### A Difficult Season

**Summary**

The Thorn's challenges begin to mount as they reach the end of the 2014 NWSL season. Alex wishes that was all she needed to worry about.
“That game friggin sucked!” Tobin listened as Alex expressed her frustration about losing to Boston. “We took so many shots and not one made it past Naeher to find the back of the net. “Well sitting here in Portland sucked as well. I wish I could have been there to play,” Tobin replied. “Yah, I totally get that. The teammates talked about Naeher and HAO’s play for a while. Tobin thought she had the game of her life. The forward agreed. Alex noticed the time and realized she need to get her stuff packed and still needed to take a shower.

“Tobin, I wanted to let you know that the arrival time was changed to 5:45pm for our flight tomorrow. “I will be there Al, no worries. Tomorrow can’t come soon enough. I’ve missed you.” “I’ve missed you too,” Alex replied. “Hey, tell Allie hi and I will be there to pick you guys up. Good night Al.” “Good night.”

The team boarded the plane on time and Alex sat next to Allie on the flight home. The two women placed their carryon luggage in the compartment above their seats and kept what they needed for the flight. The two teammates listened to the safety guidelines presented by the steward and then the plane began to taxi onto the runway. After waiting fifteen minutes, the plane finally took off. As the plane leveled out, Alex settled into her seat. She pulled out her noise canceling ear buds. She wanted to finish Tobin’s audiobook version of Great Expectations. The midfielder had recorded her own abridged version of the classic for the forward’s 25th birthday. She turned on her I-Pad and adjusted the volume. Alex closed her eyes. She immediately envisioned Tobin sitting next to her reading and this had a calming effect and helped her to drift off and free her mind for a few hours. Next thing she knew, Allie was nudging her shoulder. “Alex, we will be landing in 20 minutes.” Alex slowly shifted in her seat and shut off her device. “Thanks Allie.”

As the plane began to descend, she reflected on what the coach had said and was ready to step away from soccer for a couple days. The Boston game had left its mark on the forward. Coach Riley told the team that they have lost control of the season and they were at the mercy of the next weeks match results. He also stated that the last game against Seattle is going to be a difficult match. He was not very optimistic about getting a result against Seattle and that statement really hit a nerve with the forward. Realistically, Alex knew that Coach Riley had hit the nail on the head but it just didn’t feel very good to hear him say it out load. Allie looked at Alex and knew that she was frustrated. “Are you going to be ok?” “I will feel better once I get home and see Tobin.” Allie reached out and reassured her by placing her hand on the forward’s forearm.

When the plane finally came to a stop, Alex sent a text to Tobin. Tobin said she would be waiting outside in the car. The two teammates exited the terminal, Alex spotted Tobin sitting in the parking garage just out of Security’s view. Tobin opened the trunk and waved the girls on. They pulled their bags up and loaded them in Tobin’s car. Tobin gave Allie a quick hug and then reached to hug Alex for a longer embrace. “I’ve missed you,” Tobin whispered. She slowly let Alex go and the forward responded “me too”. Alex looked over at Tobin with thankful eyes. They finally arrived at Allie’s apartment and she grabbed her bag out of the back and thanked Tobin for the ride. Allie told the two teammates she would talk to them soon. They said goodnight and continued on to their apartment. “Ok, I know you’re not happy about the game but what’s happening, Tobin inquired?
“What did your parents say?” “I don’t want to talk about it right now,” Alex replied. Tobin remained silent.

Tobin pulled Alex’s bag out of the trunk and Alex rolled the bag up the walk way. Alex was exhausted. The disappointment of losing was having an impact and with playoffs now in question, it was even more disappointing to accept the possibility of the season ending after their final season game.

Alex entered first and just raised her head and looked up. “Are you ok?” “Tobin I’m not sure I can do this anymore. I feel like I’m not being fair to myself or truthful to my fans.” Tobin walked over to Alex and held her. Within seconds Tobin could feel Alex crying. The midfielder knew that holding in the news of the breakup was taking its toll on the forward. Alex lifted her head. “Tobin, my parents want me to make an announcement.” “How do you feel about that?” “If I did that then I would not be honoring his feelings. Part of me wants to put it out there and part of me does not want to deal with all the publicity. It’s going to be a dam media circus. He does not want to say anything until after his season with Houston ends but that puts me in a difficult spot because all that news will come right before CONFACUP qualifiers and that will not be fair to me or the national team. My parents think I should just announce it and screw him. He didn’t take any of my feelings into account when he decided to take up with Perez.” Tobin understood what Alex was saying and felt bad about the situation and the choice she was forced to make. “Well why don’t you talk with your parents about it again and maybe that will help you decide,” Tobin suggested.

Alex pulled her bag down the hall and into their bedroom. Alex told Tobin she was taking a shower. As the warm water ran over her neck and back, it helped to loosen some of the tension from the six hour flight and the tension of her situation. Washing off the day’s travel was part of her travel routine. Alex shut the water off and rapped a towel around her wet body. She dried off and grabbed a clean pair of sweats and a tank top. When she came out of the bedroom she noticed that Tobin had poured her a glass of wine and had pizza warming in the oven. “That smells great. Thank you Tobin.” The midfielder smiled. “Feel better?” “I do.”

The two girls sat down at the kitchen table and ate dinner and avoided discussing the loss to Boston. That discussion would come later when the team got back together in a couple days. Tobin told Alex about Jeff’s visit and that they went to an indoor rock climbing facility and they had a great time. Tobin was really close to her brother and they always had a fun time when they got together. Alex was happy that Tobin got that chance to visit before her brother went back to college for the fall semester. Tobin would not have the chance to see him probably until the holidays. The CONFACUP was going to take up most of the fall months with camps and friendly’s starting after the end of the NWSL season.

Tobin picked up the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen. Alex asked Tobin if she needed any help and Tobin said she had it covered. With that said, Alex took her glass of wine over to the sofa and turned on the television settling in and deciding to watch an episode of House Hunters. Tobin joined her soon after. As the episode continued Alex began to feel sleepy. She placed a pillow on Tobin’s lap and positioned her head on the pillow. Tobin looked down at the forward. She began to trace her fingers along Alex’s hairline and pushed her loose hair behind her ear. It was soothing to Alex. “That feels nice.” Tobin continued and moved her finger through the forwards damp hair and eventually moved her hand to the back of Alex’s neck and shoulders. Tobin felt Alex’s breathing settle out and within ten minutes she was asleep. Tobin was glad that Alex was finally home. It had been a difficult month for her. Tobin spent the next hour or so flipping through various channels and shows, Tobin finally shut the television off and gently pulled herself out from under the forward and left her sleeping on the sofa. She grabbed a blanket and covered the forward. Tobin gave her a soft kiss on the forehead and shut the light off in the living room. Tobin walked down the hall to brush her teeth and got ready for bed.

As Tobin relaxed into her bed, she began to think about the choices that Alex had to make. Tobin had a few scenarios she played out in her mind, but would never push her opinions on Alex. She wanted to have some scenarios ready in case Alex asked her opinion or asked for advice. The
midfielder’s calm and nurturing personality was something that Alex appreciated and her consistent support over the last month had been a lifeline for the forward. The women had been friends for many years and there was an unspoken love and respect for each other.

Tobin recognized that since the breakup their friendship had changed and their relationship was developing emotionally and physically. Alex needed Tobin’s support. Tobin would do anything for Alex but at the same time respected Alex too much to take advantage of her vulnerability. Tobin was comfortable with just letting life takes it course and in Tobin’s mind that was exactly what Alex needed. It was a supportive relationship with no pressure.

Alex woke up on the sofa a couple hours later. She realized where she was. She slowly got up and went to the bedroom. She brushed her teeth and grabbed some water. Alex came out of the bathroom and felt her way over to the edge of the midfielder’s bed. Alex needed the warmth and security of Tobin’s body. She slowly got under the covers and moved in next to the midfielder’s side. Soon after, she fell asleep.

The next morning, Tobin began to open her eyes. She felt the warmth of Alex’s front against her back and she decided not to move. Alex’s arm was draped over her side and the forward’s hand was slightly tucked under Tobin’s side. Tobin was enjoying the position and placed her hand against Alex’s and closed her eyes and fell back to sleep. After an hour or so, Alex began to wake up and gently pulled Tobin into her front. She moved her chin in between the midfielder’s neck and shoulder. Tobin responded by shifting closer to Alex. “Mmm welcome home,” Tobin spoke in a soft voice. “It’s good to be home,” the forward replied.

Alex place a soft kiss on Tobin’s shoulder, Tobin rolled towards Alex. “Good morning.” Alex smiled at Tobin and for an instant was drawn into her soft brown eyes. “Do you know your eyes are so easy,” Alex said. “Easy,” Tobin smirked? “That’s not what I meant you dork.” Tobin kissed her forehead with a laugh and pulled Alex in for a tight hug. “I really did miss you.”

Tobin loosened her hug and moved back to look at Alex. “So how did you sleep Lex? “I always sleep best when I’m next to you,” Alex responded. “That’s not what I asked,” Tobin squinted back at Alex’s ocean blue eyes. “I slept without any bad dreams. If that’s what you’re asking.” “Yup, that’s what I was asking.” Tobin rolled onto her back and looked at the ceiling.

“Tobin?” “Yah.” “I need an escape day,” Alex said. “What would you like to do?” “I would love to drive over to the coast and hit some of the shops.” “Ok we can do that. But first I need breakfast, I’m hungry.” “Breakfast sounds good Tobin. But first, can you hold me a bit longer? Tobin answered the forward’s request.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

A Decision gets made.

It was a beautiful day. They jumped into Tobin’s jeep and they were off. There were many antique and collectable shops along the way to the coast. It was always fun to see what types of items they would come across. Tobin liked to collect surfing pins and patches and Alex collected semi-precious stones such as amethyst, quartz crystals and turquoise. At one of the shops they stopped at Alex found a really cool fossil. “Al I really like the nautilus fossil you picked up,” Tobin said. “Yah, I’m pretty psyched it was only forty bucks. It will look really great on my bookcase shelf.” Tobin smiled. “Hey how about we head towards the water?” “Sounds good but I’m getting hungry,” Alex said. “No worries, I packed a lunch so we can take it down to the beach and hang out and enjoy the rest of the day.”

The women arrived at the beach. It was a gorgeous afternoon. Tobin parked her jeep and walked around to the back of the vehicle. As Alex came around the back she handed her a blanket and Tobin grabbed the basket she had prepared. “Nice job Heath,” Alex winked. “You had lunch planned all along.” Tobin smirked and raised her shoulders in denial. “Yah you did,” Alex glinted back at the midfielder.

They found a quiet spot and laid out the blanket. “Ok Tobin what’s on the menu,” Alex asked. Tobin opened the basket and began to pull items out. “Well let’s see we have cheese, bread, some grapes, dried apricots, fresh figs and prosciutto. Oh yes, last but not least wine and chocolate.” Alex was surprised. “Wow Tobin this is great. When did you think about doing this?” “I had done some shopping before you returned. It made it easy to pull it together.” “I love it. Let’s eat.”

They opened and spread out all the food items and Tobin opened the wine and cut some of the bread. The women enjoyed the food and they enjoyed the view. They packed up what food was still left over and continued to enjoy the bottle of wine. “Let’s take a walk,” Tobin suggested. There was a large jetty at one end of the beach and they decided to walk to it. When they arrived at the jetty, Tobin began to climb up on top. “Hey Alex climb up and we can walk down the jetty a ways?” Alex was a bit hesitant but climbed up anyway. “I’m not sure Tobin,” Alex replied feeling apprehensive. “The spacing between these granite boulders seems too wide in some spots, plus I’m feeling the wine.” “Oh ok. We can go back down,” Tobin replied. Tobin actually guided Alex back down over the rocks and steadied her around the waist as she made the final jump. “Thanks Tobs. Sorry to be a letdown. I was not real comfortable up there.” “It’s ok let’s walk back” Tobin reassured. Tobin always had Alex’s best interest in mind. She never wanted to put Alex in a situation where she was not comfortable. Once they got back to the blanket they decided to watch the sun set and finish the wine and chocolate.

“I’m not sure I want to leave. This has been such a great day and I have really been able to break away and escape from this past weeks of stress and disappointment. “Tobin this has been a really great day,” Alex expressed. Alex moved closer to Tobin. Tobin poured out the remaining wine and they split the last piece of chocolate. Tobin could tell that Alex was beginning to think about her pending decision. She just watched the forward look out over the sunlit water and stare at the sunset. They were silent for a time. “Hey Al are you ok? You’ve kinda got quiet over there.” It
took Alex a minute to turn around. Alex looked at Tobin and there were tears in her eyes. “Al, I’m sorry. Did I say something wrong.” Tobin moved closer to the forward. “Tobin I don’t know if it’s the wine, but I got to make a decision. It’s driving me crazy and I’m sick of the stress of trying to decide whether or not to announce the breakup. What do you think I should do?”

Tobin did not reply immediately. That was the question that Tobin was anticipating. She knew eventually Alex would ask her. Alex had an intense expression. “I really need to know what you think I should do.” Her blue eyes locked with Tobin’s. Tobin felt the pressure of the reply. Hesitating Tobin began to speak.

“Well Lex, if I was you, I would announce it.” Alex raised her eyebrows immediately and looked into Tobin’s soft brown eyes. “You would?” “Yes and here is why. I’m all about doing the right thing you know I’m all about that. Making sure that others are ok and always thinking how I would feel if I was in the other person’s shoes. Well when he made the choice to lie to you and hurt you, that’s when I told myself frig his emotional state. He has not considered your feelings at all when he broke that trust with you. So basically I don’t think he deserves your consideration when it comes to the best time to announce your breakup. Alex you need to put yourself first. I think it’s time to send him a text and tell him you are going to announce that the engagement is off. I know your parents will back me on this one.”

Alex heard every word that Tobin said. “Tobin, give me a minute I’m going to call my parents.” Tobin was surprised at the forwards quick reaction. The conversation was well received by her parents and they all decided the best way to share the news was to make an announcement on ESPN. Alex’s dad told her to contact James Veer at ESPN and have the announcement made as soon as possible and then text Servando as soon as the news hit the airwaves. Alex’s parents were so happy that Tobin was able to assure Alex to make the announcement. It had been so difficult for her to hold back the information. She felt like she was living a lie.

Once she got off the phone she called and left a message with James. Her voicemail message expressed that she had an announcement to make and wanted to give ESPN the exclusive rights to the story. Alex finished the message feeling almost like it was a dream.

“Oh my God Tobin this is actually going to happen.” Tobin looked at Alex, “I think you made up your mind.” Alex smiled and nodded her head. All of a sudden her phone rang back it was ESPN. “Hello.” “Alex I got your message. I have to be honest you have me a little worried. Is everything ok?” “Well I have some news that needs to be announced.” Alex stood up and walked a little ways down the beach and Tobin just watched her as she paced back and forth while she had ESPN on the phone. After about five minutes or so she pulled the phone from her ear and pushed the end button. She walked back towards Tobin and Tobin stood up to meet her. “So what did he say?” As Alex got closer Tobin could see that she was crying. Tobin reached around the forward’s waste and held her. “Tobin I really need you right now.” Tobin held Alex as she cried. Tobin guided Alex to sit down next to her. Tobin placed her arm around her shoulder and Alex eventually placed her head of Tobin’s lap. As her tears subsided, Tobin traced her fingers along the edge of the forwards hairline trying to ease her mind.

Alex took in a big breath, “Well there is no going back now.” “Don’t second guess your decision. It’s the right one,” Tobin expressed. “You will be ok. Your parents and I will be right here to support you every step of the way. Don’t worry about that.” Alex raised her head and looked at Tobin. “What would I do without you?” At that moment Alex leaned in and kissed Tobin on the cheek. Tobin’s face got flush. Not really knowing how to react. Tobin placed her finger under Alex’s chin and lifted the forwards face so she could look at her square in the eyes. “You are welcome my friend. I love you and I know things will be ok. You will just need to deal with the next few days of media fallout and then things will begin to get better. We will focus on NWSL
playoffs and getting ready for the WC Qualifiers. Maybe I can convince you to come to Rhode Island during break and we can hang out on my parent’s boat and just enjoy some quiet for a few days. Whatever happens, you will be ok. You’re a strong person. “Alex reached for Tobin and pulled her in for another hug. “Thanks Tobs.”

The announcement was made on ESPN at 8:00am the next morning and as soon as the news hit the airwaves Alex sent Servando the text. That was the last communication she had with him. He never made a comment to the media and he never tried to contact her directly. That was the final break she needed to move on. The media blitz was intense but her parents and Tobin provided the support she needed and by the end of the week the story was finally beginning to sound like old news.

The Portland Thorns made it to the semifinal round of the NWSL but were beat in extreme heat by Kansas City. It was a difficult loss. As the season came to a close, Alex and Tobin headed home to visit with their families. Alex’s parents were so happy with her decision and were glad she was moving forward again with her life. The stress of whether to announce the breakup or not had finally been lifted.

Tobin was hanging out on her parent’s deck and sent a text message to Alex. “So Lex do you think you can make it to Rhode Island?” “Most definitely, looking forward to it……! Hey Mom and Dad say hi.” “Send them my best and let me know your flight date and number I will pick you up.” “Will do Buddy. Take care and see you soon….. ;)”

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