening. Tobin had no idea.

Tobin frowned when she was summoned downstairs and found the mothers sitting their quite regally. Christen just smiled at her and nodded, saying it would be okay through her actions.

Tobin sat next to her girlfriend and gripped her hand tight. “Are we in trouble? Did I do something wrong?” Tobin asked quickly.

The two adults quickly shook their heads and assured her it was fine. “No honey. There were some developments while you were at camp and we wanted to show you them.”
“Developments?” Tobin asked, confused.

Karen just grinned and grabbed the bag from next to her, pouring 5 college envelopes for Tobin. “These developments. You got more offers Tobin.”

Tobin’s eyes went wide and she scanned the letters.

*University of California, Berkley*
*Stanford*
*Penn State*
*Brown*
*Harvard*

“Oh.”

Karen just chuckled. “Yeah. Oh.”

Tobin didn’t even move to open one. “Did Christen get some more?”

Stacey threw her head back and laughed before putting her hand out for some money. “I knew it! Pay up Karen! I knew she’d ask about Christen before she did anything else.” The engineer handed the social worker $20 with a huff.

Christen just rolled her eyes and grabbed the 4 envelopes that had come for her.

None were opened.

*Florida State*
*UNC*
*University of California, Berkley*
*Stanford*

Tobin’s eyes went back and forth between the two piles before she gasped. “SOME OF THEM MATCH UP!”

Christen chuckled and kissed her cheek. “Yes babe. But we haven’t opened them yet so let’s not get too excited.”

“They have to be offers otherwise why would they send them?!” Tobin was bouncing in her seat.

“They won’t be academic ones though, so just chill. We still have time Tobi.” Christen was smiling at Tobin with heart eyes.

Tobin pouted but quickly rebounded. “Which ones match up?”

Karen piped in at this point. “UNC, Cal, and Stanford. You have Brown, Harvard and Penn State as well, while Christen has Florida State, Virginia, Columbia and USC.”

Tobin went to grab an envelope from the ones that matched before she paused. “What name is on the Brown and Harvard ones?”
“They are addressed to Miss Montgomery.” Karen said quietly.

Tobin freaked. “THEY KNOW WHERE I AM?” She jumped from her chair and started pacing. “I don’t want them to want me there for my last name, I want to get in for me. I don’t want to be a Montgomery. I’m not ready yet! Holy shit, how did they find me?!” Tobin spun and asked Karen loudly.

Karen jumped up and put her hands up placatingly. “The mail from those schools came through the estate lawyer Tobin. They didn’t come straight here. You’re okay. I promise.”

Tobin eyes were wide and not focusing on anything. Her heartbeat was erratic and her breathing was heavy. “Tobin, settle down. You’re okay. We wouldn’t let anything happen to you. They are just letters.” Karen put her hands-on Tobin’s shoulders to ground her. “You’re fine Tobin.”

Stacey spoke next. “Tobin, they can’t touch you. Privacy and protection laws keep you safe. They knew where to find the lawyer, so they sent the mail to them. Open them and see what they say.”

Tobin was still panicking, and they saw that. Christen grabbed the two envelopes and looked towards her girlfriend. “Do you want me to see what they say?” Tobin nodded quickly.

Christen opened them both and grabbed the first page out quickly. She scanned the pair of them, scoffed and rolled her eyes before she looked towards her girlfriend. “They are invitations to apply to their school to enhance your families legacy. The arrogance in these letters is astounding. They ‘expect’ to receive your application in the next few weeks. As the last Montgomery, their school will teach you what you need to know to excel. What assholes.”

Tobin was stunned. “Seriously? That’s what they say?”

Christen nodded. “It sounds like they just want to say they have the last member of an old family at their school for publicity. The rest of the packets are information about the society events and networking opportunities, not the actual school.”

“Put them away Christen. I think we can safely say Tobin won’t want to go there.” Karen said quietly. The younger teen quickly packed them up and put them out of sight, pissed off and frustrated for Tobin.

Karen got Tobin sitting down again once the letters were out of sight and the only ones left were Tobin’s original offer from UNC, her new ones from Cal, Stanford and Penn State. Christens offers from USC, Florida State, UNC, Cal and Stanford were next to them.

“Ohay. Let’s start with Penn State and Florida State.” Christen said and Tobin nodded. They ripped the papers open and read the opening page.

Christen frowned. “Half scholarship? Why would they send that out so early?”

Tobin just shrugged. “Maybe they have too many committed already. Penn’s is a half too.”

The girls put them down and out of the way. Neither looked too interested.

Berkley gave both footballers a half scholarship, which they were excited about. "It's not too far away that weekends back home could happen." Tobin was bouncing.

Christen squealed when she saw that Stanford had given her a full scholarship. "Holy shit! This is one of the best schools in the country!"
Her face dropped when Tobin’s wasn’t. It was just an partial scholarship offer, with a letter saying they were looking closely at her football and academics and encouraging her to visit the campus. “How is that right?”

Tobin didn’t know but she wasn’t concerned. Not getting a full scholarship wasn’t an issue money wise, but getting them did show how much they wanted you. “Maybe they just want to show their interest? They might need to see more from me.”

“But you are as good a student as I am?”

“Maybe it’s the soccer side. I play midfield, you play up front.”

Christen scoffed. “You are still one of the best prospects in the country. If that is there reasoning, they are idiots.”

Tobin just smiled at her. “They can’t be if they gave you a full scholarship.”

“Stop flirting and open the next one.” Karen’s voice cut through their bubble and cause the pair to blush massively.

Stacey pushed the packet from UNC towards her daughter. “Lucky last.”

Christen took a deep breath before she opened it and pulled the first page out. She scanned it and beamed. “Full athletic scholarship.”

“Actually?” Tobin asked, voice hopeful.

“Yeah.” Christen turned and grinned at her girlfriend. “They want both of us.”

Tobin beamed and hugged Christen tight. “Awesome.”

The mothers looked at each other with questions in their eyes. Stacey shrugged and looked as though she didn’t want to burst their bubble, so Karen sighed and bit the bullet.

She turned to the still hugging teens and cleared her throat. “I don’t want to burst your bubble, but you have both said you have time to decide and will wait a bit longer. Why does it look like you’ve made up your mind?”

The girls just smiled. “It is just nice to know we have a school that wants both of us enough to offer a full scholarship. We know there is more to decide, and we have to go visit these schools as well. But I’m happy to know there is a school that wants both of us.” Christen explained.

Tobin continued. “I know it is far away but if we can go together it would help.”

Stacey nodded. “What schools do you want to visit? We can try and set up some tours or something before you go back to school, or even on the weekends if they are close by.”

“UNC, Stanford and Cal. They are the ones who have shown interest in both of us and offered both of us something. Maybe UCLA we could look at, even though there are no offers, it is close to home.” Christen stated.

“None of the others? Penn or Florida? USC? The Ivy’s?” Karen floated the option out there to give Tobin and Christen the choice.

Tobin scoffed at the Ivy’s and shook her head. “No thanks.”
Christen smiled. “Maybe if we don’t like the look of the others.”

Stacey nodded. “Okay. Lets look into some dates and see what we can swing.”

Chapter End Notes

Next one should be the college tours, or at least the reaction to them, and maybe, MAYBE, a decision. BUT it isn't finsihed and I keep changing my mind. Let me know what you all want and why. Just to give me some perseptive or vent at me. Whatever your motivation is, i do not mind. Not a lot of camp action but some. I want to get through this bit and get it moving on.

Hope you like it! See you soon
Don't be an Idiot

Chapter Summary

College tour fallout, COco and TOto explanation and angst

Chapter Notes

I feel like I should apologise now...

See the end of the chapter for more notes


"OH MY GOD TOBIN! Berkley was perfect for you! The business school was amazing! You loved it! UNC was good too. Why are you making this more complicated?!"

Tobin groaned. "I just want to take a closer look at UCLA. Is that a crime?" Tobin asked sarcastically.

"It is when you are being an idiot! They haven’t even spoken to you Tobin. There has been no interest.” Christen exclaimed.

“So now I’m an idiot for wanting be close to my sister?” Tobin got her back up.

“That is not what I am saying, and you know it!” Christen growled. “We promised that we would do what was best for us!”

“How is looking at the school closest to my family a bad thing?!” Tobin yelled.

“Because it isn’t the best school for you!”

“How do you know that? Just because Stanford was amazing for you doesn’t mean we all found our perfect school in the first visit!”

Christen threw her hands up in frustration. “Are you being serious right now? It isn’t a crime to like a school! Hell, YOU LIKED UNC AND BERKLEY EVEN IF YOU WON’T ADMIT IT!”

“So what? Why shouldn’t I look at UCLA too?”

“Because we already did! You even camped there for three weeks and all you said was ‘meh. It isn’t me.’ Exactly the same as what you said about Stanford!”

Tobin just rolled her eyes. “So, you are pissed I don’t like Stanford? Not all of us are built for that Christen. Sorry I’m not perfect like you!”
Christen growled. “Don’t twist my words Tobin. All I am saying is that if you didn’t like the school when you were training there for three weeks, why would you consider going there for four years.”

“BECAUSE NOT ALL OF US HAVE THE LUXURY OF HAVING A BIG FAMILY TO VISIT US ANYMORE!” Tobin exploded.

Karen walked into the Press household with an overly excited Mallory in her arms. Stacey had taken Christen and Tobin to visit colleges over the last week and they had just gotten home.

Mallory squirmed her way down to the floor and bolted through the hallway, running straight into Stacey. “Sorry Aunty Stacey!” The girls eyes were wide, but she was still looking around for the teens.

Stacey just smiled. “You’re fine Mallory. The girls are in Christens room. But-” Mallory bolted away with a smile. She had missed them. “Damn it Mal. You're too fast for your own good.”

Karen just shook her head. “That girl was a nightmare while you were away. Servando was a lifesaver when she wasn't at daycare. How did it go? Tobin didn’t say too much on the phone.”

“Mostly good. I think the tours helped them greatly, but I have my concerns.” Stacey said as she sat down.

“What do you mean?”

Stacey paused. “They are dependent on each other for certain things, which we knew. They’ve been inseparable since they met. However, they are still total opposites in some areas.”

“Yes, but I think that three-week camp helped them both with that dependency. And they can do things alone, but often they will do something they don’t want to because the other does.” Karen said. “Why are you worried?”

Stacey smiled sadly. “Because from everything I saw and heard, they didn’t like the same schools. Christen loved Stanford but Tobin felt like she did back in New York. Stifled and stuck in a world she didn’t want to be in. Academically, Christen knew Stanford had exactly what she wanted. Dual degree of Arts and Science. Everything was perfect for Christen at Stanford. We didn’t get to meet the coach but Christen wasn’t too worried about it. She knew that could happen at another time.”

“Christen kind of ignored Berkley to be honest but Tobin really liked it and was buzzing about it. Both of them were happy about UNC. The football and business school were amazing, but Tobin was really unhappy about the flight and the weather.”

“So the only one they both liked was UNC? But it wasn’t the first choice for either of them?” At Stacey’s nod, Karen frowned. “Oh.”

“Yeah. Oh.”

“So who were the frontrunners? And what are they going to do?” Karen asked.

Stacey shrugged. “Berkley for Tobin and Stanford for Christen.”

“Why do I sense a ‘but’ coming?” Karen asked sarcastically.
“Because there is one.” Stacey chuckled. “Tobin said she wants to stay close to her sister. Which means UCLA, which she honestly barely even looked at online, didn’t like the tour of, doesn’t like the degrees on hand and has no offers from, is her first choice. The promise they made about doing what’s best for them may be getting broken by Tobin. Christens a bit pissed about it.”

“Fucking hell.” Karen exclaimed. “She can’t make such a big decision just for Mallory. Mallory understands that they probably won’t be close by for a while. And then with soccer…”

“Why do you think they are up in Christens room? I wouldn’t say they were arguing, at least to start with, but they are both being stubborn. Tobin wants to look into UCLA more closely, even though they haven’t made any offers or even reached out to her. Christen told her to stop being an idiot. That was about an hour into the car trip home from Stanford and they have been ‘discussing’ it ever since. There has been some yelling.”

“Oh god. They never yell at each other. And Mal went straight up there?” Karen was exasperated.

“I couldn’t stop her.” Stacey just laughed. “She will probably settle them down. Don’t stress. They will talk it out. If not, we’ll hear about it from here.”

Christen looked like she had been struck. “Tobin…”

“Don’t. UNC was great but I will not be 3000 miles away from my sister. Berkley was great, but a seven-hour drive is a long fucking drive. So, I will look at UCLA because maybe what is best for me isn’t the academics or the football, but my family.”

“So, I’m not your family now?” Christen looked heartbroken.

“You aren’t my baby sister! I lost my older siblings and it crushed me. They left me alone! I am not doing the same thing to Mal!” Tobin had tears in her eyes.

“Tobin.” Christen walked across the bedroom and gently put her hands on either side of Tobin’s face. The older teen tried to pull away. “NO! YOU LOOK AT ME!” Tobin did. “Listen. It was not your fault. Your family died and left you here. And it is the shittiest thing in the world. But you are not alone! You have never been alone! You have so many people here for you Tobin. We may not be related by blood, but we are your family. You are not leaving Mallory alone by going away for school! You would never do that. She has so many people here for her.” Christens voice was soft but there was pain in it.

“They said the same thing! AND I HAVE NO ONE LEFT!” Tobin slumped to the floor, defeated.

Christen followed her down and held her close. “Honey, they didn’t have a choice. If they knew, they wouldn’t have gotten on that plane.”

“They left me alone with all their life’s work for me to continue. They left me with everything and nothing. All because they were getting on a plane to see me in hospital.” Tobin was distraught.

“It wasn’t your fault Tobin.” Christen said softly. “That day was a horrible day and it was no ones fault except the people who were in on it. It was a terrorist attack baby.”

“I’m not leaving Mal. I’m not doing it.” Tobin was shaking her head wildly where it was supported by Christens hands.
“Honey, you aren’t leaving her when you go to college.”

Tobin wiped her eyes. “I won’t be here to protect her. I need to be here for her. I won’t let her grow up without me around.”

“Tobin, you will be around. Maybe not every day, or every weekend, but you will talk to her all the time. You’re not going to leave her.”

“Mama? Papa?” A tiny voice came from the door that neither teen had realised was open. “Why you crying?”

The couple both looked at the tiny figure on the doorway. Tobin just opened her arms wide. Mal ran across and jumped into them for a hug. Tobin and Christen sandwiched the kid between them.

“We just missed you so much kiddo.” Tobin said into the frizzy hair in front of her.

Mal smiled up at her sister. “I missed you too. Did you like the schools?”

Tobin shrugged. “I don’t know yet. Christen loved one called Stanford.”

Mal gasped and her eyes went super wide. She spun in the hug and looked at Christen. “Is that the super smart people school?”

Christen chuckled and swallowed thickly. “Yea. You could say that.”

“Mumma said it was 6 hours away!” Mal exclaimed. “She said that if you went there we could visit on weekends sometimes. But only if I do all my homework.” The kids eyes went wide. “I wasn’t meant to tell you that.”

Christen just tickled the kid in front of her until the worry was gone from her face. “What else did your Mum say while we were away? We want to know all your secrets.” Tobin joined in the tickling until Mal gave in and asked for mercy.

She was puffing from all the laughter. “Mumma said that no matter how far away you go, that I couldn’t be sad or ask you to stay. Because the bestest schools need the bestest people and you are both the bestest. She said that we would take trips to visit and always watch the soccer together and that if I really needed you, I could always call. That even though you may be super far away sometimes, you loved me more than anything and I wasn’t alone.”

Christen smiled at the young girl. “And what about Papa Tobi?”

Mal grinned. “She said I would always be her favourite wherever she was in the world. Cause she is super at soccer Mumma said she could play anywhere. But school was important cause even though she doesn’t use all of her big brain, Mumma said Toto needed a challenge!”

“I do use my big brain! I just forget stuff sometimes. I’m the second smartest in the year.” Tobin said quietly. She was listening to her sister intently.

Mal giggled. “But Coco is smarter!”

Christens laugh broke free despite her best efforts. Tobins pout was adorable. “I’m sorry babe.”

Tobin just shrugged. “It’s true.” Tobin turned to her sister. “What’s with the Toto and Coco stuff kid? It’s been like 3 months now and you haven’t told us.”

Mal’s face dropped. “I just like it. It’s easy to say.”
“So is Tobi and Chris. Or Papa Tobi and Mama Press. You’ve called us that for years. Why the change?” Christen said gently.

Mal slumped. “A lady at school said not to say it.”

Christen sat up, shocked. “Who? Why?”

“They said Tobi was a boys name and Papa was for dads only. When I said Papa Tobi was my sister and that I didn’t have a dad, she said that it wasn’t allowed. And that I could only have one Mumma and not a Mama Press as well.” Mal was so upset. “I thought if I could get used to saying Coco and Toto I wouldn’t get in trouble. She won’t even let me say Tobi and Chris cause they are boys names.”

Tobin was livid. “Who said this too you Mal? And why didn’t you tell Mumma or us?”

Mal shrugged. “I didn’t want to get you into trouble. She said I could get into more trouble too.”

“Who is it kiddo? You won’t get into trouble, I promise.” Christen said softly.

Mal looked between the two teens. “Are you sure?”

Christen nodded. “I am.”

Mal called Christen across to whisper in her ear. Tobin still heard it. “It was the new day care lady.”

“From holiday care?” When Mal nodded, Christen frowned. “She isn’t allowed to get you into trouble Mal. She isn’t a teacher.”

“She used to take my snacks away if I said it.”

Tobin quickly but gently moved Mal fully into Christen’s arms. “I’ll be back.” Tobin stood, grabbed her keys and bolted out the door.

“TOBIN! DON’T BE STUPID!” Christen stood and placed Mal on her feet. “Stay here kid.” She ran down the stairs after her girlfriend.

“Fuck that!” Mal said before she followed them down but found a bit of a backlog on the stairs.

Tobin was being blocked from going anywhere by Karen standing in the doorway while Stacey had an arm on Christen’s and wouldn’t let her go any further.

“Let me through!” Tobin said with clenched teeth.

“Not until you explain why you are so upset. I heard yelling and you’ve been crying. Mals upset and so is Christen. I’m not letting you run away from this. And I am not letting you drive.” Karen had her Mum voice on.

“I’m not running away. I am running towards the bitch at day care who is abusing her power.”

“What are you talking about?” Karen was confused.

“Ask Mal!” Tobin exclaimed. When Karen looked and moved towards the child on the stairs, Tobin ran through the small hole created and out the door with her car keys in hand.
"TOBIN POWELL PUGH HEATH MONTGOMERY! GET BACK HERE RIGHT NOW!"

“Shit!” Christen shook her Mum’s arm off and ran after her.

“CHRISTEN!”

Christen ignored her and just managed to get in the car before Tobin sped off.

Karen and Stacey turned to each other. "Call Cody."

Stacey nodded and grabbed her phone while Karen went towards Mal. She was upset and confused. "Kiddo, you need to tell me everything you told Christen and Tobin okay? I need to know why this is happening?"

"I won't get into trouble? They promised I wouldn't." Mal asked softly.

"No baby. You won't. You haven't done anything wrong." Karen held her daughter close.

Mal nodded into her Mumma's shoulder. "There is this..."

"Tobin! Think about this!"

Tobin was driving erratically. “I am. I’m going to talk to that day care bitch.”

“And get yourself arrested?! Pull over before you crash!”

“She hurt my sister!” Tobin yelled.

“And you will hurt her if you hurt yourself. You want to protect her, pull the fuck over and don’t get into an accident. Let Karen deal with it!”

Tobin scoffed. "She told our sister that she couldn’t call us the names she gave us because of her own prejudices and beliefs! I am not letting it slide."

“All I am asking right now is you pull the car over. You are in no state to drive right now!” Christen was terrified. “Please Tobin! I will call dad to come get us and drive us too the school. But you storming in won’t help anything!”

Tobin screamed before pulling off to the side of the road and getting out of the car and bolting. Christen yanked up the hand brake before she leant over and grabbed the keys out of the ignition before she chased after her. “TOBIN STOP!”

Tobin just kept running into the trees and Christen did her best to keep up. For ten minutes, they ran until Tobin just collapsed to her knees and screamed, punching the floor. Christen slowed her run and approached her like one would a startled animal. “Babe?”

Tobin just kept punching the floor until her hand was mangled. As soon as Christen saw blood, she gently grabbed the hand and cradled it. “Tobin, you’re okay. Breathe baby.”

“How can someone do that to a child? Say they can’t use the nicknames they gave us out of love?” Tobin’s voice was hoarse.
“I don’t know babe. But we need to let Karen handle it. After today, neither of us are in any state to be rational.”

“Why didn’t I realise?” Tobin asked.

Christen just pulled Tobin into her arms. “No one did. It isn’t your fault.”

“I am meant to protect her.”

“You can’t protect her from everything. It sucks but it’s true.”

“I was right here, and I didn’t even notice. I didn’t ask her why she changed our names.” Tobin was sobbing.

Christen sniffed. “I didn’t either.”

Tobin just stayed in Christens arms and cried. It took twenty minutes, but she eventually cried herself to sleep in Christens arms. The younger teen just smiled sadly before grabbing her phone. She found missed calls from her parents, sisters and Karen. She called her Mum back first.

“Christen thank the lord. Where are you? Dad found Tobin’s car abandoned on the side of the road.”

Christen sniffed. “Somewhere in the trees. Tobin ran full pelt for about ten minutes. Pretty straight line though. He should be able to walk straight to us. Did Mal tell you what had Tobin so pissed?”

“Yes. Karen is livid and called the day care immediately to ask for a meeting. She is there now with the principal, head of the day care and hopefully the woman who told Mal all this. As worried as she is about Tobin, she knew she couldn’t help her while she wasn’t here. And sorting out Mals issue will help Tobin as well.”

Christen exhaled. “Thank god. Tobin looked like she was going to murder someone.”

“I texted dad and he should be there soon. Are you or Tobin hurt?”

“Tobin’s hand is busted and emotionally we are both a wreck. She fell asleep. She was emotionally drained.”

“Okay. I’ll get dad to take her to the hospital and I’ll meet you there with Karen and Mal.”

“Thanks Mum.”

“Stay safe honey. Dad won’t be long.”

Christen hung up and just sighed. “How did this day go from driving back from Stanford talking about our futures to this?”

Cody carried Tobin out in his arms while Christen walked beside him. He laid her down in the backseat while Christen got in the front. Other than to ask a few questions, he didn’t say much. He looked shaken.

Tobin woke up when they pulled into the carpark of the hospital. She was disoriented and confused. “What?”

“You need to get your hand looked at Tobin.” Cody wasn’t messing around.
Tobin was lead into the ER and straight into a treatment room. Her body sagged when she saw her Mum and Mal. The kid ran full pelt at her but Christen intercepted the missile. “Easy kid. Tobin can’t pick you up right now.”

“Are you okay?” Mal asked.

“Are you?” Tobin countered, but the question was directed at her mother.

“Yes. It was dealt with. In a civilised manner.” Tobin scoffed. “Don’t scoff. You are in for it kid.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“You wanted to. We will talk at home.”

The doctor opened the door at that point and didn’t react at the high number of people in the room. “Miss Montgomery?”

Tobin groaned. “Yeah?”

“I’m Dr Green. I need to look at your hand.”

“Fine.”

Tobin got stitches and a brace, but she was lucky not to break it. Dr Green was honestly impressed that she hadn’t. Four weeks in the brace and she would be back to normal.

“I’m grounded for two months?!” Tobin exclaimed. “For what?”

“Leaving the house when you weren’t meant to, driving like an idiot, punching the ground till you screwed your hand up and threatening to go beat up people at Mal’s day care!”

“I didn’t even get there!”

“NOT THE POINT! You will hand me your keys, phone and laptop. You will apologise to your sister, Christen, Cody, Stacey and me for your behaviour and scaring everyone. You will not get to see your friends. You will not get to do extra training. You will not get to go out of this house without me. Do you understand?” Karen voice was deadly.

Tobin glowered. “So what am I meant to do?”

“School work. Research for colleges. Cleaning. Walk the dog. Your behaviour was reckless, dangerous and you terrified all of us. You will not get your driving rights back until you prove to not only myself, but Stacey and Cody that you are responsible. You let your anger drive you.”

“They hurt Mal.”

“And I dealt with it. Newsflash Tobin. I am her mother. I am the one who is meant to deal with her teachers and her issues. You are not. You are her sister. Her biggest supporter and her protector sure. But that situation is not one you go near. You just showed you are not mature enough to deal with it.” Karen sighed. “I booked an appointment for you with Anna. I also booked another tour of Berkley in October so that Mal and I can have a look. Cody will be taking Christen to Stanford at the same time.”
“I want to look at UCLA.” Tobin said stubbornly.

“Fine. I will take you after your appointment with Anna. But you haven’t liked it before, and I doubt that will change. No matter how much you say it does.” Karen looked her eldest in the eye. “I know you want to be here for Mal. But you need to grow as a person and do what is best for you. Kids are resilient. She will be fine with whatever you choose.”

Tobin rolled her eyes. “Can I go now?”

“Yes.”

Tobin stood and walked away without another word.

Karen listened as Tobin slammed the door. “Teenagers.”

Chapter End Notes

Well... that happened.
THoughts?
Guilt and Fear are strong motivators

Chapter Summary

Tobin does some thinking and writing.

Chapter Notes

Howdy! Hope you all had a good week. This is going out just after 1am on a Monday morning from Sydney. i’m exhausted but i’m in the flow right now. want to write as much as possible before uni starts again next week (last semester thank god.) Editing isn't my strong point at 1am so sorry in advance. But i hope you like this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 13th, 2004

The doorbell rang and Karen stood from her place at the table to answer it. Before she could, a missile came bolting past her.

“Mallory! What did I say about running in the house?” Karen exclaimed.

Mal just called over her shoulder. “Not too! But Mumma, it’s Unca Serv!” Mal opened the door and jumped in his arms. “Happy Birthday Unca Serv!”

Servando just beamed. “Thanks Princess. How have you been?”

“Meh.”

Servando and Karen just laughed. It was such a Tobin thing to say. “Meh?”

“Yeah. I thought when Tobi came home we’d have fun, but she got in trouble so bad. She hasn’t left her room!”

“Yeah I heard.” Servando looked at Karen. “I know she is grounded, Chris told me, but was there any chance I could talk to her?”

Karen nodded. “Of course. If you can get her to come and have a conversation with me, that would be great too. I’m worried.”

“I’ll do my best.” Serv put Mal on the floor. “Why don’t you go see Christen? I’ll be there in a few minutes Princess.”

Mal looked up at her Mum. “Can I Mumma?”

“I’ll walk you over. But not for long. Tyler and Channing will be able to play with you more. Grab
your shoes.” Mal shot off. “AND NO RUNNING IN THE HOUSE!”

A “SORRY” was yelled down the stairs but Karen just rolled her eyes. “So eager.”

Servando grinned. “Ever thought when she was born that she’d have four big sisters and a big brother?”

“No, but I couldn’t be happier that she does. Even if the five of you drive me nuts half the time.” Karen sighed. “Good luck with the grump. You’ll need it.”

Servando knocked on the door but didn’t get a reply. He knocked continuously until the door was yanked open by a pissed off Tobin. “What?”

“Good to see you too. Can I come in?” Servando knew he had to keep his head.

Tobin just rolled her eyes and stood back. Servando walked in and sat in front of the desk that no longer had electronics on it. “Damn. Your Mum took everything. No laptop, phone or Nintendo?”

“What do you want Servando?”

“I wanted to see one of my best friends on my birthday.”

Tobin sighed. “Right. Happy birthday Serv. I’m sorry I can’t go out and do something with you today.”

“Well you aren’t the only. Besides, it’s your own fault.” Tobin didn’t say anything. “What were you going to do if you got there Tobin?”

Tobin shrugged. “I don’t know. I don’t even know what I was thinking.”

“That’s an understatement.” Serv muttered. “Your Mum is worried about you.”

“You mean disappointed in me, right?” Tobin accused.

“No. I mean worried.” Servando stood from his chair. “Everyone was terrified when you drove off with Chris. And then they find a car abandoned, you unconscious with a fucked-up hand and Chris distraught. I was scared when I found out and I knew everything ended up okay. Of course your Mum is worried. Mal misses you, Chris misses you –“

“Chris hasn’t spoken to me since I got grounded. I doubt she misses me.” Tobin spat.

“I’m not saying she isn’t pissed off and needs some space, but she can still miss you and be worried about you. Even if she doesn’t want to talk to you.” Servando explained. “I spoke to her yesterday very briefly. She thinks you need some time to work your own shit out without her hovering.”

“Great.” Tobin whined. “Just great.”

Servando snapped. “For fuck’s sake Tobin. Pull your head out of your ass.” Tobin looked taken aback. “You could have killed someone. Yourself, Chris, someone you never met, by driving like that. You were so pissed off you basically broke your damn hand!”

“Sort your head out and talk to your mother. Because this sulky, angry and self-entitled girl isn’t my friend. The smiley, happy and easy-going girl is. The one who loves her sister more than
anything that they would put their own feelings aside to make sure that she had a good day. Who wants her girlfriend to be happy and her Mum not to worry!”

Tobin was silent.

“Think about it Tobin. Because you can’t be happy right now. Everyone is worried about you. Yes, they may be mad and frustrated, but they are mostly worried.”

Servando closed the door on his way out and Tobin sighed before she ran her hands through her hair.

“What is going on with me?”

August 14th, 2004

“Tobi! It’s Saturday! It’s soccer day!” Mal shouted through the door. “Mumma says we gots to go!”

Tobin opened the door looking drained. “We?” She asked.

“Yea! Ollie is in the car with Mumma. Mumma has your bag and my game starts soon. We gots to go Tobi!”

Tobin smiled. “Let me get changed and I’ll meet you at the car.”

“Awesome!” Mal dashed away and Tobin just smiled slightly.

“I guess it's time to go.”

It was a short trip to the park for Mals game. Tobin and Karen sat with Ollie on the sideline and cheered her on. There was an unspoken agreement to not talk about what had happened three days previously. This was for Mal.

However, when Mal got a bad kick to the ankle and went down crying, Tobin’s first reaction was to jump and go to her. Karen put a hand on her knee to grab her attention. “Just watch Tobin.”

She watched as the coach ran across and knelt down to talk to Mal. He had his spray bottle which all the team new was full of magic water and sprayed the ankle. He helped her to her feet and got her to do their special dance to test it out and make it better. By the end of it, Mal was no longer crying and running off to join the game.

“You don’t need to always be the one to save her Tobin. Sometimes it isn’t your place.”

Tobin looked conflicted. “But what if no one is there?”

Karen just smiled. “Do you really think she will be alone? That no one will be looking out for her?”

“No. I don’t.”
“It doesn’t always have to be you. You just have to be her sister. Her best friend and her favourite.” Karen put her arm around Tobin. “And you can be her best friend from Berkley if that’s what’s best for you.”

Tobin was watching Mal run around and play soccer with her friends. She was smiling and happy. Tobin nodded. “We’re going to UCLA on Tuesday right?”

“That’s the plan. After Anna.”

Tobin sighed. “I really didn’t like it there at camp.”

“I know.”

“I still want to look. See if it is different out of a football camp.”

“Okay.” Karen pulled Tobin close. “I just want you to be happy Tobin. If that means we have to take road trips up the California Coast to see each other, we will. If it means flying to UNC, we will. You need to be selfish kid. If you keep putting all this stress on yourself, explosions like that will keep happening.”

Tobin sniffed. “I didn’t mean to. We just spent so long talking about college on the drive and arguing and I was so frustrated. I’d been away for a week and I couldn’t wait to see you both again. Then we kept going around in circles and I got so upset about everything and I couldn’t explain why. Christen kept asking and asking and asking why and I just didn’t know. She was right about almost everything. That I liked UNC and Berkley.”

“And the family stuff came up again and I just broke. Then Mal came in and everything was fine until she told us what that person at school did and I saw red. Everything just came to a head and it was something I felt I could fix. I don’t even remember getting in the car.”

Karen just held the teen as she let it all out. Her fears and worries, what she was thinking and how it all came to be. Karen didn’t question or interrupt, she just gave her an ear. She let Tobin work it out in her own words and her own time. Tobin was one of those kids who wouldn’t talk if she didn’t want to and could clam up in a moment.

Tobin spent half an hour talking to her Mum and didn’t stop until Mal came bounding across with a massive grin. She leaped into the arms of her Mum and sister, beaming. “Did you see me? I scored four goals and tackled the big kid!”

“We saw Princess.” Tobin said. “Well done.”

Mal looked really creeped out. “Don’t call me Princess. That’s Serva’s name for me. You call me Kiddo.”

“Sorry, I didn’t know he had a monopoly on it.” Tobin joked. “You played very well.”

Mal shrugged. “I’m just happy you’re happy now and you could watch. I was so happy Mumma said you could come. I knew I’d play super good.”

Karen held her two girls close. “That’s all I want. Both of you happy.” The little family were quiet for a little bit, just enjoying the moment.

Karen straightened and cleared her throat. “Right. We better get to Tobin’s game.”

Tobin looked shocked. “But I’m grounded.”
“From extra training, driving, having a social life and electronics. Not your team training and games. That would mean you let down your teammates. You still have responsibilities like school and football and Ollie. If you had a job you would have to go to that as well. You just aren’t meant to be able to have fun.”

“Oh.” Tobin said. “But I don’t have my stuff.”

“It’s in the car.” Karen stood and called Ollie across to her. “Any other reasons you can think of to avoid this?”

“My hand is busted. I haven’t trained in two weeks. I haven’t seen Chris in a few days and I’m not prepared?” Tobin said unconvincingly.

“Playing is up to your coach and you don’t use your hands in football. You still have to be there to support them.” Karen rolled her eyes at Tobin’s worry. “You’ll be fine Tobin. She just wants what’s best for you. Not playing will probably worry her.”

“She’s best for me.” Tobin said as she stood up. The family walked across to the car.

“We all know that. Besides, she’s been grounded too.”

Tobin jaw dropped. “Why?”

“She got in the car with someone who wasn’t in their right mind and she knew that going in. Cody was furious that she put herself in that position.”

“She was trying to stop me.”

Karen just looked at her. “And if you had gotten in an accident, it would have been both of you who were hurt. She’s grounded for two weeks.”

“Oh. But she wasn’t doing anything wrong.” Tobin was confused.

Karen just smiled slightly. “Ever heard that saying ‘if all your friends jumped of a cliff, would you jump too’?”

“Yeah.”

“Cody has seen too many people do that. Christen won’t be another statistic, and neither will you. He will be talking to the pair of you about safe driving soon.”

Tobin paled and Karen just chuckled. “He isn’t that bad. Cody is a softy.”

“Detective Press isn’t Cody.”

Tobin didn’t play, and neither did Christen. The pair hadn’t been at training for two weeks because of their college tours and the coach was rewarding the players who had been there.

No one mentioned they were playing the team on the bottom of the table and resting their two stars wasn’t a big risk that day.

It was awkward. They were both tense, they didn’t know how to interact with each other after the events of the last week (Tobin refused to say they were fighting) and the coach had stuck them on
the end of the bench.

It was ten minutes into the second half when Tobin spoke. “Mum said you were grounded too.”

Christen looked like she had been shocked before she replied. “Until school goes back. Took my phone and computer, can’t go out at all. I reorganised my room I was so bored.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I made the decision to go after you Tobin. I was part of the reason you were so wound up before Mal got there. It’s not your fault.”

Tobin looked at her shoes. “You were right though. I was being stupid.”

“Maybe, but I should have respected your reasons and not lost my head. We could have avoided all of this if we had just been calm about it.” Christen put her hand on Tobin’s thigh. “Sometimes I forget what happened to you. What you lost. Because you are often so happy with me and Karen and Mal that I forget you were adopted. I’m sorry for not realising that going away for school is a bigger deal for you than it is for me.”

“Mum’s taking me to see UCLA on Tuesday. Do you think you’d be allowed to come?” Tobin asked hopefully.

“No.” Christen smiled sadly. “Even if I was, I think you need to go by yourself. Me being there won’t help you.”

Tobin nodded. “Fair enough.”

The pair sat in silence for the rest of the match. It was still tense but Christens hand was still on Tobin’s leg and Tobin had moved her hand to cover it.

Baby steps.

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August 17th, 2004

Tobin was sulking in the car and Karen was letting her stew. She hadn’t said much since she had left Anna’s office. Throughout the tour of UCLA, she had stood at the back of the group with Karen with a frown. A few times throughout the tour she asked questions, but the answers didn’t improve her mood.

Karen pulled into the carpark of the restaurant and turned the car off. “Let’s go Tobin.”

Tobin was confused. “What’s happening?”

“We are having dinner and a chat. I think it is a chat we need to have.”

“Am I in trouble again?” Tobin asked warily as she got out of the car. “Because I swear I didn’t do it.”

Karen just chuckled lightly. “No Tobin. You’re not.” Tobin visibly relaxed. “That doesn’t mean this will be fun.”

Tobin slumped. “Spectacular.”
They ate their dinner in comfort. Not a deep conversation by any means, but comfortable. Considering less than a week ago Tobin had been locked in her room mad and upset, it was a positive for them.

Karen took a sip of her water before she spoke. “What did you think of UCLA?”

Tobin looked at her Mum with sad eyes. “I really wanted to love it.”

“But?”

Tobin sighed. “I didn’t. Everything just felt, I don’t know how to describe it, but I didn’t feel good.”

“Okay. What does that mean then Tobin? For you and college?” Karen asked carefully.

Tobin looked her in the eye. “It means Chris was right. I was being an idiot.”

“She wasn’t right. You were being a protective sister. Neither of you were reacting well that day.” Karen shrugged. “Was that your first proper fight?”

“It wasn’t a fight.” Tobin said immediately but ducked her head at Karen’s look of disbelief.

“Tobin, you’re allowed to fight. And argue. But you both need to sit down and have proper conversation about it, like adults. Work out why it happened and fix that. You two are good at that.”

“We spoke a bit at soccer.”

“I know.” Karen said. “But you both need to collect your thoughts and be ready for a long conversation. Are you ready for that?”

Tobin frowned and shook her head. “Not yet. Give me a few more days and maybe.”

“Neither is Christen according to Stacey.” Karen sighed. “But I didn’t bring you here to talk about your relationship.”

“No?”

Karen shook her head. “No. I got side-tracked. This is about college.”

“Okay.”

“What’s your dream school?”

“Huh?”

Karen smiled. “Don’t think about distance or cost or scholarship offers. If none of that was a factor, where would you want to go?”

Tobin sat back and frowned. “I never thought about it like that. Because they are factors I have to consider.”

“You don’t, actually. Your family trust will pay for everything Tobin. Flights home, dorm costs,
fees, everything. You are very lucky that you have very few barriers.” Karen said as she pulled out a pad of paper and pen. She pushed it across the table to the teen. “UCLA, Berkeley, Stanford and UNC. Pro’s and con’s lists. Write about them. Rank them. Whatever you need to do to clear your head about the choices. It could be a gut feeling, the schooling levels, the location, the football. Write out what you like and don’t like about the schools. We have plenty of time.”

Tobin looked at the paper and back at Karen before she slowly pulled it towards her. Karen watched as she got settled and started writing.

When the waitress came across to see if they needed anything, Karen ordered a coffee, but Tobin didn’t even look up. She just kept writing and getting it out.

Tobin stopped after 30 minutes and looked up at Karen. “Do I have to finish this now?”

“No. Take as much time as you need.”

Tobin nodded. “Is there any chance I could get my laptop back?”

Karen narrowed her eyes. “Why?”

“I want to look some stuff up. I have some questions that I can’t answer.”

“You can use the computer in the family room.” Internally Karen was cheering. Tobin was taking it seriously.

“Okay. Thank you.” Tobin looked as though she had more to say.

“What is it Tobin? You look like you are biting your tongue.”

“Do you have the trust paperwork about property at home?” Tobin asked.

“I do. It should be with all the other stuff. If not, I can ask for it. Why?”

Tobin sighed. “I want you to have somewhere to stay if I go away to school. That way you can come visit without having to stress. Whether I’m in the dorms or not, you and Mal have a place to be. And, if I can get out of the dorms and into the house, Ollie can come with me too. It's a factor.”

“I’ll have a look tomorrow. Are you ready to go?” Karen asked.

“You don’t want to know what I’m thinking?” Tobin looked stunned.

“Have you made up your mind yet?”

“Not even close.”

“Then no. Unless you want to ask me some questions, I’m not going to bother you about it.” Karen said. “You need to come to your own conclusion Tobin. I won’t judge if you want to talk to me, and I won’t ask you questions if you don’t.”

The pair walked out towards the car quietly. Karen could tell Tobin was mulling it over.

They were five minutes from home when Tobin spoke. “Do you think Chris will forgive me?”

“For what Tobin?”

“The fight and the driving.”
Karen smiled to herself. “She already has. You just have to forgive yourself.”

Tobin huffed. “I’m not good at that.”

Karen chuckled. “No. You’re not. You just have to talk to her. It will do wonders for both of you.”

“Will you un-ground me for a day to do that?”

Karen rolled her eyes. “Saturday good for you?”

Tobin looked stunned. “Actually?”

“Yes. If Christen wants to talk, you can be un-grounded for the day to talk. If not, you can wait until she is.”

Tobin nodded. “Okay. Thanks Mum.”

Karen smiled. “You’re welcome Tobin.”

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August 21st, 2004

Tobin was sitting at the computer in the family room with her pad of paper next to her. She had filled pages with information but was now consolidating it and making decisions. Karen had asked Mal very nicely to not bug her sister about playing with her and convinced her that staying out of her way was best for everyone.

Tobin had occasionally asked Karen a question or two, or her opinion on something, but generally kept writing on her pad of paper to organise everything.

The teen was so engrossed in her research and writing that she didn’t hear the front door open and her Mum greet Christen. She didn’t even know the pair had joined her in the family room until Karen tapped her on the shoulder.

“Tobin?”

Tobin jumped. “Shit!”

The pair looked slightly amused. “You okay there?” Karen asked.

Tobin nodded and jumped to her feet. “Yeah. I’m fine.”

“Riiight.” Karen said. “I’m going grocery shopping and taking Mal with me. We will then go do something fun because she is bored. You two have run of the house for the rest of the day. I’ll be home around 6pm.” Karen looked at the pair of them. “I feel like I need to say good luck but you two will be fine. You’ve never had a problem communicating before. Just, be honest.”

Karen turned and walked to the bottom of the stairs. “Mallory, are you ready to go?!”

Mal came hurtling downstairs. “YEA! It’s Mumma and Mal day!”

Tobin and Christen smiled at the pair as they walked out the door. “Sometimes I forget they were a duo before you were a trio.” Christen said. “It’s cute.”
Tobin nodded. “Yea, they have a great relationship.”

Tobin and Christen fell into silence after that. It was quiet for about 30 seconds before Tobin sighed. “Do you want to go upstairs and talk there? It’s our space.”

Christen nodded. “Yeah. That sounds okay.”

Tobin grabbed her notepad and led her girlfriend upstairs without a sound. Halfway up, she felt a small hand slip into hers. Tobin turned with a look of confusion.

Christen smiled and shrugged. “I’ve missed you.”

Tobin’s face lit up and she squeezed her hand tight. “Me too.”

They were both sitting against Tobin’s headboard, holding hands and bodies slightly angled so they could see each other.

“I need to apologise.” Tobin started. “I shouldn’t have lost my temper and stormed off.”

“I shouldn’t have kept attacking you and realised that there was something else going through your head.” Christen said. “I’m sorry too. I don’t think either of us handled it well.”

“I shouldn’t have gotten in the car.”

Christen just chuckled slightly. “Okay, if we keep saying all the things we shouldn’t have done, we will be here all day. Before we get into that cycle, can we just agree that we both fucked up and we are both sorry? Because we are both in trouble for that day and rightly so. We need to talk about how to move forward from that, not rehash it 7 different ways and get upset again.”

Tobin just grinned. “You always were the sensible one.”

Christen nudged her and rolled her eyes with a slight grin. “Shut up.”

“It’s true.” Tobin said. “I’ve actually been channelling you when thinking about some stuff.”

“What do you mean?”

Tobin looked slightly sheepish but also proud. “‘What Would Christen Do?’ is becoming my new saying when I want to do something stupid. Or make a big decision. Just thinking that makes me calm down and follow logical steps, like you do.”

Christen blushed. “Really?”

“Yeah. You think everything through and manage to balance your head and your heart, what you want and what’s best for you. It’s amazing really.”

“Thanks.”

Tobin shrugged. “It’s just who you are.”

“What have you been thinking about then?” Christen asked.

“How much I fucked up.”
“Tobin…”

“I know we said not to talk about what we shouldn’t have done, but I need to say some stuff. It is the best way I can explain my thoughts and stuff. Can I ask you to sit there and just listen while I vent?” Tobin asked, shyly.

Christen, moved, nodded and smiled. “Okay.”

Tobin took a deep breath. And then she paused. “Wait, I have notes and a letter I wrote. I was going to get Mal to sneak it across if you didn't want to talk.” She jumped up and grabbed the note pad before coming back across and sitting cross-legged with the pad in her lap. She put her glasses on and took a few deep breaths.

Christen could tell she was nervous. She reached across and put her hand on Tobin’s in a show of silent support.

Tobin smiled before she looked down and started reading.

“Christen.

I was being an idiot. And as always, you were right about that. I did like UNC and I honestly loved Berkeley. I didn’t like Stanford and UCLA gave me a weird feeling. You knew that, and you called me on it. However, I didn’t explain why I would still consider UCLA and that is what caused our fight. I’m sorry. But this is why.

I am not good with loss. I don’t like losing at soccer or scrabble. I don’t like losing in a running race to you even though you have always been, and will always be, faster than me. I just don’t like it.

And that’s because of this.

I lost everything in a day, and no one knows. And no one would ever find out if I could help it.

I don’t want to be known as the orphan. But I am.

I don’t want to be known as the last Montgomery. But I am.

I don’t want to be known as the quiet kid who gets into fights at school. But I am.

I don’t want to be known as the person who got so mad they don’t remember getting in a car and driving off in anger. But I am.

I want to be known as the kid who loves her sister. Because I am.

I want to be known as the kid who is great at soccer. Because I am.

I want to be known as the kid who is in love with Christen Annemarie Press and would do anything for her. Because I am.

I want to be known as the kid who found a new family but still mourns her old one. Because I am.

I lost everything in a day, and somehow found something almost as good almost immediately. And I still feel guilty about that.
I say almost as good because nothing can replace my Mum who had no idea about soccer but came to every single game with face paint on and cheered for me. Even when I was six and scored an own goal, she still cheered.

I say almost as good because nothing can replace my Dad who would take me camping and show me the stars. He would help me chart them in our own book and pin the drawings on my bedroom ceiling, so I had the stars with me when I slept.

I say almost as good because no one can replace Perry who would always steal my brussel sprouts and eat them, so I didn’t have to. Her only request was that I had to go hiking with her. Once a month she would take me to see something new. A lake, a canyon, a funny shaped tree. It could be anything, but it was our time.

I say almost as good because no one can replace Katie who read me a Harry Potter chapter every night. Even when she was at college, she would call and read it to me over the phone. Even though I could read them myself, it was our thing. We were going to go to the premier together before they died.

I say almost as good because no one can replace Jeff who taught me how to play the piano. He would sit with me every night he was home and teach me every trick he knew so I could pass my class. Because he was the only one who knew that I only took piano to be able to learn guitar. I had to learn piano before anything else. And I only wanted to learn guitar to be like him, so we went through it together.

I lost the five people closest to me and I will never get over that. But I found happiness.

I found Karen who took me in and let me go at my own pace. She doesn’t push, she just lets me figure out my own solutions. She’s my Mum. And I’m so proud to be her daughter.

I found Stacey who believed I was someone worthy of meeting Karen. Someone who believed in me and that I was more than the devastated girl with a broken leg and a broken heart. She’s Stacey, and one day I really hope to call her Mum too.

I found Cody who put on a horrible English accent the day I met him just to make me smile. He had to tell me the worst thing ever, but he gave me happiness and laughter very soon after. Don’t tell him, but I see him as my Dad and I really hope one day I can tell him that.

I found Channing who doesn’t judge. She didn’t judge me when I started crying while looking at the stars. She just put her arm around me and let me cry. She knows not to push me and how to calm me down if necessary. She’s my sister, and one day I hope that’s official.

I found Tyler who is my protector. From bullies or myself, she keeps me from getting hurt. She talks me out of bad decisions and ideas, but if I do it anyway, she helps pick up the pieces. She’s my big sister and one day I hope that she can officially call me her little one.

I found Mallory who is my angel. She is happiness personified and an amazing kid. I will do anything to make her smile. She sees only the good and that terrifies me. She is trusting and that terrifies me. But she is Mallory, my baby sister and I would walk to the end of the world for her every single day. She is my baby sister, and I cannot lose her.

I found Servando who is my brother. He will call me out and talk shit, but he will protect me, even from myself. He sees me, the real me, and talks to her. Not the grump or the overly excited one. Me. Tobin. He’s my brother and I need him.
I found you, Christen. I found a girl with wild curls, an amazing smile, brilliant sense of humour and lovely laugh. I found the girl of my dreams. The girl who knows that sometimes I don’t feel like talking and she says that’s okay. The girl who lets me curl up in the corner and cry when I can’t deal with everything at that particular moment. The girl who knows when to push and when to let me be. The girl who loves nothing more than make me smile stupidly in public because I just can’t help it because you make me so happy. I found the love of my life and I will not lose you. I am going to marry you one day if you let me, and I will be the happiest person in the world.

Christen, I found all this after losing everything. And I was terrified if I went away to school I would lose this too. I know it isn’t logical or right, but that’s how I felt in that car on the way home. I was scared that I had loved Berkeley so much that I would lose everything at home. If I was away from it all, they would forget about me.

I was so worked up that I couldn’t think, and it just came out in a mess of words and tears. I am sorry for saying you were mad I didn’t like Stanford. I don’t, but you know that, and you don’t care. You just want what’s best for me.

I don’t like losing anything and I was scared if I admitted that the school away from my new family was where I wanted to go, I would. We promised each other we would make the decision best for ourselves and I was trying to go back on that. I am sorry for that.

I cannot express how sorry I am for driving that day. I don’t remember getting in the car, which is even scarier. My emotions took over and I terrified you and everyone else. Thank you for convincing me to pull over. I can’t imagine how bad it could have been if I kept driving. I was pissed off that someone had hurt my sister. I know I cannot protect her from everything, but I want to. I know it isn’t my place, but god I wish it was.

However, in the last week, I realised something about my siblings. And writing this helped because I remembered all the good times.

They let me fight my own battles Christen. They would back me up and be there if I needed them, but I had to stand on my own two feet.

I used Mal as an excuse and that was unfair. Because I realised I can be a good sibling from a school 7 hours away because I had the best example to follow. My siblings. They would always be in my life even if physically they were a long way away.

Christen, I know that you loved Stanford and I know that school will do wonders for you. But that school isn’t for me. I will happily visit whenever I can though.

I’m putting this in writing. I do not like UCLA. I don’t know why; I just get a bad feeling. And Cody always says to trust your gut.

UNC is amazing, but I don’t think I can go there. Not because it’s a bad school or has a bad soccer program. It’s actually the opposite.

I can’t go there because all the positive’s I can find in UNC I can find in Berkeley. But Berkeley has something UNC doesn’t.

It’s seven hours from home if I drive. And 90 minutes if I fly.

And it’s one hour from Stanford. From you.

I can test myself but still be close. I am going on a tour again in October but after all my research and thinking, I believe Berkeley is the best choice for me. I just wish it didn’t take all this crap
I lost my head because I didn’t want to lose everything again. And I am sorry. But I found my head and followed it to what I believe is the best conclusion for me.

Christen, I hope this makes sense and helps you understand my thoughts and my brain. I love you.

Tobin.”

Tobin looked up from her lap and saw Christen sitting there fighting back tears. She herself had wet cheeks.

The younger teen sniffed. “I don’t know what to say to that.”

“Do you understand why I freaked?”

Christen nodded. “Yeah. I do. I’m sorry I didn’t realise earlier.”

Tobin shrugged. “I think I needed to figure this out myself. Writing this really helped me sort it out.”

“Maybe you should start journaling?” Christen suggested.

“Maybe.” Tobin looked at Christen. “Are we okay?”

Christen nodded. “We’re fine. Grounded, but fine. I think this week apart was good for us. I realised some stuff too.”

Tobin looked intrigued. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I realised that if UCLA was what you wanted, I would support you, even if I thought you were an idiot. Because I will always back you 100%, because you are my idiot and I can’t make decisions for you. At least, not the big ones. Maybe some fashion decisions though”.

Tobin grinned. “I promise to always be your idiot. But I also promise to think rationally about what’s best for me, and you. WWCD is looking like a sound strategy.”

Christen rolled her eyes and leant across to move the papers out of the way. She then dragged Tobin down to lie next to her. They held each other close and tight.

“I missed this Christen. I slept so badly this last week and a bit.” Tobin murmured in her ear.

“Me too. But we will have to get used to it for college.” Christen said quietly. “Right now, I’m not moving.”

“There might be a way around that actually.” Tobin said after ten minutes of comfortable silence.

Christen hummed. “What do you mean?”

“My family has a house in San Francisco. I looked it up, it’s about 30 minutes from both schools. Depending on traffic.” Tobin said.

“Okay…”

“Both Stanford and Berkeley expect students to live on campus as Freshman. However, they both have exceptions for married students.” Tobin said. “You know I always said I wanted to get
married before college, like my parents. It’s like it’s fate.”

“Yeah. We always said we would go after graduation.” Christen stated. “I’m still waiting for my ring.”

Tobin chuckled. “I have to officially ask your parents’ permission before I show you it. Then I have to propose.”

Christen sat bolt upright. “Wait, what?!?”

Tobin was confused. “Babe?”

“You have the ring?!” Christen screeched.

Tobin smiled. “I’ve had the ring ever since my birthday. Mum and Stacey took me shopping.”

“My Mum knows?!”

Tobin pulled Christen down on top of her. “Yes, now breathe.”

“How did I not know about this?” Christen asked wide-eyed.

“Because I can actually keep a secret if I want to.” Tobin joked. “Now can we have a nap before Mal and Mum get home? I’ve missed this and I’ll be re-grounded for another seven weeks and not get this again until November.”

Christen settled into Tobin’s side and exhaled. “I’ve missed this too.”

The pair were quiet and Tobin thought Christen had fallen asleep until she spoke again.

“Have you spoken to our Mum’s about our sex life?” Christen asked sleepily.

Tobin chuckled. “I was cornered at the café after I got the ring. They know it is still essentially non-existent. Heavy make-out sessions are as far as it goes.”

“Were they surprised?”

“No. I think they know we would talk to them before doing anything like that.”

“Good. Tobin?”

“Yeah babe?”

“I love you.”

Tobin grinned and kissed the girl. “I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

i'll be honest, i teared up writing this. if you needed tissues, know you aren't alone. That letter was hard to write and re-read. Let me know what you think please. Do you think Chris forgave her too quickly? Was there anything to forgive? Is Tobin making the right decisions? Any other questions
you want to give me answers to, let them lose.

ellaaa25 xoxo
August 29th, 2004

“Karen?”

The engineer looked up from her book and found Tobin standing in the doorway looking sheepish. “Yes Tobin?”

“Is there any way I can negotiate the terms of my grounding?”

Karen’s eyebrow shot up. “This should be good.”

Tobin smiled nervously. “I have two requests. The first is about my laptop and phone. I need them for school. I was hoping I could get them back.”

Karen smiled and put her book down. “What do you need them for exactly?”

Tobin looked confused. “Well my phone in case something happens. I can call you an-.”

“No electronics Tobin. Not until after the trip to Berkeley at the beginning of October. You will get your phone if you need it for a trip, and even then, if Christen is going, you don’t. Your laptop is barely used at school, for the first part of the year at least, and you can use the home computer.”
Karen explained. “It isn’t ideal or convenient for you, and that is the point. You are lucky Christen’s grounding ended yesterday and she can come here to hang out.”

Tobin sighed but nodded. “Okay. Second request. Can I ask that I am allowed to go and do some extra training with Serva and Christen? I want to keep getting pulled into national camps and the training before school with the school team isn’t enough, and club training isn’t intense anymore.”

Karen narrowed her eyes. “How many days a week do you train already?”

“Mondays and Wednesdays before school for Chadwick, Tuesday and Thursday evenings for club.”

“And that isn’t enough?” Karen asked. She called Tobin across to sit down so they could chat. “I just don’t want you over doing it and your schoolwork suffering. What were the three of you thinking?”

Tobin, seeing her Mum wasn’t shooting it down relaxed a touch and smiled. “Chadwick has a gym which we can use. They have a trainer that will set us up with a program to help us build muscle and strength but still let us grow and develop. We were thinking about going there Tuesday and Thursday mornings before class, say 7ish like training is. And do one outdoor session on Wednesdays after school.”

“You three want to train 7 times in four days? And play on Friday and Saturday?” Karen clarified.

Tobin nodded. “I know it sounds like a lot-“

“It sounds like too much.” Karen interjected.

“But we are able to balance it all. Christen and I have no trouble with the school work, Servando keeps up but we help him if he needs it. We don’t have jobs, so we just have this focus. I want to play football as a career, Serva and Chris still aren’t sure but we want to start working for it.”

“You were grounded from extra training Tobin.” Karen said softly.

“I know.”

“Why should I allow this? You are still allowed to go to the beach every morning with Ollie. If you add this in, you will be up at 5am every day of the week. And don’t forget you will be bringing Mal home after school on the bus.”

Tobin nodded. “Christen and I spoke about it last night when she came over. Getting up early just means going to bed earlier, which is fine because we will be tired. Tyler will drive Mal and Channing to school, but training isn’t till 5 so we can get the bus home and then go to the park to train. Mal trains on Wednesdays already, I would be there anyway because I always take Mal to soccer. She always comes to our training and plays on the side. Us training while Mal does, doesn’t add anything on time wise.”

“I don’t know Tobin, especially the early morning gym stuff. I just think you are pushing yourselves too much.” Karen said. “I will allow the Wednesday session, because you will already be there with Mallory. If you three don’t struggle, once your grounding is over, one gym session a morning could be a possibility. Again, I do not want you three pushing it and getting hurt.”

Tobin smiled. “Thank you. I’ll tell Chris if she comes over tonight.”

Karen smiled back. “You’re welcome, but if I see any slacking off with your schoolwork, it’s taken
back, and you can study while Mal trains.” It was a warning.

Tobin heard it loud and clear. “We won’t.”

“Good. Now help me with dinner. I was thinking tacos.” Karen said as she stood.

Tobin beamed. “That’s Mals favourite.”

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*September 8th, 2004*

Tobin was quiet, she always was during this time. Most of the school just thought she was moody and considering it coincided with the start of the school year, they had their own problems to deal with.

Servando and Christen were sure to keep an eye on Tobin but not crowd her. The anniversary was on a weekend this year and they were pretty sure that she would want to hide under her covers and not emerge. But this was also the first time they had soccer.

“Tobin?” Christens voice pierced through the silence.

She looked up from the textbook in front of her. “Yeah babe?”

“We have soccer on Saturday. I figured we would go to Mals game and then ours? We can go together and just chill. We can ask Karen if I can stay the night before too?”

Tobin frowned. “We still have soccer?” At Christens nod, she sighed. “I forgot.”

“That’s okay.” Christen said with a small smile before going back to her books.

It was quiet for a few minutes before Tobin spoke again, startling both Christen and Servando who had just joined them.

“Life doesn’t stop because of an anniversary. Even the shit ones.” Tobin grimaced. “Maybe it will be good for me. Get me out of my head.”

Christen and Servando didn’t comment but watched as Tobin settled back and worked on her assessment. They just looked at each other and shrugged.

They couldn’t really argue with it.

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*September 11th, 2004*

Tobin cheered her sister when she scored and clapped at all the right moments. She even laughed when Mal lined up a ball from ten metres away, ran up and air swung so hard she fell on her butt. But if Mal wasn’t close to the ball or on the field, she was reserved and quiet. She sat with Christens hand in hers and fiddled with the fingers to distract herself.
However, Tobin was a different person when she was playing. She was still trying all the tricks but got frustrated more easily if it didn’t happen. Little things got underneath her skin. She scored a goal and barely celebrated. She just pointed to the sky and smiled tightly before she was mobbed by her teammates.

Christen scored a double and Tobin set them both up. They were a dynamic and deadly duo which no one had figured out how to stop. They were 3-0 up with 15 minutes to go and the coach, aware something was wrong, pulled them both early. Tobin looked relieved when she came off, which worried him.

Her coach, Michael Stone, went and spoke with Karen after the game. Tobin had left the group and gone straight to her sister and was laughing at something she said. It looked like she was describing the game to Tobin. It was the first time Tobin had looked like herself.

“Is your kid okay? She hasn’t been herself this week.” Michael was concerned.

Karen sighed. “She will be. This is a tough time of year for her. This is the first time she has gone out in public on the anniversary.”

“What anniversary?” Michael asked.

“Tobin’s family were killed when the Towers went down. They were on one of the planes.” Karen said.

He paled. “Shit. I had no idea. I am so-“

“Don’t say sorry.” Karen interrupted. “It wasn’t your fault and so many people lost their lives. Tobin doesn’t tell anyone for a multitude of reasons, but she doesn’t want anyone’s pity. She has come a long way in three years, and this was a massive step for her.”

“I was just going to say sorry that I was unaware that this was such a hard time for her, and for your family. Is there anything I can do to help her, or you, out?”

Karen shook her head. “No. She will bounce back to being Tobin in a couple weeks. The first part of September is just shit.”

Michael nodded. “Okay.”

“Don’t treat her differently. She will never forgive you if you do. She just wants to be Tobin, the soccer player. Not the orphan who lost it all.”

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**September 26th, 2004**

Christen, Tobin, Servando, Channing and Tyler were all sitting on the couch in the Press living room, terrified.

Cody had just given them a presentation and a lecture about safe driving. Tobin felt about an inch tall, Christen’s eyes were wide, Servando looked sick, Channing was confused, and Tyler looked stunned.
Detective Press was passionate. “I will not let any of you become a statistic. And I will not let Mallory become a victim of your recklessness. Tyler and Servando, you have your licences. Tobin, yours will be returned to you on October 6th. Christen, you can get yours in December and Channing you have two years to wait. You will all be safe drivers. You will not let your emotions rule you. If you do, Tobin’s 8 week ban from driving will look like a day. I have seen too many accidents where lives are ruined because of stupid idiots behind the wheel.”

“I have told too many parents that their children are dead because of someone else’s actions behind the wheel, or their child own. I do not want to be on the other side of that conversation, or have to console your mothers after they hear it.”

“A car is a dangerous object. If you do not feel you are in the right state of mind to get behind the wheel, don’t. If you have been drinking, do not get behind the wheel. If you are tired, upset, overly anxious, distracted or your mind is not fully focused on driving, do not drive.”

Cody sighed. “I care too much about you all to let this go. If you have any questions, you are always allowed to come to me. Do not ever think you can’t. Your safety is paramount, and I will do all I can to ensure you all get to a very old age having lived very good lives. I will not allow an argument to cause havoc.” He turned to Christen and Tobin. “You two are two of the most mature teens I have ever met. Which is why I know if either of you get so worked up like you did that day, it will cause fireworks. I need you both to promise me that if you ever fight, argue, get upset, get overly emotional, whatever it is, that you do not get in a car. Your emotions will get in the way of making good decisions. Going away to college means you will be on your own in a way. You need to be aware of what you are feeling and what you do in response to that.”

Tobin and Christen just nodded, choosing not to verbally respond. There wasn’t much that they could say in response to that anyway.

October 1st, 2004

Tobin was knocked out cold in the middle seat of the plane with headphones on. Mal had the window seat and Karen was in the aisle.

“Mumma can I please –“

“No, you cannot wake your sister.” Karen said without looking up from her book. She knew her youngest would be pouting.

“But-“

“Mallory. The tablet she takes that helps her get on planes makes her sleepy. She cannot play with you. There is an hour left, you can manage to entertain yourself for an hour. You have your colouring books.”

About ten minutes later, Mallory spoke again.

“Mumma!” Karen turned and looked at her youngest. She looked very annoyed.

“Yes Mallory?”
Mallory sighed. “Why couldn’t Chrissy or Serva come with us?”

“They are flying up with Uncle Cody this afternoon after their physics test. Tobin’s was yesterday which is why we came early. You know this.”

“Will they be awake on the plane?”

Karen smiled to herself. “I’m sure they will be.”

Mallory just huffed and started fidgeting. “Papa has never been so boring.”

Karen snorted. “Better she is boring than freaking out.” Karen looked at her youngest briefly.

“Are you sure?” Mallory asked. “At least Tobi be entertaining.”

“Entertaining, Mallory.” Karen rolled her eyes. “And your sisters anxiety is not entertaining.”

“My friends love my Tobi stories. Her sleeping isn’t a good story.” Mallory sighed. “Mumma?”

Karen closed her book. She wasn’t going to finish the page, let alone the chapter. “Yes baby girl?” She leant forward so she could see across the drooling teen.

“Can I still call her Papa Tobi?”

“Do you still like calling her Papa Tobi?” Karen responded.

Mallory nodded wildly. “And Mama Press and Unca Serv.”

“If you still like calling them by those nicknames, of course you can. Why?”

“It isn’t silly? Dak at school said I was silly for calling them that. I said I could call them what I want cause they loved me.” Mal said matter-of-factly.

“I think this Dak at school is a bit silly. You can call them what you want.”

“Coco and Toto and Serva too?”

“Coco and Toto and Serva too.” Karen replied with a smile. “Besides, have you ever called them Christen, Tobin and Servando?”

Mallory frowned and shook her head. “I get tangled with my letters.”

Karen chuckled. “You will get there eventually Mallory. You are only six.”

Mallory just nodded before she looked down and started colouring again. Karen smiled before she sat back and opened her book.

Karen read for about five minutes but could hear Mallory getting antsy again. She didn’t acknowledge it, hoping the kid would settle herself down.

No luck.

“Mumma?”

“You cannot wake your sister up.”

“Damn it.”
“Mallory!” Karen sat forward and frowned at her youngest.

“Shit.”

Karen just facepalmed.

The family of three settled into the hotel room, with Tobin still feeling the effects of the tablet and crashing out quickly. The hotel was in San Francisco and Cody, Christen and Servando would be joining them in the early evening. The next day Karen would be taking Mal, Tobin and Servando to Berkeley while Cody and Christen went to visit Stanford.

Servando was looking at colleges and Berkeley was one that was on his radar. He gladly took the Pugh’s offer to join them for this weekend, so his parents didn’t have to stress about it.

On the Sunday, the group would be going to look at Tobin’s families house and see if it was suitable for the pair to live in during the school year or for any family to stay in when they were visiting.

Tobin was still asleep in the far bed when the group arrived. Mal ran at the teens who were awake and started complaining about how boring Tobin was, much to everyone’s amusement. They could tell she wasn’t too upset because she ensured that she didn’t raise her voice and wake her up.

Cody looked at Karen with a quizzical expression. “Tobin didn’t react well to the tablet?” He asked quietly so the kids didn’t hear.

Karen shook her head. “No that was all fine. She didn’t sleep last night. I heard her pacing in her room from about 2am. She needs the rest, the tablet just helped her along.”

“Worried?”

“I think nervous is a better word. Considering what happened the last time they were up here. And I think this tour will just solidify the decision she’s made in her mind.”

Cody looked confused. “What decision?”

“That Berkeley is where she wants to go. Cody, she has a binder of information about the school.” Karen said quietly.

“That’s a Christen move.” Karen nodded. “I did not expect that. Has she decided on what she wants to study? Because Christen wants to do a double in the Arts and Humanities section. I think it was Communications and Economics.”

“Tobin is really liking the look of a science one.” Karen said.

Cody frowned. “Not Business?”

Karen shrugged. “There is a Management, Entrepreneurship and Technology program. Gives you two Bachelor of Science degrees. They combine engineering and Tobin’s love of fixing and fiddling with business. She is going to talk to them about it tomorrow.”

“Engineering? Tobin? Really?” Cody was astounded.

Karen chuckled. “Cody, do you know what few subjects Tobin beats Christen in and actually puts
effort into?”

“Art and Sport?”

“Chemistry, physics, computer science and maths.” Karen smiled. “She’s a math nerd.”

Cody looked absolutely thrown. “Actually?”

Karen nodded. “Christen can talk and communicate and does all the English based subjects very well. Tobin is more of the behind the scenes kid and just goes through unnoticed. How did you think she was getting to second in the year?”

“I thought she was so far ahead in art and sport that her academics were just above average! I haven’t even seen her study!” Cody exclaimed.

Karen snorted. “They study in Tobin’s room. Like actually study. She only complains about English and History because we make her do it before the science stuff. Gives her some motivation to actually complete it.”

Cody just shook his head. “How did I not know this?”

“I have no idea. She tutored Tyler in chemistry for her finals last year.”

“WHAT?!”

Tobin jerked awake at the outburst.

Mallory lost it.

"WHY WAS UNCLE CODY ALLOWED TO WAKE HER UP?!" Mallory yelled before running and jumping on her still half asleep sister. "Can you play with me now?!"

"Huh?" Tobin looked across the room. "What is happening? When did everyone get here?"

Karen frowned at the detective. "Thanks Cody."

Cody looked sheepish. "Oops?"

Chapter End Notes

met . berkeley . edu - take out the spaces and you get tobin's program - yes, i am very aware that it probably wasnt available 16 years ago. i do not care because I like the degree. I would do that degree. It may have been under another name though - leaning towards the electrical engineering and computer science + business one.

exploredegrees . stanford . edu / schoolofhumanitiesandsciences/ - Christens double major of economics and communications

i have no idea how the american school system works. no clue. Like with credits and class loads (thank you twinofsarah for pointing out I did not explain why I had no idea) tbh the aussie system is weird too and every uni has their own system. I’ll do my best to make it as realistic as possible but my experiences are so different and google can
only tell me so much.

anyway, thoughts? ideas? questions? comments? rants?

Edit; legit just this comment cause I was a bit sharp and snarky when I said I don’t care. I really do. I’ve just had a shit time lately and when I wrote this i didn’t think. Sorry -

TwinOfSarah Made a great point about following reality. I legit killed off Tobins whole family - this is fiction based off live ppl.
I’m not Following reality cause it’s fiction. but I like taking inspiration and making it realistic. So this is a callout- I don’t know much about your college system. Particularly the class load and timetables, when sport is played, etc. if you want, can you send me some? Just drop a comment with some info so I have a greater view point. Please?

TwinofSarah - the real mvp at this moment- cheers for the info in every story, I really love it and it helps. Often I go back and change it because I now know more. Thanks, really
Ineedacodename - dacb972 - ayeesh - you guys comment all the time and it makes my day - you guys are brilliant and I save every comment and read them in a shit moment,

Everyone else who comments and reads thIs or my other stories or left kudos, thank you. I read them even if I don’t reply all the time.

Right, take two, I’m exhausted and feel like crap so I’m going to bed. Sorry this got emotional. I’m so out of it.
Tours

Chapter Summary

Tobin and Christen go on a tour of their prospective schools.

Chapter Notes

After a four hour drive to get to the matildas, I watch a 5-0 win which was brilliant. I missed the US game (bloody uni) but I still saw that epic goal from Christen. HOLY SHIT! the ponytail tug, not on - i’m going to watch the recorded game when I get home. heard it was an absolute cracker!

This is up finally, thankfully (been a nightmare) . Let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

October 2nd, 2004 - Berkeley

Karen could see how happy Tobin was on the tour of Berkeley. It was a private tour and only the four of them were on it. It allowed them to look at what they wanted to, have no qualms about asking questions and the guide, an upperclassmen who was actually taking the program Tobin was interested in, spent an hour talking them through the nuances of the degree and what would be expected of them.

Tobin was in her element. She was letting her inner nerd show but Karen could also tell she didn’t feel as though she had to know everything, and she could ask questions. Tobin had told her Mum that Stanford made her feel as if she had to have all the answers otherwise it wasn’t good enough. Here she felt as though she the opportunity to grow and learn at her pace, not at the universities.

Servando liked the school and the grounds, but he knew he would go into any degree with an undeclared major and see what he found. He was looking at the overall vibe and feel of the college, rather than anything else. He did agree with Tobin about Stanford. It fit Christen to a tee. She would thrive in that environment. He wouldn’t.

Mallory was regretting her decision to come on the trip. She was bored. She was told there would be soccer but there was no soccer! She spent whole tour pouting and kicking the floor, looking for attention. They ignored her, knowing it would pick up soon.

The tour was coming to an end, and they were standing outside the athletic centre. The guide turned and smiled. “I really hope you come to Cal Tobin. You seem to be the perfect fit for our program. However, I know nothing about sports so the head of the athletic programs will be here in a few minutes. Apparently there is another player doing a tour of our school and they want to do the soccer tour together.”

He turned and left them be, and Mallory pounced. “Tobi, can we play soccer please?”
Tobin chuckled. “Not yet. We don’t have a ball kiddo.”

“Urgh!” Mallory groaned as she ran and jumped onto Tobin’s back, but she was expecting it and turned, catching her easily. “You bored Mal?”

“So bored. This is not fun.”

“You didn’t like the school?” Tobin asked.

She shrugged. “It’s pretty and your happy, so I guess it’s okay.”

“But…”

She huffed. “Where’s the soccer? I want to play soccer.”

Before anyone could reply, Servando uncharacteristically swore in front of Karen. “Shit.”

“Servando?” Karen was astounded.

“Karen, how do I look?” He asked quickly.

She arched an eyebrow before moving forward to adjust his collar. “Very smart. Why?”

“Well –“

“Tobin?” A voice called.

The group turned and found what must have been the other tour group. The student in question was none other than Alex Morgan.

Tobin grinned. “Alex! Hey!”

Alex and Tobin walked forward and hugged, even with Mallory still pouting in Tobin’s arms. “Kiddo, you are six. Can you get down so I can talk to my friend.”

“You said there would be soccer. Till there is soccer, I’m going to annoy you.” Mallory said stubbornly.

Alex chuckled. “At least you aren’t crying this time.”

Tobin just rolled her eyes. “Alex, this is Mal, my mum Karen and best friend Servando.”


“Stanford tour.”

“Scandalous. Two-star soccer players, a couple, at two rival schools! How dare they?” Alex exclaimed before she laughed. “Tobin, this is my Mum, Pamela and Dad, Michael.”

The adults all introduced themselves and the teens and Mallory spoke amongst themselves. Servando was uncharacteristically tongue-tied around Alex and the girl noticed. She got a slight blush on her face as well as a happy smile.

“Are you in your Junior year as well Alex?” Karen asked.

She nodded. “Yeah. My birthday is in the Summer, so I got sent early. I think I got kicked out of
pre-school to be honest. I was ready to go to school.”

Tobin chuckled but then groaned. “Does that mean I am the only one whose birthday is actually going to be in finals time? That is not fair.”

Before anyone could respond, the head of athletics came out to greet them. “Alright. Who wants to go see where the magic happens?”

Mal saw he had soccer gear on and gasped. “You mean soccer?”

He grinned. “I do.”

She dropped out of Tobin’s arms so fast the teen lost her balance. “Mal!”

Mal just grabbed Tobin and Servando by the hands and started dragging them forward. “It’s soccer time Tobi! We get to be a superstar!”

The adults and Alex just laughed and followed them. The director was laughing. “This should be great. Kids are hilarious.”

October 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2004 – Stanford

Christen was buzzing. They had just come out of a first-year class, Economics 101, and Cody couldn’t believe how excited she was about Economics of all things. “That made sense to you?”

Christen nodded and followed her tour group. “I covered it in class very briefly the other day, but that was so much more in-depth. But it still made sense!”

Cody grinned. “A bit happy are we?”

“They pushed it along and you had to keep up. You had to be prepared otherwise it would be harder for you! This may be the one place where my planning will actually be celebrated!”

Christen was bouncing.

“What about the communications class?”

Christen shrugged. “That has more freedom because there is more room for individuality and different perspectives. Less structure and more interpretation. Econ you have to know the content. Comms, you have to know how to apply the content. But, I reckon you can probably talk your way through anything in it. Econ is fact.”

“But you still want to do both?”

Christen nodded. “Oh yeah. They are two totally different challenges to conquer. But will work well for, you know,” Christen looked around to make sure no one was looking before she whispered to her dad, “the future.”

Cody rolled his eyes and whispered back. “I think everyone is thinking about the future Christen.”

She elbowed him, grinning. “You know what I mean.”

He sobered. “I do. And I think they suit you well.”
“Thanks Dad.”

The two followed the group and continued the tour before it merged with the students who were thinking about the engineering program. Christen and Cody were minding their own business at the back when an arm was thrown over the teens shoulders.

“What the-“

“Christen Press, in the flesh. I can’t believe you are here! Where is the girlfriend?” This random person asked.

“Who the hell are you?!” Christen exclaimed.

The girl pouted and put her other hand over her heart. “I am hurt. How did Tobin never mention me? We spent three weeks together at camp and she talked about you all the damn time, but she never mentioned me? The fun, the pranks, the jo-“

“Oh! You’re Kelley! The human incarnation of a bouncy ball!”

Kelley looked taken aback. “That’s how she described me?”

Christen nodded.

She shrugged. “I’ve heard worse.”

“Tobin’s given people worse. How did you know who I was? And where are your parents?”

Kelley chuckled. “They are hiding at the back, probably blushing and slightly amused at my impulsive behaviour. And, we stole Tobin’s phone and went through her photos on camp. Naeher for MVP after that effort. Almost all of them had you, her sister, a soccer ball or her dog in them. And the fact she never shut up about you once we got her talking.”

Christen blushed. “Really?”

Kelley nodded. “Your girl is really in love. Are you headed to the soccer fields after?”

Christen nodded. “Yeah. They have this tour for me apparently.”

“Me too! Maybe they are putting us together for the tour? That’ll be cool. Someone I actually know.”

“Do you though? Know me?” Christen asked.

Kelley shrugged. “More than anyone else here.”

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_Berkeley_

“Your sister is worse than Kelley!” Alex exclaimed. The six-year-old was bouncing around the facilities and asking more questions than three teenagers who were actually interested in the school.

Tobin shrugged. “You’ve seen her crying and you’ve seen her overly excited. This is more her normal than the crying, but you get used to it.”
“Does that mean you are babysitting Kelley at our next camp?”

“Oh, hell no! I have to deal with Mallory! I need a break.”

The two chuckled and put their attention back on the director. He seemed like a good guy and was going through the perks of their program. He had run back to his office to grab their folders and he suddenly paused in his talk.

“Tobin?”

“Yeah?”

“Two questions. What’s name you go by?” He asked.

Tobin groaned. “Do you have my long one on there?”

He nodded. “Requirements are that we have your full legal name on all the enrolment forms and scholarship stuff. But, when, and I am saying when because I really want you here.” The group chuckled. “When you enrol, you can put what you are known as. At school, what name do you go by?”

“Heath.”

“Right. If you went by that here, all the teachers, TA’s, lecturers, markers, whatever, will see Tobin Heath on their roll and that’s it. They won’t see Tobin Powell Pugh-Heath-Montgomery at all. The system will automatically change it for them. Your transcripts and stuff from the Uni will be under your full name, but you won’t need to write it out except when you enrol.”

“Seriously?”

He nodded. “Your legal name will be in the system, but you won’t get weird looks by every single tutor or teacher you have. I’ll know cause it’s an athletic scholarship, admissions will know, and the dean will know if he cares to look.”

“Cool. That’s really helpful.” Tobin smiled. “You said two questions though?”

He looked sheepish. “Yeah. Please tell me we sent you a full scholarship offer?”

“Oh no. I think it was a half.”

“Shit. Damn assistant.” He smiled tightly. “We recently dismissed one of the assistants in admissions, who kept making mistakes. One was with the scholarships. He sent a few to the wrong people or with the wrong offer. Looking at this, yours was one.”

Tobin looked stunned. “Oh.”

“Yeah. I’ve been going through all the students who were offered and scholarships and have had to resend half of them. Do you know how hard it is telling a kid that the full scholarship they were offered was meant to go to someone else? It’s horrible.”

The group was quiet. The director smiled tightly. “I will give you your fresh packet at the end of the tour. But first, I think we should go see the field.”

“Finally!” Mal exclaimed.

“Mallory Diane Pugh! Patience please!” Karen said sternly.
Mal pouted. “But it’s finally soccer time. I’ve been sooo good Mumma!”

Alex took pity on the pout. “Come on kiddo. We can go together.” She put her hand out for the kid to hold.

Mal did eagerly. “Cool. But you can’t call me Kiddo. That’s Tobi’s name for me.”

“Oh yeah?” Alex asked as they walked away.

Mal nodded excitedly. “Serva’s is Princess. And Chrissy changes between Kiddo and Kid, but it’s mostly Kid.”

“What do you want me to call you then?” Alex asked eagerly. Mal got a look of intense concentration on her face. Alex gasped. “What about Superstar? I heard that you will be better than Tobin, and she is a star. So you have to be a Superstar!”

Mal’s eyes went wide. “Cool! You’re so cool!”

The two caught sight of the pitch and Mal took off running, dragging her knew friend off with her. Tobin was standing with Servando, chuckling.

“Hey Serv?”

The teen seemed to jump. “Yeah Tobs?”

“You’ve got a bit of drool…” She pointed to her cheek.

“Shut up.” He grumbled and took off jogging after the two, wiping his face. Tobin went after him.

“Payback time. You have given me shit for so long.” She mumbled to herself, chuckling all the way.

Stanford

Kelley and Christen were laughing their heads off as they walked around the field. Cody was with her parents at the tunnel and they were chatting about their kids.

“You mean to say that Tobin, ridiculously laid-back Tobin, got into a fight? And you jumped in?”

Christen nodded, chuckling. “I tried to pull her out and got pushed on my ass. That was the extent I got into it. We laugh now, but she broke a line-backers nose in her freshman year. She got beat up and broke her hand, but she is kinda proud of it.”

“Remind me to never insult you, not that I would, but I like my nose the way it is.” Kelley deadpanned for cracking up.

Christen shrugged. “I think she is on a violence free path now. Yoga or surfing every day. She is trying to really be chill for a bit.”

“Where is she anyway? I’ve tried messaging her and she hasn’t got back to us in months.”

“Oh, she’s at Berkeley on a tour. And she’s been grounded for two months”

Kelley’s eyebrows shot up. “She got a full offer from UNC. How has she not taken that and run? And what did she do?”
“She doesn’t fly well. And what she did is something we aren’t discussing.” Christen kept the explanation short.

Kelley sensed that it wasn’t something Christen would elaborate on, so she continued. “You two could only be an hour apart. And playing for rivals.”

Christen nodded. “We know. But that is basically just till December and the NCAA tournament is finished. Then we are college students, not soccer players and college students.”

“What do you mean?”

Christen smiled. “I was doing research—”

Cough*NERD*cough.

Christen elbowed the girl. “Do you want to know?”

“Sorry.” She was not sorry.

“The season is basically two games a week, Sunday and Tuesday for some god-awful reason, till the middle of November. Then the Tournament, then in the New Year nothing. We may be travelling different places for the games, and they will probably fill up our Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays with classes for the first semester, but come January, it’ll be a big load off. We’ll manage for the first few months. And, it’s not too far apart.”

Kelley whistled. “Damn. How do you know all that?”

Christen shrugged. “Nerd.”

“No. You have an actual plan on how to work with the information. That’s more than being a nerd. That’s being organised.” She gasped. “Oh my god! Do you have a planner?”

Christen blushed. “Shut up Kelley.”

“You do! Can I please insist you are my roommate? You will keep me on track of everything!”

“Who says I’m living on campus? Maybe I’ll live with Tobin.”

Kelley scoffed. “You have to be on campus. At least for freshman year. Even I know that.”

Christen just cocked her eyebrow. “Really? There are no exceptions?”

Kelley shook her head before she jumped for joy. “I knew something you didn’t! I’m a genius!” She ran across the field yelling that she was a genius, making the adults on the other side laugh. Christen just shook her head and grinned knowingly.

By the time she had gotten across the other side, Kelley had calmed slightly. Cody smiled at his daughter. “I invited the O’Hara’s to dinner with us in the city. I told Karen. Apparently Mal has made a friend who calls her Superstar and refuses to be parted from her, so they are joining as well. There will be a dozen of us for dinner.”

Christen just chuckled. “That girl makes friends with everyone!”
Dinner was loud. There was no other way to put it. The six adults, five teens and one Mallory made a lot of noise.

Mal insisted she sat next to Alex, and Servando claimed Alex’s other side much to Tobin’s amusement. Christen in between Tobin and Kelley on the other side of the table facing them. The adults tried to ignore the banter happening at the other end of the table, but it was not easy.

Kelley was debating with Mallory what she could call her. “If everyone else gives you a nickname, I should too!” It was an on and off debate, with Kelley throwing names across the table and Mallory declining them. Mallory kept turning every option down and Tobin could see the 6-year-old was playing her. She knew she had a name she liked in mind and was waiting for Kelley to pick it so she could be called that.

“Squirrel?”

“No.”

“Angel?”

“Ew.”

“Boo?”

“Why?”

“Who doesn’t like peek-a-boo?!”

It was causing endless amounts of entertainment for everyone.

The teens were discussing the tours and their thoughts. Kelley was set on Stanford while Christen diplomatically said more research was needed but it was in a good position. She got good-hearted jeers for that response. She rolled her eyes and admitted almost nothing could make her say no. Stanford was her number one.

Alex liked Cal but was still looking. However, it was her front-runner by a mile so far.

Servando just shrugged. He wasn’t debating scholarships, he had to go through the application process. But Cal had a good vibe.

Tobin looked up from chicken and smiled. “I think it’s perfect for me to be honest.”

The table grinned and cheered, the same they had for Kelley, when Alex suddenly gasped.

“What?”

Alex started bouncing in her seat and flapping her hands excitedly. “You have to go to school with the Montgomery part of your last name! Please?!”

Tobin was confounded. “Why?” She asked warily.

“We could be roommates! Morgan and Montgomery are so close together. It would be perfect!”

Tobin relaxed and Karen did too. “But I’ve been known as Heath since I was in middle school. It’s natural for me.”

“But Tobin. Listen to reason. You could get stuck with a horrible roommate. We just need to go to
the athletic guy and tell him we need to be paired together and our names are close enough it doesn’t matter!” Alex bargained.

“I think it is just randomly allocated Alex.” Tobin said with a grin. “Besides, who says I’m living on campus? If I go to Cal and Chris goes to Stanford, we can live together.”

In unison, Kelley and Alex spoke. “Freshman have to live on campus.”

Tobin looked at her girlfriend with a question in her eyes. Christen grinned. “Tell them. I want to see their reactions.”

Tobin looked between the pair and spoke clearly. “There is an exception to that rule if you are married.”

The two soccer players frowned before their jaws dropped. “WHAT!” Kelley screeched.

“You sound like a bird.” Mal deadpanned.

“Shut it chicken.”

“I’m not Chicken!”

Alex shushed Kelley and Mal. “You two are getting married?”

Christen and Tobin smiled shyly. Christen spoke for the both of them. “It’s been discussed. Let’s just leave it there for now.”

“It’s fine Chris.” Tobin said, surprising everyone. She shrugged and spoke quietly. “My parents always told all these stories about how they knew they found the one. They got married before college and always had these grand adventures together. I always said if I found the one, I’d do the same. After they died and I moved in next to Chris, it was like a sign. My siblings never found their one. I was lucky enough to. I’m not letting her go.”

The group was quiet until Pamela sniffed. “That’s very lovely Tobin. You and Christen suit each other very well.”

“Thanks Mrs Morgan.”

Pamela smiled. “It’s Pamela dear. I have a feeling you will be putting up with my youngest for many years to come, so you can call me Pamela.”

“Oi!”

Tobin smiled and nodded before ducking her head. She only looked up when she felt a kick from Kelley.

“What?”

Kelley was bouncing in her seat. “Can we come to the wedding?!”

Tobin rolled her eyes. “I guess? I haven’t even asked her yet.”

“Ask her now.”

“No Kelley.”
“But-“

“Kelley.” Her dad, Dan warned. “Leave them be.”

Kelley sat back and pouted. Mal giggled. Kelley glared playfully at her. “What’s so funny?”

“You got in trouble. You got ‘the voice’. I only see Toto get in trouble and get the voice. It’s weird it’s not Tobi.” Mal explained.

Tobin groaned and the table laughed. Kelley saw an opening and took it. “Oh yeah? What did she do to get the voice?”

“Well, the first ti-“

“That’s enough Mallory.” Karen said.

“But Mumma!”

“Let’s leave Tobin alone huh?”

Mallory climbed out of her chair and over Cody to get to Karen. “But it’s a good story! It’s my friends favourite Tobi story!”

“Oh my god she is like a monkey the way she climbs and latches on.” Alex exclaimed.

Kelley slammed her hand on the table. “That’s it! You’re Monkey!”

Mal grinned. “I like that one.” Kelley jumped up and cheered, running around the table like an absolute psycho.

Tobin groaned and turned to her girlfriend. “Oh god what have we done?”

Christen laughed in response. "Match made in heaven those two." She whispered as she leant across. "Mal has a friend who acts her age!"

October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004

Tobin stood outside the house, stunned. “I thought it would be an apartment.”

Christen held her hand. “Haven’t you been here before?”

“No, I only lived in the Jersey house, New York one and the home in LA. I’ve never been up to San Francisco before we came to look at schools.”

The house was a three-story townhouse with a basement as well. The top floor was the master bedroom and en-suite. It took up the entire floor. The middle floor had four bedrooms and two other bathrooms, as well as small living area. The bottom floor had a lounge room, kitchen, dining room and study. Essentially all the public areas of the house were on the main floor. The basement held the laundry and another small bedroom and bathroom.

Tobin and Christen walked through the house alone to start with. The other four had stayed at a café down the street until they got a message that they were ready to be joined. They assumed Tobin would be emotional.

She wasn’t. There was no connection to the house, it was empty of everything and she had never
been there before. They were walking through an empty house hand in hand.

“You okay?”

Tobin shrugged. “My parents and my family owned a lot of stuff. If I was going through the Jersey or New York home, I’d be a mess. There’s memories and stuff there. This, this is just an empty shell. I don’t know if that’s good or not.”

Christen just held her hand tighter. She led her to sit on the floor of what was meant to be the master bedroom. “Do you think we could live here?”

“We could, but it’s a lot for two people Chris.” Tobin said. “I’d prefer an apartment where we used all the space than this, but there are upsides. Almost everyone who came to see us would have their own room, but for two people? It’s massive.”

Tobin and Christen sat in silence for a bit. Christen could tell the older teen was thinking something through.

About ten minutes later, Tobin spoke. “Do you think your parents would allow you to live both on campus and here? Split time during the season? We don’t have to pay for anything here.”

“Why?”

Tobin shrugged. “Because some nights it may be really convenient to be on campus, like the night before a 7am class or if it is a class that doesn’t finish until 8pm. I was talking to the tour guide and apparently Berkeley try to cram all the classes into the three days we are on campus for the sports students. January it changes again, but while we are playing, they ensure nothing clashes. It just means we probably get shittier time slots to fit it all in.”

Christen frowned. “So, you want us to split time between the dorms and here?”

“Just for soccer season, or until we adjust to the schedules. After that we can live here to our hearts content.”

“That could be a hard sell Tobin. I think it would be one or the other.” Christen said quietly.

Tobin sighed. “I know. But I want to live with you and make sure we manage with school okay. Maybe spending some nights apart is best for the school side of it.”

Christen smiled. “Let’s think about it a bit more, okay? And we can always ask. The worst thing they can do is say no.”

Tobin nodded.

“I’ll text Dad and get them to come have a look. I think they will be surprised.”

“Me too.”

Tobin looked flat. Christen just leant across and kissed her on the cheek. “We’ll figure it out Tobin. One day, we will have it all I am sure.”

“What’s your ‘all’ look like?” Tobin asked.

Christen shrugged. “Honestly? You, me, a few kids and being happy with our family. They are the constants. Soccer will come and go, your families business will always be in the background. But us, the kids, the dogs and the happiness always stay constant.”
Tobin smiled. “That sounds perfect.”

October 9th, 2004

“Karen!”

The engineer turned to see Tobin’s coach, Michael Stone, jogging across to see her. He was smiling.

“What’s Tobin done now?” Karen asked with a wry grin.

“Oh nothing! She’s been fine. I wanted to say just that actually. Towards the end of September, she was coming back out of her shell, but this last week she’s been Tobin again.”

Karen smiled. “That’s good to hear. I haven’t heard the same from her school, but they seem to just want to tell me when she’s a pain.”

“What do you mean?”

She sighed. “You are the first of Tobin’s coaches or teaches who have actually asked if she was okay and wondered what was going on. You asked how you could help. The others, especially the teachers at the beginning of the year, send emails saying Tobin needs to be more engaged and vocal in class and that pouting because the holidays are over isn’t necessary. They just see she isn’t paying attention or not as involved and assume she just doesn’t care. When she perks up a few weeks later, I don’t hear a thing.”

Michael frowned. “That’s shitty of them.”

“I get they have a lot of students and they expect a lot of Tobin, but they never asked why. You are the first person who did. And you haven’t treated her differently which is even better. So, thank you.” Karen said with a small smile.

“You never have to thank me for that. She’s a good kid.”

Karen grinned before her eyes went wide. “She is. But right now, I need to make sure she doesn’t do something stupid because of her sister. TOBIN! STOP!”

Michael turned to see Tobin running with Mal on her shoulders. Normally that would be a regular occurrence, but this time Mal was covering Tobin’s eyes and she was about ten yards from running into a post.

Mal moved her hands at Karen’s yell and Tobin screeched before skidding to a halt. Mal cackled and giggled. “That was awesome!”

“You were meant to tell me where to go!” Tobin complained before she trod totted over to Christen and Channing who were looking at them with wide grins.

Karen sighed before she turned back to the coach. “They are a handful.”

Michael chuckled. “Let me know if you need anything. Even if it is just to keep an eye on Tobin.”

Karen nodded. “I will. Thank you.” She turned to walk away before she paused. She turned back to the coach.
“Tobin trusts you. And getting her trust is hard to do. Don’t take it for granted.”

“Does she know? That I know what happened to her family?”

Karen arched an eyebrow, surprised, before she nodded. “I told her a few days after. She just shrugged and said that it was fine. That she trusted you and you cared about her as a person, not just as a footballer. I wouldn’t bring it up with her, but she knows you know.”

Michael exhaled. “I won’t break her trust. Or yours.”

Karen smiled. “Good.”

November 17th, 2004

Mal stomped in the front door and Tobin was chuckling with Christen as they followed her in. She had been mad all afternoon and had been sent home early from soccer training for being too rough. She had been training with the U9 boys and was being too rough for them, much to her sisters amusement.

Karen was making dinner and turned when she got a poke in the back. “Yes Mallory?”

“I don’t want to be a present! I want to be an elf! Tell them I have to be an elf!”

Karen was terribly confused and looked at the two teens for an explanation. Tobin and Christen threw their hands up, having no idea what had her so mad. She hadn’t said anything about it. She just worked her frustration out at training.

Karen looked at her daughter. “What are you talking about?”

She frowned and stomped her foot. “The Christmas play! They are making me be a present and I have to sit under the tree! I want to play an elf!”

Karen was stunned but tried to hide it. “Did you tell them that?”

“Yes.”

“And what did they say?” Karen asked.

“That I didn’t have a choice!”

Karen frowned. “Did everyone just get given a role?”

“NO! The kids who do drama after school got the good bits! Cause they got to try! It’s not fair Mumma!” Mallory started tearing up and blubbering. “They didn’t let me try!” She burst into tears and Karen pulled her in for a tight hug.

Christen and Tobin both looked heartbroken for the girl.

“Oh honey. I’m sorry.”

Mal was hiccupping and crying while trying to talk. “But Mumma, wh-wh-wh-why?”

“I don’t know sweetheart. I just don’t.”

Karen kept consoling Mallory and talking to her quietly, trying to calm her down. The six-year-old
was trying to explain what she was feeling, and Karen did her best to keep her from crying uncontrollably. You could see she was livid and upset as well but was holding it back to ensure Mal felt heard and was the priority.

Christen and Tobin were standing back and just watching. Christen could see Tobin was tense. “Babe?”

Tobin shook her head. “I can’t help her.” She murmured. "It hurts."

“Let’s give them some space.” Christen pulled her by the hand and led her up the stairs. Tobin just followed along quietly. They sat down together on the bed and Tobin put her head in hands. Christen rubbed her back softly. “You okay?”

Tobin inhaled sharply before nodded. “I hate seeing her upset.”

Christen was quiet. She was just going to let Tobin talk.

“She was just grumpy and didn’t want to talk. She looked like I do when I am mad. It was adorable but I didn’t realise something had happened. I wonder why she didn’t want to tell me?”

Tobin sighed and flopped onto her back. “What do I do?”

Christen smiled softly. “You’re doing it now.”

Tobin frowned. Christen chuckled. “She needed her Mum. You gave her space and let her rant, and when she got home she saw her Mum and she told her everything. You did what you needed to.”

“Really?”

Christen nodded. “She’ll come to you when she needs cheering up. Right now, she needs her Mumma.”

When Mallory snuggled up with Tobin to watch a movie after dinner, Tobin stayed quiet. She just let Mallory lead the night and dictate what they wanted to do. By the time it was her bedtime, the kid was latched to her side. Karen was in the study sending emails off to ensure that she got some answers in the morning.

“Can I sleep with you tonight Papa?” Mal asked.

Tobin looked down at her and smiled. “Always. We can have a sister night.”

Mal grinned. “Cool.”

They set up a fort and slept in that rather than the bed. While they were joking and having fun, Tobin realised something.

Mal was her sister. She could make her smile and laugh and take her worries away to make it better. She didn’t have to go and confront the person who hurt her to help. She just had to be Papa Tobi.

Chapter End Notes
This is different to what I've written and I actually liked the way it came out. A bright light for this week and i really hope you enjoy.

Now, the edit is probs poor - apologies. Let me know if you see any big mistakes please? It's been a nightmare. Uni fucked up my course units and they won't update my enrollment, so i am stuck in the wrong classes and if it isn't fixed soon, i dont finish in June - Not happy
also, my computer is shite and i bought a new one.

But my old computer had problems, - it used to burn me and overheat, turn off, utter nightmare - and I had to transfer all my files off and then send it off to get fixed, before i spent $2K on a new one. Just set it up and transferred my files back. Thank god all my stories seem okay! And... i found some i had forgotten I'd started and finished. May just post them at some point if you'd like? Let me know!

I am trying this thing to keep perspective when stuff is shit and makes me stressed and anxious.

Positive's from this week though. - my laptop was in warranty by 16 DAYS! How good is that?! Hopefully they find its a piece of shit laptop and give me my money back to help cover the cost of the new one.

- I AM GETTING A PUPPY! He comes home next week, german shepherd pup. Name will probs be Crash! I feel like he is going to Crash head first into stuff like i do lol.

- I got a shout out at work from one of the teams i ref for being awesome. I also got cake.

- i got to watch the matildas.

Love you all and if you got to the end of this note, love you twice
ellaaa25
Tobin, Christen and Servando were on the fields kicking a ball around during their lunch break. The fields were the link between the three schools at Chadwick. The teens were joking and laughing with each other, while Christen was talking about this student.

“He was asking me out and Tobin is just sitting there, laughing silently, not helping me at all.”

“Zach is in middle school. I tutor him in chemistry, in my HOUSE, and he wanted you to go to the dance with him. He is harmless and he just wanted to go to the dance with someone he thought was cool. What was I meant to do? Go super protective? You hate it when I do that.” Tobin said, rolling her eyes at Servando.

Christen pouted. “I did feel mean turning him down.”

“He came to our session proud of himself for taking that step. I don’t think he thought you say yes, I just think he needed to try.” Tobin shrugged. “He’s a good kid.”

Servando giggled. “I still can’t believe Tobin tutors. It both makes no sense and is perfect at the same time.”

“Oli!” Tobin exclaimed, while Christen laughed. “Zach is awesome, he just has some troubles with chem. Mrs Ruth asked me to help him.”

“Really?”

Tobin nodded. “If he kicks ass on the exams after Christmas he doesn’t have to get tutoring anymore if he doesn’t want to.”

Servando grinned. “Good on him. You ever thought of being a teacher?”
“No. I think they would do my head in. I’d rather make stuff or blow it up. Or both.” Tobin shrugged. “But after soccer. Berkeley looks as though they will do everything they can to help me with both.”

“I’m glad you two made your choices. Stanford and Berkeley are good schools. Though, I will back Stanford in a football match.” Servando joked.

Christen and Tobin looked at each other and grinned. They had made the best decisions for them and even though there had been some tears and unfortunate events during the process, they had gotten there. Tobin knew that while Berkeley didn’t have the greatest footballing program, it was still a good one and the academic side of the college was exactly what she needed. Football would be a challenge and Tobin would only say this to Karen, but she needed one. She needed to push herself and play against the UNC’s and Stanford’s of the world. She wanted to.


There was a knock on the door to Mrs Ruth’s lab and Tobin barely noticed. She was in the zone. It was first period and her assessment was being demolished.

“Tobin?” Mrs Ruth’s voice was quiet. The teen put her goggles down and looked across, immediately frowning.

“Mallory? Are you okay?”

The six-year-old ran across the room and tackled the teen around the waist, sniffling. Tobin looked at her teacher, and the head of the primary school Mr Long, quizzically. “What’s happening?”

He gestured for the pair to join him outside. Once they were alone, he spoke. “We can’t get into contact with your mother.”

“She is flying home from New York. Something happened in the East Coast office and they needed her input. She is flying home now.”

Mr Long sighed. “Who is your next emergency contact?”

“It should be Stacey Press.” Mr Long took a note. “But you still haven’t told me what is happening? Why is my sister crying?”

“She is being sent home for the day.” Mr Long said.

“It’s the last day of school sir! She has the play this afternoon as well. It can't be that bad to punish her like that!” Tobin protested. Mallory just sniffed and hid further into Tobin’s side.

“That is the issue. She told the teacher in no uncertain terms she would not be in the play. Miss Sharp was very upset.”

“She is the one who didn’t give her a chance to be an elf.” Tobin countered.

“We didn’t tell her that the rest of year one was in it, not just the drama kids. That is on us as well.” Tobin sighed. “What did she say that was so bad?”

“I normally wouldn’t repeat this.” Mr Long looked Tobin dead in the eye. “She told Miss Sharp to
get fucked and stormed out of rehearsal. We found her at the gate to the high school fifteen minutes later. She was looking for you.”

Tobin closed her eyes and breathed deeply. She then knelt in front of her sister and got her to look at her. “Why did you say that Kiddo? You know that is a bad word.”

Mallory looked at her shoes and shrugged. “I dunno.”

Tobin didn’t believe her for a second and could tell that Mallory was hiding something. “You’re going to need better than that by the time Mumma comes home.” Tobin warned.

Mallory sighed. “It was so boring Tobi.”

“You can’t swear at a teacher, even if you are bored.”

“But I was the one who kept getting in trouble for talking when we all were cause it was boring. She was always putting me in the corner away from my friends. She was mean.” Mallory stomped her foot.

Tobin just smiled sadly. “I have to talk to Mr Long about how this is going to go. Because Mumma isn’t home to pick you up.”

“Aunt Stacey or Uncle Cody could come get me?” Mallory asked hopefully.

Tobin gave her a look. “They are both at work. Do you think they are going to be happy with you if they have to leave work?”

Mallory looked sheepish. Tobin stood and spoke to her principal. “How do we do this?”

“I need to call Mrs Press and see if she can come and pickup Mallory. She will sit in my office while she waits.”

“What if she can’t come?”

Mr Long shrugged. “We will cross that bridge if we get to it.”

Tobin managed to wrangle her way into being allowed to sit with Mallory in the principal’s office as they were waiting for Stacey. She was ahead in chemistry and her next period was study hall. The younger Pugh wasn’t very upset she was being sent home as it meant a day of no rehearsal for something she didn’t want to do anyway. Tobin spent most of the time trying to be the stern one when she knew that she was going to get into more trouble than anyone else when Karen got home. Karen was always talking to her about her language.

The door opened and Tyler walked through. She raised an eyebrow at the sisters. “How is it always a Pugh in trouble?”

Tobin scoffed. “That’s a bit rich. I know some stuff about you that contradicts that. Where’s your mum?”

Tyler smiled sadly. “Bad case. She is working with Dad. They’ll be home late.” Tobin’s face dropped. “She texted me. Luckily, I was at home from college yesterday. What happened?”

Tobin and Mr Long looked at Mallory with an expectant look. The six-year-old shrunk down and refused to talk. Mr Long sighed. “Miss Pugh decided to swear at her teacher and run to the high school to find her sister. Instead of putting it on her record, we thought going home early for the
“holidays would be a better course of action.”

Tyler snorted. “I know who that sounds like.”

“Tyler…” Tobin warned.

“Easy tiger. Mallory, get your bag. We have to let your sister get back to class.”

Mallory stood and put her bag on her back before walking across to Tyler. The eldest Press gave her an expectant look. Mal sighed and turned to Mr Long. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done what I did.”

“Thank you, Mallory. I hope when you come back after Christmas, we can forget all about this.”

She nodded. Tyler put her hand on the kids’ shoulder. “Let’s get home and we can figure out how to tell your Mumma.”

Mallory blanched and it caused Tobin to chuckle. “It can’t be worse than what I’ve had to deal with.”

“But you were bad.” Mallory said quietly. Tobin knelt in front of her and gently pushed her the hair off her face.

“I know. I was really bad, but you also did something bad. Promise me that you will tell mum exactly what happened. No lies. No secrets.”

Mallory hugged her. “I promise Papa.” She said quietly.

_____

Tobin got home after school and found Karen sitting at the kitchen table with a not impressed look on her face. Tobin smiled hopefully. “Hi?”

“Sit.”

Tobin sat immediately.

Karen sighed. “Your sister told me what happened. Tyler explained further. She is grounded for a week.”

Tobin nodded slowly. “Okay…”

“I need you to do me a favour. And Servando, Christen, Tyler and Channing. I’ll tell them too. Please, watch your language. It’s cute and funny when Mal is at home, even when we call her on it, she sees the reaction of someone giggling and it encourages her. Now, she is in trouble and she is stunned.”

“I’m sorry. Sometimes it just slips out. Especially when we play soccer.”

“I know. But please make a proper effort. We can’t have her telling teachers to fuck off.” Karen said quietly.

Tobin nodded. She then smiled at her Mum. “How was New York?”

Karen groaned. “That office needs someone to run it properly. It was in shambles. However, I do have some news.”
Tobin cocked an eyebrow. “Yeah?”

“I will have to make a few more trips to the other offices around the country. Once a month. They want me to assess the engineering departments.”

“Why?”

Karen smiled. “Because I was promoted. I'm essentially the head of the engineers now. At least the ones in my division. I can assess the others because of it.”

“Really? That’s great!” Tobin beamed and stood to hug her Mum.

Karen chuckled. “Thank you, Tobin. But that isn’t all.”

Tobin frowned. “That doesn’t sound good.”

Karen sighed. “The company is moving it’s head office. They are constructing a new building as we speak. It should be ready in a couple of years.”

“We have to move?” Tobin was confused.

“You will be at college up in San Francisco by then.” Karen reminded her. “But so will we.”

“Huh?”

“San Francisco is turning into a big tech hub and engineering firms are in high demand. We are trying to get on the front foot.” Karen smiled. “By Christmas of your Freshman year, Mallory and I should be up there with you.”

Tobin was stunned. Karen just chuckled. “I promise not to crimp your college lifestyle. Mal and I will have our own place, don’t stress. You and Christen can live in peace.”

Tobin shook herself. “Are you being serious?”

Karen nodded. “I haven’t told your sister, or anyone else, and I won’t for a while. Not until everything is official and organised. But I know how bad you are with surprises and secrets. I figured you could help me get it all organised?”

“You would trust me with that?”

Karen smiled. “Always.”

December 29th, 2004

It was Christen’s 16th birthday. The couple were lying together on Christen’s bed and relaxing when Tobin brought up a conversation, they had had many times before.

Marriage.

They practically pre-engaged and neither girl thought it was too soon. Their parents were aware that they had plans and what they were hoping to do.

Tobin’s parents had been married at 18 and all her childhood she had heard stories about their love
throughout high school. Her siblings had never been able to find someone who didn’t see past their wealth, but she felt the same way about Christen that her parents had about each other. However, they had greater obstacles than her parents had.

First, they were both women and there weren’t many places they could get married.

Secondly, Christen wouldn’t turn 18 for two more years. They would be halfway through their first year of college by then.

“Tobin, you still have to ask me before anything is decided.” Christen kissed Tobin on the shoulder and smiled. “I would marry you today, but we aren’t allowed until we are both 18.”

“What if Karen and your parents consented? Could we do it before then?” Tobin asked softly.

“Yea, but Tobi. We are only 16, they won’t allow it.”

“I don’t mean now. I was thinking the Summer before college. You will be 17 by then.” Tobin said quietly.

Christen sat up and leant across Tobin with a grin. “Doesn’t change the fact that you haven’t asked me yet.”

Tobin rolled her eyes and flipped them. “Are you expecting a cliché birthday proposal? Or a New Years one? You have to know I am way smoother than that!” Tobin joked.

Christen chuckled. “You’re too dorky to be smooth.”

“I have a super plan! I just, there is something I need to do first.” Tobin said quietly.

Christen smiled softly. “I will wait as long as you need. But I reserve the right to tease.”

Tobin nodded. “Okay. But I have to ask our parents something first.”

Tobin was pacing in front of the couch that their parents were sitting at. The three were bemused but knew the footballer wouldn’t say anything until she was ready. Christen sat on the armchair and curled up. This would be interesting. Tobin had left the bed quickly after their conversation and gone downstairs.

Tobin stopped suddenly and stared at the three most important adults in the world to her. “I want to marry Christen.” She blurted out.

Christen faced palmed. Classic Tobin start.

The three adults nodded and smiled. “We know. You have told us your plans many times. Before college.” Cody stated. He had been the hardest to bring around to the idea of his baby girl getting married.

“Yes, but I have to do something first.”

“Propose?” Stacey asked with a grin.

The three adults froze. That wasn’t expected.


Tobin looked at Christen and got a reassuring smile. She looked back at her family with a shrug. “I love you all so much. But there is a big part of me that is still locked up in a house in New York City. I need to go and face that part before anything happens. Embrace it maybe? At the very least, I need Chris to see it. And all of you, if you want?”

The three adults relaxed, happy that this was the way the conversation was turning. Karen took the lead. “Are you sure? It will be hard Tobin.”

She nodded. “I need to do this.”

“When?”

Tobin exhaled sharply. “Summer? I thought maybe we could make it a family holiday before Senior Year?”

Cody frowned. “Do you really want to wait that long?”

Tobin shrugged. “I want you all there with me. My new family finding out about my birth one. I will wait longer if I need to.”

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Questions? Comments? Rants?

i am sorry it is short - Updates are going to be weird. maybe out of order if i get inspired by one story in particular - I can't tell how life will be one day to the next. my mind isn't always in writing and it is slowing stuff down. Also watching more TV now than ever, mostly the news. I need my muse back!

Question: Would you prefer shorter updates more often (1000-2500 words i guess is short to me) or longer ones once they are ready? I cant guarantee anything but it would be cool to know what you think!

like everyone else, life isn't great right now but we'll manage. hopefully something positive comes through soon which makes people smile.

stay safe.
ellaaa25 xoxox
February 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2005

“They want me?” Christen was utterly stunned. Christen and Stacy were sitting on the beach together. She had just opened a letter and couldn’t believe her eyes. The US u18s wanted her for their next camp in March and she was blindsided. She hadn’t heard much except to hear that she was close for the U17s camp. The 18s was another kettle of fish.

Her Mum just smiled and nodded. “Yes baby. Why does that surprise you so much?”

Christen looked at her Mum and shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“You’ve been close before. This is your opportunity to put your name firmly in their minds for future camps. It’s a 18s camp, so you will be young, but who cares? Show them how great you are.”

“Did Tobin get a letter too?”

Stacey frowned. “I’m not sure. You aren’t thinking of not going if Tobin isn’t, are you?” Christen opened her mouth but Stacey spoke before she could answer. “Christen, you can’t make decisions for your life because of Tobin. You are going to separate colleges; you can go to this camp if Tobin isn’t.” Stacey chastised her daughter.

Christen rolled her eyes. “That isn’t what I was going to say.”

“Oh.” Stacey said with a questioning eye.

“I want to go. I want to see if I like playing soccer in a really competitive environment. If it is what I want to do with my life. Tobin is set on it, I’m not. It is one thing I love, but not the only one. I don’t know what to expect from the camp, but I want to go.” Christen handed the letter to her mum. “The camp is in Orlando. That is why I asked about Tobin. She hasn’t had to be on a plane without Karen or you since she moved next door.”

Stacey closed her eyes and exhaled slowly. “Oh.”
“Do you really think I would decline something just because Tobin wouldn’t be there?” Christen asked her mother. She was slightly insulted. Stacey looked at her daughter with a serious look. Christen scoffed. “You don’t know me at all then.”

“Christen, that isn’t what I am saying.” She looked her daughter in the eye. “I just worry. You two do so much together and even though I know you are very good at being rational and thinking logically, you are 16. I’ve seen Tobin explode when something happens that separates you.”

“That’s not me Mum. That’s Tobin. And she’s justified for her reaction.” Christen said softly.

Stacey sighed. “I know. She doesn’t want to lose anyone else. But you two are young and things can change so quickly. I just want to make sure neither of you misses out on something just because the other won’t be there.”

Christen huffed. “Have we given you any reason to believe that we will do that?” Stacey paused so Christen pressed on. “I love Tobin. I will marry her. But I won’t let being with her hold me back from doing something I want to. And she wouldn’t let me do that either. We want each other to do everything we can and if we are physically together, awesome. If not, we will miss each other but we will come back to each other. We talk about it. So much.”

Stacey sat back and looked across the ocean. “I’m your mother. I’m going to worry even if you are ridiculously mature.” She looked at her daughter. “I’m proud you got into this camp, and I know everyone will be too.”

Christen smiled. “Thanks Mum.”

Stacey hugged her daughter close and kissed her temple. She was about to start another conversation she had been meaning to have with Christen for a while. “While I’m proud that you are so mature, and have so many things for your future already sorted out, you are still 16. I can treat you like a teen, especially with Tobin, if I need to.”

“What do you mean?” Christen asked.

Stacey just rolled her eyes. “Sex. I’m talking about sex Christen.”

Christens eyes went wide. “Oh.”

“I know you two haven’t gotten that far yet, but I also know it will probably be sooner rather than later. And while you two are both women and there is no risk of pregnancy, it is still a big step.”

Christen nodded. “I know.”

“You’ve spoken about it?” It was a question but Stacey was fairly certain of the answer considering she had overhead them talking about it a few times.

“Yeah. It is a conversation that comes up more often now. Usually after a make-out session or something.” Christen blushed. “Tobin told me about the ring and that you spoke about our sex life.”

Stacey smiled. “That was months ago. I’m surprised she hasn’t done anything about proposing. But yes, we spoke about sex as well. Karen and I just wanted to see where you were at.”

Christen said quietly. “It’s getting closer, really close now actually, but we both want it to be special.”
“If it is with the right person, it is always special Christen.” Stacey said quietly. Christen blushed which made Stacey curious. “What?”

Christen bit the bullet. “We want privacy. We can’t get that at home.”

Stacey hid the grin that she wanted to show and kept a straight face. “What do you mean?”

Christen looked at her Mum and saw nothing but understanding and acceptance. “We have been really close, making out and shirts off, but then someone comes home, or yells, or something and it breaks this bubble and kills the mood. We want it to be special, and we want no one to be around when it happens. We can’t get that anywhere.”

Christen was blushing but she wasn’t shying away from the conversation. Stacey nodded for her daughter to continue.

Christen started fiddling with her fingers. “I was hoping that maybe we could go away for a weekend down the coast to a beach house we could rent. Just the two of us. Sometime soon.”

Stacey nodded. “Have you spoken to Tobin about this?”

Christen shrugged. “It’s been spoken of as a wish of mine but nothing she expects to happen. I was hoping to surprise her with it.” Christen shrugged. “I love her and I would wait forever, but I love her and I want to show her that too.”

“It’s a balance.” Stacey nodded. “I’ll talk to your father and Karen. But I don’t see it being an issue. I think your dad is probably ignoring the possibility to be honest.”

Christen chuckled. “Considering what Tyler did, I am not surprised.”

Stacey gave her daughter a look. “If you ever do what she did, I don’t even think being married to Tobin would save you from being grounded.”

Christen rolled her eyes. “We are not going to be having sex in the back of a car. Let alone be unlucky enough for Dad to be the one to find us.”

“Good.”

February 19th, 2005

“How on earth did you get our parents to allow us to rent a beach house in Newport for the weekend?” Tobin was lying on her back on the bed with her eyes closed. “This is amazing.”

Christen laid down next to her and sighed happily. “It wasn’t hard. I just had an honest conversation with Mum.”

“Oh yeah?”

“About sex.”

Tobin’s eyes opened immediately, and she sat up next to Christen. “Seriously?”

Christen nodded with a grin. “Yep.”
“And she allowed us to go away for the weekend? Knowing that?” Tobin asked.

“And spoke to your Mum and my Dad to make sure there were no issues with it.”

“That explains why your Dad gave me the look when we left this morning. I thought it was the ‘don’t be a stupid driver look’.” Tobin said, almost too herself.

“Oh it was definitely the ‘don’t hurt my daughter but I am not talking about sex’ look.” Christen joked.

Tobin grinned slightly and kissed Christen on the cheek. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Christen replied softly. “You know, we could just have a nice weekend away and not do anything. We don’t have to.”

Tobin chuckled. “I know. We can just see where the weekend takes us.”

Christen smiled. “They have surfboards we can use.”

Tobin jumped up immediately. “Awesome! Are you going to let me teach you?”

“No. I figured I would just watch. I don’t want to get sand anywhere that could be uncomfortable later on.”

Tobin felt very hot under the collar, especially since Christen was giving her a look which made her look very devious. The older teen just turned and started getting her swimmers ready while Christen giggled. She was very happy she had gotten that reaction out of Tobin. It bode well for the weekend.

Very few people knew that Tobin and Christen could cook. It was something Tobin had started doing when she got to the Pugh’s and she was looking after Mallory. Christen had always helped her Mum cook, so between the two of them they were able to make a decent meal.

After the day of travel, surfing and exploring the beach and cliffs, the pair cooked together. A very simple meal of spaghetti bolognaise, and as much as they joked they should have wine with it, they drank water. Neither of the girls had much love for alcohol anyway.

They watched the sunset and ate their dinner, just talking about nothing and enjoying being together. It had been the perfect day for the young couple.

They settled into bed together and were cuddling while watching a movie on the television. Neither girl was really paying attention and wouldn’t remember anything about it after Christen leant across and kissed Tobin the first time.

Tobin kissed her back for a while before she pulled back and put her forehead against Christens. “You know if we never did anything other than kiss for our entire lives, I wouldn’t care.”

“I know.” Christens voice was soft. “But I want this. I want you.”

Tobin smiled. “I want this too.”

“We are in this together.” Christen said with a grin.

Tobin chuckled. “From now until forever.”
“You’re such a dork.” Christen said before she kissed the grinning Tobin deeply.

Tobin pulled Christen on top of her, the world outside of the two of them forgotten.

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**February 21st, 2005**

Tobin was sitting at her desk when she heard a knock on her door. Christen was studying on her bed and they both looked up, a bit confused. No one interrupted them when they were studying. “Come in?”

The door opened and Karen and Stacey walked in. “You two have a minute?” Stacey asked. They sat on the bed near Christen and Tobin moved to sit there as well. The bed wasn’t really big enough for the four of them to sit, but they made do.

“What’s up?”

Karen smiled. “We have more rules for you both. Considering what happened this weekend, we felt it was appropriate.” Karen was pleased when neither girl blushed nor got embarrassed that their mothers were acknowledging that they had had sex over the weekend. They were actually proud that both girls had come home and spoken to them about. Not in detail, they didn’t need that, but the emotional side of it all, which was more important.

“Okay. What are they?” Tobin asked seriously. She hated being grounded and she didn’t want to do anything that would separate her from Christen any more than she had to be.

“Common sense essentially. Example: if Mal is up and running around, you won’t be getting down.” Karen said, laughing inside. Tobin looked horrified of the thought of her little sister walking in on her and Christen that the Mums knew that rule would never be broken.

“Never outside of your bedrooms. That is your space and we will respect that, but nowhere else. We do not want to walk in on something and see something we don’t want to. Tobin has an en-suite connected to her bedroom. Do with it what you will. But we don’t want to hear or see anything.” Stacey was blunt.

“Fair enough.” Christen muttered. She didn’t want her family seeing anything either.

“You live with other people, respect them and they will respect you. That being said, I would probably recommend not having sex in a house with a police officer in it. He works weird hours and could come home and hear something no one wants him to.” Stacey smiled slightly, amused. “I think your father would greatly appreciate living in denial for as long as possible. At least until your wedding.”

Christen looked horrified at that thought and nodded quickly. “Anything else?”

Karen and Stacey shook their heads. “Not for now.”

“Can I go buy a lock?” Tobin blurted out. Christen smacked her on the shoulder and Tobin just looked at her defiantly. “I am not taking any chances! Mal wakes up in the middle of the night and comes for cuddles. We are not being naked when that happens!”

Karen bit back her laughter and nodded. “Yes. But I would recommend getting changed and unlocking the door after any activities you partake in. Otherwise Mal will ask questions.” She tried to see how red she could make Tobin go with her language.
Tobin flopped back on the bed and groaned. Karen just chuckled. “You can talk about sex with me but talking about how no one wants to see it is embarrassing?”

“Yes!” Tobin exclaimed while Christen blushed.

Karen and Stacey both just laughed and left the room chuckling. Christen just grabbed a pillow and smacked Tobin with it.

“What did I do?”

Christen laid down next to her with a sigh. “You deserved it.”

“For what?”

“Bringing Mal into the conversation multiple times and making it worse than necessary!”

“Do you want her walking in on us?” Tobin asked sarcastically.

“No way in hell.” Christen stated.

“Then it was a fair question to ask.”

Christen just rolled her eyes. “We essentially got banned from having sex in my room.”

“I know.” Tobin groaned. “But there is no way I am risking Cody seeing anything.”

The two were quiet for a minute, just lying together peacefully. Neither were going to get back to their study for the night. Their minds weren’t into it.

Christen turned to Tobin and grinned. “Want to go to the hardware store?”

Tobin jumped up so fast she tripped over the bedding and faceplanted on the floor. Christen just held her ribs laughing crazily. “Bit eager babe?”

Tobin was bright red but still glared at her girlfriend when she sat up. “Shut up.”

“You’re such a horn dog. Our weekend change your life?” Christen jokingly asked.

“Christeeeeeeeeeeennnnnnnnn.” Tobin whined, much to Christens amusement.

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March 3rd, 2005

Tobin was thankfully sound asleep on the flight to Orlando. She had taken the medication before she left the house and was sleepy all throughout the check-in. Christen and Tobin weren’t the only ones on the flight who were heading to the camp. US Soccer had put all the athletes from California on the same flight, so they travelled together. Alex and A-Rod were both on the same flight and were sitting in with the couple in the row of four. Christen was on one edge with Tobin next to her. A-Rod was on Tobin’s other side and Alex was on the other end.
Christen didn’t know much about the girls from the previous camps, just what Tobin had told her. Kelley and Alex had kept in touch with Christen since their college tours and they were excited to all be together again for this camp. But the others were mostly a mystery.

“How does she sleep on flights? It’s impossible for me.” A-Rod asked over the snoring teen.

Christen didn’t look up from her textbook. “Meds. She hates planes and flying.”

“How?” A-Rod asked. “It’s safer than heaps of other things.”

Christen paused and looked across at the older striker. “It doesn’t matter why.” She was confused as to why she was pushing.

“Sure it does. If we all make it to the senior team, we will have to fly a lot. Same with playing domestically. And in college. There will be heaps of flying.” A-Rod pressed.

“If she takes her meds before she gets on the plane, or even to the airport, she should sleep the whole time. It doesn’t matter why.” Christen stated.

“What happens if she is awake?” Alex’s raspy voice carried across the row, interrupting the group. Christen frowned. “It isn’t fun.”

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Tobin had needed to be woken by Christen after they landed and was lethargic and slumped the whole way through the airport, much to Alex and A-Rod’s amusement. Christen wasn’t amused, just kept an eye on her girlfriend and ensured she was okay. In the van to the hotel, Tobin sat next to Christen with her headphones on and head on Christen’s shoulder, going back to sleep.

Alex was in the front and chuckled. “Whatever is in that tablet must be the cure to insomnia.”

Christen smiled slightly. “It’s a strong one for anxiety.”

“She really hates flying that much?” Alex asked.

Christen nodded. “You’ll have an interesting time together at Berkley.”

Alex grinned happily. “I am so happy she is going with me. It will be amazing. Any word on whether she will be living off campus or not?” Alex’s question was two-fold and Christen knew it.

“But not yet.” Christen answered with a grin. “But we will hopefully know more by the end of Summer. If I have Tobin’s plan figured out.”

Alex chuckled but A-Rod was terribly confused. “What am I missing? What plan?”

Christen shrugged and Alex giggled. “You will have to check with Tobin.”

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_Camp – A-Rod + Cheney’s room_

The players were allowed to pick their roommates for the 10-day camp and to absolutely no one’s surprise, Tobin glared at anyone who dared to joke about Christen being their roommate. Kelley was honestly surprised her hair wasn’t on fire after she tried to grab her future college teammate as a roommate.

“But we have to get some experience before Stanford!” Kelley whined. She got no response.
They had an hour before dinner and A-Rod had called for a meeting. Allie, Alex, Kelley and Alyssa were in her room with Cheney. Christen and Tobin were in their room down the hall and had not been invited.

“What’s this about A-Rod?” Alyssa asked. She was uncomfortable gossiping and liked Tobin as a friend. She hadn’t known Christen was going to be here and had hoped they would be roommates this time. However, she was in with Kelley and already regretting it. That girl did not stop.

“Tobin. She is a mystery and I hate mysteries.” A-Rod stated as she paced.

“She is private. There is a difference.” Cheney gently reminded her.

“I’m worried. She is keeping secrets. Secrets only Christen knows. Like why she hates flying? That is something that shouldn’t be a secret. Why can’t we know? Why only Christen? She was spaced out of her mind today!” A-Rod exclaimed.

Kelley snorted. “Because you aren’t going to marry Tobin.” Her eyes went wide and she looked at Alex who was just as stunned. “I don’t know if that was a secret. Alex?”

A-Rod froze before she spun to look at the girl from Georgia. “Excuse me?”

Kelley looked sheepish. “I know nothing?”


Kelley sighed. “I don’t know much. Just that they were talking about living off campus for college and you can only do that if you were married.”

A-Rod spun to Alex. “That’s what you were talking about cryptically on the plane?” The striker nodded. “Why didn’t you just tell me that?”

“Because it wasn’t my place. The two people involved were right there and didn’t tell you. Why should I?” Alex responded.

Cheney stood and dragged A-Rod back to sit down. “Let’s just settle. This is a private matter for Christen and Tobin. We shouldn’t be gossiping about it.”

“What else is there to do at a soccer camp when we aren’t training?” Allie asked.

The girls were quiet for a minute before Cheney spoke her mind. “Tobin and Christen are our friends. Well, Tobin is, and she raves about Christen. And she barely talks about her personal life. Let’s get to know Christen and watch them together. Tobin is private. But she is allowed to be. You guys don’t know everything about me. Why should we know everything about her?”

“Because we are teammates.”

“We are at the same camp. If we make the senior team together and spend most of the year travelling together, fine. Right now, we don’t need to know anything. Let’s just leave them be.” Cheney stated firmly, looking at A-Rod. She knew the other four wouldn’t press them into anything.

“Tobin is still keeping secrets!” She countered.

“She is private. There is a difference.” Alyssa said from the other side of the room before she left.
The keeper walked her way down the hall and knocked on Christen and Tobin’s door. There was a muffled ‘one sec!’ from Tobin before the door opened.

The midfielder looked wrecked. “What’s up Lyss?”

The keeper smiled. “I heard you had A-Rod annoying you on the flight. I figured I’d come check on you both before dinner.”

Tobin smiled tiredly. “I think Chris had a hard time. I was sound asleep. Come in!” Tobin stepped back and the keeper entered the room. She just raised an eyebrow when she saw the two suitcases and belongings on one bed.

“Aren’t they going to do room checks?”

Tobin nodded. “We are just putting the clothes in the dresser. Since we are here for a decent amount of time, there is no point of living out of a suitcase. But if we can get away with it, we will share a bed. We do at home.”

Alyssa chuckled. “Fair enough. Where is Christen?”

At that moment, the bathroom door opened and Christen walked out looking green.

“You feeling any better?” Tobin asked softly.

Christen shook her head. “You may be the one who hates flying but at least you don’t hurl on your meds. I hate getting car sick. I can still feel it now.”

“Want to go for a walk on the beach before dinner? Get some fresh air?”

“That sounds amazing.” Christen smiled at Tobin and Alyssa could feel the love in the air. “Do you want to come as well Alyssa?”

The goalkeeper smiled, knowing the offer was sincere and not just polite. “Yeah. That sounds good.”

The trio didn’t see anyone else on their walk down to the beach. Alyssa assumed the other five were still in A-Rods room trying to get the striker to stop being so damn nosy. The other girls in the squad didn’t really seem to factor into the equation. They just stayed in their rooms and didn’t really talk to anyone.

“Just so you know, A-Rod is on a warpath. She thinks that you are keeping secrets.” Alyssa decided to give them a heads up.

Tobin was dribbling ahead on the sand and turned, frowning. “About what?”

“She doesn’t understand why Chris wouldn’t explain why you hate flying.” Alyssa explained.

Christen just groaned. “Fucking hell. It’s none of her business.”

“That’s what we said. I figured you should know.”

Christen smiled at the keeper gratefully. “Thank you. Really.”

Alyssa shrugged. “You’d do the same I am sure.”
Day 3 – 11pm

Tobin woke up to a knock on the door. Christen was sound asleep after a long day and Tobin quickly moved across to ensure she didn’t wake her up.

She opened the door and was confused. “Allie? Lyss? What’s going on?”

The New Yorker looked sheepish and Alyssa looked exhausted. “Can we crash here tonight?”

“Why?”

“We aren’t safe in our rooms. Alex and Kelley are in a prank war.”

Tobin immediately stood back and let them in. The two gratefully walked in quietly, aweing when they saw how Christen had curled around Tobin’s pillow.

Tobin smiled. “Do you need anything else?” Her voice was quiet.

They shook their heads and made their way over to the unused bed. Tobin gently tucked herself back in and Christen stirred. “Babe?”

“I’m here. Go back to sleep.” Tobin said softly.

“Mkay. Love you Tobi.” Christen settled herself on Tobin’s chest and was asleep quickly.

Tobin had closed her eyes and was about to drift off when she heard giggles. “What?” She asked quietly.

“We love you Tobi!” The two refugees whispered and then broke down in more giggles. Tobin just huffed and closed her eyes. She was in love and her girlfriend called her Tobi. They could laugh all they want.

Day 9 -3pm

Alyssa, Christen, Alex, A-Rod and Kelley were walking back to the hotel after the specialist forwards training session which needed Alyssa. Tobin, Cheney and Allie were in the midfielders group and had finished about 15 minutes before the group. They were walking back laughing and joking around. Christen had slotted in really well with the group and they were all really kind. A-Rod had even apologised for being a nosy bugger at the beginning.

“Why don’t we have a bonding night again? It’s the last night!” Alex suggested.

No one could think of anything to curtail the suggestion and it honestly sounded like fun. Alex grinned.

“Brilliant. Christen, you and Tobin are on ice-cream and soda duty. Lyss, you and Allie are finding games. Whatever you want. A-Rod, you get Cheney and find movies. Me and Kelley are bringing the surprise!” Alex stated.

“That’s terrifying.” Christen deadpanned.
It was alcohol. The surprise was alcohol and Christen was unsurprised. “I am not drinking anything someone who isn’t you, hands me.” She murmured to Tobin.

“Oh yeah. I’m with you on that.” Tobin replied. “I say we do everything we can to pretend it’s alcohol and just drink soda.”

“It shouldn’t get too out of hand. We are confined to A-Rods room.” Christen said warily.

“We should play Truth or Dare!” Allie exclaimed. She was tipsy but it made her louder than normal.

“Maybe just truth? That way no one gets out of the room and gets us all in trouble.” Cheney was still quite level-headed.

The group agreed readily, except for Alyssa, Christen and Tobin. The keeper had been doing the same as them, pretending to drink alcohol but stuck to soda as much as possible. The only time any of the three had actually drunk alcohol was when they had sipped the vodka bottle that was being passed around.

The eight teens sat in a circle and A-Rod passed an empty bottle and they used that to spin to see who would be asked a question.

The questions were stupid and childish, but they all got a laugh. Christen admitting that Tobin was her first kiss made them all coo, and they giggled when Tobin kissed her on the cheek happily.

“So you two have never kissed anyone except each other?” Allie was stunned.

Christen nodded. “We’ve been together for two and a half years. It isn’t that surprising considering our age when we got together.”

“What’s it like living next door to each other and dating?” Alex asked.

Tobin shrugged. “We are lucky and our parents let us sleep in the same bed fairly often. We generally stay in my room more than Christens. It’s bigger. But we were friends first, for almost a year. I think that helps with our parents being so cool about it all.”

Kelley snorted, slightly drunk. “And you are planning on getting married ASAP. That could help your parents be nice about it.”

Tobin just closed her eyes and sighed while Christen grinned wryly. “Really Kelley?”

“I’ve been drinking and I’m little. Fight me.” Kelley was slurring.

Christen rolled her eyes. “Well, Tobin still has to propose –“

“I said I have a plan!”

“-but we were thinking about getting married before college.” Christen finished without acknowledging her girlfriend’s interruption.

The girls’ squeals were loud and then they were being bombarded with questions. Kelley and Alex both knew a bit more than the others but still wanted information about it all.
Tobin and Christen didn’t say anything, they just sat there laughing at their friends being idiots. Even Alyssa was asking questions and she was generally the quietest of them all.

It took the group a few minutes to calm down and they didn’t get any answers out of the couple. In fact, they looked slightly smug about it. “We aren’t going to answer anything because we don’t have all of them yet.” Christen said with a shrug. “There is a lot to work out.”

“Fair enough, but why is Tobin the one proposing? Why not you Chris?” Allie asked.

Everyone looked at Tobin with a quizzical look. “That’s a good question.” Cheney said.

Christen just held Tobin’s hand but didn’t say anything. Tobin was the one proposing because she wanted to. She was the one who had grown up with her parents’ stories and she was the one who had been planning it for months, if not years.

And Christen wanted to be wooed.

Tobin huffed and pointed a finger accusingly at Allie. “I have a plan. That is all you get to know.”

“Can we come to the wedding?” Allie countered.

“If it gets you to drop it, maybe.”

“Done. Back to the game.” Allie grinned and leant forward to spin the bottle. It landed on Tobin. Tobin groaned when she saw it landed on her again. “Haven’t I been tortured enough tonight?”

Allie just chuckled. “Nope. You ready? Or do you want to drink?”

“What is your question?” Tobin asked as she put her arm around Christen.

“Have you and Chris had sex this camp?”

Tobin blushed scarlet and Christen groaned. The group just cackled and took their response as a yes. “I knew it!” Allie exclaimed.

“Alright next question.” Tobin leant forward and spun the bottle. It landed on Alex. She grinned evilly. “Alex. Do you have a crush on my best friend?”

The striker glared at Tobin. “You’re mean.”

“Not an answer. Serv is amazing! How can you not like him?” Tobin asked with a pout.

“I never said I didn’t.” Alex smiled to herself. “He is nice and he is cute. But nothing will happen. Not for a while at least.”

Tobin did a little happy dance but promised Alex she wouldn’t tell Servando anything.

The bottle went around multiple times and a few of the girls got steadily drunker. A-Rod spun the bottle and it landed on Tobin. The striker was one of the most inebriated and Alyssa suddenly got a bad feeling.

“Maybe we should stop here and go to bed? Some of us have early flights.” Alyssa suggestion was forgotten almost immediately because Amy asked her question to Tobin.

“Why are you scared of planes?”
Tobin froze.

Christen stiffened.

Kelley swore under her breath.

Alyssa levelled A-Rod with a stare which would have set her on fire.

Cheney just closed her eyes and exhaled slowly.

Alex was stunned.

Allie was curious but didn’t say anything.

A-Rod didn’t realise what she had done.

Tobin exhaled shakily. “I’ll pass.”

“Not how it works T.” A-Rod said. “It’s an innocent question.”

“That’s bullshit.” Cheney murmured.

Tobin looked hurt. “It’s private. Leave it.” Her voice was small.

A-Rod was confused. “I don’t get it. Planes and flying aren’t that bad. Why do you have to take meds before you get on one? What makes you so anxious?”

“Why are you doing this to me? Everyone has told you to drop it.”

Christen could feel Tobin tensing and she herself was pissed. “I think we are done for the night.” She stood and gently helped Tobin to her feet. Tobin walked to the door but froze when she felt a small hand on her arm.

“Tobin.” A-Rod started. The girls could see she was starting to realise that she had picked the wrong thing to focus on getting to the bottom of.

“Let go of me.” Tobin gritted out. A-Rod lifted her hand off quickly. “A piece of advice. If Christen says not to push me on something, don’t. She knows me better than anyone.”

Tobin left quickly and alone. Alyssa hustled out after her, leaving Christen to face the group. A-Rod looked hurt but also slightly ashamed.

Christen just looked at her and shook her head. “Tobin doesn’t let people in. If she wants you to know something, she will tell you. You will never be able to pry something out of her. It took me a year to find out why she didn’t like flying. What makes you think she would tell you after two camps?”

Alyssa followed Tobin down to the beach and saw her sitting watching the waves roll in. She didn’t say anything as she sat down next to her.

Tobin didn’t acknowledge her friend. She just kept thinking and staring out at the ocean. She wasn’t ready to talk just yet. How were you meant to explain to people why you hated flying when it led to them learning your whole life story?

*I hate planes because my whole family died in 9/11.*
That one statement would open everything up and it wouldn’t take too much research to put together than she was the last Montgomery. And as much as she liked some of those girls, she wasn’t going to tell them her biggest secret just because they may have to deal with her on a plane at some point.

They knew she was adopted.

They knew her last names.

It wasn’t a big leap to put it all together if they found that out.

It was maybe ten minutes before Christen joined them. She smiled as the goalkeeper got up and jogged back to the hotel. Alyssa just nodded and mouthed for Christen to look after Tobin.

“Well that was fun.” Tobin’s voice was small.

Christen sighed. “I wish I could say it was because she was drunk.”

“She has been wanting to know for the whole camp. The alcohol just gave her the courage.” Tobin replied. “I thought I’d get through this without having to talk about my past or run away from it. Everyone must think I’m a weirdo.”

“No one thinks that.” Christen assured her. “You are allowed to have your secrets Tobin. They don’t know you well enough to get to ask anything of you.”

Tobin just looked out across the ocean and didn’t reply. Christen nodded. “We should get to bed. We have to fly out early in the morning.”

“With Amy?”

“I am sure she won’t say a thing.” Christen sounded certain. “She wouldn’t dare.”

Day 10 – Airport

Tobin had her headphones on and was ignoring the world. She’d slept horribly, had eaten a very small breakfast and that was only because she needed food in her stomach for her medication. She had been antsy and paced the entire time, and no one could get close to her without getting glared at.

Christen knew see how much she detested taking the tablets in her hand. There was a fight going on in her mind every time. She hated taking medication, even painkillers, but Tobin knew that it would be worse for her if she didn’t.

So Tobin sat with her headphones on and was ignoring the world while waiting for their gate to be called. She had her hand clasped in Christens.

A-Rod was sitting across from the couple with Alex and felt horrible. She had been lectured by the whole team overnight and she knew she had fucked up. She could blame the alcohol but she wouldn’t. She had wanted to know, and the alcohol had just stated what she wanted to ask.

“Fuck it.” A-Rod stated and stood quickly. She walked across and knelt in front of Tobin.

The midfielder was tense but slowly took the headphones off her head. A-Rod took it as a sign to talk.
“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked that, and I knew it was a sensitive topic from what everyone had said. I fucked up and I am sorry.”

Tobin just nodded. “Thank you.”

A-Rod was both stunned she had gotten an answer and confused she hadn’t gotten more than that. She nodded and stood back up and walked back to Alex with a shrug.

They landed in LA and they departed together. Tobin had woken up during the last 30 minutes of the flight and she was tense and fidgeting. A-Rod and Alex could see how she was disorientated, and it took her a few minutes to settle in and relax. However, they hit a bump of turbulence and she immediately tense again.

“You’re fine Tobin. Just breathe.” Christen’s voice was soothing and Tobin nodded and tried to settle but every bump just made her tense again. The landing was the worst and Tobin was gripping the arm rests tight. She looked as though every sound made her feel physical pain.

Christen just gave the two other girls a look that said not to mention anything.

Once they got to their families, Tobin went straight to Mal and hugged her tight. If anyone could ground her, it was that girl.

Christen just smiled tightly and Karen. “She woke up and we hit turbulence.” The engineer nodded and smiled sadly.

The four groups were about to move off when A-Rod and Alex pulled Christen to the side. Mal was thankfully distracting Tobin very well and she was even smiling.

“What was that?” Alex asked lowly.

Christen sighed. “That was a small view of Tobin on a plane with turbulence. She is generally okay if there isn’t any and she has taken her meds. Still anxious but not as bad.”

“Is there anything we can do to help her?” A-Rod asked.

“Yeah.” Christen nodded. “Don’t bring it up. One day it will be really obvious why. Right now, it isn’t. You just have to let her be and let her deal with it. She has had to ever since I’ve known her.”

Chapter End Notes

I. Do. Not. Write. Smut. I just don't feel comfortable writing it - Somehow writing emotional heaviness is easier for me.

Thoughts, questions, ideas, rants?
Seriously though, let me know what you think - sometimes I miss stuff that is right in front of my eyes and you all point it out with questions and stuff. I really do take it all on board.

This is a lot longer than I thought it would be honestly. This one is the one I struggle writing the most right now. Hopefully it gets some creative juices flowing through soon.
See you soon with a Not Just Any Soldier Update. I have an assessment due before I can get started on it though

ellaaa25
“Babe have you seen my shirt?” Tobin was digging through her dresser only wrapped in a towel after a shower. She had been at the beach for most of the afternoon by herself and needed a shower as soon as she got home. Christen was slightly distracted by Tobin’s appearance and didn’t hear her. “Babe!”

Christen started. “Sorry. What?” She looked up to see Tobin looking amused. She rolled her eyes but refused to blush. “What did you say?”

Tobin chuckled. “My shirt. Have you seen it?”

“Which shirt?” Christen asked as she got off the bed and walked across to the dresser.

“My Giants jersey.” Tobin said as she gestured to the mess that was her dresser. “I swear I put it in this drawer.”

“I haven’t seen it since we got home from camp. Have you asked Karen?”

Tobin shook her head. “I just felt like wearing it today.”

Christen nodded. “I’ll go ask Karen while you change.”

The striker walked out the door and down the stairs of the Pugh household. She found Karen sitting at the kitchen table helping Mal with some homework while Ollie sat at their feet. “I still can’t believe you let Tobin have that room upstairs Karen.” She stated as a way to announce her presence. “It is amazing.”

Karen chuckled. “I needed to be close to this little one and it was easier to put us both on one floor. Besides, when Tobin got here that October, she needed that room and all that space. I didn’t and still don’t.”
Christen smiled and sat down at the table next to Mallory. “What are you working on Kid?”

Mallory made a face. “Spelling.”

Christen did her best not to laugh as she looked at the younger girl. Mallory had some trouble with reading and writing and she struggled with some words when she spoke. But she looked utterly adorable when she complained about it. Her face was so expressive. “Oh yeah?”

Mal nodded with a frown. “I want to play soccer but Mumma is making me finish this first.”

“Aunt Stacey does the same with me.” Christen kissed her on the crown of her head. “Well I won’t distract you anymore. I just came to ask your Mumma a question.”

Karen looked at her quizzically. “What’s up?”

“Tobin is looking for her jersey. The Giants one. Have you seen it?”

Karen’s eyes went wide in realisation. “Oh yes. It’s in Mallory’s room.”

Christen was confused. “Random.”

Karen chuckled and looked at the girl sitting between them trying valiantly to write out her words. “She was missing Tobin while you were at camp. She wore it all over the house and to bed. I couldn’t stop her even if I wanted to.”

Christen smiled softly but didn’t comment on it. “I’ll go grab it and leave you both to your homework.” She walked away quietly and into the almost 7-year-olds bedroom. She saw it was folded and sitting on the little desk that Mal had in there. Christen went to pick it up but paused to look at the photos Karen had put on wall for Mal.

There were photos of Karen and Mal from when Mal was a baby, and one of Christen holding a newborn Mallory. Christen chuckled because she looked utterly terrified. But the photo that had pride of place was one of Mal, Tobin and Karen from Christmas 2001. It was of the three of them in front of the tree, Mal snuggled up in Tobin’s lap while Karen had her arms around the pair. Tobin was wearing the Giants jersey and Mal was clutching it close. Tobin wore that jersey when she was feeling sad about her family, but she had never explained why.

Christen left with a sad smile and went upstairs to find Tobin wearing a ratty t-shirt. She handed her the jersey. “Mal stole it. She missed you when you were at camp.”

Tobin smiled and quickly put the shirt on. “Thanks Chris.” It was massive on her and she would never grow out of it.

“Giants are football yeah?” Christen asked for clarification. “You always watch them but –“

“You always fall asleep and have no interest.” Tobin finished with a chuckle. “Yeah, they are football. The NY Giants. My family loved watching them. We tried to get together for every game they played if we could. We had a box at MetLife Stadium and went to every home game possible.” Tobin paused and smiled. “I guess we still do. It’s in the Trust’s name.”

“I promise to try and stay awake when they play next time.”

Tobin grinned. “Your Dad watches with me. Even if he is a 9ers fan. I’m just happy you sit on the couch with me.”
“The Giants are a big part of your family. I’m sorry I didn’t realise before. I just thought you liked the game,” Christen was apologetic.

“It’s fine.” Tobin looked at Christen and pointed to her shirt. “My family got me this for my 13th birthday. They put Montgomery and 17 on the back, my favourite number, and made it extra big so I never grew out of it.”

Christen smiled sadly. Tobin had turned 13 in 2001. “Honey…”

Tobin sniffed and wiped her eyes. “I was wearing it when their plane hit the tower. It gave me comfort. I guess it is my security blanket.” Tobin turned her head and placed it on Christen’s shoulder. “Katie would have turned 30 today.”

Christen hugged her and held her tight. She didn’t say anything. There wasn’t much she could.

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Tobin turned in early that night and Christen said she would join her later. Before she went to bed, she spoke to Karen. “Did you know it was Katie’s birthday?”

Karen nodded. “She never brings them up, but I have a list of her family’s birthdays just so I am aware. September 11th is always the worst reaction. That whole month is an upheaval. I think on their birthdays she remembers the good times and just goes a bit quieter. Sometimes she goes to the park or the beach and just sits quietly.”

“Is there anything we can do?”

“Just be there for her.” Karen said softly. “Other than that, not really.”

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April 29th, 2005

“Tobin! You need to be quiet!” Christen whisper shouted across the kitchen.

“She can’t hear me!”

“Her room is down the hall and she sleeps with the door open! She can hear you bouncing!”

Tobin paused, looking down at the toes she didn’t know had been tapping. “Oh. Sorry!”

“Just come her and help me finish the pancakes.” Christen pointed to the whipped cream can. “You’re in charge of the art.”

Tobin beamed as she went around the island and grabbed the can. Very carefully she wrote ‘HAPPY BIRTHDAY KIDDO!’ on the top pancake. Mal was seven that day and the couple were hoping to get her day off to a flyer.

Karen walked into the kitchen to muffled giggles and a mess of cooking ingredients. She just smiled. “I didn’t think you two would beat me up.”
Tobin shrugged. “Neither did we. How long until Mal wakes up?”

Karen just laughed. “I am surprised the smell of pancakes hasn’t already done it to be honest.”

“Well, we were thinking of sending Ollie on for an ambush if she isn’t up when I have finished with the pancakes.” Tobin said softly. “Are we still doing presents at dinner?”

Karen nodded. “It’s tradition.”

“But-“ Christen started. However, before she could finish, she heard soft footsteps coming down the hall. They were tentative, slower than normal for Mallory. Normally the now seven-year-old would be zooming through the house after her sister before skidding to a stop when Karen yelled for her to stop running indoors. The engineer was dreading the day she started playing soccer indoors. These were the steps of a Mallory who either had a plan or had done something that she didn’t know how anyone would react to.

A frizzy haired Mallory poked her head around the corner with a grin. “I’m seven!”

The three chuckled. “Are you? I swear you were turning 6!” Karen exclaimed.

Mallory shook her head wildly. “Mumma no!” She didn’t step out from out behind the doorway.

“Oh no! Well you are just going to have to give me hug so I can see.”

Mal nodded and walked across the room to her mum with a nervous grin. “I’m seven! I’m a big girl now!” She gave her Mum a big hug and got lots of kisses and ‘happy birthday baby’s’ from her while Tobin and Christen looked across the room with soft smiles.

Mal turned to her Papa Tobi and Mama Press and grinned. “Hi!”

Tobin grinned and knelt down, putting her arms out. The young girl ran across and tackled her sister. “Happy Birthday Kiddo.”

“Thanks Tobi.” She pulled back slightly and only saw happiness on her sisters’ face. “Your shirt is comfy.”

Tobin chuckled. “I know. It’s my favourite shirt. Did you steal that to sleep in?”

Mallory nodded. “Can I wear it to school too?”

Tobin leant back and pretended to appraise the shirt while she thought about it. It was her NY Giants jersey which swamped the kid. It was still too big for Tobin, it always would be, but it was a shirt she would never throw away. And as much as she loved her sister, she didn’t really want her wearing it at school.

It was one of her 13th birthday gifts from her family. The last birthday they had with her. It was a normal blue jersey, but on the back was MONTGOMERY and the number 17.

Tobin sighed. “That might not be a good idea. It is massive on you Kiddo. It comes down to your shins! It won’t be fun to play in.”

Mal pouted. “Okay.”

Tobin was stunned. “What? No arguing?” She jokingly checked Mal’s temperature. “Are you feeling okay?”
Mal giggled and nodded. Tobin smiled and hugged her again. “I’ll find you another one of my jerseys to wear if you want? One that isn’t that massive on you.”

Mal nodded eagerly. “Okay. Pancakes now?”

Tobin just chuckled. “What about Chris? Where is her hug?”

Mal bolted across the kitchen and into Christens arms. Christen just laughed and caught her easily. She plopped her on the stool and placed the pancakes in front of her with a smile. “Eat those while I go grab something.”

The 7-year-old dug in while Christen went to her bag and grabbed a wrapped present. She turned and smiled at the confused Pugh’s. “I know I am breaking tradition, but I have a present for Mal that I think she should open now. I swear it will make sense.”

Karen gave her a quizzical look but nodded her agreement while Tobin bounced on her toes. She was always happy for someone to get presents. Christen waited until Mal was finished eating before she gave her the gift.

Mal was not patient and ripped the paper off as soon as the pancakes were gone. Her eyes went wide. “WOW!”

Mal pulled out a kids sized Giants jersey. It was the exact same as Tobin’s, with MONTGOMERY and the number 17 on the back, but it was hers. Christen smiled. “I thought you might like your own. Rather than steal Tobin’s all the time. Now you can match.”

Mal nodded eagerly and hugged Christen tightly. “Thank you thank you thank you Mama!”

Christen just held her tight. “You’re welcome.”

Once Mal got out of the hug she immediately stripped off Tobin’s jersey and put on her own version. “Tobi! Put yours on so we match!” Mal insisted and even picked it up and tried to put it over the teenagers head. Tobin chuckled and did as she was asked. Mals face lit up once they were matching.

“Awesome!”

Mal wore her jersey to school and enjoyed her day. Her friends loved it and they kept asking questions which Mal only had vague or no answers to, but in a seven-year-old way she tried her best. She told them all about how it matched her Papa Tobi’s, how it was worn by giants and how it kept her safe.

There was one question she didn’t know the answer to. “Who is Montgomery?”

Mal had paused. They were playing on the grass at lunch time. “I dunno. Tobi never says.” Her eyes went wide. “We can ask her!”

Mal’s small group of friends looked at her weirdly. “How?”

“We can go to the big school! Tobi and Chris and Serva are there. We can ask them.”

Dak paused. “But we could get in trouble.”
“There is a gate to the big school at the back of the grass! We do sport there. We can go and come back fast.” Mal looked at her three best friends with a grin.

Dak, Andy and Ellie nodded and Mal jumped up. “Let’s go!”

The four seven-year-olds were trying to be sneaky on the playground and if any teachers had been watching the gate, they would have been caught quickly. As it was, they got to the gate to the high school sports grounds without any adult seeing them, which was a small miracle.

“Now where do we go Mal?” Ellie asked.

Mal looked up at the buildings in trepidation. “Um, I dunno? I thought they’d be playing soccer at lunch like me!”

Dak and Andy looked at each other and shrugged. “I guess we go looking?” Andy said with a grin.

The four year one students ran off together, looking for a door to get inside the building and find the teens. They found one which led to the science wing, not that the kids knew that. They just knew they were inside.

The four went to each of the doors and were peaking in the windows, looking for one of the three teens. They had all met the trio and knew what they looked like which sped up the process.

Ellie was the one who found Servando. “Mal! Serva is here.” The other three ran across to peak in the window and Mal grinned.

“And Chrissy!” The birthday girl ran to the door and pushed it open. “Chris!”

The Junior class turned to see four little kids standing there. Christen and Servando were sitting there, shocked and confused. “Mallory? What are you doing here?”

“Looking for Tobi!” Mal said.

Christen and Servando looked at their teacher who was doing his best not to laugh. “Mr Thomas, is there any chance we can escort these four back to the primary school?”

The physics teacher just wrote out two hall passes and handed them over. “I would suggest taking them to the office and calling the primary school. Just so they know they aren’t missing some students.”

Chris nodded and quickly stood and walked across to the four kids while Servando picked up their bags and books. “Thanks sir.”

The two teens were in the hall with the four kids. Christen sighed and pointed ahead. “Walk. Now.”

Mal was stunned but walked with her friends. “Are we going to find Tobi?”

“Nope. We are going to the office and getting you four back to school before you get in even more trouble.” Christen said sternly.

Dak frowned. “Why isn’t Tobi in your class? We all in the same class all the time?”

“Because when you get to the big school there are more kids and more classes.” Servando explained to the kids. “Tobin is at math right now on the other side of the school.”
“Oh.” Andy said lowly. “But we need to talk to her!”

Christen chuckled. “Whatever it is, it can wait.” She put her arms around Ellie and Mal. “School can’t.”

Mal pouted and looked up at Christen. “But we need to know who Mongogmey is!”

“What?” Servando asked.

Mal just tried to point to the name on her back but just got tangled up. “Tobi never says who this is. It’s special but I don’t know why.”

“And you had to ask her right now?” Christen asked. “You could have asked her at home.”

Mals jaw dropped. “Oh. Yeah.”

Christen just rolled her eyes. “Oh. Yeah.”

Mal and her friends managed to escape too much trouble, just one lunch detention. Karen wasn’t too impressed with her daughter but once she heard what she was looking for, she understood. Mal didn’t know exactly what brought Tobin into their lives, just that her family was gone, and she had been questioning it lately. She didn’t really remember a time before Tobin was there, but she had seen the photos.

Tobin had no idea about what had happened during the day and Karen had asked Christen and Servando to not tell her just yet. She said that she would speak to them before Mallory’s birthday dinner.

Mal and Karen were sitting at the table working on what looked like homework when Tobin ran in grinning. “What is this? The birthday girl still has to do homework! Isn’t there a law against that?” Tobin joked as she sat next to them.

Karen just smiled. “Not at all. But this isn’t homework.”

“Oh?”

Mal huffed. “I have to write a letter to Mr Thomas saying sorry.”

Tobin frowned. “Mr Thomas my physics teacher?”

Karen nodded. “Mal led an exhibition to find you at school today. She and her friends found Christen and Servando in physics instead.”


Mal sighed. “I’m fine. I just wanted to ask you something.”

“You can ask me anything. You know that.” Tobin said soothingly.

Mal looked at her Mumma who smiled and nodded encouragingly. Mal took a deep breath and steeled herself. “Who is Mon-gom-er-ee?” She sounded out the name as well as she could. “The name on the shirts.”
Tobin paused before she sighed. “Do you remember how I came to live with you when you were little?”

Mal shook her head. “Not really. Just that you needed another family cause yours died.”

Tobin smiled sadly. “That’s okay. But you know that Mumma adopted me?”

“Yeah. It was your Christmas present. It meant you could stay with us forever.” Mal stated.

Tobin grinned at her sister’s explanation of what adoption was. “Yes. It did.”

“But what does that have to do with the name?”

Tobin sighed and Mal looked at her for answers. “It’s my name honey. Montgomery is my last name.”

Mal frowned. “I thought it was Heath? Or Pugh like me and Mumma?”

Tobin chuckled. “It is. But it is also Montgomery.”

“That’s weird.” Mal made a face.

Karen stepped in. “Mal, when Tobi’s family died, she came here and, and we decided that she should use a different last name until I was ready.”

“Why?”

“You ask a lot of questions.” She sighed. “My family was well known but they kept me out of the spotlight. If I kept my last name, some people might try and find me before I was ready. Besides, I like being a Heath and a Pugh.”

“So what is your name?” Mal asked.

Tobin smiled. “The name my parents gave me was Tobin Powell Heath-Montgomery. And after your Mumma adopted me, it ended up being Tobin Powell Pugh-Heath-Montgomery. But all that is important is I am your Papa Tobi. And you will always have me.”

Mal just hugged her tightly and nodded into her chest. “Promise?”

“I promise. And I promise when you are older, I will tell you everything.” Tobin said softly. "I promise."

Chapter End Notes

Hi.
I was going to post this on Saturday April 25th. My birthday. But plans change.
This isn't what I was going to write, at least there was more planned like Tobin's birthday! but shit has happened and it has been hard. If you commented on Protect the Genius's last chapter, I'm sorry I haven't replied. I don't know if I will.
Uni has been horrible, and honestly I am struggling with not being able to do what I normally do. I feel useless and it is stressing me out. I am sure lots of you know what I am feeling.
When I first started writing this story, it was when I got some really shitty news. Protect the Genius was planned, this one wasn't and just kind of came to me. Shitty news: my older dog had cancer and we didn't think he would get to Christmas. He is only 7. It is part of the reason we got a puppy. But now it almost May and it is time for us to say goodbye to him. And I honestly can't stop crying. He goes to the vet tomorrow evening.
I might not write for a while. I just don't know how I will be. I need to ensure I get through uni without failing and my head is a mess. As soon as I feel up to it, I will post as much as possible.
I don't like leaving things unfinished, and be assured this isn't a goodbye but just a break. I'll be back - that's a promise. I just don't know when.
Love you all
ellaaa25
New York

Chapter Summary

The group travel to New York and get a greater insight into Tobin

Chapter Notes

So it's been a while... I had some inspiration and flow issues - but it's done now so enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

June 4th, 2005

“Mallory!”
The newly seven-year-old sat back in her seat quickly at the rebuke from her mother. “Sorry!”

“You’re not. If you were, you wouldn’t have done it multiple times!”

“But I’m bored!”

Karen gave her a deadly look. “Your sister is not a toy for your entertainment. Let her sleep!”

Mal pouted. “She is no fun on planes.”

Karen sighed. “Go swap seats with Christen. I am sure Channing and Tyler will humour you.”

Mal crawled over her drooling sister and mother before running up the aisle to the Press family. Christen joined Karen with a knowing smile. “How bad?”

Karen just shook her head with a wry smile. “Four times in 20 minutes. She is not good on planes. Just in a different way to Tobin.”

“Channing and Tyler were expecting it and will keep her occupied.” Christen looked at her girlfriend drooling in the middle seat. “It’s going to be a tense few days, isn’t it?”

Karen nodded. “Going back to New York for the first time since they died will be hard for her. Going home will be another challenge. At least she can sleep through the plane ride.”

Tobin stood by herself, looking at the place where her family was buried.

Not their graves. They were empty.

Nor their memorial in LA which Tobin had put together.
And not the monument in DC where the public memorial had taken place.

No. Tobin stood in front of the place where thousands had died, and many of their bodies had never been found. They were buried in rubble.

And her family was there as well.

One of the hardest things for Tobin to come to terms with was that she had never been able to bury them. She had never been able to say goodbye.

Tobin stood by herself, looking at the place where her family was buried. And it still hurt.

Christen, Karen and Cody stood back and gave Tobin space. The others were out shopping and staying out of the way. This wasn’t something that needed a lot of attention. It had been hard enough for Tobin to ask to go and see the site, everyone being there and Mal bouncing around wouldn’t have helped.

After what felt like three hours but in reality was maybe 20 minutes, Tobin turned and wiped her eyes before she walked back to the group.

“Can we go now?”

Karen nodded. “Of course. Do you want anything before we go back to the hotel?”

Tobin shook her head. “I just need to get out of here.”

Tobin was glued to her laptop and had her phone in hand, texting constantly, when they returned to the hotel. She had made one phone call on the balcony and then immediately set in. They all gave her space and privacy. Christen didn’t bug her about what she was doing, she just read her book on the bed next to her. Karen and Cody went to join the rest of their family in the city.

They were quiet for almost an hour before Tobin sighed and closed her laptop.

“You okay?”

“Define okay?”

Christen smiled slightly as she kept her eyes on her book. “Not about to freak out and run away?”

“If that’s the case, I’m dandy!” Tobin joked before she looked at Christen. “I’m okay. Do you want to go somewhere?”

Christen looked up, bewildered. “I kind of assumed you would just want to sleep or chill. I’m in my jammies.”

Tobin looked at her girlfriend more closely and saw that it was true. She relaxed visibly. “Oh. I hadn’t noticed. But I’m glad. I’m buggered.”

“Go change and then come back so we can watch a movie or something.”

Tobin jumped up and grabbed her clothes out of their suitcase before quickly changing and jumping back into bed. The pair had a hotel room to themselves and would for the entire trip. Tobin had hesitantly floated the idea of staying in her house, but she was very quickly (and politely) turned down by all parties. The house had been packed up over three years ago and wouldn’t be easily habitable.
The pair settled in and cuddled up watching Friends on the hotel tv. Tobin was distracted and was fiddling with Christen's curls. Christen just let her stew but when they had watched two hours of meaningless television and her hair would survive another.

“Tobin?”

“Hmm?”

Christen smiled. “I know you love my curls, but I don’t love the knots I know are going to be there if you keep twirling them.”

“Shit, sorry. I didn’t realise.” Tobin blushed and pulled her hands back.

“It’s fine. Do you want to tell me what’s bothering you?”

Tobin sighed. “Nothing.” Christen gave her a look which had Tobin smiling. “I promise. I’m okay.”

“What has you so distracted then?” Christen asked softly.

“The whole family legacy stuff. Standing there kind of hammered home that it’s only me. I thought that it might happen tomorrow, but seeing that was more enlightening then I expected. So when I got back here, I called Rob.”

Christen frowned on confusion. “Your lawyer? Aren’t we seeing him tomorrow at your house?”

“Yeah. I wanted to know what the guidelines and those types of things that were in place for my privacy and college and stuff. Our privacy and all that.” Tobin smiled to Christen. “He laughed and said it took me long enough. He sent me through an overview document without all the ‘legal jargon’. It was really helpful. Then I asked him what the trust was doing with the rebuild of the towers and if they were involved.”

“Are they?”

Tobin nodded and smiled. “They were silent backers because they weren’t sure if I would want it public, but the rebuild or restoration of buildings was something my parents allocated resources too. I told him I was happy for it to be made public.”

Christen smiled. “Why?”

“Because it has nothing to do with me. It is the Trust and my families work that will be public. That shouldn’t change just because I want privacy.”

Christen sat and turned in the bed so she was facing Tobin. “What did the privacy document say?”

Tobin grinned. “Don’t get arrested before I turn 35 and they won’t have to use my name to get me out of trouble.”

Christen just rolled her eyes and laughed. “Be serious Tobin.”

“Fine. But that is actually in there.” Tobin sobered a bit and stood to grab her laptop. “It’s wild Chris. And when we get married, it’s going to be the same for you. We have to be careful.”

Tobin then spent the next 30 minutes laying out everything she had learnt and been told by Rob. She had written it all in a way she could understand in a word document and showed that to Christen as well.
The pair of them would have to be careful. Tobin joked about not getting arrested, but that was a very serious worry that the Trust had which could out the teen before she was ready. And they weren’t worried about her doing something wrong, but just being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

If it came out that Tobin was the Montgomery Heiress, her life would change forever. Their lives would change forever because their marriage would also come into the public domain. Their privacy would disappear, they would be hounded by the press. People would approach them for favours and try to exploit them. Rob suggested that they wait until they were finished college and well into their careers. If football didn’t pan out, wait until they were settled in the business world and had a handle on what would be necessary to run the trust and the many business and organisations they managed. He didn’t expect to be organising a press conference for their reveal until they were 30. At 35, Tobin had no choice. It was in the will that she take the reins of the company and trust by then and become the face of it.

When they married (even Rob knew it was a question of when not if) the lawyer suggested that they never make it public knowledge if they wanted to have a career in football. It was harsh, it was shit, but it was reality. It was the one suggestion that hurt Tobin the most. She was private, but she wasn’t hiding her love for Christen! Their entire high school knew but no one really cared anymore.

To not make it known they were married or even together hurt. And if they made the National Team, or even the junior camps, it was even more important. He hadn’t reacted well when Tobin said some of the players already knew, but he settled when the coaches and management had no idea. They just knew they were friends.

Rob had encouraged them to live off campus for college. It would ensure any mail went to their house and not via the college and no potential roommates would read the name Montgomery on mail they weren’t meant to see. He had ensured them that they could go by their maiden names, or any combination of, at college, while legally being Montgomery’s. He had actually suggested Tobin go by Pugh while Christen kept Press in public. While it wasn’t common knowledge that Tobin’s mothers maiden name was Heath, it was still public knowledge and could be found out.

The couple came out of the conversation clear and understanding.

If they wanted a career in football, together, they stayed private about it.

Tobin being a Montgomery, that was a secret.

Dinner that night was at a restaurant Tobin recommended. When she was younger, she used to get take-away with her siblings when her parents weren’t home and she loved it. It was a little whole in the wall burger joint, but Tobin was happy. She was talking about her past, her parents, without that sad look in her eye. She was reminiscing and it didn’t seem to hurt her as much after seeing their resting place.

“Tobi!”

Tobin turned to her little sister who was looking up at her with tomato sauce on her face.

“Yyyyyessssss?”

Mal giggled. “What was that?”

The whole table laughed at the interaction.
“What’s up Mal?”

“We get to see your house tomorrow yeah?”

Tobin nodded. “My old house yeah. Why?”

“Do you have a big backyard?”

“Yes…”

Mal gave her the best puppy dog eyes she could. “Can we please play soccer? I had to walk everywhere today and Mumma said I couldn’t take my ball cause I’d get hit by a car. I wanna play soccer!”

Tobin just nodded and then cringed when her sister tackled her with tomato sauce all over herself.

“Gross.”

“You and Chrissy kissing is gross.”

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“Holy shit.”

Channing’s words weren’t reprimanded by any of the adults because they were also in awe.

“This is where you grew up?” Tyler asked.

The only way to describe the house was mansion. It was in New York State, not New York City and they had to drive up a mile-long driveway to get to the house. It was invisible to road and fenced off with 15 foot high fences.

Tobin nodded. “Yeah. Until I moved to LA for 6th grade. I hated the trek into the city for school, I hated the school and I had no friends. I went by Heath at school so my peers didn’t try to be friend me because of who my parents were and would like me for me. I was a tomboy who got muddy and beat the boys. No one liked me for me.”

The group was quiet as they followed Rob up into the house. Tobin paused at the front door, seemingly frozen.

“Tobin?”

“Go ahead.” She murmured. “I need a minute.” The teen walked away and off to the side.

Rob powered through and took the group into the house and showed them around. However, as they were looking up and around, they forgot to look down. Mallory Diane Pugh was a devilish child and snuck away, having no care for the inside and wanting to see the outside. Finding her sister was just a goal that allowed her to do just that.

(She had no idea she was not sneaky at all and her mother followed her movements from afar.)

Mal took off in the direction her sister had walked and found where she assumed her sister had gone. The grounds were huge and there was a mini football pitch in there. In the corner, was a tree.

With a tree house up the top.
Mal bolted to the tree house and found the ladder, climbing up quickly. When her head popped up, she saw her sister sitting in the corner. “Hi!”

Tobin was startled. “Mal?”

The kid took that as an invitation to come in. “This is awesome Tobi!”

Tobin grinned. “My dad built it for my oldest sister, but we all got to come in here. My parents always knew if I wasn’t in my room or on the field, I was up here.”

“Can we build one at home?”

“We don’t have a tree in the backyard kiddo.”

Mal frowned. “Can we buy one?”

“A tree? Not one this big.”

“Well that sucks.” Mal sighed.

Tobin chuckled. “Do you want me to show you the rope swing? It goes across a creek!”

Mal’s eyes lit up.

When the duo re-joined the group, Tobin quickly separated with Christen again. “There won’t be much in my room, but I can show you.”

The pair walked into what Christen could only describe as a wing of the house. Christen voiced that thought and Tobin just shrugged. “It kind of is. All of our bedrooms were on this side and it’s easy to lock off from the dining room and stuff. Whenever my parents had friends over for dinner, or there was some fancy event here, I was able to stay here and no one ever bothered me.”

Christen was stunned as they walked down the hallway. “So you never met any of your parents friends?”

“I wouldn’t call them friends. They always wanted something from my parents and the dinners were just a way for them to tell them to get fucked politely. My siblings always snuck out early if they were there.” Tobin sighed. “I was happy to be out of there. The only rule was I had to stay in this wing, and I couldn’t go play soccer.”

“Honey…”

Tobin just waved her off. “It’s fine.”

Christen put her hand on Tobin’s arm, stopping her. “Babe, did you have anyone your age to talk to growing up?”

Tobin shrugged. “Not really. I had my siblings and my parents. I was happy.”

“And lonely?”

Tobin looked at her feet. “It was for a good reason. We moved to LA and stayed low-key so I had more freedom. New York is a fishbowl for families like mine. My parents couldn’t move without it being reported on and my siblings went through hell in school because of their last name. When Mum found out she was pregnant with me, she stepped back from what they were doing and just let
Dad do what he needed to. They didn’t want me to go through what Jeff and Katie and Perry did. The threats, the bullshit, the lies. I was two when the media found out I even existed and that’s because my sister mentioned me in her Valedictorian Speech.”

Christen was quiet and Tobin sighed. “I want to show you my room. Can I, or do you want to sit down somewhere and talk?”

“No, show me. That’s why we are here, isn’t it?”

The two walked together quietly and into the room at the end of the hall.

Christen laughed. “You have a fireman’s pole!”

Tobin grinned. “The room above was the games room and I begged my parents for a way in and out from my room. The way in was the ladder in the corner and the way out was down the pole. The first day I exhausted myself running up and sliding down.”

“That doesn’t surprise me at all.” Christen smiled at Tobin. “It must have been interesting growing up here.”

Tobin smile drop a little but still held some happiness. “Interesting is a good word for it. But I was happy when we got to L.A. There was less pressure.”

Tobin shook herself and smiled. “Come on. Let’s go find the others.”

The group took a wander around the house and Tobin was genuinely okay. She answered questions, ignored the sad looks and overall didn’t hate the experience. She liked that they all got to see what her childhood was like. Especially Christen. It wasn’t what they expected, and it gave them insight into why she was so protective of family and why it was hard for her to let friends on.

It also explained why there was such a high emphasis on her privacy. Rob had spoken to the others while Tobin was with Christen and told them a similar story. The eldest three had a horrible time with people trying to exploit them for their family name and by the time Tobin came along, they had had enough. They kept her a secret. Not out of shame but out of love. They wanted to give her the chance to grow up free from her family’s name.

Tobin was meant to have flown to Boston with her parents that weekend to see the rest of her family before they went to a charity event. Tobin was to stay home with Jeff while the others did their duty.

“Tobin breaking her leg so severely was the only reason she hadn’t flown across. If she had, she would have been on the plane as well to come back to L.A. Breaking her leg saved her life.” Rob explained. “It also allowed us to put higher levels of security and privacy around her name and identity. Almost weekly we get reporters asking about her and right now, we can cite her age. When she turns 18, we will put out a statement stating that the Trust will slowly be released to Miss Montgomery from the age of 21. However, due to Miss Montgomery and her families wishes, she won’t speak with the press until she is settled within the company and ready to embrace that legacy. But, I will start getting Tobin used to Trust and the way we operate when she starts college. The more she knows earlier, the better.”

Stacey was frowning. “Will the girls have to hide who they are? For Tobin to keep her family past private, will that affect their relationship?”

Rob paused. “That’s not an easy question for me to answer. For the trust, it doesn’t matter if Tobin
is out and proud and married to Christen. However, for their footballing careers, being out could be detrimental. I advised that they didn’t tell the Federation about their relationship and their marriage when it happens. I don’t think it would help them.”

Stacey and Karen looked at each other sadly. They were glad it wasn’t the Trust who wanted the to hide.

“Isn’t this keeping secrets though? Won’t the girls just be keeping everything secret from everyone they care about?” Cody asked.

Rob shook his head. “There is a difference between being private and being secretive. This is being private. Not telling your boss about your relationship status isn’t illegal and they can’t ask about it. We will advise the girls to tell friends, family and those they trust about being together, which is what most people do. They don’t tell everyone now, I don’t think that will change.”

The trip to New York was eventful but they could all see that Tobin was happier and lighter after the trip. She spoke more about her childhood and her family, and she didn’t sugar coat it. She was honest and it was refreshing.

It was perhaps a week later when Servando took Christen and Mallory out for an afternoon of, according to Mallory, surprise Tobin shopping. Christen wasn’t sure why but Servando hadn’t been able to get Tobin a birthday gift before they went away and wanted their advice. Little did she know, Tobin had organised all of it.

Tobin was sitting at the Press’s kitchen table, facing Cody and Stacy with Karen next to her. She was bouncing her leg nervously and fiddling with her fingers. Cody and Stacy were trying not to laugh at her nervousness.

Tobin knew that they knew what she was going to ask, but it didn’t make it easier. There was about five minutes of silence were the adults just sat sipping their tea, waiting for Tobin to organise her thoughts.

“iwannamarrychrisandineedtoaskyourpermissioncauseeventhoughsheisntproperlysheisyourdaughterand-“

Stacey put her hand on Tobin’s and interrupted her. “Tobin! Breathe in!”

Tobin inhaled and nodded.

“Out!”

Exhale.

“In.”

“Out.”

Stacey talked Tobin through her breathing and once she was calm again, she smiled. “Now, ask us what you need too.”

Tobin looked at Karen who smiled. She inhaled and spoke.

“Cody. Stacey. I love your daughter. I want to marry her, which everyone knows. But I want to have your blessing to ask her now. She is the greatest person I have ever met, and I know she is it
for me. I love her. Do I have your blessing?”

Tobin wasn’t good with words. But this was perfect.

Cody and Stacey smiled. “Yes Tobin. You have our blessing.”

Tobin visibly relaxed and then beamed. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank us. You and Christen are made for each other. We always knew that. Just promise me one thing.” Cody was serious but calm.

“Anything.”

“You keep my girl safe. I know more about your past and your family and the privacy concerns. I don’t care what you do to make sure she is safe, but you do it.”

Tobin nodded. “Of course sir. That’s all I want.”

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Comments? Questions? Rants?
Tobin drove both herself and Christen back from U20s camp at Carson. It was a big jump from the 18s camp they had previously been at, but they had impressed greatly. Their chemistry was showing on the field and the selectors had rewarded them for it. The duo were happy they had been pulled into the camp after a few players had dropped out last minute, but it had been a big jump and they could see that while they held their own, they had plenty to improve. The pair had gotten good feedback from the coaching staff and felt they were in good stead for their futures. They were starting to prepare for the U20s World Cup in 2006 and Tobin felt they had a shot to make the squad.

“Babe, pull over would you?” Christen said quietly. It was sunset and they were driving down the coastline. The colours were gorgeous.

Tobin pulled into the carpark and shut the car off. “You okay?”

Christen nodded. “I just need a minute.”

Tobin sat back quietly and watched the sunset. Christen seemed to be mulling something over. For more than fifteen minutes they sat there quietly, holding hands and thinking.

Christen looked at Tobin once the sun had fully set. “Do you think we can make it?”

Tobin frowned. “Make what?”

“The National Team. You don’t think we will be stuck behind the others and always be on the outside?”

Tobin smiled. “No. I think we will be there earlier than we could have ever dreamed. We were the youngest ones at that camp by at least two years, and I think we will have a shot at the World Cup squad. They believe in us. Why do you ask?”
Christen smiled. “Because I think we will make it too. And I think we will make it together.”

“So why did you ask?”

Christen shrugged. “I just had to be sure you thought the same. We are going into our senior year, we have college sorted. I wanted to make sure we were on the same page about really going for it. We are in the US Soccer program and being pushed. Making it all the way to the first team will take a lot of work and effort. As long as we are both clear on what we want, it will all be worth it.”

Tobin smiled. “I agree. It will be hard work, but we will make and we will be okay.”

Christen grinned and kissed her girlfriend. “Let’s get home. I need a cuddle.”

“Me too.” Tobin chuckled and restarted the car. This camp they hadn’t been roommates. Tobin had been roomed with a girl called Heather while Christen was in with someone who insisted on being called Pinoe. None of the group knew they were together, and they didn’t say anything. There were no stolen kisses, no extra long hugs, no holding hands. They were the best friends from Palos Verdes and that was all. It was a new experience for the pair and while they weren’t happy about it, they managed.

They got home at 8pm and Tobin parked in her driveway. They left their bags in the car and walked across into the house. The families were having dinner together.

They had barely gotten through the door when Mal launched herself into Tobin’s arms. The midfielder had expected it and caught her quickly. “Hey Kiddo.”

“I missed you.” Mallory whispered into Tobin’s ear.

“I missed you too.” Tobin whispered back. “Were you good for Mum?”

“So good.”

Tobin grinned and put her down on the floor. “I’m proud of you.”

Mallory made her way to Christen and hugged her tightly around the stomach while Tobin moved into the dining room. She grinned at the adults before she hugged her Mum. “Hi.”

“Everything okay?” Karen asked softly. She was asking about the pair not being coupley at camp.

“It was weird, but it was fine.”

“Good. I missed you.”

Tobin smiled as she pulled back. “I missed you as well.”

“You got your plan ready? Being at camp didn’t change anything too much?” Karen asked with a grin.

Tobin blushed. “Just the date. I’ll ask tomorrow afternoon.”

“She’ll say yes Tobin.” Karen assured her.

Tobin just nodded and didn’t verbally respond. She didn’t want to tell Karen she was nervous. That
Tobin and Christen had a peaceful night sleeping in the same bed for the first time in two weeks. What they didn’t get was a sleep in, courtesy of Mallory the energetic kangaroo bouncing on the bed at 6am. She had missed her sisters greatly and insisted that they hang out with her all day. Christen just pulled the seven-year-old down between the pair.

“If you let me sleep for another hour, I will make pancakes for breakfast.” Christen mumbled.

Mallory gasped and lay down as still as possible, as quietly as possible. Tobin and Christen cuddled her up between them and went back to sleep, the quiet soothing the energetic child. They made it to 7.30 before they were awoken for pancakes.

Tobin and Mallory were matching in their Giants jerseys, while Christen was happy to just wear sweats and an old t-shirt while they were crashing around the house. It was a joyful breakfast and Mallory caught them up on everything they had missed. Tobin and Christen barely spoke for twenty minutes because Mallory was on a roll.

It was barely 8.30 am when Channing and Tyler came in the front door. “Christen are you ready to go?”

Christen looked down at her old sweats and up at her sisters. “Where are we meant to be going?”

Tyler looked at her like she had two heads. “You promised when you got back from camp we would do a massive shopping trip to get everything we needed for school. Clothes, books, shoes, whatever we needed, and we were doing it together.”

Christen groaned. “I forgot.”

“Go change now then! We need to get an early start at the mall.” Channing insisted.

Christen turned to Tobin and pouted, but the midfielder threw her hands up. “No way. If I say anything I get dragged along and I ain’t suffering like that again. I don’t shop.” Tobin looked down at her hands because that pout could get her to do anything.

Tyler decided to bail out her future sister-in-law. She walked over and pulled Christen from her chair. “Put on clothes and let’s go!” She then escorted her up the stairs much to Mal’s amusement. She was chuckling into her pancakes while Tobin grinned at her.

Channing rolled her eyes at the Pugh sisters antics. “How much time do you need T?”

“Can you keep her distracted till after lunch? I need to get the park set up.”

“Servando helping you out?”

Tobin nodded. “And your Dad.”

Channing grinned. “I can’t believe she has no idea.”

Tobin smiled. “I can keep secrets when I want to.”
Tobin was going to propose.
And she was nervous. She wanted it to be perfect. She was going to ask Christen in the area of the park where she had put her families memorial. She felt close to them there and it was the couples spot to be alone. It felt like the best place to propose.
Servando and Cody were a godsend in helping her set up. They helped string the fairy lights, clean up the little area and make sure everything was in place. Mallory was on garbage patrol and was running around picking up tiny bits of trash to make it look perfect. She had some idea of what was happening and wanted to help make it perfect for her sister. She wasn’t happy that she wasn’t allowed to be there when Tobin asked Christen, but she would take what she could get.

Christen came home laden with shopping bags at about 3pm and with a smile on her face. She had actually enjoyed her morning with her sisters. They had given her shit about being in love but it was nice. They could see how happy she was and it made them happy as well.
Tyler and Channing were still stunned that their father was letting her and Tobin get away with so much, but knew in their hearts that it was because he knew that the pair were going to be together for a very long time. He could say no or block it, but it would just strain their relationship with him, and they would do it anyway. By setting ground rules and boundaries, they respected his space and their relationship with him was amazing.
Christen put all of her shopping bags on her bed and collapsed. She was knackered. She was just about to doze off when she heard the tell tale footsteps of Mallory coming up her hallway.
“Mama P!” Mallory exclaimed as she launched herself onto her stomach. Christen caught her and not too much weight hit her in chest.
“Baby Mal!”
Mal frowned. “I’m 7.”
“And I’m 16. What’s your point?” Christen countered with a grin.
Mal huffed. “I’m not a baby.”
Christen just laughed. “You will always be Baby Mal to me. But I promise I will only call you that when it’s me and you. Okay?”
“And Tobin? Cause you two are always together.”
“However could I forget Papa Tobi!” Christen jokingly exclaimed.
Mal just giggled before her eyes went wide. “I forgot!”
“What?”
“Tobin said that you have a date night tonight! And I was meant to tell you to wear something pretty. I told her you always look pretty.”
Christen cocked her head to the side and looked up at Mal. “I don’t remember her telling me we were going out.”
Mal shrugged. “She said she texted you.”

Christen groaned. “My phone died. Did she say what time we were going out?”

“Dinner time!”

Christen just chuckled. That was such a Mallory response. “How about you tell Tobin that I will be ready at 5.30?”

Mallory nodded and jumped up and ran out the door. She was going to be running between the houses sending messages all afternoon.

Christen smiled after her before she sat up. “I’d better get ready then.”

Karen could hear pacing from Tobin upstairs and she was getting concerned. It was almost 5pm. She went up slowly and knocked on the door. “Tobin?”

“Come in.” her voice was quiet.

Karen opened the door and saw Tobin pacing in soccer shorts and her giants jersey. Clothes were strewn across the bed. “You okay?”

“I don’t know what to wear.” Tobin said quietly. “I want it to be perfect.”

“Didn’t you pick out a dress a month ago?” Karen asked softly as she went and sat on Tobin’s desk chair.

“It isn’t comfortable. None of them are.” Tobin gestured at the clothes and sighed. “What do I do?”

Karen looked at the clothes and noticed that there was one outfit that wasn’t there. She smiled at her daughter. “What about your suit? You look great in it and it matches almost anything Chris wears.”

Tobin shook her head. “Chris loves it when I wear a dress.”

“She loves it when you wear what you want to wear. When you go on dates, you always wear dress pants. Why change it to a dress now?”

Tobin shrugged. “It’s a bigger date than normal Mum.”

“So? You are still the same people.”

Tobin just shook her head and kept pacing. Karen sighed before she grabbed her mobile and called the woman in question.

“Karen? Is everything okay?”

Tobin’s eyes went wide when she heard her girlfriends voice. Karen just grinned and waved her off. “I have a question for you.”

“Okay.”

“Tobin wearing a suit for date night or wearing a dress? What would you prefer?”
“Tobin comfortable. I don’t care either way as long as she is happy and comfortable in what she is wearing. But her suit looks amazing on her and she is much more confident wearing that than any dress I have ever seen her in.”

Karen smiled at Tobin who just frowned. “What colour are you wearing? I can match her shirt with your dress.”

“It’s a dark green colour. Her white button down and maybe a green tie if you can’t find a shirt.”

“I will do just that. Thanks Chris.”

Karen hung up the phone and looked at Tobin with a smile. “Go grab your suit.”

“But-“

“Tobin. You wear suits. Who cares?”

Tobin shrugged. “I thought Chris might like me to be a bit girlier today.”

Karen went and hugged the teen. “She wants you to be you. She doesn’t care about anything else.”

Tobin held her Mum tight. She needed a minute.

Tobin knocked on the Press front door with enthusiasm. She barely had to wait 10 seconds before it was opened by Christen.

Her jaw dropped. “You look amazing.”

Chris was wearing a knee length forest green dress. I was flowy and was sleeveless. She had on black 3 inch heels, her leather jacket was over her arm in case it got cold later on. Her make up was light and she obviously had her contacts in because her green eyes were looking at Tobin with love. Her curls were out and wild, just like Tobin loved.

“Thank you. You look very smart yourself.” Christen said with a grin.

Tobin was wearing her black suit. The pants and jacket were tailored to fit her perfectly, with the slim cut making her figure pop. She was wearing heeled boots as well. Her shirt was white and the skinny tie she had on matched Christens dress perfectly. Tobin had her glasses on. She had been shaking so badly she couldn’t get her contacts in.

In her inside jacket pocket was a small box which was making it’s presence known.

Tobin presented her elbow to Christen. “Shall we?”

Christen giggled and took the arm. Tobin led her to the car with a smile.

Their families were watching on with beaming smiles, knowing that when they returned, they would be as happy as could be.

Christen was slightly confused when Tobin drove them to the park after their dinner. They had
been to one of Christen’s favourite seafood restaurants on the board walk and had watched the sunset. It had been an amazing night. But it was nearing 9pm and they needed to be home soon.

“What are we doing here?”

Tobin jumped out of the car and she walked around and opened Christen’s door for her. “I have a surprise for you.”

Tobin escorted Christen across the park to the little hidden area in the corner. Christen gasped when she saw it.

“Oh my!”

The fairy lights were strung across the trees, it was clear of leaves and rubbish. There was a picnic blanket on the floor with a wicker basket on top. Tobin led Christen across and sat her down. She opened the basket and found the chocolate covered strawberries Karen had organised waiting for them, as well as a few bottles of water.

“This is amazing Tobin.”

Tobin grinned and held a strawberry out for Christen to eat. The striker beamed and took a bite, moaning because it tasted so good. Tobin blushed and Christen chuckled before she swallowed. She then handed Tobin a strawberry and they repeated the process.

The sat for about half an hour, just talking and laughing, enjoying themselves. Christen eventually stood and walked around, looking at all the lights and how pretty it was. Tobin stood as well and removed the box from her jacket pocket and held it in her hand. When Chris came back to stand with her, Tobin gripped her hand tightly and smiled nervously.

“What is it?” Christen asked with a soft smile. “You’re shaking.”

Tobin took a deep breath.

“I met you when I was broken. And I knew immediately that you were special. You were happy and smart and always let me talk about stupid stuff even if you had no care in the world. You helped me pull myself out of the gutter and put me back together. I wouldn’t be the person I am today without you.”

“It took me almost a year to figure out that I really liked you. You weren’t just my best friend. You were my everything. Well, except for Mal. She is Mal and no one can replace her.” Tobin rushed out.

Christen let out a watery chuckle. “Keep going.”

“Right.” Tobin took another breath. “We went through shit and we went through good times. But I knew that I always had you there with me. You were my rock, my anchor and my love. I knew that I couldn’t live without you in my life. You made everything better and I am a better person with you.”

Tobin slowly got down on one knee but didn’t let go of Christen’s hand. Christen’s free hand flew up to cover her mouth.

“I know we are young. But I know you are the one. And I am not going to wait any longer.” Tobin pulled her other hand to the front and popped open the ring box.

Christen gasped and had tears running down her cheeks.
“Christen Annemarie Press. Will you marry me?”

Christen nodded wildly before she knelt down and kissed Tobin silly. She pulled back grinning and Tobin had a dopey grin on her face.

“Was that a yes?”


Tobin beamed and then manoeuvred the ring out of the box and onto Christen's awaiting finger. It fit perfectly.

“I love you. So much.” Tobin said with a grin.

Christen beamed and wiped the tears from her eyes. “I love you too.”

The pair stayed there for almost twenty minutes, kissing and crying and smiling. Christen was in awe of her ring and Tobin was in awe that Christen had said yes. She knew she would, but it was still her dream come true.

Christen snapped Tobin out of her reverie. "Maybe we should get home?"

Tobin looked up with a grin. "I booked a hotel room down the coast for the night. I thought it would be better."

Christen beamed. "I agree."

Christen led Tobin by the hand to the car, before they took a short drive down the coast to their hotel.

They would see their family tomorrow.

VERY late tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Well... thoughts??!!?!?!?!!?
“What is this?” Tobin asked. She was sitting with her fiancé (she hadn’t stopped smiling since Christen said yes) on the beach, watching the sunset. She was holding a small box that she had been handed by Christen.

Christen was bouncing and beaming. “Open it!”

Tobin chuckled at her eagerness but opened the box quickly. In it she found a simple ring. It had a solid silver band with clear gems dotted around the middle. It was very Tobin. Simple, elegant and understated. Tobin looked at it with a confused grin. “What’s this?”

Christen rolled her eyes and moved to sit on her knees in front of her fiancé (she inadvertently grinned at the thought) and took her left hand. “What do you think? It’s a ring!” She said with a smile.

“I know that.” Tobin said. “But why?”

Christen shook her head at the adorable look of confusion on Tobin’s face. “Just because you proposed to me doesn’t mean I didn’t get you a ring.”

Tobin looked gobsmacked. “Really?”

Christen giggled. “Yes, really!” Christen gently grabbed the ring out of the box and squeezed Tobin’s hand. She looked Tobin in the eye with a sweet smile. “Tobin Powell Heath Montgomery Pugh – wait, did I get that right?” Christen suddenly asked.

Tobin chuckled. “Close enough.”
“Okay.” Christen cleared her throat and smiled again. “Tobin Powell Heath Montgomery Pugh, will you marry me?”

Tobin beamed. “Yes.” Christen slipped the band on Tobin’s finger and then pulled her forward and kissed her softly. Tobin kept smiling and the kiss didn’t last long because of that. “I love you.”

Christen smiled. “I surprised you then?”

Tobin nodded. “I had no idea.” Tobin looked at the ring on her finger. “I love it. Thank you.”

Christen shrugged. “Had to let them know you were taken.” She said proudly.

Tobin laughed. “No one will be looking at me if you are next to me and they think they have a shot.” Christen rolled her eyes but Tobin just kept talking, laughter in her voice. “I’m serious! You my love, are stunning, gorgeous, lovely, kind, beautiful, smart, talented, skilled, fast, cute, funny, loving and any other good adjective I can think of. I love you and I love that I will be lucky enough to marry you.”

Christen was blushing and smiling. “You are perfect Tobin.”

“I’m not, but I have you. That automatically makes me smarter and kinder.”

Christen just kissed the dork in front of her, smiling as she felt the ring on Tobin’s finger on her cheek.

She felt amazing.

August 12th, 2005

“Tobin?” Christen said suddenly. The pair were lying in the park reading together, enjoying some peace and quiet. Once Servando returned tomorrow from his college tours, they knew that their time would be spent with their best friend. They had barely seen him.

“Yeah babe?”

“Your name is confusing.”

Tobin looked up, stunned. “What?”

Christen closed her book and sighed. “I was thinking about what our last name would be once we got married, but then I realised that I don’t actually know what your family did with last names. I tried to google it, but your family was so secretive. I was lucky to find that your Mum’s maiden name was Heath, and that is only because I knew that I could look for it. Right now, Tobin Powell Pugh Heath Montgomery is what I have as your name, which legally I think it is. But no one will ever say Mrs Press Pugh Heath Montgomery, they will pick one and to be honest, I don’t want that many last names either.”

Tobin looked understanding after Christen explained, even if it was slightly rushed. “What exactly do you want to know? How my family did it or what name I would love to go by for the rest of my life?”
“Both, I guess?” Christen said uncertainly.

Tobin sat up and shrugged. “My Dad was an only child and so was my Mum. Mum said something about wanting the kids and parents to have the same last name, so she happily changed it to Montgomery and never looked back.”

“I guess that makes sense.” Christen said quietly.

“What name do you want to go by?” Tobin asked. “Forget everything else, what do you want to be called?”

Christen sighed. “I want to be known professionally as Christen Press. It is who I am, even if my married name is different. Besides, Christen Press-Montgomery sounds pretty good too.”

Tobin chuckled. “I agree. That makes total sense.”

“What do you want? Are you going to stay as a Heath or go to Montgomery for college?”

Tobin looked at her fingers. “I actually think I want to be a Pugh.”

Christen looked surprised. “Really?”

Tobin nodded. “Heath was just a name we decided on because it was Mum’s and I came here for school. But I feel more like a Pugh than a Heath. And…” Tobin tapered off nervously.

“And?” Christen prodded.

Tobin sighed. “Mal is my sister and Karen is my Mum. I want to show that on my jersey. I want Mal to be able to say that I am her sister, and no one questions it. When we come out as married and together, whenever that is, I want my jersey to say PUGH-MONTGOMERY and yours to say PRESS-MONTGOMERY. I want everyone to know that yeah, I am that Montgomery, but I am also a Pugh, big sister to that cheeky little monkey, daughter of that amazing woman and wife to that brilliant woman. I am more than the name on my back and the family it belongs to.”

Christen smiled sweetly. “That’s very thoughtful and lovely Tobin.”

Tobin shrugged. “It is the truth.”

Christen held her fiancé’s hand and squeezed it. “I think Tobin Pugh suits you.”

Tobin smiled softly. “Yeah?”

Christen nodded. “I can be secretly married to Tobin Pugh.”

“We won’t be secretly married. It will just be private. We will tell our friends and everyone who cares about us, and we will end up telling our soccer teams I am sure, but it just won’t be public knowledge for the media or fans until we are ready for it to be. Until we are settled and happy and secure in our futures in the USWNT. Because we will get there, and we will be there for a long time.” Tobin said determinedly.

“Personal life stays private, soccer life can be public knowledge?” Christen asked for clarity.

“Yeah. It isn’t anyone’s business but ours.” Tobin said.

Christen smiled. “So back to names…” She was trying to get Tobin to smile and it worked. “We go to college and into the world as Christen Press and Tobin Pugh, then once we are ready, we tack
Montgomery onto the end of it?"

Tobin nodded. “I think that works well.”

“And what name would our kids have?”

Tobin got a look of deep contemplation on her face. “I don’t know. Three names is too many. I
know from experience.”

“It is indeed.”

Tobin sighed. “Maybe we cross that bridge when we come to it?”

“And how long will that be do you think?” Christen asked cheekily.

Tobin grinned. “Who the hell knows what life will throw at us? We can revisit it that in like 10
years time.”

“Fair enough.”

August 26th, 2005

“Are you sure Tobin?” Karen asked seriously.

Tobin nodded. “It makes sense to change it for my Senior Year if that is the name I am going to
use at college and beyond.”

“I agree with you. I mean about using that last name.”

Tobin smiled at her adoptive mother. “Yea. I am not ashamed to say I am not ready to be Tobin
Montgomery. I need to learn and grow a lot before I take on that mantle. Heath is my Mum’s
maiden name and as much as I like it, that isn’t fully me. Not anymore. I have changed and grown
because of being here and living here. I am a Pugh.”

Karen smiled and nodded. “If you’re sure?”

“Absolutely.”

“Okay.” Karen picked up her pen and signed her name on the papers in front of her which had been
put together by Tobin’s family lawyer. She was proud of her daughter. She was thinking things
through, thinking strategically and long term with her decisions and taking initiative.

She was growing up.

She put the pen down and smiled at Tobin. “Tobin Pugh. It is lovely to meet you.”

Tobin beamed.

August 24th, 2005

“Hey Mal! I have something for you!” Tobin called up the stairs. Mal had decided to set up a fort
in Tobin’s bedroom and was having a grand old time. They had been bribing her to come down for
meals for a couple of days.

Karen rolled her eyes at the thumps on the stairs. “NO RUNNING IN THE HOUSE!”

The thumps slowed and then Mal was standing sheepishly at the bottom of the stairs. “Sorry Mumma!”

Tobin just chuckled and got Mals attention. She saw there was a wrapped parcel on the table. “Is that for me?” Tobin nodded and Mal walked quickly across to her. “Can I open it?” Mal asked, even as she was ripping into it.

“Yes Mal.”

It took Mal less than ten seconds to see that she was holding a soccer jersey. It said CAL on the front, and it was big. It was Tobin size. “What is this?”

“That is my soccer jersey for college next year. I thought you’d like your own to snuggle in like you do with your Giants one.” Tobin said with a smile.

Mals eyes went wide. “Really?”

Tobin nodded. “Do you want to see what number I picked?”

Mal spun the jersey around and frowned. “That isn’t 17!”

Tobin chuckled. “No. Someone already has that number. So I picked 98.”

“Why?” Mal looked at Tobin, curious.

Tobin grinned. “One of my favourite people was born in 1998 and I thought that having that number would be pretty cool. They are really cool so I thought it would help me be cool too.”

“Who?”

“You.”

Mal beamed. “This is for me?!” She asked.

Tobin nodded. “You are my favourite person and you are really cool.”

“Yea I am!” Mal exclaimed before she tackled her in a hug. “Thanks Papa.” She whispered.

Tobin smiled. “Anything for you Kiddo.”

Mal pulled back and looked at it again. “It even says Pugh for me Mumma!”

Karen smiled at her youngest daughter. “Does it now?”

Mal nodded. “Yea! Tobi always has Heath on her shirts.”

“What if I said that I would have Pugh on my shirt from now on?” Tobin asked Mal.

Her eyes went wide. “That would be awesome! Cause then we would be the same and I would be like your real super proper sister and then no one would say it didn’t count and we would be the same! Can we be the same?” Mal pleaded.

Tobin nodded. “All my shirts will say Pugh now. We will be the same.”
Mal beamed and then burst into tears as she hugged Tobin. Tobin and Karen welled up as well.
“We be the same Mumma. We the same!” Mal cried happily into Tobin’s chest.

Karen came and hugged them both. “We are all the same now Mal.”

Mal sniffed. “This is the best day ever.”

August 26th, 2005

“Are you ready Mal?” Tobin asked.

The seven-year-old nodded wildly, making the helmet on her head fall in front of her eyes. Tobin just chuckled and moved it back and tightened the straps, so it was secure. She knelt in front of her and smiled. Mal had twin braids to keep her hair out of the way and a wide fluro-pink headband under the helmet. She had knee pads, elbow pads and wrist guards on as well. She was holding her new skateboard from Servando under her arm and was bouncing excitedly.

Servando had come back from his college visits with a new skateboard and wanted to learn from Tobin. He had always wanted to learn but finally bit the bullet and bought a cheap one when he saw how big campuses were and realising that walking was boring. He would be joining Tobin at UC Berkeley and was really happy with what he had decided. He would be close to both of his best friends and was keen as.

Mallory had insisted she watch Unca Serv learn to skate from her sister and she had sat next to Christen on the sidewalk, enraptured with the sounds and the movement. Tobin had always surfed and skated, but had tried to keep it away from Mallory until she was a bit older. But after watching Tobin teach Servando and then watch Tobin go through the bowls and rails at the local skatepark with ease, Mal was adamant she wanted to learn. Which is why they were in an empty carpark on one of the final days of the holidays. Servando had bought her a new skateboard, Christen had bought her all the pads and protective gear, Tobin was going to teach her safely and Karen knew that between the three of them Mallory would be safe.

Tobin took a deep breath. “Okay. We are going to start really simply. Stand on the board.”

Mal put the board on the floor and put her foot on it, jumping back when it suddenly shot away from her. “What? No!”

Tobin just smiled and jogged to get the board while Servando and Christen watched on. “It’s okay Mal!” Christen called.

"You'll get it Princess!"

Tobin came back and put the board down again. “I’ll hold it so it doesn’t run away. Try again.”

Mal did so and then she was smiling as she stood wobbling on the board. “I DID IT!”

Tobin stood and beamed. “You did. Are you ready to go forward now?”

Mal nodded and held her hands out for Tobin to take. She had seen Serv do the same thing. Very slowly Tobin pushed her along, and allowed her to get used to the movement. Mal was giggling at smiling widely. “This is so cool!” She screeched.
Tobin very slowly let one of the kids hands go and put it on her back, while the other stayed on her upper arm. “Bend your knees a bit Kiddo. And push your butt back.”

Mal did just that and Tobin slowly turned her so she was heading towards Serv and Chris, who were cheering loudly. Mal was determined.

“Are you ready Mal?”

“For what?” She asked her sister.

“Stay calm and still. Head facing forward and stay balanced.” Tobin said and gave her a slight push before letting go. Mal was on her own. She kept walking next to her just in case.

Mal did as her sister did and she kept going straight at a decent pace, happy as could be. Once the board ran out of momentum and stopped, she stepped off carefully before jumping up and down. “I Did It!”

The three teens laughed at her with big smiles. She was adorable.

She turned back to her sister and gave her the puppy dog eyes. “Again?”

Tobin nodded. “This time we can work on you pushing off.”

“AWESOME!”

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August 28th, 2005

Tobin and Christen were sitting across from their parents, all of who looked serious. “Did we do something wrong?” Tobin asked concerned. “I swear we didn't do it. Channing is here too.”

“No love.” Stacy assured her and the two relaxed. “We just want to ask your thoughts on something that has us concerned.”

“What is it Mum?” Christen asked.

“Your rings.” Stacy said quietly. “We are worried about you wearing your rings at school.”

“Why?”

Cody sighed. “Kids are cruel and you two have had trouble in the past about being together.”

“That was years ago. Now no one really cares. Hell, some don’t even realise we are together which is stupid. We were pretty obvious about it, even if we don’t do PDA.” Christen grumbled.

Tobin snorted. “They keep asking Chris out in front of me. Kids are dumb.”

Karen had a slight smile on her face at the look of indignation on Tobin’s. “Regardless, we were just wondering what you two were planning for your Senior Year.”

Christen shrugged. “Lots of people wear rings. I’m not going to be shoving if it under peoples noses but I am going to wear it. I wear like 8 rings anyway. What's one more? Tobin?”
“It’s understated and I love it. It is really me. People will probably assume it was a birthday gift.” Tobin said.

The three adults looked at each other, still worried but seeing the girls weren’t concerned did settle them a bit. “What happens if someone guesses or says something?” Stacy asked out of curiosity.

“We will say the same thing we always do.” Tobin started.

“Nothing. It is none of their business.” Christen sighed. “We have had people say we look like best friends, close friends, girlfriends, whatever and we always act the same way. I don’t think they will care.”

“And college?” Stacy asked.

“That is 12 months away. We have time.” Tobin whined. “Why are you so worried?”

Cody rolled his eyes. “Do you forget when you got suspended in Freshman Year?”

“That was different! We haven’t had half as much trouble since then!”

Christen put her hand on Tobin’s arm to settle her. She was getting worked up. Tobin sat back and crossed her arms, pouting. She was getting her back up.

Christen sighed. “We will be careful around assholes. We promise.”

The three adults took what they could get. Even if it wasn’t much.

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**Senior Year**

Tobin hadn’t gone to school on the anniversary in the past and this year was no different. Karen stayed downstairs and worked from home while Christen was by her side with Ollie as she stayed in her room grieving and remembering. Mallory had been informed about why her sister was so sad not long ago and she tried to give her space to grieve. If Tobin needed her, Mallory would cuddle up on her front and not move until Tobin asked her too. It had been four years and it still hurt like it was yesterday.

Tobin and Christens final season for Chadwick was bittersweet. They carried their team through the competition, often being the only reason that they won. Their chemistry was evident and they were constantly in touch with US Soccer for camps and about new training programs. It was their senior year and the pair were honour students, so balancing their workload and football was tough. US Soccer eased off until after their school football season was finished, and then gave them training programs. Tobin and Christen were chuffed. It meant that US Soccer saw them in their future.

Not one person mentioned their rings. No one noticed them, no one said anything about them being engagement rings. The pair were quiet and other than Serv, didn’t really have any close friends. Their soccer team was sweet but they didn’t click with them to hang out outside of football. They had so much going on, they barely had time to date and be together outside of training and studying.
In January, the pair were pulled in for a U20s camp and they could see that it was one that would be gearing towards the World Cup later that year. The players were older than them and all in college.

Except for one.

“WHERE IS MONKEY?” Kelley demanded as soon as she saw the pair walk into camp in Carson.

Tobin rolled her eyes. “In first grade. Isn't that where you are meant to be?”

Kelley scoffed. “Jokes on you. I skipped first grade.”

“Well I skipped fourth grade.” Christen said with a grin before she hugged her fellow future Cardinal. “Hey Kelley.”

“Hey Pressi.” Kelley said with a smile.

“I didn’t skip any grades. I am just born at the end of the school year.” Tobin grumbled before she hugged Kelley as well. “Do we know who we are rooming with yet?”

Kelley shrugged. “I’m in with Allie Long. No idea why. Just ask the staff.”

Tobin dropped their bags and walked across and got their information and room keys while Christen spoke with Kelley. Something Kelley said made her laugh and Christen put her hand up to push the curls out of her face. Kelley’s eyes went wide.

“NO WAY!” She exclaimed. She grabbed Christens hand. “Is that a?”

Christen nodded. “Yes. But chill out would you. We can talk later.”

Kelley nodded and Tobin jogged back across. She was smiling. “Guess who are roommates?”

“Actually?” Christen asked, surprised.

Tobin nodded. “Alphabetical order.”

Kelley frowned. “Your last name is Heath, isn’t it?”

Tobin shook her head. “I took my adoptive families name. Pugh.”

“Aww. Monkey has a big sister!” Kelley said with a smile.

Tobin rolled her eyes. “She always had a big sister. I now just have the same name as her.”

“She happy about that?” Kelley asked seriously.

Tobin nodded. “Extremely.”

“Good. Monkey deserves the world.”

They returned from camp and went straight back into their school work, trying to catch up and do all their assessments. Christen and Tobin, if they kept up their grades, would be the valedictorian and salutatorian for their year. Tobin was very happy that Christen was ranking first. She did not want to do any speeches. Her skills lay in maths, art and sport. Christen was the talker of the pair.

Karen, Cody and Stacy saw the pair were invested and concentrating fully on their schoolwork and
they were proud. They already had their scholarships organised and they still cared to put in the full effort.

What they weren’t organising or even looking at was a wedding, and considering how much the pair, especially Tobin, had been talking about getting married before college, they were confused.

Stacy was the one who approached the pair about it and she was stunned and impressed at their mature answer.

“There is a really high chance one, if not both of us, will be called to the U20s World Cup squad.” Tobin explained. “That will take most of the Summer away from us.”

“We don’t want to have it rushed or shoved in a tiny little gap we can find.” Christen continued. “If it takes a bit longer, or until Winter break, the following Summer, it takes a bit longer. It sucks, but we can’t do much about it. We want a wedding for us and to do it properly.”

“So you are happy to delay it?” Stacy asked for clarification.

“Yeah.” Tobin said while she smiled softly at her fiancé. “It doesn’t change much.”

“GO CHRISSY AND TOBI!”

Christen smiled into the crowd as she listened to the applause for her Valedictory address, with Mallory standing on her chair clapping loudly next to her parents and sister who were beaming. Karen was wiping tears from her eyes.

She looked back to see Tobin in her graduation getup, beaming and clapping loudly. As the valedictorian and salutatorian, they got to sit on stage together and have their final moments as Seniors together.

It was a perfect day.

Their graduation party was filled with family and it was doubling as a going away to college party. They would be leaving in less than a week. Christen and Tobin had decided that they were going to live in the townhouse in the city and commute to school. While it was about a thirty-minute drive for both of them, they wanted to live together properly for the first time. When Mal and Karen moved up to San Francisco closer to Christmas time, they would be living in a house not too far away. Karen didn’t want to cramp their style. Mal wanted sleepovers all the time.

Servando was going to be living in the dorms for his freshman year, but the offer was there for him to crash out whenever he wanted to. Depending on his roommate, he might just take them up on that.

During their graduation party, both Tobin and Christen got a call from the US 20s coach. Christen got hers first but before she could say anything, Tobin’s phone rang. The midfielder had no poker face and was beaming when she hung up. She turned to Christen with a pleading but beaming face. “Please tell me we got the same phone call?”

Christen shrugged. “I don’t know. Are you going to camp in late June and Russia in August?”

Tobin just laughed and picked her up and spun her around.

They were going to the World Cup!
yes i delayed the wedding and kinda skipped through their senior year... but i think we are all ready for college, kelley, alex, servando and more NT stuff starting up soon.

and with a delayed wedding, more people we love will make an appearance.

I hope you all enjoyed it - let me know what you think!
Heads Up

Chapter Summary

Tobin and Christen get a bit of a wakeup call and Alex and Kelley find out something big

Chapter Notes

Hi? All mistakes are mine - sorry it took so long.

Long time no update? My hand is okay, I just kinda have a bit (or a lot) of writers block so this did not come easily or smoothly. I hope you like it, it is a bit different than what i thought was going to happen but I like.

Oh, and I am making US Soccer super fucking ‘evil and shitty in this. I'm in that kind of mood - enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

June 23rd, 2006

Tobin came home to their house in San Francisco and flopped on the couch with a groan. Her coach was running her ragged in pre-season training and she was exhausted. She had barely spent any time with Christen since they had gotten to San Francisco. They were both busy in preseason training and unpacking what they could. It didn’t help that they were going back to LA for a camp in early July before going to Russia. Everything was hectic and Tobin wasn’t finding her feet easily.

Christen chuckled at her future wife. She was slumped like a sack of potatoes. “Hard day?”

“Urgh.” Tobin lifted her head up and frowned. “They want to go out as a team. I don’t know how they have the energy.”

Christen just shrugged. “You better go then.”

“No. There will be freshman hazing and I don’t want to get hazed. And I don’t want to drink.”

“Drive the Jeep and then don’t drink. Easy. Hazing is going to happen regardless. They can’t make you drink and you have the World Cup soon as well. They will understand.”

Tobin frowned. “Are you trying to get rid of me?”

“No. I am trying to get you to bond with your team.” Christen walked over and pulled Tobin up. “Let’s shower and see how you feel.”
“Why don’t you have to go out? And how are you not exhausted?”

Christen smiled. “We are going out tomorrow night. And I had a recovery day today. I feel refreshed.”

Tobin pouted at her wife as they headed up the stairs to their bathroom. Christen just smiled at her adorableness.

Tobin drove to the soccer house on campus and some of the girls were frowning. They were half surprised the midfielder had turned up. She was so private and hadn’t let anyone into her personal life. Only Alex could get her out of her football head and get her to focus. It was preseason and they had to get used to playing with each other, but they had to trust each other as well. Tobin clearly didn’t and they needed to get her to open up.

“I didn’t know freshman were allowed cars on campus. I thought you had to be a sophomore?” A senior, Jess asked.

One of the other freshman spoke up. “We aren’t, but I don’t think she lives on campus. I haven’t seen her in the dorms, and we are all in the same building.”

The Cal soccer team were bemused and turned to Alex for an explanation. The striker shrugged. “She lives in the city, that’s all I know. Tobin is like an onion, she had layers.”

“Did you just quote Shrek?” Jess laughed.

“If it works, it works.” Alex said quietly. “She goes to the World Cup soon, when she comes back we can work on getting her to open up. I’ll see if I can get her secret weapon to help us out.”

Andi, a Junior, cocked an eyebrow. “What weapon?”

“The one person she cannot say no to.”

July 19th, 2006

The U20s World Cup Squad and the first team were both at camp in Carson. They had been there for over a week and now had a free day. Christen and Tobin quickly went home to see their families and Kelley, Allie, A-Rod and Cheney had planned for a day relaxing on the beach when they found themselves being pulled into a hotel room by some of the girls in first team. Megan Rapinoe, Hope Solo, Abby Wambach, Christie Rampone and Shannon Box were there waiting for them.

“Are we in trouble?” Cheney asked.

Christie was the captain and was taking the lead. “No. But you are the ones who seem closest to the ones who could be if they aren’t careful.”

“Normally we wait until there are people in the senior ranks before we bring it up, but from the looks of things a fair few of you won’t be too far away.” Boxxxy continued. “Pinoe?”

The youngest senior team player smiled at them sadly. “What’s the deal with Pugh and Press?” The four younger women tensed. “Your reaction tells me what I saw was not a one off.”
Hope cut in, blunt but clear. “We do not care if they are together. They seem sweet and they are good kids. The team is fine with it, we don’t care. Pia and the coaching staff don’t either. The board and the bosses up above? Different story. They aren’t the most open-minded people in the world.”

“What are we meant to do?” Cheney asked.

Abby sighed. “The only reason we know is because Pinoe saw them holding hands down a hallway and kissing once. Then you see all the little things, the looks and the comfort they have together, which could be just because they are best friends. But they need to be careful.”

“If they want to go as far as they can, they can’t be out. It sucks, but it isn’t the right time. They could be out, but they couldn’t confirm they were together which would almost be worse. The players and the travelling group is very inclusive, but any scandal is not seen well by US Soccer. Dating a teammate could be a scandal for them.”

“Tell them to keep it behind closed doors. They are best friends, that’s obvious. That will probably be promoted and played up. There is a line, and if they cross it, they may not make it back in.”

Christie spoke. “We wouldn’t know if Pinoe hadn’t seen them kissing, and all their other interactions are pretty much fine. They won’t be outed, they won’t be hurt. We will protect them. But US Soccer won’t.”

“Isn’t that discrimination?” Allie asked.

Abby scoffed. “They will find some sort of justification for it.” Her expression was dark and the girls wanted to take a step back. They could feel the emotion pouring off her. A-Rod assumed she had been a victim of the ‘justification’.

“Why tell us though? Why not go straight to them?” Kelley asked.

“They know you, they trusted you to tell you. You are their friends. You are in a better position than us to approach them, and we don’t want to spook them. When they make it to our squad, we will talk to them if we need to. But they aren’t here yet, and you guys are going with them. They will listen to you.” Boxxy said with a small smile.

The four U20s players left and went back to Kelley and Christens shared room. They sat in stunned silence.

“I hadn’t even noticed them acting coupley. They always act like that!” Kelley exclaimed. “They were friends first and always put their relationship behind them at football.”

“That’s what they have done, but they obviously slipped up a bit and got seen.” Cheney said quietly.

“But if they don’t have an issue, why can’t they be coupley?” Kelley asked.

“Because from the sounds of things, if the wrong people find out they could have their careers ended before they begin.” Cheney explained.
Kelley shook her head, mad for her friends having to hide. “This fucking sucks.”

Before anyone could respond, the door opened and in came the pair in question. They looked refreshed and smiled at the group, but their smiles turned to frowns at their friends expressions. “What’s wrong? Is someone hurt?”

Kelley just flopped on her bed and screamed into the pillow. Allie rolled her eyes and smacked her arm. “Stop being dramatic.” She turned to the couple. “We have to tell you something.”

Tobin sat on the floor in front of the TV while Christen sat on the bed. “What’s up?”

“One of the first teamers saw you kissing. They asked us to warn you. While the teams wont care, the coaches wont care, US Soccer will.”

Tobin grimaced and Christen looked at her with an annoyed look. “I freaking told you. Keep it in the rooms at most!”

“I thought we were alone!” Tobin sighed. “Sorry honey.”

Christen shook her head and then exhaled. “It’s fine.” She turned to the four girls who looked stunned. “Thanks for telling us. It’s good to know that the girls don’t care.”

Kelley sat forward. “You don’t care you have to hide?” She asked.

Tobin and Christen looked at each other before they chuckled. “It isn’t hiding. This is our work place and keeping personal and private lives separate is something we always said we would do. Camps are essentially work, so no couple stuff. Only if we are in the same room is there anything coupley.” Christen explained.

“Would you be out publicly now?” A-Rod asked.

“No. Our friends know, our family know. Everyone who cares about us knows.” Tobin said with a shrug.

The four girls were stunned. “You don’t care US Soccer would be assholes about it?”

“Yes, we do.” Christen said sternly. “But we aren’t in a position to change that yet, and we aren’t wanting to be the ones who kick start it at 17 and 18. It will come in time. We need to get into the first team and go from there.”

The girls were quiet and Tobin groaned. “Ok. We need food. Let’s get out of this place.”

The six walked out together and in the lobby ran into the five first team players who had spoken with the group. Cheney just nodded at them and you could see that they visibly relaxed. Tobin and Christen didn’t take any notice of the interaction, as they were busy telling Kelley about how Mal was going. The kid had wormed her way into the hearts of everyone she met, and Kelley always checked on her. It was also the best way to make Tobin open up and smile and laugh, which was infectious. By the time they got to the local restaurant, the conversations were almost forgotten and they were all talking about going to Russia. Their minds were on the game once again.


dated August 16th, 2006

“Mal, we are going to Russia. You can’t come with us to Russia.” Christen was explaining quietly. The U20s World Cup squad and the first team squad was leaving from LA and Mal had happily
come with Karen and Stacy to drop them off. Now that she could see they were leaving, she wasn’t as happy. Especially because they would be going straight to college when they returned and she wouldn’t see them until Thanksgiving.

Mal was holding Tobin tight while Christen spoke with her. “You keep going away from me.”

“Not on purpose honey. You move up near us in a couple months and you will see us all the time. Now you have to stay with Mumma and look after her.”

Mal sniffed. “You will call me all the time?”

“Of course Kiddo.” Tobin said from above her. “Whenever we can. Mumma has set times up for us and everything.”

Tobin knelt next to Christen and looked at Mal in the eye. “We will see you soon. Promise.”

The eight-year old hugged them tight and Tobin and Christen wrapped her up, not caring that every single player in the terminal was watching them.

Their caring for the younger girl was something that would stand out for the first team players and the U20s players. They saw the heart of Tobin which you hadn’t seen too often, and they saw Christen openness. They let in the ones they loved, it just took time.

September 11th, 2006

Tobin’s phone was ringing, and the footballer was in the shower. She had just returned from the World Cup in Russia for the U20s and hadn’t had a chance to organise the day like she normally tried to. Her routine was out of whack in San Francisco and it would time to level herself out.

She was going to class that morning before finding a place she could use to talk to her parents and siblings. It had been five years since she lost her family and the 18-year-old couldn’t get to the park in LA where their plaque was. She hadn’t been able to bury them, but she did have a place to go and be with them. Now she needed one in San Francisco. Christen had suggested a place in their backyard, but Tobin wanted it to be somewhere she could escape to.

The phone rang out before it rang again and Christen saw it was Jess. Tobin had spoken about her repeatedly and knew she looked up to the senior player, even though she had also admitted she hadn’t them in yet. The phone rang out and then once again Jess called.

Christen sighed and bit the bullet. She answered the phone with a sigh. “Tobin’s phone. This is Christen.”

“Oh thank god someone answered. My name is Jess. Is Tobin there?”

“She isn’t available right now. Can I take a message?” Christen was trying to keep it short and sweet.

“Shit. We were going to look for her in the dorms, but she doesn’t seem to live on campus.” Christen didn’t say anything, she knew the senior was fishing. “We have a team dinner tonight and Tobin is the only one we haven’t heard from because she was in Russia. Alex called and said she
had left a message, but even she hasn’t heard from her. She needs to be there; it is compulsory bonding time. And we want to celebrate her performance. She did awesome.”

Christen sighed but internally was laughing that they hadn’t realised she had been on the team too. “It isn’t a good day, but I’ll let her know. I can’t guarantee she will rock up.”

“Your welcome Christen. I’ll text the details.”

Christen hung up and could see her wife come out of their bathroom. “You have a team dinner tonight. It is compulsory apparently.”

Tobin sighed. “I know. I was going to plead ignorance.”

“Sorry.” Christen hugged her fiancé tight. “How you feeling?”

“I don’t want to go to dinner. I want to lie here with you all night.”

Christen kissed her cheek. “I would love nothing more. How about I drive you and then you can text for a pickup when you are ready?” She had the evening off for just this reason.

Tobin nodded and pulled herself back. “Let’s get this day over with.”

That night, Tobin was dropped off at the restaurant. It took her 10 minutes to get out of the Jeep and she knew she probably wouldn’t last two hours at dinner.

The team saw the jeep they knew to be Tobin’s roll up, but they frowned when she didn’t get out right away. Eventually she did and the team was surprised at how ragged she looked. The midfielder was a mystery they were still trying to unravel.

When she entered the team cheered and congratulated her for her amazing performances in Russia. She thanked them quietly and sat in the seat that was left for her next to Alex. The striker didn’t say anything, just smiled and put her arm around her.

The team could tell she was off and let her be. They tried to pull her into the conversation occasionally but her one-word responses concerned them. Alex frowned, having no idea what was up. She picked at her pasta and the girls were quietly concerned.

They were an hour into dinner when the news flashed across to the 9/11 attacks and the memorials that had taken place that day. The whole restaurant was quiet and listened to how people were trying to move on. Tobin just kept her head down and tried not to react while she focused on slowing her heart rate and breathing down.

She almost got through the bulletin until the reporter brought up her family.

“One of the families impacted were the Montgomery’s. The only member left in that family would be 18 now. We reached out to the trust and they said she was healthy and doing well. We wish her the best and hope she has support around her on this day. It was a tough day for all Americans, but for the families of the victims, it was even worse.

I know we focus on Miss Montgomery more than the others, but her family and their legacy are something this country misses. She has us all behind her and we hope she feels she is able to resurface soon.”

The whole table was quiet until Andi snorted. “That is bullshit. You want that girl to resurface for a
story. Let her be. I am glad she hasn’t been pulled into the public eye. She gets to have a life.”

Tobin quietly excused herself to the bathroom and texted Christen to come get her. She was done for the night.

The team barely noticed as they were talking about not only the Montgomery heiress, but the rest of the victims and their families. No one there knew someone personally who had lost their life, but they all felt the impact.

Alex wasn’t paying attention, more worried about her friend in the bathroom that the conversation.

Christen had been two minutes away from the restaurant when she got the text, so she drove their and parked right out the front of the restaurant. The team stopped talking when the car stopped, and they realised that Tobin wasn’t at the table.

“Is she still in the bathroom?” Jess asked. The girls shrugged and one of them stood to go and check when the drivers’ door opened. To say they were shocked when Christen got out was an understatement. They expected some burly guy, not a gorgeous woman.

“Who is that?” Andi asked.

Jess smiled. “It might be Christen.” The team swung to the captain and she shrugged. “Someone called Christen answered Tobin’s phone today.”

Michelle, a defender, threw her head back. “That’s Christen Press. She plays for Stanford and was in the U20s squad in Russia. We play her in a month.”

Christen walked into the restaurant and saw the team staring at her. She smiled slightly before she walked straight to the bathroom. Alex stood and followed quickly.

Christen stopped at the door. “Don’t ask why. Not today, okay?”

Alex had never seen her so serious. “Alright.”

Christen opened the door and found her fiancé fighting back tears and gripping the sink hard. Alex was quiet but unsure of what was happening, so kept her mouth shut. “Come on babe. Let’s get home.”

Tobin nodded and swept past her and Alex. She knew the moment she held Chris, she would burst into tears. Tobin went to the table and grabbed her jacket and phone, mumbled a quick goodbye and went straight to the Jeep.

Christen took a bit longer and watched her wife walk out the restaurant before any of her teammates could move. They turned to her and Alex for an explanation, but Christen just shrugged. “Today isn’t a good day. It will never be a good day.” She walked out quickly and got in the drivers’ seat so they could leave quickly. It wasn’t a long drive home, but Tobin needed to be back quickly.

The team was gobsmacked. They didn’t know what was happening, but they knew they had to protect their teammate.

“We can talk to her tomorrow.” Jess sighed. “That is if she lets us in.”

Tobin didn’t. It was too soon.
September 27th, 2006

Tobin was sitting in her locker and talking with the other players when Alex came barging in. “TOBIN!”

Tobin looked at her, spooked. “What?”

Alex grinned and stepped to the side as a missile ran in. “PAPA TOBI!”

Tobin was tackled by Mallory and was laughing the entire time. The eight-year-old let her know exactly what she thought about being left behind and how much she missed her sister while Tobin just nodded along with a smile.

“How about I introduce you to my friends and then we can visit Chris at Stanford?”

Mal nodded and then got to meet all of the Cal womens soccer team. She had them wrapped around her finger quickly and they had loved the energy the kid brought. They also loved how she immediately opened Tobin up and they knew this was Alex’s secret weapon. This was the person who was the key to Tobin’s heart.

Tobin just watched as her sister chatted with Rey the keeper about how good at scoring she was and smiled. Alex put an arm around her and held her tight. “You seemed to be feeling better this last week.” It was a statement but Tobin answered regardless.

“September is shit.” She said bluntly. “But it gets easier every year.”

“What happened?” Alex asked quietly.

Tobin looked at her. She made a decision on the spot. “Come for dinner tonight. I’ll tell you then.”

Alex nodded. She hadn’t seen the house Tobin and Christen were living in, no one had. “Okay.”

Alex met Kelley at the door, who looked at her confused. “You here for dinner?” Alex asked.

Kelley nodded. “We’ve been summoned to a mansion.”

Alex snorted. It was a town house, but it was almost a manor house. It was massive. “What college kid needs this much space?” Alex asked.

That was the question everyone would want to know the answer too in the future.

“Hey Tobin! What is this?” Kelley called from the hallway.

Dinner was lively but no questions were asked or answered. Mal had just been put to bed and it was now just the four college soccer players and Karen.

Tobin, Alex and Christen walked into the hallway and Tobin smiled sadly. “That’s my family.”

It was a family photo from when Tobin was four. She was smiling widely, and her siblings and parents were to. It was in the hall so every time she left the house, she saw them at their happiest. Right next to it was a Pugh and Press family photo. It made her smile.
Kelley cocked her head to the side. “They look so familiar but I do not know why.”

Tobin shrugged while Christen smiled slightly. “Let’s go sit down.”

The four sat around the living room while Karen made herself scarce. She was house hunting while visiting and was going to continue it in her room unless Tobin asked for her to stay.

Tobin took a breath. “I need you to promise what I say won’t leave this room.” Alex and Kelley immediately agreed and Tobin nodded. “Okay.”

Christen turned the television on to the news coverage around 9/11 and the memorials that had been recorded. When it got to the part about the Montgomery’s, Kelley and Alex’s heads whipped between the photo and the television, seeing the same people in both. “Holy shit.” Kelley said quietly. “The Montgomery’s.”

Christen turned the television off and put her hand on Tobin’s thigh. Suprisingly she wasn’t shaking. She was calm.

Alex broke the silence. “I guess that answers why you have such a big house?”

Tobin smiled and nodded. “Family house. No sense in going to the dorms if this was here.” Tobin took a breath. “I’m sorry for not telling you before.”

Kelley scoffed. “You didn’t have to tell us shit, never apologise for not telling people this. This is huge. Regardless of who your family is, losing everyone is traumatising and you have no obligation to tell anyone about it. It is your life, your history. You decide what to do with it.” Kelley exhaled. “That being said, thank you for trusting us with this.”

“I guess this is why getting you to say anything about yourself or your past is like pulling blood from a stone?” Alex asked quietly.

Tobin shrugged. “One question leads to more. If I don’t answer the first one, they don’t get close to finding out about all this. I’m proud of my family, but I want a life and to make my own way. I don’t want to be known as the orphan, I just wanna be Tobin. It is all I have ever wanted.”

Alex and Kelley were quiet. Christen was rubbing her hand up and down Tobin’s thigh to comfort her. Tobin was fiddling with her fingers.

“No wonder your last name is so fucking long.” Kelley suddenly blurted out.

Tobin just laughed at the look of shock on Kelley’s face. She nodded and grinned. “Yea, it is a bit crazy.”

Alex rolled her eyes at Kelley. “Well, whether you are Tobin Heath, Pugh, Press, Montgomery or any combination of them, we will always see you as Tobin. Your last name doesn’t matter. You are you and your family is your family. We like you for you, not your last name or your legacy.”

“Thank you.” Tobin said quietly. “it means more than you could ever know.”

Kelley and Alex both stood and hugged her. “We’ve got you T. Always will.”

Tobin nodded into their shoulders, feeling lighter than she had in weeks. Telling them had been easier than she expected and now she had more people she could talk to about it. She trusted them with everything, and she knew they wouldn’t betray her.
What do you think of how this is going? And where do you think it will go?

Cannot promise any type of update schedule - i am kinda stumped with writing at the moment, working on a resume for fulltime work. this job is like perfect for me I want it so bad and I am putting everything into getting it. Writing is on the backburner until that is kind of done and dusted, whether i get it or not. I will write if I can, but 100% not my priority right now.

I am going to answer the Not Just any Soldier comments on the final chapter, it is just taking some time for me to get to them

Let me know what you think.
Adjustment Time

Chapter Summary

Mal is mucking up and Stanford players just want the best for Christen

Chapter Notes

So my home life just went kind of sideways and after dinner I hid in my room and wrote. This was the result. Hope you all enjoy and let me know what you think - it isn't the classic college chapter, it isn't full of classes and training and games, it's more the other stuff which suits this story (at least to me lol) so i hope it works

ANother thing, I have Alex and Kelley in this story and that isn't going to change. I know some people aren't happy with them, and that is cool! You do you! They will float in and out like a lot of other characters, but i won't change what i had in mind for their characters because the humans they are based on are, im going to say polarising, at the moment. I have had people say they aren't fans of one or the other in comments and that is fine, but this is fiction and there will be changes to so much, including them.

I had this idea of writing all of the college years stuff in one go, but then decided if i did that i'd get annoyed at myself for holding stuff back. I do think I am back on track though, thanks to some help from a friend!
Thank you thank you thank you!!!
“It’s fine Mum. I’ll try and figure out what’s going on with her.” Tobin assured. “I’ve got to go now though.”

Karen breathed deeply. “She hasn’t taken the move well, I know, but she is a good kid. We need to find out if something more is happening.”

“I’ll talk to her. If she won’t talk to me, Chris will talk to her. We’ll get it sorted Mum.”

Mal was sitting with her arms crossed, frowning out the window. She hadn’t spoken to her sister she had picked her up and Tobin was concerned. Mal didn’t shut up. This was weird.

Tobin tried to make conversation all the way back to Cal’s training fields but Mal wasn’t having it. She asked about soccer, her new school, her new house and she was getting stonewalled. Once she parked near the buildings entrance, Tobin turned to her sister and sighed. “Mal, what’s going on? You’re not talking to me an it’s worrying me.”

Mal turned to her sister and gave her a dark look. Tobin frowned. “Grab your bag. You can do some homework on the sidelines while we train if you aren’t going to talk to me.”

Mal huffed and grabbed her bag before she got out of the SUV. Tobin went to put her arm around her shoulder and got shrugged off. “Don’t touch me.” Mal growled.

“Mal!” Tobin exclaimed as she knelt in front of her, aware a lot of the team was arriving and watching the exchange. “What is it?”

“You don’t care! You don’t even see me anymore!” She yelled with tears in her eyes before running ahead and in the doors. Alex had arrived and was waiting at the doors, and was the one who Mal ran to.

“Hey Superstar.” Alex said softly. “You okay?”

Mal just buried her head into Alex’s stomach and cried.

The team was silent, and Tobin was devastated. She had no idea what was happening.

The training session was competitive and intense, with Tobin being the one who was leading it. She was full of emotion and everyone knew why. Her sister was currently sitting in the bleachers with Servando, doing her homework quietly while he talked to her. She hadn’t said anything to anyone about why she was upset and why she had gotten in trouble. Serv seemed to be getting her to talk which was a positive.

The session finished and Tobin jogged straight across to the stands. Servando came down and smiled at her.

“She’s okay. But you and Chris should talk to her at home.” Serv said quietly. “She’s calmed down, she is just hurt.”

Tobin frowned but nodded and thanked him before running into the change rooms and quickly showering and changing before going back to the bleachers. Mal was sitting with her backpack on her lap, waiting quietly. “You ready Kiddo?” Tobin asked.

Mal nodded and jumped up, following her sister to the car. She didn’t say anything, but when she slipped her little hand into Tobin’s, the teen knew everything would be okay.
“Alright Kid, what’s going on?” Chris asked softly. They were all sitting cuddled on the couch together. “You’ve been a different kid since you moved up here.”

“Like you care.” Mal muttered.

Tobin frowned. “What do you mean? Of course we care Mal.”

“You don’t come to soccer, you don’t help me with my homework, you don’t see me anymore. I never see you, only Mumma plays with me. It is just Ollie and Mumma. You forgot about me. I'm alone again.” Mal sounded empty as she buried her head in Tobins chest.

Tobin and Christen felt horrible. They hadn’t realised that their adjustment to university life, living together, football and moving had left Mal behind. They knew they didn’t see her too often but they didn’t know how badly it had affected her. When they thought back, she had started getting moody around the time they were preparing to go to Russia. Her whole family was being uprooted and she felt alone. She wanted them to be with her, she wanted their attention.

And Tobin and Christen vowed in that moment to do everything they could to make their Mal smile again.

“Mal, we promise you that we never forgot about you, and we never ever will.” Christen said softly as she rubbed the girls back. “We weren’t good big sisters, but we promise to do better. We promise.”

Tobin agreed. “You are the most important person ever Mal. And we are so sorry we made you feel like this.”

Mal poked her head up and pouted. “You said that when you came here, you’d still be my Papa Tobi.”

“And I still am. I was just bad at it for a while.” Tobin said with a soft smile. “I’ll do better, I promise.”

Mal didn’t look hopeful, but she tucked her head under Tobin’s chin and closed her eyes, soon falling asleep. It had been a stressful day.

Christen made them tea while they waited for Karen, who was stuck in a meeting. “We need to fix this Tobi. Now.”

Tobin sighed. “I know. We need to talk to Mum about it though. Sounds like she has gotten the brunt of this little storm.”

Christen sat next to her and put the teas on the coffee table. “They live 15 minutes away. We could see her everyday if we tried.”

Tobin nodded. “We need to make a schedule.”

Christen chuckled. “You and your need for routine. I love it.”

Tobin blushed. “It makes life easier.”

Christen kissed her cheek and then leant back. “Never change my love.”
Two weeks later

“Are you ready?” Tobin asked quietly, smiling to herself. She was holding her hands over the excited 8 year olds eyes. Mallory was vibrating.

“Yes Papa!” She exclaimed.

“Open up Kiddo.” Tobin took her hands away and Mallory opened eyes.

Mal stepped into the giant room. “Is this for me?” She asked, awed.

Tobin nodded. “Do you like it?”

“I get my own room? Here? And at home?” Mal asked for clarification.

“Chris and I thought you might like your own space when you stay here.”

“I never stay here. I always go home.” Mal went and sat on the bed and looked around. “It’s a bit empty.”

Tobin chuckled as she sat next to her. “We also thought you’d like to pick your own furniture out. You just had to move up here away from all your friends with Mumma and everything is changing for you.”

“So did you.” Mal said quietly.

Tobin nodded. “I know, but I still have Chrissy with me. You’re a bit alone. Which is you can make this your space to come when you need to, okay? You can do whatever you want with it.”

Mal leant into her sister and sighed. “I miss home.”

Tobin put her arm around her. “I do too. But now this is home and we will make it work.”

“When can I come here?” Mal asked eagerly.

Tobin smiled. “Whenever you want, but we talked with Mumma. How do feel about staying here every Thursday night? Sometimes it will be just me and you, sometimes just you and Chrissy and sometimes we may have to changed days cause of soccer, but we will have an afternoon and night every week together, just us. And then you can come whenever you have to after that.”

Mal looked up, full of hope. “Really?”

“Really really.” Tobin replied with a grin. “And when soccer is over, you can see us more often and it will be really cool.”

Mal wrapped her arms around Tobins waist. Tobin just smiled softly kissed her on the top of the head. “Come on. You are coming to dinner with me, and then we are meeting Chrissy for dessert after their team dinner.”

Mal’s eyes lit up. “Awesome.”
“Christen, we were surprised you even came tonight! You never seem to come to team stuff.” One of the Juniors, Mariah, said snarkily. She was a player who had been moved to the bench with Christen starting in her position, so Christen just let it go. It was not worth fighting with her.

She smiled at the group. “I don’t party, I come to the dinners, the bonding nights. It’s a personal choice, I am sure you understand.”

Kelley was stifling her laughter into her pasta and not doing a very good job of it. She knew tonight was going to go sideways very soon but she was enjoying herself too much not to say anything.

Christen had won most of the team over with her play, her commitment to the team and her maturity. There was a small few who were just bitches.

A few of the team were worried about Christen’s lack of social life, not getting that she didn’t want to party, she wanted to study and play football professionally. They thought she was lonely and had put together a plan to try and set her up with someone. One of the guys on the football team, Matt, had approached a few of the girls and wanted to ask her out but they knew it would end up with a hard no if he went direct. She needed to be surprised.

They did not tell Matt that.

Christen was talking to her goalkeeper when the door opened and a tall man walked in. Some of the team sat up straight while Kelley just ensured she had a good view of the Christen Press smack down that was about to happen.

A voice cleared itself behind Christen. “Uh, excuse me? Christen?”

Christen turned and looked up to see Matt standing there holding flowers. “Matt? What are you doing here?”

The footballer blushed. “The girls told me you would be here.” He said quietly before he handed her the flowers. “These are for you.”

Christen took them carefully. “Matt, they are very nice. Thank you.” Christen said politely.

Matt nodded. “I was hoping you were free for dessert after this? I have something I would like to ask you properly, but I don’t want to do it in front of your team.”

Christen smiled tightly as she felt Kelley vibrating with laughter next to her. “Matt, I’m flattered, but I can’t. I’m sorry. I’m seeing someone.”

The footballers face fell and Christen felt like she had kicked a puppy. However, to Matt’s credit, he straightened up and smiled. “Thank you for being honest. Your teammates said I might have a shot, but someone as lovely as you couldn’t possibly be single.”

Before Christen could respond, the door opened again and Mal burst through. “CHRISSY!” She dodged the big footballer and hugged her tight.

The team had met Mal before, but only once, and were surprised to see her. Christen was thankful for the interruption. “Hey Kid. Tobi on her way in?”

Mal nodded. “She said she texted you. We have to get ice cream!”

Before Christen could respond, the door opened, and a slightly embarrassed Tobin popped her head in. “I’m not stealing secrets, just need to grab my sister. She was eager for ice cream.”
The team recognised the midfielder from Cal and greeted her kindly. Matt was just kind of standing there awkwardly, and Kelley was still laughing. “Monkey had perfect timing T.” Kelley said. “I hear you are grovelling.”

Tobin rolled her eyes. “Hence the ice cream.”

The team wasn’t understanding the bi-play but let it go as Christen grabbed her bag and got up. She had Mal under one arm and the flowers in her hand. She nodded at Matt. “Have a good night.” She turned to the team. “I’ll see you at training.”

Christen then left quickly, with Tobin opening the door for her and smiling softly at her. The team watched them walk out to the car which must have been Tobin’s and saw her get Mal settled, open the door for Christen before getting in herself. The actions were subtle, but it slapped the team and Matt in the face.

Matt just smiled. “Never had a chance, did I?”

Kelley just laughed out loud. “Nope!”

The team looked at her, kind of annoyed. “Why didn’t you say anything to us? Or Matt? This could have been avoided.” Eve exclaimed.

Kelley rolled her eyes. “Would you have believed me if I said Christen wasn’t single? Without evidence?”

Not one single player could answer that, and Kelley shook her head. “Does it even matter?”

“NO!” Half the girls exclaimed. “We don’t care, it just would have been nice to know before we tried to set her up with Matt!”

Kelley smiled. “Tell her that at training, and then never mention it again.”

Christen was asked a bit about Tobin at the next training session, but nothing invasive. They did twig on the fact she lived off campus with the Cal player, but they didn’t push. They knew she would open up if she wanted to, but she was a private person. They would make sure to invite her and Tobin to events and even thought they were bitter rivals, they would eventually get on brilliantly with the girl from Cal. Mal came to games often, and in the final four, Christen showed the team a photo of Mal and Tobin wrapped up in Stanford gear, supporting from home. They loved it and gave Tobin shit for it. Tobin just countered with a photo of Christen in Cal gear and they turned quickly. It was quite funny to watch.

The team got their first proper glimpse of the pair as a couple by chance, and by the quick use of a camera phone, in late December.

Mallory was in staying with Chris and Tobin as Karen had to fly to New York. Mallory was happy to stay with her sister, utilising her new room as often as possible. Her behaviour at school had improved and they were going to take her out for dinner as a reward. Mal was going to make the most of it since come January her sisters were heading into the extended camp for the first team and they wouldn’t get to see her for a month.

They were at a diner with Mallory and were unaware that a few of the Stanford players were watching them from the other side of the diner. The group consisting of Kara, Lana and Lena were gobsmacked. Christen was lit up. Tobin was holding her hand and talking to her sister, and they looked like a family.
Lana gasped and they turned to her. “They have rings!”

The girls looked closer and they all dropped their jaws. “No way. Chris isn't even 18 yet!”

“Maybe they are promise rings?”

The girls didn’t look convinced. “Maybe.”

“They are happy.” Kara said with a smile. “Christen will tell us eventually.”

Lena scoffed. “We better get to go to the wedding. That's all I’m saying.”

January 4th, 2007

“We have a lot of college kids in for this camp Pia. What are you planning?”

The coach smiled at her training staff. “We need some fresh blood for the Olympics and I want to get a look at some of them after their college seasons and see who we need to watch closely over the next 12 months. I already have some ideas of who should be there.”

"Pugh and Press?"

Pia nodded. "Without a doubt. If I have my way, they will spend more time in camps than at college. They need to be there. They are electric, they are the future if we get this right."

Abby and Hope were standing off to the side of the room as the college kids came in. They were watching and making observations to their behaviour and who was ready. You could tell a lot from how they acted in the first meeting.

The pair were happy to see that the couple didn’t look any more than friends, weren’t overly attached and coupley. They looked like mates and if they didn’t know any better, they wouldn’t have any idea. “Looks like they left the girlfriends part back at school.” Abby muttered.

Hope nodded. “I wish they didn’t have to.”

“They are good enough to make it.” Abby said with a sigh. “Once they do, it is a different challenge.”

"Is there anyone you think who might hurt them? Out them?” Hope asked.

Abby shrugged. "Someone who won't want to lose their spot, someone who is jealous, someone who is a bitch. I don't know who, but we have had to pull people in line before, we can do it again.”

Hope nodded. "You know what?"

"What?"

Hope smiled at Abby. "If it happened to them, I think they'd handle it. They have good heads on their shoulders, and plenty of support. It would be tough, but they would be okay."

Abby exhaled. "Let's hope it doesn't."
Tobin and Christen loved the camp and loved the challenge. A lot of their friends from the 20s were at camp as well and they didn’t feel out of place. Tobin learnt from the veteran midfielders while Christen moved towards the strikers to soak up the knowledge. They were playing in the training games and felt comfortable. However, they realised that further towards the end of camp that they were being put on the same team.

They took advantage of their years of experience playing together. Their chemistry was off the charts and they were in sync. Tobin set Christen up for goals all over the place, while Christen knew exactly where Tobin needed her to be for that sneaky flick or ball through before knocking it back to the midfielder in a better position. They played well together and they showed that they could make that translate to the first team.

Pia emailed the 20s coach and told them in no uncertain terms that Press and Pugh were to be in every camp and playing every game possible this year. They needed the experience but they needed to grow this year. She planned to pull them in for the June camp and then next January.

If they kept playing like this, they would be going to Beijing in 2008.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Does it make sense? Do we like it? Let me know!

Stay safe!

oh, and I need an asshole from the uswnt in the late 2000s - around 07/08/09 era - any ideas? Or should i create my own character player based on some shit heads in reality? Let me know

End Notes

Let me know what you think.
ellaaa25 xoxox

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!