

# ~ Strike Out ~

by A. K. Naten

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**Category:** Uber Alternative fic / Drama, Mild Angst

**Rated:** Mostly R; some minor NC-17

**Summary:** A woman who is unlucky in love meets up with someone who could change her losing streak. Will they get a hit, or will they strike out?

**DISCLAIMER JUNK:** This is a F/F SLASH PIECE that depicts a sexual relationship between consenting adult women. If you are under 18 years of age and/or this type of story is illegal in the state or country or household in which you reside, consider yourself hereby warned, and thereby incredibly unfortunate. If depictions of this nature disturb you, then stop reading and step awayyy from the screen.

This is an UBER story; characters are loosely based on two chicks from a now-defunct TV show, but that's where the similarities end. Any resemblance to people or characters living, dead, or imagined is purely coincidental and completely unintentional.

Sex, Violence, Rock 'n Roll? - Yes, No, No. This is nothing major; just a little somethin' somethin' that's been rattling around inside my head.

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## Chapter One

"Damn!" The petite blonde cursed as she checked the time on her watch again. She jumped out of her car, locking it and scurrying up the sidewalk toward the Cross Creek High School building. Reaching the large front doors, she opened them hastily and rushed inside.

After getting lost and asking two people for directions, she finally found Room 549. When she at last opened the door and stepped inside, however, she was greeted by emptiness.

"Shit!" She muttered under her breath. *All that rushing around for nothing*, she thought with a disgusted sigh. *No wonder I hate coming to these stupid things*.

It wasn't that she disliked teachers and counselors, she just disliked constantly hearing that her daughter 'wasn't working up to her full potential', or that 'she could be an all-A student if only she tried harder'. The clincher was when they started asking questions about the student's home-life, and, more specifically, about the parent's personal life. She was fairly certain that all school counselors were trained to ask invasive personal questions.

"Hello." The voice was right behind her, and the blonde spun around, startled. A tall woman with

raven hair and unbelievably blue eyes was smiling at her. "You must be Mrs. Graybill," the towering woman said, sticking her hand out, "I'm Jacqueline Roberts."

"Hi... Evelyn Graybill, and I am \*so\* sorry that I'm late!" Evelyn said apologetically as she shook the proffered hand.

"Not a problem. Come in and have a seat," the teacher said, walking toward her desk and waving Evelyn over. "I keep telling the Administration that they should schedule these parent-teacher things later in the evening, but the suggestion keeps falling on deaf ears." The tall woman said as she sat down and started shuffling through some papers.

"Yes; it's difficult to get out of the office before five-thirty. I apologize again."

"Don't worry about it; you're my last appointment anyway." The brunette waved her off again and opened the file in front of her. "I'll try to make this as quick and painless as possible." She added, giving Evelyn an understanding smile.

"In case you weren't aware, they've completely revamped the teacher-counselor teams, and in addition to being your daughter's Biology teacher, I'm also her Team Leader/Mentor for the year, so that's why you're talking to me," Jacqueline explained. "Although personally, I just think old Mrs. Busfield is tired of doing the academic counseling, so now she's putting the onus on all the teachers." She added, lowering her voice to make it sound conspiring. Evelyn couldn't help but chuckle as the teacher gave her a sly grin.

*She's very attractive, Evelyn thought as she watched the brunette thumb through some papers, bet all the teenage guys go nuts over her. Wonder if she's married or..., she mused, her gaze surreptitiously darting over to the tall woman's left hand.*

The fourth finger of the brunette's left hand wore a ring, but it wasn't a diamond, and it wasn't a band of any kind. Evelyn couldn't help but think that it would be unusual, and a waste, for a woman as attractive as Jacqueline Roberts to be unattached.

*'Course, the presence or absence of a ring doesn't mean anything these days, she admitted.*

They proceeded to talk about Evelyn's daughter, Taylor, and her school progress. Evelyn had to admit that she was pleasantly surprised with the teacher's approach and manner of 'counseling'. In a polite and roundabout sort of way, the teacher hinted that she thought Taylor wasn't working as hard as she could, but she tempered the gentle criticism with praise about the teen's abilities and assets. It was evident that she liked Taylor and thought she was a good student, and for Evelyn, it was a welcome change to have someone say so.

"Y'know, I must say Ms. Roberts... even though you probably don't relish having to meet with all the parents, this has been a much more pleasant experience for me than the last time."

"Really? Why's that?" Jacqueline asked.

"Well, it gets a little old to constantly hear that your child is an underachiever, and she needs to set goals for herself, and she needs to concentrate on her school work, and she's unfocused because of an unstable home life, etc., etc." Evelyn said, making a small face. The teacher just pursed her lips and nodded in understanding.

"I'm a single mother, and I admit that things are sometimes tough for Taylor and I," Evelyn said, feeling slightly defensive despite the teacher's friendly demeanor. "But she and I are very close, and when it comes right down to it, she's a good kid with a big heart and a good head on her shoulders."

"I absolutely agree," Jacqueline replied with a nod. "Taylor is a bright kid, and she's very mature for her age," the brunette added, "but... she's also a 16-year-old, and everyone knows how 16-year-olds can be." She gave Evelyn a knowing grin, which the blonde mother returned.

"Yeah... school work and straight A's don't mean a whole lot to her right now, and honestly, I'm not too concerned about that for the time being." Evelyn said. "She's been thinking about going to college, but she really doesn't know what she wants to do, and quite frankly, I'm not the type of person who believes in constantly pushing a kid about their future, especially if they're uncertain." Again the defensiveness flared, and Evelyn crossed her arms, fully prepared for the teacher to argue with her.

"I don't blame you, Ms. Graybill. Taylor should take her time to decide what she wants to do about college; there are a lot of options out there for her." Jacqueline said gently; she didn't miss the defensive body language displayed by the attractive little blonde who, the teacher noticed, possessed the same bright blue-green eyes as her daughter.

"The only caveat is that she doesn't have a \*whole\* lot of time; if she is considering college or technical school, there are certain courses that she should take in high school. So, I agree with not pushing her, but I also wouldn't let her put it off too terribly long." Jacqueline added carefully.

"I know... I'll try to explain all that to her... \*again\*." Evelyn said with an acknowledging sigh. She didn't want to be a prick to this woman. Jacqueline Roberts was a far cry better than the crotchety old crone she'd always had to meet with in the past, and she was no dummy either - Evelyn noticed how the brunette addressed her as 'Ms.' instead of 'Mrs.' after she mentioned 'single mother'.

The meeting finally came to a close, and as Evelyn stood and shook the tall woman's hand, she again considered how attractive Jacqueline Roberts was. She wore a pair of crisply-pressed gray trousers and a silky, short-sleeved burgundy-colored blouse that accentuated the lightly-tanned tones of her skin. When she walked in front of Evelyn to escort her to the door, the long tresses of her midnight-colored hair billowed gently behind her.

"It was very nice to meet you, Ms. Graybill, and if you ever have any questions or wish to discuss anything, please don't hesitate to call me." Jacqueline said, extending her hand once again.

"I won't, Ms. Roberts. Thank you very much for your time." Evelyn said, shaking the firm hand and staring into the piercing pale blue eyes of the tall brunette.

"My pleasure." Jacqueline smiled.

With that, Evelyn smiled and walked out the door and down the hallway.

*Mmm-mmm... my pleasure indeed*, Jacqueline thought, feeling slightly amorous as she watched the blonde's firm little figure walk away. *Oh for heaven's sake, Jackie, control yourself! Godd!* She chastised inwardly. It wasn't her practice to lust after the parent of one of her students, but the feisty little jade-eyed woman struck a chord inside her. Of course, she had a bit of a weakness for blondes, but it was something aside from that. Something about Evelyn Graybill piqued her curiosity as well.

It was always interesting to meet her students' creators, and often very enlightening as well. She could ascertain quite a lot about a student just by meeting the parents. *And after meeting you, Ms. Graybill, I can see where Taylor gets her personality from.* Smiling and sighing aloud, Jacqueline went back into her classroom, determined to clean up quickly and go home for the night.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Two

"Oh GOD, Evie! Oh God... OhGodOhGodOhGodddd...!"

Cries of orgasmic bliss were shouted into Evelyn's ear as the young man atop her grunted and pumped and strained under the magnitude of his climax.

Evelyn lay beneath him, trying to reach some kind of climactic finale as well, but having no luck whatsoever. It wasn't the first time she was unable to orgasm with a man; in fact, she was fairly certain that no man had ever caused her to have a real, honest-to-goodness, curl-your-toenails-and-make-you-lose-consciousness orgasm.

She had hoped that Charlie would be different. He was young, good-looking, and had a nice body, but as he lay panting and sweating on top of her now, she realized that he would be no different than all the others.

"Jesus baby... that was fuckin' \*awesome\*," Charlie mumbled as he rolled off of her, coming to rest on his back.

Evelyn said nothing; she just rolled her eyes at his pathetic words of praise. Obviously Charlie was as clueless and insensitive about her responses and needs as all the other men she'd slept with.

*I can't believe I slept with him... and it's only our third date!* Evelyn thought as she closed her eyes, fully disgusted with herself. *You slut!*

Evelyn was so busy berating herself that she almost didn't notice that Charlie was completely still and silent beside her. Opening her eyes, she turned her head to look at him.

*Oh please don't let him fall asleeeeeepp! No nononoooo!*

The loud, nasal-garbled sound of snoring soon filled the bedroom, and Evelyn cringed and closed her eyes, wishing she could be anywhere but there.

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"You \*fucked\* him?!"

"SHH! For chrissake Maggie! Shut \*UP\*!" Evelyn hissed at her friend, glancing around furtively to make sure no one heard them.

The two friends were sitting on the bleachers at the local high school softball field, chatting as they watched the Cross Creek Girls Softball team warm up before their opening day game.

"I didn't \*mean\* to sleep with him! I just... we just...," Evelyn stumbled.

"Yeah, I know - 'it just \*happened\*'... right?" Maggie asked sarcastically.

"Well, yeah... sort of, I guess... I don't know, really." Evelyn gave a sheepish shrug as she looked out toward the teenage players.

"Jesus, Evie," Maggie said, shaking her head.

"What?" The blonde shot back, her voice laced with slight indignance.

"You \*really\* need to stop and think about what the hell you're doing with your love life." Maggie chastised.

"Thanks." Evelyn huffed in return. She was hurt by her friend's cutting remarks, even though she knew they had some merit.

"I'm just saying... you've been serially dating guys for the past, what? Two years? And you've slept with almost every one of them." The redhead pointed out.

Evelyn's mouth opened, but she didn't say anything; she shifted her jaw and snapped her mouth shut, glaring at her best friend.

"You strike out with every single one! You've \*never\* had one who satisfies you... they always

have some fault or you always have some kind of complaint about them. I have to wonder why you even bother anymore?" Maggie added.

"I haven't \*complained\* about Charlie. He's just... I mean, he's nice, but he just... he doesn't 'do' anything for me." Evelyn trailed off in an uncertain voice.

"Well maybe it's career-related. Didn't you say he worked at a fruit stand? I mean, what kind of guy works at a fucking \*fruit stand\* for chrissake?!" Maggie's sarcasm was in full bloom now.

"Would you be \*quiet\*!" Evelyn hissed, looking around to make sure no one could hear them. "It's not a fruit \*stand\*, it's a \*farmer's market\*, and his parents own it, so shut up!" Evelyn argued. "Besides, it isn't that. Charlie's sweet, but he just... he isn't what I'm looking for."

"They're \*never\* what you're looking for, Evie!" Maggie sighed and regarded her friend. "Look, honey... I know we've gone over this a hundred times, but I \*seriously\* think you should stop and think about what you want before you run off in search of some other loser to screw."

"Thank you very much! You make it sound like all I do is hunt around like a bitch in heat looking for my next sexual conquest!" Evie snapped.

"Well!?" Maggie answered expectantly.

" 'Well' nothing! I don't just go looking for random sex! And I have \*not\* slept with every guy I've dated, so fuck you!"

"Yeah, well, at the rate you're going, that might not be completely out of the question, honey." Maggie answered with a cynical smile.

"Fuck you, Maggie." Evie snapped, running a hand through her short hair as she turned away, hurt and angry.

Maggie sighed and looked away from her friend for a moment before turning back and scooting closer. She draped her arm around the petite blonde and spoke calmly. "Listen... I know you don't want to hear this, and I \*know\* you flipped out the last time I mentioned it, BUT...", Maggie started, but Evelyn cut her off.

"NO, Maggie! No fucking way are you going to preach to me about the 'I think you're in denial' thing - Nuh-uh!" Evelyn protested, shoving her friend's arm off her shoulders and moving down the bench away from her.

"Evie, just listen!" Maggie tried as she watched her friend shake her head then abruptly stand up and hop down off the bleachers. "Dammit," Maggie cursed quietly herself as she set off after her friend.

The argument was not an old one for the two friends. Maggie knew that Evelyn had been interested in women once upon a time, but, for some reason, the blonde decided to end that

lifestyle and date only men. The reason for the abrupt change had never been divulged to the redhead, but Maggie was certain that Evie was just scared to be 'out'. She couldn't blame her, of course, but she really hated seeing her friend continually date and search for 'Mr. Wrong', simply because she thought it was the 'easy' and/or 'politically-correct' thing to do. Even worse, she hated to see the normally-vivacious blonde so miserable and alone.

Evelyn was slouched against her car when Maggie found her. She approached her romantically-challenged friend carefully, coming to rest beside her.

"Just answer me this, Evie... what would be so horrible about dating a chick?"

Evelyn sighed loudly, closing her eyes. "It's not that I think women are 'horrible', it's just...", she stumbled, unable to finish the thought.

"Just what?" Maggie prodded.

"I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

"Maggs... do we really have to get into this now... I mean, \*now\*?!" Evelyn exclaimed, throwing her hands out in exasperation.

Maggie moved to stand in front of her friend, placing her hands on her shoulders so that Evelyn was forced to look at her. "Yes, Evelyn, I think now would be as good a time as any. I'm concerned about you, hon. You're unhappy, and you're trying to compensate for that unhappiness by overdosing on sex."

Evelyn released a soft snort, "Is that so, Dr. Freud?" She challenged her friend with a glare. "I have a strong libido, okay? I \*like\* sex... is that such a terrible thing?"

Maggie pursed her lips, "No, it isn't terrible. I just think you're making a big mistake by sleeping with all these losers. Jumping into the sack with some guy you barely know isn't what you need."

Evelyn rolled her eyes and glanced away for a second. "So, what... you think I'm going to find what I \*need\* by rediscovering my lesbian roots and screwing around with women instead?"

"No, I'm not saying that either." Maggie said, shaking her head.

"Then what, pray tell, \*are\* you saying?" Evie asked, her patience waning.

"I'm just saying... it's obvious that men don't float your boat, number 1. Number 2, you've had relationships with women before--," Maggie started, but was cut off.

"\*One\* woman, Maggie - I had one relationship with \*one\* woman, wayyy back in my early college years!" Evie protested.

"Yes, \*and\*, you've admitted to me that that relationship was the only one where you felt anything close to being in love." Maggie said.

Evelyn said nothing; she just pursed her lips and averted her eyes again.

"So...?" Maggie prodded.

"So what?! So I had the hots for some chick back in college, and because of that, you think that \*women\* are the answer to all my romantic prayers? Christ Maggie! Give it a fucking REST already!" Evie snapped and pushed out of her friends grasp.

Maggie could only sigh in frustration as she watched her friend make her way back to the softball field where the game was about to begin.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Three

It was the bottom of the fourth inning and the Cross Creek girls were losing by one run. Having quietly made amends, Evie and Maggie sat and watched the game with the other Moms and Dads who were able to attend, which wasn't a lot.

Taylor Graybill was the second-string left fielder, but the 16-year-old didn't mind; she was thrilled to have made the Cross Creek Varsity Softball team, and if all went well, she hoped to be part of a team that would win the district championship again this year. Maggie's daughter, Lauren, was the first-string third baseman. She was a year older than Taylor, and this was her second year on the Cross Creek team; when last year's third baseman graduated, she eagerly proved herself worthy of the first-string spot.

The two girls had gotten to know each other after their mothers had become fast friends while working together. Both girls were only children, and for them, it was more like a sisterly relationship than anything else. Evelyn and Maggie depended on each other a great deal, and their daughters seemed to be following in their footsteps.

"C'mon Lauren!" Maggie yelled as her daughter stepped up to bat.

The first pitch came in low and inside, and Lauren watched it whiz by at an impressive, but off-the-mark, speed.

"Stee-riiike!" The umpire called out, clenching his fist high above his head.

Lauren made a small face, surprised at the call. Nevertheless, she readied herself for the next pitch. Another ball hurtled by, hitting almost the same mark as before.



"Stee-rike two!"

"What!?" Lauren spat, dropping the bat onto her shoulder and glaring at the umpire.

"No balls, two strikes!" The ump snapped, ignoring Lauren's angry stare as his hands held up the count.

"Hanson!" The Head Coach's voice pulled the redhead from her angry stare, and she jogged over toward the third base line for a consult.

"He's calling \*crap\*, Coach!" Lauren explained hastily before her Coach reamed her out.

"I know, but you gotta ignore it. You're crowding the plate a little; take a step back, and if the next one's anywhere close, give it a ride, okay?" She said, patting her player on the shoulder.

Lauren looked at her Coach's intense but understanding blue eyes, "Okay." She mumbled, turning and heading back to the plate.

"Count is O-and-two!" The ump shouted.

The pitch was delivered, this time right down the middle, but high. Lauren planted her left foot and leaned back on her right, but, sensing that the ball was chest-high, she didn't swing.

"Stee-rike three! Batter's OUT!" The umpire called, fisting his hand in the air again.

"Oh come ON, man!" Lauren yelled, banging the bat down onto home plate.

The ump was just fixing her with a warning glare when the Coach came jogging in.

"Hey, come on, Bob! What's with this crap you're calling?!"

As the Coach started to talk to the umpire, Lauren turned to look at her mother sitting on the bleachers.

Maggie shrugged and spread her hands out, "It's okay honey; you'll get 'em next time!" She called out.

"Yeah, good try Lauren!" Evelyn called out, clapping in support. The slender redheaded teenager was almost like a daughter to her, and she knew how competitive Lauren could be with her sports. The girl was very talented when it came to all aspects of athletics, unlike Taylor, who seemed to only excel in softball.

As the redhead smiled and trudged off to the bench, Evelyn watched the tall, dark-haired Coach who had now taken her hat off to continue arguing with the umpire.

"Hey Maggs, who's the Coach?" Evelyn asked, knowing that her friend would have the goods.

"Jackie Roberts is the Head Coach, and Kristin Winslow is the Assistant." Maggie said, nodding toward the dug-out where the brown-haired Assistant Coach talked to the players. "I've known Kristin for years - we used to be neighbors. I think she and Jackie are pretty good friends, but that's all I know about her."

"Roberts... Roberts...," Evie repeated aloud, "I think I met her... parent-teacher conference, I think... a few months ago."

"Could be. She teaches Biology, and she's the new Head Coach this year." Maggie explained.

"Yeah... I think she's Taylor's Biology teacher, and she's her Team Mentor, or whatever they call it. Hmm...," Evie mused as she watched the long-limbed, jeans-clad brunette replace her hat back onto her pony-tailed head and stalk off toward the third base line again.

"She's pretty, isn't she?" Maggie offered lightly.

Evie immediately shot her friend a warning look, knowing full well what the underlying implications of the statement were.

"What? I'm just stating a fact... she's a very pretty woman." Maggie insisted, holding her hands palm-up.

Evie sighed, "You're incorrigible, Margaret."

"And you're as stubborn as a mule, Evelyn."

Both women smiled and laughed at one another.

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A few innings and several runs later, the Cross Creek team managed to pull off a win. The coaches were still congratulating the girls when Evelyn and Maggie and the other parents approached the team.

"Heyyy! Good game guys!" Evie and Maggie cheered when their daughters came up to them.

"Yeah, but I only got to play two innings," Taylor said, sounding dejected despite the win.

"Well you still got to play, honey, and you had a nice hit too," Evelyn said, trying to encourage her daughter.

"Yah, Tay... I told you that hit was awesome!" Lauren chided, giving the younger girl a light punch in the arm.

"Lauren, Taylor... good game today." The soft, feminine voice of the Assistant Coach announced

her presence.

"Coach Winslow, good to see you again," Maggie said properly, reaching out to shake her friend's hand.

The Assistant Coach smiled, "Ms. Hanson, nice to see you... looks like we're gonna have a winning team again this year, huh?" She said, indicating the team of teenagers.

"You bet," Maggie grinned. "Oh, Coach Winslow, let me introduce you to my good friend," the auburn-haired woman said. "This is Evelyn Graybill, Taylor's mother." She tugged on Evie's arm, encouraging the small blonde forward to make the introduction.

"Ms. Graybill, nice to meet you. Your daughter is a welcome addition to the team." She said, indicating the lanky teen who was deep in conversation with her red-haired friend.

"Thank you. She's happy to have made Varsity, so I hope she has a good year." Evie said, mildly unnerved by the way Kristin Winslow was looking at her. The woman was slightly taller than her and was well-built and attractive, but something about the little smirk on her lips made the blonde uneasy.

Before Evelyn could excuse herself, Kristin spoke, "Hey Jackie, c'mere," she called, turning back toward the Head Coach. The dark-haired woman finished talking to another parent before she came over to socialize with the little group.

"Jackie Roberts, this is Maggie Hanson, Lauren's mom, and Evelyn Graybill, Taylor's mother."

"Pleasure," Jackie said as she shook first Maggie's hand and then Evie's.

"Uhm, actually, we've met before, I think," Evie stammered as she locked eyes with the attractive brunette.

"Yes, we have... the parent-teacher conference a few months ago... I remember." Jackie said, looking into the bright aqua eyes of the small woman whom she indeed had not forgotten. She remembered thinking that the petite blonde was quite attractive before, and she was finding - to her chagrin - that she still did. She reluctantly released the smaller woman's hand and gave her an easy smile, hoping to conceal her inappropriate thoughts.

"Taylor shows a lot of promise for a new player... I think she'll be a real asset," Jackie said, her eyes still fixed on Evelyn.

Evie's nerves were further jangled by this tall stranger. First the Assistant Coach threw her off-kilter by watching her with a strange, amused look, and now this dark-haired beauty was staring at her with electric-blue eyes that seemed to cut right through her.

"Uhm, thank you," Evie mumbled, nearly having forgotten that she was being spoken to.

"Mom, can we \*go\*?" Taylor's voice called out, breaking everyone from their thoughts.

Evie gave a quick chuckle, grateful for the interruption, "Well, duty calls. It was nice meeting both of you. See you at the next game." She smiled and gave a small wave as she turned and headed off toward her daughter. Maggie bid farewell also, and the two coaches turned away to gather up their belongings and head home.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Four

Numerous weeks and even more games passed as the mild Spring weather began to give way to warmer Summer temperatures. Today's game was a turning point for the Cross Creek girls. If they won this one, they would win first place in their division and were guaranteed to at least go to the State playoffs.

The season had been progressing very well. Lauren continued to excel and Taylor was playing more and more, being the first alternate to fill in whenever one of the other outfielders was absent. Her skills continued to improve and she openly credited Coach Roberts with her success. The Head Coach was proving to be tough, but fair, and she had a way of instilling a great sense of pride and teamwork in her young players. She encouraged them to give it their all, and they worked hard not to let her down.

While the girls tossed balls back and forth and warmed up for today's game, Jackie and Kristin walked around observing and discussing the line-up. As Kristin rambled off some numbers, Jackie's attention faltered and she turned her head to watch a certain little blonde make her way to the bleachers. A ghost of a smile touched the brunette's lips as she watched Evelyn Graybill greet some of the other parents while settling herself into a seat. The blonde began scanning around for her daughter, and when her aqua eyes collided with the light blue ones of the Head Coach, Jackie couldn't help but smile wider. The brunette lifted her hand in greeting, and the blonde smiled and waved back. It was only then that Jackie realized Kristin had stopped talking.

She turned back to look at her Assistant, "...What?" Jackie asked, knowing that she'd been caught.

Kristin grinned knowingly at her friend, "You still going to deny that you think she's attractive?" Jackie merely gave her a disgusted look and snatched the paper from Kristin's hands.

For weeks, the Assistant Coach had been teasing Jackie about the fact that Evelyn Graybill was exactly her type. The pretty woman was petite, blonde, had beautiful eyes and a wonderful smile - all things that Jackie favored. Plus, Evelyn had a little spark in her personality that jumped out at you every once in awhile, especially when she laughed. Kristin had seen it occasionally, and always when the blonde talked to her tall friend.

"I hear that she's singleee." Kristin sing-songed, teasing her friend.

"Tch... I told you I'm not interested, Kris," Jackie insisted, pretending to be engrossed in the line-up.

"Suurre you aren't." Kristin said, the grin still in place.

Jackie looked up. "I'm not! I just... she's just nice, that's all... she's... very \*nice\*." The brunette asserted, though not too convincingly.

"Uh huh... that's why you're always looking at her and waving to her, right?"

"I am not!" Jackie said.

Kristin merely smiled. "You should talk to her."

"I \*do\*! All the time!"

"Why don't you ask her out?"

"What?!" Jackie squawked, giving her friend a horrified look.

"Ask her out... I dare you." Kristin shot back.

"Uh, newsflash, Kris - she's the mother of one of my \*students\*. ...Besides, she's straight."

Kristin let out a laugh, "How do you know?"

"I can just tell." Jackie said with a shrug.

"Ha! God, you're so blind, Jack!" Kristin laughed. "She totally digs you. I bet she's looking at you right now." Kristin said, not looking, but instead tipping her head in the direction of the bleachers.

Jackie turned slightly and ventured a glance over to where her favorite blonde-haired supporter sat. Aqua eyes were on the ball-players, but they immediately slid over to lock with blue for just a moment before veering away again. Jackie blushed.

"See. Told ya."

"Oh shut up! Go make yourself useful and get the girls ready, you instigator!" Jackie said, giving the chuckling Assistant Coach a slight shove. Before she headed toward the dug-out, the brunette tossed one last glance at the little blonde on the bleachers. She was not disappointed to find the smiling aqua eyes still looking at her.

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"Hey." The sudden greeting and hand on her shoulder made Evelyn jump.

"Jesus, Maggie! You scared me!" Evie cursed softly.

"Sorry! What were you in such a trance about?" The redhead inquired with a grin as she sidled up beside her friend.

"Nothing, just... nothing." Evie mumbled evasively.

"Uh-huh," Maggie said, giving her friend a knowing look. It was obvious to the redhead that her friend felt some attraction toward the tall Head Coach. Maggie was a keen observer, and she was well aware that Evelyn had been surreptitiously watching and quietly obsessing over the brunette all season long. The blonde always managed to conveniently meander over to Jackie after each game so that the two of them could exchange polite little pleasantries. They didn't have long conversations, but it seemed to Maggie that they usually made a point to at least say 'hi' to one another. She wondered if her friend had changed her mind about her romantic life, and she also wondered how long Evelyn would deny her interest.

"So, what have I missed?" Maggie inquired, deciding to let her friend off the hook... for the moment.

"Not much. Score's 2-2. Lauren just had a nice line-drive, but the shortstop caught it, unfortunately." Evie commented.

"Hmm," Maggie hummed as she took a drink of her water, "Taylor been in yet?"

"Nope. She's still on the bench."

The redhead nodded in silent acknowledgement as she glanced over to the bench. She saw the two coaches talking to each other, then both of them turned to look over to where she and Evelyn were sitting. Kristin waved and Maggie waved back, but Jackie didn't. The brunette instead said something to Kristin and turned to walk away quickly. When Maggie turned back to Evelyn, she noticed that the blonde had also been watching the coaches. Meeting her friend's eyes, Maggie's lips twisted into a sly smile.

"What?!" Evie asked, trying to sound perturbed.

"What?" Maggie answered innocently.

"Don't give me that look."

"What look?"

"You know what look. The 'I know what you're thinking' look." Evelyn said in a mocking voice while making her eyes wide.

Maggie chuckled at her friend. "Well, maybe I \*do\* know what you're thinking." Evie just gave her a glare, then turned her attention back to the game. The two friends were silent for a moment, before Maggie ventured quietly, "Why don't you just talk to her?"

Evie paused, trying to decide whether or not she should play dumb and deny everything, like she usually did. The look on her friend's face was not smug, however, so she decided to be honest. "I do talk to her... I talk to her after every game."

"I don't mean softball chit-chat, I mean \*talk\* to her for real, y'know?" Maggie insisted gently.

Evie sighed. "And say what, Maggie? 'Hi, I'm a dork and I think you're hot.'? Geez!" She shook her head and looked away for a moment.

Maggie laughed softly, delighted that her friend was at least joking about her attraction. But, as she watched the tension and nervousness flit across Evelyn's face, she realized that the blonde was uncharacteristically rattled over the pretty Head Coach.

About a week ago, after enduring a day of Maggie's hounding and hint-dropping about the brunette beauty, Evelyn had admitted that she was 'intrigued' by Jackie Roberts, but she wouldn't concede much else. The two friends ended up getting into a huge, long-time-in-the-making, oral brawl about the blonde's sexuality, and after many tears and harsh words, Evelyn finally admitted that she was attracted to women, still. She even divulged that she had considered dating women, but she never seemed to come across the 'right' one; and besides all that, she was indeed scared... of many things.

Further probing and prodding by Maggie confirmed her suspicions that not only did Evie find Jackie Roberts very alluring, the blonde conceded that the tall coach seemed to be the type of woman that she'd go out with, if asked. That was all the encouragement Maggie had needed. She was now on a quiet but unwavering mission to get these two women together. She had even phoned Kristin Winslow and asked her what she thought, since she was Jackie's friend. Kristin cryptically told her 'good luck', but gave the mission her blessing and told Maggie that she'd help wherever she could.

"Hey," Maggie said, nudging her friend with her elbow, "for the record, I don't think you're a dork." Evelyn gave her a half-smile. "Listen," Maggie began again, "It's Friday night... let's go out someplace and have some fun. I had a shitty week, and I need to kick back and let loose a little."

Evie sighed and ran her fingers through her shaggy, flaxen-colored hair. "I dunno. I'm kinda tired. Besides, I don't know what kind of plans Taylor might have, and-"

Maggie cut her off. "Tell her that she can stay overnight at my place, with Lauren. No problem. I know they won't care. C'mon... whaddya say?"

"Mmm... I dunno," Evie hedged with a shrug.

"C'mon, Evie. We haven't been out in ages."

The blonde looked at her friend's sweetly pleading face and couldn't help but grin. "Oh alriiiight." She said, rolling her eyes.

\*\*\*\*\*

The game ended with a close score of 8-7, but the win went to the Cross Creek girls. Everyone was ecstatic that had won their divisional-clinching game, and they now had their eye on the upcoming playoffs.

Maggie and Evelyn made their way across the field, reaching their excited daughters and congratulating them on their victory. After the rush began to subside and everyone started to make their way out of the park, Evie and Maggie discussed their plans for the evening with the girls. Taylor was happy to spend the night at Lauren's house, and the two teens immediately began making their own plans to stay up all night eating junk food and chatting with their friends on-line.

"Oh to be a teenager again, huh?" Maggie said as she and Evie watched their daughters giggle and talk about their upcoming evening.

"Yeah... what I wouldn't give for that some days," Evie sighed in return.

"Hey guys!" A voice behind them called out, interrupting their musings. Turning around, Maggie and Evie saw Kristin approaching them in a slow jog.

"Hey Coach... awesome game; congratulations!" Maggie said to her friend.

"Thanks. I think all of us are really stoked and ready for the playoffs. You guys gonna be there next week?"

"Of course." "Definitely." Evelyn and Maggie answered simultaneously.

"Cool. Hey, uhm, listen," Kristin began a little hesitantly. "Jackie and I were gonna go out later with a few friends, to celebrate the win, y'know," she said, tossing a quick glance over her shoulder in the direction of the Head Coach, who was busy talking to one of the parents. "And, uhm, I thought maybe you guys would wanna come along...?" She was trying to sound nonchalant, but Maggie suddenly got the feeling that the idea was a set-up, and a perfect one at that.

The redhead smiled broadly at the Assistant Coach, "Well, actually," she began, turning to venture a glance to her blonde friend. Evie was staring at her with very wide eyes. "Uhm, we had already decided to go out ourselves, but... maybe we could meet up with you... or something...?" Maggie thought she sounded pleasantly nonchalant too, and she hoped that she and Kristin were on the same wavelength.



"Great! We'll be at 'Planet Z' later on, so we'll look for you there. See ya!" Kristin said cheerfully, then turned and jogged away.

When Maggie turned back to her friend, it was painfully evident that Evelyn was going to kick her ass once they were alone.

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"I can't believe you invited them to come along! Jesus, Kris!" Jackie scolded her friend as they carried their equipment to their cars, which sat in the now-deserted parking lot.

"What?! What's the big deal?" Kristin said, feigning innocence.

"You know what the big deal is - I know what you're up to; I'm not stupid, y'know." Jackie snapped as she reached her car and dropped the large equipment bag onto the pavement with a loud thud. "You think you can play 'matchmaker' with me and Evelyn ... well forget it. Last time you did that, I ended up with a psycho on my hands!"

"Cheryl was *\*not\** psychotic, she was just a little... 'unique'." Kristin said, tossing the bags into the back of Jackie's Jeep.

"Uh, Hell-oO? She used to refer to herself as 'we'! When you'd ask her how her day was, she'd say, 'oh *\*we\** had a bad day today', or 'oh *\*we\** don't feel good today' - and then, even after I told her I wasn't interested in seeing her anymore, she still called me for weeks! I thought I was gonna have to change my phone number! She was a *\*psycho\**!" Jackie said emphatically.

"Okay, okay, I get the point. But this is different, Jack. You *\*know\** Evelyn." The amber-eyed woman said calmly.

"No I don't... not really," Jackie interrupted.

"Well you've been around her enough to know that she isn't a lunatic!" Kristin insisted. "Besides, I've known Maggie for years, and I know she wouldn't be good friends with someone who's completely whacked, okay?" Kristin wasn't about to tell Jackie that she and Maggie had discussed the fact that their two friends seemed interested in one another; she wanted to make it look as non-contrived as possible.

"That's not true... she's friends with you, isn't she?" Jackie said, wanting to shift things to a less serious tone.

"Very funny," Kristin said, giving her friend a punch in the arm. "Look, just relax and have some fun tonight, okay?" Jackie didn't say anything, she merely slammed the trunk of her car shut and sighed, dusting off her hands and flipping her messy ponytail behind her shoulder.

"You need to get out and start seeing other people, Jack," Kristin said, reaching out to grasp her friend's left hand. Both women looked at the small ring that still adorned the fourth finger. "The

sooner you forget about Karen, the better. You need to move on."

The brunette shot a dark, warning look at her friend.

"Don't give me that look... you know I'm right." Kristin pushed.

"Kris, don't start with that again," Jackie growled.

"Hey, just tell me that I'm *\*completely\** wrong, and I'll shut up about it!" Kristin insisted. Jackie said nothing; she just glared at her friend.

"Tell me that it's healthy for you to keep pining over some bitch who lied to you, broke your heart, and wiped out your bank account before disappearing?! Tell me that it's *\*healthy\** for you to keep wearing her fucking ring, for chrissake!?"

"Shut UP, Kris!" Jackie yelled back, her eyes flashing bright blue. "I am *\*not\** getting into this with you again!" Jackie growled, fisting her hands in anger.

The two women stared each other down for a good minute or two. Finally Kristin drew a deep sigh and dared to speak.

"Look... all I'm saying is, why can't you just take the ring off and try to start over? I think Evelyn is really nice... I think you two are attracted to each other... and I think she could be good for you."

Jackie ignored her by looking off into the distance.

"If she does show up at the club tonight, promise me that you'll at least *\*talk\** to her, for *\*real\**?" Kristin urged, squeezing the brunette's hand to get her point across.

Jackie looked back at her friend, pursing her lips tightly in indecision. "I'll *\*try\**." She relented at last.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Five

Maggie and Evelyn were having a great evening. Evie had dropped Taylor off at Maggie's house, and the two moms then headed out to their favorite restaurant to have a nice dinner before going to meet their friends at the club. It was nearly ten o'clock when they reached the nightclub, and as Maggie drove around looking for a parking spot, Evelyn grew increasingly tense.

"I don't wanna go in."

"Evie come on... don't be a shithead." Maggie pleaded with her petite friend as she finally spied a

spot just down the street from the club.

"No, I'm serious. I don't feel like it. You go if you want; I'll call a cab and head home." Evelyn's voice was nervous and her speech was rapid.

Maggie quickly parked the car and turned the engine off. "Evie," she began, fixing her friend with a serious look, "there's nothing to be scared about."

"I'm not scared, I'm just... I'm just..." Her words faltered.

"Evie... don't be so nervous. You look great!" Maggie said, looking at her friend's black mini-skirt and tight red shirt. "We're just here to hang out with a few acquaintances... have a few drinks... share some polite conversation, and just... have some fun. That's all." Maggie said, trying to sound as calm and casual as she could.

"Pah." Evie made a noise of disbelief and shook her head, "'That's all', she says." Evie sighed and looked at Maggie, "I'm not a complete idiot, Maggie, and I'm sure Jackie isn't either. I know that you and Kristin set this up."

Maggie darted her eyes away for a second, then turned back to fix Evelyn with a serious look. "Look, Evie... if you don't wanna talk to Jackie and get to know her, then don't. No one's forcing your hand." Evelyn just stared at her friend. "But, if you *\*do\** want to... this is the perfect opportunity. That's all I'm saying." Maggie finished, then abruptly got out of the car.

"Great... that helps a lot." Evie mumbled, drawing a deep breath as she too got out of the car.

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The club was your typical, run-of-the-mill nighttime hot-spot. It had a long bar, a large dance floor area, and a lounge room in the back with an area off to one side that housed a few pool tables.

Maggie spotted Kristin immediately and she took Evie by the hand and walked over to a booth full of both familiar and unfamiliar faces.

"Heyyy! Glad you made it!" Kristin yelled above the music.

"Yeah! I can tell that you've been here for awhile!" Maggie said, laughing at Kristin's obvious state of intoxication.

"Well, we're celebratin', baby! Woo!" Kristin shouted, turning to clink her drink glass with those of the other women at the table.

The server had approached the table in the meantime, and as Evie ordered something to drink, Maggie leaned in close to Kristin, "Where's Jackie?" She inquired as quietly as she could.

"Uhhh, last I saw her she was over at the pool tables whuppin' the guys' butts." Kristin slurred, pointing toward the back room area. Maggie nodded and tried to formulate a game plan as Evie tapped her shoulder and handed her a drink.

After a few minutes of socializing with the people at the table, Maggie suggested to Evelyn that they go check out the pool area. Evie hadn't seen Jackie and she wondered if perhaps the brunette had decided not to show up. To her chagrin, the notion filled her with disappointment rather than relief. Her disappointment immediately faded, however, when she and Maggie reached the small pool hall area.

*Oh wow...* Evelyn thought, her eyes widening and her teeth clenching to keep her mouth from falling open.

Standing tall and smiling smugly was Jackie, dressed in snug black jeans and a black v-neck shirt, her dark hair hanging long and loose as she leaned against her pool cue while watching a young man set up his shot. The guy missed the shot, and Evie watched in fascination as Jackie said something to him, laughed, and then moved to the table to take her turn. The brunette moved fluidly as she stretched her long arms out, delivering a smooth, clean stroke to sink her remaining ball and finally, the eight-ball. The game was over, and the guy who'd been playing Jackie was obviously not happy about losing. He dug into his jeans pocket and produced a few bills, but rather than hand them nicely to his female opponent, he tossed them onto the pool table, said something, and stomped off. The other observers made a few booing noises while Jackie just laughed and scooped up the money. Maggie and Evelyn approached the victorious brunette as she leaned over the table to rack up the balls.

"So, you're a softball coach *\*and\** a pool hustler?" Maggie said with a smirk.

Wintry blue eyes looked up and white teeth flashed in a wide grin, "I'm not a hustler; he bet that a chick couldn't beat him, and I took him up on it." She shrugged, still smirking.

"Uh-huh... 'course you did. Sounds like hustlin' to me, Coach." Maggie laughed.

"Hey, twenty bucks is twenty bucks." Jackie said as she stood up and turned to face the two women fully. "Hi Evelyn." Jackie said, finally making direct eye contact with the pretty blonde who was nervously twirling her drink glass in her hands while trying to act nonchalant.

"Hi." Evelyn eeked out. *Oh that was smooth, you dork.* She hated that she sounded, and probably looked, like a gawky teenager, but something about Jacqueline Roberts just completely unhinged her. Especially when the strapping brunette fixed those glacial blue eyes on her... like she was doing right now.

"So," Maggie interrupted, wanting to save her friend from completely choking in front of the object of her dormant desire. "You feel like playing an amateur?" The redhead asked.

"Sure, why not." Jackie smiled broadly.

"I'm not gonna wager twenty bucks, but I'll fork-over a beer if I lose; how's that, hustler?" Maggie said as she grabbed a cue stick and stepped up to the table.

"That's a deal." Jackie said, still grinning as she looked over at Evelyn and gave the blonde a small wink.

Evelyn's eyes bulged and she blushed furiously at the brunette's mild flirtation. Maggie almost laughed out loud watching her friend's reaction. For as much dating as the blonde did, she seemed to be incredibly unnerved by the softball coach. Not that Maggie could blame Evelyn. Jackie was a beautiful woman, and she looked wickedly stunning tonight all decked-out in black with her raven hair freely tumbling down over her shoulders. She looked equal parts dangerous and yummy.

Somehow Evie managed to quirk a smile back at the brunette, "Uh, I'll just sit over here and... watch." She mumbled, pointing to an empty table that sat in the corner of the pool area.

*If I try to stand here any longer, my legs are going to give out*, she thought as she walked away with her face still on fire.

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Barely fifteen minutes had passed before Evie started attracting the attention of some of the men who were hanging around the pool area watching the action. Two of them had approached her and made small talk before offering to buy her a drink or asking her to dance, but she tactfully turned both of them down. She rolled her eyes as a third guy sauntered over to her.

*Okay, that's it... I'm outta here as soon as I ditch this doofus*, she thought, rolling her eyes and taking a sip of her third drink.

"Well now, you don't strike me as a pool player. What's a pretty thing like you doin' over here, hidin' in the corner all by yourself?"

Evelyn almost groaned at the pathetic come-on. "I'm watching my friends play." She said in a curt tone as she nodded toward the tables.

"That big bitch is your friend?!" The guy squawked, motioning toward Jackie with his thumb.

Evelyn's anger flashed immediately, and as she fully turned to face the arrogant man, she recognized him as the dude who lost the earlier pool game to Jackie.

"Yes, she's my \*friend\*, you asshole. Now if you don't mind, I'd prefer to watch her play rather than entertain you."

"Ohhh, I get it. You're \*with\* her, huh? Like a coupla' fuckin' dykes, huh?" The young guy was obviously drunk, and his voice got louder as his ire grew.

Evelyn froze when she heard the disdain in his voice. One of her biggest fears of being openly gay was something just like this. Besides the fact that her daughter and her parents would flip out and hate her forever if they knew the truth, fear of an altercation like this had kept her deeply imbedded in the closet for the past several years. She hated not being true to herself, but she also didn't want to be excommunicated from everyone and everything, or worse, have the shit beaten out of her. Judging from the look in this angry young man's eyes, she feared the worst; he certainly didn't look like he was just going to quietly walk away.

Maggie had just turned to glance back at her friend when she saw the obvious tense interaction between the blonde and a strange man who was standing awfully close to her. Evelyn had the fear of death in her wide aqua eyes, and the young man was sneering at her as he spoke, sliding an arm around the back of Evie's chair and holding his face near hers.

"Hey," Maggie said, swatting Jackie's arm as she continued to watch Evelyn, "...something's up." She pointed to the blonde.

Jackie followed the redhead's direction and saw the potentially troublesome scene that was unfolding. She looked at Maggie, arching her brows high, "That guy's a jerk... better go check it out."

"Come on baby... just one little dance and I'll let ya alone, I swear." The drunken guy wrapped a clammy hand around Evelyn's wrist, and she went rigid with panic.

"What's going on?" Jackie's rich voice called out as she and Maggie approached the uncomfortable little tete-a-tete.

"This \*ass\*hole doesn't know when to fuck \*off\*, that's what's going on!" Evie spat out, her anger returning full-force now that she had the reinforcement of her friends.

"Is that true, Mr. Asshole?" Jackie said, remaining completely straight-faced. Maggie snorted in laughter and quickly brought a hand up to quell it.

"Yeah, you're real funny, dyke. You and your fuckin' \*teammates\* here are just a \*scream\*." The man spat back as he straightened himself up, coming to stand in front of Jackie. The brunette refused to be intimidated, however, which wasn't difficult seeing that she easily stood nose-to-nose with the drunkard. "All I wanted was to dance with the pretty lady here... no crime in that, is there, dyke?"

"It may not be a crime, but it's completely out of the question, Mr. Asshole." Jackie retorted condescendingly.

"Oh yeah? ...Why's that? She your piece of ass, butch? Huh? She \*belong\* to you?" He slurred back with a snarl.

Jackie hesitated, her eyes flicking over to Evelyn for a split second before returning to the defiant drunk in front of her. "Yeah, that's right... she belongs to me." The brunette quickly maneuvered

over to the stunned blonde and grabbed her hand, tugging her off the bar stool. "Now if you don't mind, Mr. Asshole, I'm going to go dance with my girl, okay?"

Jackie slapped her cue stick against the young man's chest and slid her arm around Evelyn's waist, pulling the little blonde alongside her as she guided them away from the drunken idiot and out of the pool area. Conveniently, a nice slow song was playing, and Jackie calmly walked Evelyn out to the dance floor, casually wrapping her arms around the blonde's trim waist and pulling their bodies close together as they began to move.

Evelyn didn't say a word. She couldn't. She was too stunned at the turn of events... all of them. She somehow managed to slide her arms up and wrap her hands around Jackie's neck, but she couldn't bring herself to look at the brunette as they swayed back and forth slowly. Instead, she just rested her cheek on Jackie's chest, right where she could hear the hammering of the tall woman's heart and feel the warmth that burned through her shirt.

"I'm sorry about that back there." Jackie suddenly spoke, her contralto voice raspy and close to Evelyn's ear. "I didn't like the look in that guy's eyes, so I thought it'd be better if he thought... I mean, y'know, if we made him think..."

Evie interrupted her, "It's okay. I appreciate it, really." The blonde said, finally looking up into uncertain, sky blue orbs. "I think that's the first time I've had to be 'rescued' from a situation like that." She said, a small smile lifting the corner of her mouth.

Jackie gave a soft laugh, "Yeah, well, that's the first time I actually feared getting my lights punched out by some homophobic drunk."

Evelyn laughed lightly and they smiled as they continued to hold onto each other and dance. A minute later, the song ended, but it was immediately followed by another slow number. The two women stopped for a moment and looked at one another with uncertainty, their hands and arms unlocking and dropping away from each other's bodies.

"Uhm, do you wanna...?" Jackie made a slight motion with her hand, indicating that they could leave if Evie wanted. Suddenly realizing that dancing with Jackie and holding the brunette close had been the most sweetly romantic thing she'd done with another human being in a very, very long time, Evie made an impulsive decision.

"No, that's okay... unless you want to?" She asked, looking up at Jackie shyly.

"No... we can stay here." Jackie said. Evelyn gave another shy smile and stepped into Jackie's arms again.

They held each other close, swaying gently to the music. Consciously, they told themselves they were only pretending to put on a show of 'togetherness', but privately, inside both their heads, the sensual connection was blowing their minds and destroying their sense of control.

Evelyn's body swirled in a whirlwind of thought and emotion. She wasn't sure if the amorous

thoughts racing through her head were due to the alcohol she'd consumed or not; she only knew that dancing like this with Jackie was making her body come alive with desire. Jackie was warm, solid, and secure... a strong, steady presence in comparison to Evelyn's loosely-tethered frame of mind. She felt completely at home in the brunette's embrace, and yet, her heart thundered in her chest at the implications of their intimate dance. The experience of having another woman's body within her arms and beneath her hands brought back a landslide of long-forgotten feelings and emotions. And it was all Maggie's fault. She had pushed her to 'get to know' the attractive brunette, and now that she was, Evie was more turned-on and confused than ever.

Jackie fought to remain calm as her hands grew sweaty while resting on the small of the blonde's back. Evelyn smelled heavenly, and she felt absolutely divine... she was soft, shapely, and oh-so-warm in all the right places. It was all the tall teacher could do to refrain from sliding her hands up and down and all around the petite frame of her lovely dance partner. She had vowed to 'talk' to the blonde, not feel her up and make a fool out of them both. But it was so hard to keep her hands off of Evelyn; Jackie knew she'd had too much to drink already, and that was always a bad thing to mix with a beautiful woman. Closing her eyes, Jackie took a deep breath and let her cheek rest gently against the soft blonde locks, inhaling the flowery fragrance and letting herself absorb the highly-charged euphoria of the moment.

In the meantime, Maggie had returned to the booth where Kristin was still drinking and talking with her friends.

"Hey," Maggie said, elbowing Kristin in the side, "Look out there."

Kristin turned and spied Jackie and Evie dancing together slowly. "What the...? Wow... you work fast... how'd that happen?"

"It was accidental, really, but that's not important... they look good, don't they?" Maggie said, a proud smile on her face.

"Yeah, they do." Both women watched the couple until the dance was over. Once the song ended, Jackie and Evelyn headed back to the table, and Maggie and Kristin acted like they hadn't seen a thing, although Maggie thought she might burst from excited satisfaction.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Six

"Ohhh! You suck, man!" The redheaded teenager shouted at her friend.

Taylor laughed, "Ha \*ha\*! Eat my dust, bee-otch!" The blonde laughed as her blue racecar overpowered Lauren's green one in the Playstation game. The game ended and Taylor whooped in victory. "Looo-serrr!" She taunted her friend.

"Shut up!" Lauren punched her in the arm. The two girls laughed and flopped themselves down



to rest on the carpet of the family room. An empty popcorn bowl, a pizza box, and several cans of soda were strewn about the room.

"Uhh, I'm tired." Lauren groaned. It was nearly midnight, and they'd spent most of the evening talking, playing games and chatting on-line with their friends.

"Yah, me too." Taylor agreed, rolling over to her stomach and laying her head on her arms.

"Hey Tay?" The redhead began.

"What?"

Lauren rolled over onto her side so she could look at her friend. "What do you think of Coach Roberts?"

Taylor shrugged, "She's pretty cool. Kinda hard on us sometimes, but we made it to the playoffs, so...?" She shrugged again.

Lauren nodded, "Yeah, she is cool." She paused for a moment. "What do you think about the rumors?"

Taylor brought herself up to rest on her elbows. "Whaddya mean?"

"Y'know, how everybody says she's gay and stuff?"

The blonde made a disgusted sound and rolled her eyes. "Brother. Just because she isn't married, everybody thinks she must be a \*dyke\*." Taylor quipped. "Your Mom isn't married - does that mean she's a dyke?"

"My Mom's divorced, that's different. And don't say 'dyke'... I hate that word." Lauren argued.

"Pardon me - \*lesbian\* then. And it isn't different. For all we know, Coach could be divorced too." Taylor said, rummaging through the popcorn bowl in search of any lingering puffed kernels.

"No, I don't think she's divorced. I don't think she's ever been married." Lauren said.

Taylor made a snorting sound. "Well, so what. My Mom's never been married... do you think she's a \*lesbian\*?"

Lauren gave her friend a long, intense, worried look, not saying a thing. Taylor frowned and pushed herself up into a sitting position, staring back at her silent friend. "Laur...?" She asked incredulously.

Lauren sat up and scooted close to her best friend. "Taylor, listen," the redhead began, but Taylor pushed away from her and stood up quickly.

"Fuck! You think my Mom's a fucking \*dyke\*!?! What the fuck, Lauren!?"

The redhead jumped up quickly, "Listen!" She shouted in demand. "I overheard my Mom talking to someone the other night. They were talking about the Coach, and I heard them talking about going out with her and stuff."

"What does that have to do with my Mother!?" Taylor argued.

"It was \*your\* Mom that my Mom was talking to." Lauren explained.

Taylor hesitated for a second. "Well, so... so what? Talking about 'going out' doesn't mean anything! They were probably just talking about tonight!"

"Tay... they didn't mean 'going out' as in casually... they meant 'dating'." The blonde stared at the redhead in disbelief. "I heard my Mom specifically saying your Mom's name, and I heard her talking about 'dating' and 'liking' the Coach." Taylor's eyes dropped to the floor and they began to burn with the threat of humiliating tears. Lauren stepped close to her friend again. "I know what they meant, Tay... I \*heard\* what they were talking about. I think your Mom likes the Coach."

Taylor looked up at her friend, her moist eyes suddenly angry. "I don't believe you! My Mother isn't gay! She dates guys \*all\* the time! She is \*not\* a fucking \*dyke\*!" The blonde shouted and spun on her heel, running out of the family room.

"Taylor!" Lauren called after her friend, but it was too late. "Shit!" She grumbled as she flopped down onto the sofa in defeat.

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Back at the club, the time was passing with everyone talking, laughing, drinking and dancing. Jackie and Evelyn danced together twice more, each time getting a little more friendly and a little more hot and bothered. Evelyn was now pleasantly buzzed, in more ways than one, and she found that she kept staring at the gorgeous brunette who had her heart racing out of control. Due to her fuzzy brain function, Evie wasn't sure if Jackie was putting the moves on her or not; she only knew that their little dances were setting her ablaze, and she kept trying to put the flames out with a cold drink. But it wasn't working. Not at all.

Jackie, on the other hand, was telling herself to slow down - both her drinking and her escalating libidinous thoughts. Alcohol made her reckless, and she berated herself for drinking so much so quickly, and for possibly coming on too strong with Evelyn. Sneaking a tiny peak at the luscious blonde and her scintillating little outfit, Jackie considered how Evie seemed to be more than willing when she'd pulled her close the last time they danced. Their thighs had mingled and their breasts had touched, and the petite blonde didn't seem to mind, so maybe, if she was lucky, she hadn't drifted too far out of line. But it was hard to tell... her thought process was definitely impaired.

Maggie had run into some other friends of hers, so she was busy cavorting at another table, while Kristin partied and carried-on with her friends out on the dance floor. Jackie and Evie were the only ones who remained seated. They sat close beside one another in the little booth, making the atmosphere between them even more fraught with sexual tension.

Jackie snuck yet another peek at Evelyn's little black skirt and the shapely legs that were crossed together and barely hidden beneath it.

*If I keep looking at her, I'm gonna rip that little skirt off right here in front of everyone,* she thought as she drew a deep breath and drained the remains of what she swore was her last drink of the night.

Evelyn watched Jackie's fingers as they twirled her empty glass around and around. She quirked her mouth in a small grin, secretly satisfied that the brunette was feeling at least a little uptight; it was somehow reassuring to know that she wasn't the only one. When the long fingers switched from fumbling with the glass to lightly drumming the tabletop, Evelyn finally had to intervene. She reached her hand out and covered Jackie's overactive digits, stilling them at last. When she looked up, the brunette's intense eyes were on her.

"Sorry," Jackie grinned sheepishly.

Evelyn smiled back. "Is something wrong?"

"Uh, no... just... bad habit, I guess...?" Jackie shrugged, her cheeks coloring slightly. She was being a spazz, and she had just been busted for it.

"Uh huh," Evie smirked at her. "You should break that habit... it's distracting." She said, surprising herself with the low, throaty sound of her voice. *Oh my god, am I flirting with her now?!* Evie panicked, realizing that she still had ahold of the tall woman's hand.

Jackie grinned back and leaned closer to the blonde, "Yeah, well... there are a lot of things that are 'distracting' tonight." Evelyn seemed to be flirting with her at last, and she wasn't about to pass it up. She'd been waiting all night for some kind of sign from the blonde.

Evelyn swallowed hard but continued to grin at her table mate. "Oh really? Like what?" *...I can't believe I'm doing this.*

"Liiiiikke... you, for example." Jackie drawled. *Oh yeah... here we go.*

"Me?" Evelyn asked, feigning surprise. "How can you blame it on me?" *...I flirt with guys all the time... I can do this.*

"Easy." Jackie grinned, an eyebrow arching high. "There are many, many things about you that I find highly distracting." *Like... that \*skirt\*.*

"Ha... I think I'm offended," Evelyn feigned being indignant. *God she's gorgeous.*

"Oh no... on the contrary, it's really a compliment." Jackie smiled mischievously. *God I want her.*

"A compliment? How is calling me 'highly distracting' a compliment, pray tell?" *I really am doing this, aren't I?!* Evie's mind screamed.

"Welllllll," Jackie drawled again. *Okay Jackie... it's now or never,* she thought as she let her gaze wander over Evelyn's fair face, returning at last to the penetrating but slightly apprehensive aqua eyes. "For example," she paused, scooting closer to the blonde so that their legs touched from hip to knee. "This little skirt," Jackie said lowly, dropping her hand from the table to touch the little black garment that covered Evelyn's thighs, "...is driving me insane."

Evelyn swallowed hard. Jackie's hand was surely burning a hole in the fabric of her skirt, and she could feel her skin flush and her nipples harden in reaction. She drew a shaky breath and licked her lips, "Oh really?" She asked in a breathy voice.

"Mm-hmm," Jackie hummed in affirmation as she splayed her hand out and moved it down to touch Evie's bare skin, then back up over the edge of the skirt again.

Evelyn inhaled sharply, barely able to comprehend what was happening. She darted her eyes down to observe the lightly tanned hand that was now delicately caressing the bare skin of her thigh. When she looked back up, the undisguised hunger on Jackie's face sent a wave of heat through her entire body.

*Holy shit... I'm going to spontaneously combust right here,* she feared. Gathering her wits for a moment, Evie fought to maintain some semblance of control. "Well," She started, clearing her throat, "...what does one do to... \*remedy\* such a distraction?" She managed to respond coyly.

"Hmm, well," Jackie said, feigning deep thought, "...normally one would simply \*remove\* the distraction," she purred smoothly, her fingertips sliding beneath the edge of the skirt and giving the material a gentle tug. "But obviously, that isn't possible at the moment." She smirked lasciviously.

"Ah... obviously." Evelyn answered, her heart hammering loudly in her chest.

"Soooo, in lieu of that... I would suggest... finding an alternative method to easing the... \*distraction\*." Jackie murmured, leaning in even closer to the blonde and sliding her hand further underneath the skirt so that her fingers touched the baby-soft flesh of Evelyn's inner thighs.

*Oh my GOD!* Evelyn jumped slightly, not really expecting the brunette to be so bold. She began to breathe erratically as Jackie's fingers gently stroked her soft skin. Their faces were only inches apart and she could feel the jolts of electricity that sparked between them. Pale blue eyes hypnotized her as she tried to stay in control and withhold the moans that begged to spring from her mouth.

Jackie could see Evelyn's pulse throbbing at her throat, and she longed to lean forward and suck it between her lips almost as much as she longed to push her fingers higher and delve further in-between the blonde's legs. The petite woman's eyes were wide and darkened, and although Jackie was pretty sure the look on her face was one of arousal, she had to be sure she wasn't going completely overboard.

The brunette leaned forward and touched her lips to Evelyn's ear, "Do you want me to stop?" she whispered before grazing her lips along a blonde temple.

Evie's eyes closed reflexively, and she could only shake her head 'no'. Of course they shouldn't be doing this, for more than one reason, but it just felt too good to stop. When she opened her eyes again, Jackie's face was right in front of her. She licked her lips and gave in to the natural instinct of tilting her head and pressing their mouths together. When their lips met with soft daintiness, Evelyn thought she'd faint right there from the sweetness.

However, the mildness lasted only a few seconds. It was as though that first kiss was a trigger that set off a series of explosions within both of them. The kisses immediately turned hungry, and their mouths opened and tongues began to search and probe desperately while they shifted their bodies more toward each other. Evelyn wound her hands into Jackie's hair and groaned as she felt the brunette's hand slide further up the insides of her thighs until the fingertips grazed her silky underpants.

Jackie swallowed the gasp emitted through Evelyn's mouth as her fingers danced along the damp silk that evidenced the blonde's arousal. *I can't believe I'm doing this*, she nearly said aloud as she slid her fingertips beneath the elastic, pushing them in further until they touched the wet warmth of Evelyn's secret recesses. The hot moisture fairly burned her fingers, and she groaned her satisfaction out loud, kissing the blonde harder and deeper.

Evelyn gasped and jerked her hips against Jackie's invading fingers, gripping the brunette's shoulder with one hand and digging her nails into the dark head with the other. Her foggy mind waffled between telling Jackie to stop and begging her to go all the way. It was dark, and she was seated on the inside part of the booth, but still...

*We shouldn't do this here... not here where someone can see us!* Evelyn's hazy subconscious thought in a panic.

But no one seemed to notice for them, so for the moment, they let themselves be blinded by passion and alcohol as they drew closer and continued to drive each other insane. Jackie's fingers gently tortured Evelyn in her most intimate spot, teasing delicately and then sliding away. The brunette knew they shouldn't be doing what they were doing, but she just couldn't make herself stop. Finally, when her fingers pushed further and threatened to penetrate the blonde's entrance, Evelyn gasped and quickly reached down to still the probing fingers with her hand.

"I... I think... I think we should... take this someplace else." Evie said, her voice breathy and quavering.

Jackie nodded, her chest heaving and her face flushed. "Y-Yeah." She rasped. She almost said 'I'm sorry', but Evelyn hadn't indicated that she disliked it, only that they needed to escape the public setting. Jackie decided she was happy to oblige.

Five minutes later they were walking briskly down the street toward Jackie's Jeep.

Maggie had been more than happy to see Evelyn take off with the sexy brunette, and Kristin said she'd get Maggie to give her a ride home. It worked out much too conveniently.

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Within fifteen minutes, they were pulling into the parking lot of Evelyn's apartment. Jackie had driven very slowly, and Evelyn knew damn well that she really shouldn't be driving at all. Normally when she went out to party, she made it a point to switch from alcohol to club soda or something, to help her sober up before the drive home. But they hadn't done that. They'd been so wound-up and preoccupied that they took off without thinking about things - a lot of things - rationally. She felt bad for putting Jackie, and herself, in a potentially dangerous situation.

Jackie kept the car idling, thinking that Evie would just jump out and rush inside. The evening definitely hadn't turned out the way she'd expected... even though she loved dancing with Evelyn and kissing her, and... and...

*And attacking her?* Jackie scolded inwardly. Yes, she enjoyed that too, but she was really afraid that now that they were at Evie's place, the blonde would reconsider. Evelyn had been quiet the entire ride home, and Jackie feared that things had gone too far too fast. 'Getting to know each other' was not supposed to include heavy necking and intimate probing while sitting in a booth at a nightclub. Obviously Jackie had been out of the 'dating' loop too long to know what was okay and what wasn't. She was just pondering if and when she'd ever have the chance to see Evie again when a small hand suddenly touched her arm.

"You wanna... come inside for awhile?" It was a quiet, uncertain question, but Jackie's heart did a flip anyway. "We've both had too much to drink and you really shouldn't be driving around." It wasn't a question. Evelyn quirked a small, nervous smile at the brunette and got out of the car.

*I really shouldn't be doing a \*lot\* of things... but here I am,* Jackie thought with a shake of her head as she wordlessly switched off the ignition and followed the blonde inside.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Seven

They entered the apartment and Evelyn locked the door and tossed her things onto a living room chair.

Jackie walked into the room and looked around the small apartment, pretending to take

everything in. "This is nice," she said softly, turning to look at her hostess, who was twisting her fingers in her hands, obviously besieged by nerves.

"Thanks." Evelyn said simply as she bit her bottom lip. She was so wound-up, she feared her head would explode. *I've done this before... this time is no different!* She yelled to herself. However, looking up into the mesmerizing blue eyes of the woman who now stood before her, she knew that it was indeed very different.

Suddenly Jackie reached out and wordlessly sunk her hands into Evelyn's hair, urging the blonde to her and kissing her deeply. Time seemed to stand still as they moved together and sampled each other again and again until Evie had to pull away, desperate for air.

She placed her hands on Jackie's chest and pushed away gently. "Uhm... why don't I get us something to drink?" she stammered, backing away from the magnetic brunette. She didn't really want anything to drink; truth was, she needed to get herself under control, and there was no way she could do that if she was anywhere near Jackie.

She disappeared quickly into the kitchen, coming to rest against the cabinets and leaning her hands on the countertop. Her heart thundered in her chest and she closed her eyes and blew out a long breath. She brought a hand up to touch her swollen lips, still feeling the tingle from the bruising kisses she'd just shared with Jackie... the beautiful woman who drove her crazy... the beautiful woman who made her heart race... the one who was standing out in her living room right now...

"Oh God... I can't believe I'm *\*doing\** this!?" She whispered to herself. Before she had a chance to change her mind, however, she felt the hair on the back of her neck rise up. Turning around, she was not surprised to find Jackie standing in the doorway.

The darkened kitchen cloaked the tall brunette in shadows, but Evelyn could see the hunger plainly written on her face and burning in her eyes. Jackie took a few steps until they were standing in front of each other, and Evelyn felt her stomach twist and her pulse quicken. She knew, however wrong it might be, that there was no way she could ignore her feelings for this woman. To deny it anymore would be pointless and to avoid it would be painful. She wanted Jackie, and it was obvious that Jackie wanted her.

*If she doesn't touch me, I'm going to explode.*

Evie closed the gap between them by grabbing the front of Jackie's shirt and pulling her down for a deep, passionate kiss. Jackie didn't hesitate to respond; she wrapped her arms around the smaller body and hugged Evelyn tight against her as they kissed long and lasciviously.

Evelyn broke away for a moment, gasping and clinging to Jackie as she let her forehead come to rest on the broad shoulders. *We shouldn't we shouldn't*, Evie's flustered mind rambled. The feeling of Jackie's hands tugging on her shirt and sliding warm fingers up underneath quickly changed her mind, however.

She brought her lips back to Jackie's and kissed her again. "We shouldn't do this." Evelyn tried to reason in-between breaths, her voice scratchy and broken.

Jackie kissed her back, "I know." She nodded, her lips still touching the blonde's.

They searched each others eyes for a moment, then began kissing again, but with more urgency, almost as if they felt a need to consummate their desire quickly before one or both of them came to their senses and really did put a stop to it. But there was no danger of that, really; they had both lost all sensibility and control by now. It didn't matter that they both knew they shouldn't be doing this; there was no way they could stop the want that consumed their souls and pushed all rational thought aside.

The kisses quickly turned savage again and Jackie pinned Evelyn against the kitchen cabinets, insinuating one of her legs between Evie's and flexing her quad muscles while pressing against the blonde's overheated center. Evelyn responded eagerly, grinding down against the invading thigh and gyrating her hips as all strength reason left her completely.

Jackie pushed her hands down to grab Evie's firm bottom and as she squeezed and pulled the smaller body against her, Evelyn moaned into her mouth. Soon frantic hands were pulling the aggravating little black skirt up and yanking the dampened panties down off of slender hips to drop onto the floor. The first touch of Jackie's fingers in Evelyn's wetness drew groans from both of them and the brunette felt dizzy as she delved uninhibited into the overheated core of Evelyn's very being.

The sensation of Jackie's boldly plunging fingers made Evie gasp aloud, and she jerked her hips forward and threw her head backward, banging it against the cupboard doors. "God!" She exclaimed breathlessly, her nails digging into the brunette's shoulders as she opened her legs wider and lifted one upward, hooking it around Jackie's thigh.

Jackie immediately silenced her by kissing her roughly and wrapping one hand around a soft, silky neck. She wanted to feel every breath, every swallow, and every pulsing beat of life as it raced up and down the blonde's throat. She wanted to forget her troubled past and replace it with this beautiful woman who had somehow managed to tug on her heart and call to her soul.

Evelyn devoured the tongue that invaded her mouth while moving her hips and forcing Jackie's fingers deeper. Fiery, burning sensations coursed through her body, and she felt her eyes sting with unshed tears as her body acted and reacted in ways she hadn't experienced in far too long, if ever.

Apparently, Maggie was right; she had needed this. However, Evie suspected that what she'd been needing wasn't just some woman - it was just Jackie.

The brunette felt the telltale clenching sensations around her thrusting digits, and soon Evelyn's small body went rigid, her nails biting harshly into Jackie's skin and her eyes squeezing shut as she came with a strangled, gasping cry.



Jackie held the trembling blonde in her arms as they both struggled for air and tried to calm the frantic pounding of their hearts. Pushing her nose into Evelyn's dampened hair, the brunette closed her eyes and inhaled the fragrance she knew she'd remember forever.

"Beautiful," Jackie whispered, her voice rough and raspy from the tremendous expenditure of pent-up lust and desire.

The tears that were already filling Evelyn's eyes now spilled over and trickled down her cheeks as she brought her arms around the brunette's back and clutched tightly. She had no response for the taller woman; she could only bury her face into the damp skin of Jackie's neck and let the tears fall as her mind teetered on the brink of consciousness.

Jackie felt the excessive dampness and immediately worried that they'd gone too far, and that Evelyn was ashamed and regretful. She was just ready to push away and offer her apologies when she felt small hands reach up and splay themselves across her back. As Evelyn's arms hugged their bodies even closer together, a flood of relief rushed through the brunette's veins.

After a moment of rest, Jackie reached down and helped Evie fix her ruffled skirt, then she turned and silently took the blonde by the hand and led her back out to the living room.

Sitting and reclining back on the sofa, Jackie pulled on Evelyn's hand, urging the smaller woman to lie down on her. Silently complying, Evie maneuvered her body so that she fully lay atop the brunette. They looked at each other for a moment before Jackie reached up to brush away the moisture that lingered in Evie's oceanic depths. Not daring to break the tenuous connection by talking, they soon began kissing slowly and sensually while their hands gently caressed and touched.

A portion of Evelyn's mind was questioning the impropriety of their actions while another portion was still in shock over the fact that she had just experienced the elusive, honest-to-goodness, curl-your-toenails-and-make-you-lose-consciousness orgasm. The subconscious portion of her mind, however, was directing her hands to wander further south, seeking out more private areas, wanting to fulfill Jackie as the brunette had fulfilled her. Evie's questing fingers soon discovered the tall teacher's secret treasure, and the resulting gasps and moans were enough to silence the voices inside the blonde's head for quite awhile.

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The sound of a door closing jostled Evelyn's mind out of its fitful sleep. Bleary aqua eyes fluttered open and she sat up, clutching her head against the wave of pain that instantly announced its presence. "Ohh... owww!" She groaned aloud.

Outside a car engine rumbled to life, and Evelyn immediately realized that she had just missed Jackie's exit. She walked over to her front window and looked out just in time to see the blue Jeep backing out of the parking spot and driving away.

Evelyn's reaction was merely to take a deep breath and sigh. She didn't know what she was thinking; she didn't know how she felt. Her mind was no longer intoxicated, but her thoughts

were still a jumbled mess. Walking out to the kitchen, Evie squinted to check the time on the microwave. It was early; only 5:30 a.m. *God, I feel like I haven't slept a wink*, she thought, closing her eyes and resting back against the counter. *And, I don't think I did... at least not much*, her mind added. Instantly, images of her body tangled with Jackie's as they explored and pleased one another flashed behind her eyes.

"Oh God," Evie breathed, bringing her hands up to cradle her pounding head again. Snippets of the sensations and feelings and emotions that had filled her last night again ran through Evelyn's mind. There were so many, her aching head struggled to classify them. She had been overwhelmed last night, and this morning, she felt like she was in a state of shock. It wasn't that she was stunned at the things she and Jackie had done, it was that she had enjoyed it so thoroughly and had responded so fiercely. She had finally been able to achieve mutual gratification with someone. She had lost herself in the blistering heat of passion, and she had reached her own breathtaking climax... many, many times. That was the amazing part, but that wasn't the best part. The best part was... she really felt like being with Jackie was 'right'. It was satisfying, it was electrifying, it was tender, it was sensual... it was everything she'd ever wanted with someone but could never find. Until now.

*Yeah, I finally find someone, and they're off-limits*, Evelyn lamented. *If that isn't my fucking luck.*

Blowing out a long breath, Evie opened her eyes and immediately caught sight of a paper tablet and pencil lying on the kitchen countertop. She frowned, not recalling seeing it there before. She picked it up, observing that a sheet had been hastily torn out. Running a finger across the top, she could feel an indentation in the paper. Twisting her lips in contemplation, Evie took the pencil and lightly began to shade in the area around the indentation. The result was inconclusive. There, plainly visible in bold, block lettering was the imprint of her name, with a dash after it... then nothing. Jackie had apparently begun to write her a note but then stopped, or changed her mind.

What did that mean? ...Evelyn didn't have a clue.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Eight

The first game of the Creeks' playoffs arrived a week after the amazing, but perplexing night Evelyn and Jackie spent together.

The blonde remained troubled and confused about her feelings toward the tall brunette. So far, Evie had managed to avoid telling Maggie the complete truth about that night, which wasn't easy. When her friend bugged her about the evening's events, Evie brushed Maggie off, telling her that the only thing she really remembers is Jackie taking her home and then waking up the next morning on the couch because she had been too drunk to make it to her bed, which was true... in a very tiny, miniscule, microscopic sort of way, she reasoned. Luckily, Maggie admitted to being extremely out of it as well, so she didn't hound her too much. Evelyn was glad to let it go, because something else held her concern these days.

Evelyn had noticed that ever since that earth-shattering night, Taylor had been uncharacteristically quiet and withdrawn. Whenever Evie tried to ask her daughter what was bothering her, Taylor just shrugged it off and insisted everything was fine. She didn't want to interfere too much in her daughter's life, but as they sat in the car and silently drove to the field for today's game, Evelyn felt the need to broach the subject with the girl again.

"You ready for the game today, hon?"

"I guess," Taylor shrugged as she continued to stare out the window.

Evelyn pursed her lips, biting down on the numerous questions and remarks that threatened to spring out of her mouth. They turned into the dirt drive that lead to the field and parked alongside the other cars. Taylor began to open the door, but Evelyn reached out and grabbed her arm.

"Taylor... wait a minute, honey." The teenager closed the door again and stared straight ahead, refusing to look at her mother. "What's going on, sweetie?" Evie asked. "You haven't been yourself all week." The blonde teen dropped her eyes to her lap but still said nothing. "Did you and Lauren have a fight or something?"

Taylor shook her head, "No."

"Then what is it? Something's got you upset... can't you tell me what it is?" Evie implored.

The teen suddenly turned to face Evie, her eyes angry and impatient, "I told you it's nothing, Mom. Stop bugging me about it, okay!?" Taylor snapped at her mother before flinging the car door open and jumping out. She was halfway to the field before Evelyn was able to reign in her shock. Evie opened her door and got out, watching as her daughter ran off toward her teammates.

Standing at the dug-out, arms crossed over her chest, the tall, dark-haired coach watched the blonde teenager jog across the field. Squinting blue eyes turned and searched the parking area until they found the small blonde woman who had been occupying the brunette's thoughts much too much these days. The span between them may have been great, but the connection was palpable nonetheless. Across the distance, aqua eyes met with pale blue, and both women knew that they were in for an interesting afternoon.

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The team was warming up as Jackie paced back and forth inside the dug-out. She should have been out with the girls, talking to them and getting them psyched for the game, but she didn't want to be in full view of the supporting fans... especially one in particular. It was ridiculous, of course, but she knew that the little blonde's eyes would be on her. Part of her was dying to go over and talk to Evelyn, but another part of her just wanted to dig a hole in the ground and lie down in it.

The entire week, Jackie had wondered what she would say to the blonde if and when she saw her again. She felt like a real shit for leaving Evie's apartment without so much as a note, but at the time, she didn't know what to write. 'Call me'? 'I'll call you'? 'Thanks for a good time'? 'Oops'? - What? She was attracted to Evelyn - probably more than attracted, if she were honest with herself - but the fact remained that they should not have slept together... for many reasons. To make matters worse, Kristen kept harassing her for details, even though Jackie had steadfastly refused to divulge anything. She would never admit that with that one night, her world had been turned upside down... and she didn't know what to do about it.

Evelyn sat on the bleachers and looked everywhere except at Jackie. She knew it was going to be difficult to be in close proximity to the attractive brunette, but she refused to stay away because of it. The two of them were adults, she reasoned, and they could carry on and behave as adults, no matter what had happened between them. Nevertheless, all week Evelyn kept wondering what Jackie might be thinking. The paper evidence that showed that the brunette had attempted, but reneged, on some sort of parting gesture left her with a mixed feeling of worry and anger. Did Jackie regret their night of passion? Was she embarrassed? Was she angry or upset? Evie didn't know. Not only that, she still wasn't sure how \*she\* felt about it herself. She was embarrassed and she probably did regret some of it, but only because she knew it was inappropriate for her to carry-on with her daughter's teacher and coach. What she really regretted was the bad timing, not the fact that she did what she did and enjoyed it.

Evie also regretted the fact that her daughter seemed to be upset ever since that fateful weekend. She considered the possibility that perhaps Taylor had found out about her and Jackie somehow, but she didn't see how that could be. Maggie didn't know, and Lauren couldn't know, so she wondered again if something had happened between the two girls. Maybe they'd just had a fight or something. Sitting and watching Taylor's interaction - or rather, non-interaction - with Lauren, Evelyn figured that that was indeed where the problem lay. Regardless, she was going to have to pry the truth out of Taylor somehow.

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Jackie was leaning against the dug-out wall, deep in thought, when Kristin suddenly appeared. "Hey! I've been looking for you... what're you doin' in here?" The Assistant Coach queried with a frown.

"Nothin', just thinking... about the game... our line-ups and strategy and stuff... y'know." Jackie shrugged, hoping she sounded more convincing than she looked.

Kristin's mouth quirked in a small, knowing smile. She walked over to the bench and retrieved the game roster papers, noting that the line-up sheet was untouched. "Yah, okay." She said, waving the blank paper in front of Jackie. The brunette's face flushed pink and she scowled at her friend before looking away. "You planning on hiding in here the entire game?" Kristin asked as she came to stand in front of the brunette.

"No!" Jackie said, a little too forcefully. To prove her point, she stomped out of the dug-out and began walking back and forth amongst her players. Kristin just shook her head as she watched

her proud and stubborn friend.

Jackie's face was pinched tight in concentration as she walked around watching and observing the girls. Her head was supposed to be on the game, but instead, she found her eyes constantly darting over toward the bleachers.

"Watch out!" A voice cried out as Jackie jerked to a stop and cringed for impact. A white ball whooshed past her face, coming within centimeters of her nose. She turned and looked at the player who had carelessly let the ball go by. Taylor Graybill stood looking at her with a strange expression on her face.

Jackie felt herself stiffen in panic for just a moment. "Watch what you're doing, Graybill." She scolded mildly, regaining her composure as she began walking again.

Taylor watched her Coach walk away, her mind filled with a multitude of thoughts, none of which were related to the game.

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Evelyn's eyes were positively glued to the tall, dark-haired woman as she walked amongst the players. The sculpted face held a frown and short commands were barked to each girl as the Coach watched and critiqued them. When the brunette neared her daughter, Evie saw Taylor glance over at Jackie, completely missing the ball that was being thrown to her. Evelyn gasped aloud when the ball nearly smacked Jackie in the face. She watched as the tall coach said something to Taylor, and she saw Taylor's odd reaction. Normally when something like that happened, someone laughed or made a joke about it. But no one was joking now. Everything seemed tense and uneasy.

*Taylor couldn't possibly know, Evelyn panicked for a moment as she stared at her daughter. How could she know? No one knows!* A sense of dread began to fill her nonetheless. Evelyn continued to watch Jackie, her mind ricocheting between her fascination with the alluring brunette and her concern over Taylor. As the Coach continued to stalk back and forth, Evie's eyes began to follow the movements of the long legs, thinking about how softly muscular they were and how nicely they had mingled with her own. She trailed her gaze upward, looking at Jackie's hands and thinking about those long fingers and how they had touched her so intimately and repeatedly drove her over the edge. She looked up at the chiseled features of Jackie's face and remembered how the brunette looked and sounded when she'd climaxed in Evelyn's arms.

"Hey."

The voice and pat on the back jerked Evie from her reverie. She flinched and turned, finding familiar brown eyes staring at her.

"You okay?" Maggie asked with a frown, noting her friend's odd behavior.

Evelyn blushed slightly, "Uh, yeah... fine." She blinked several times, clearing her mind and

forcing herself back to the land of the living.

Maggie bit her tongue as she watched the blonde obviously fighting for control of something. She wanted to jump on her about whatever it is that's been bothering her all week, but now was not was the time nor the place.

"Hey," Evie said, abruptly turning to face her friend, "has Lauren been acting odd lately?"

Maggie frowned. "Mmm, I dunno. She's been kinda quiet this week, but that's not so unusual. Why?"

Evie sighed and ran a hand through her hair. "Something's up with Taylor. Ever since last weekend, she's been completely withdrawn. She won't talk to me at all. I thought that maybe something happened between her and Lauren..." She said, looking at her friend in question.

"Hmm, well... now that you mention it, Lauren was pretty subdued when I asked her if she had fun with Taylor, but I just chalked it up to her ever-changing moods at the time." Maggie shrugged.

"Something's up. Look over there," Evie nodded toward the girls, "they haven't spoken to each other at all."

Maggie looked over to see Taylor throwing ball with another outfielder and Lauren, standing well down-field from them, throwing with the first baseman. "Hmm." Her brows wrinkled again. "You're right... they're not even warming up together. I'll ask Lauren what's going on, okay?" The redhead said, turning back to her friend.

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The game went into extra innings and finally ended in a one-run loss for the Creek girls. They gathered in the dug-out, exhausted and ready to have their coaches encourage them to not let the loss get them down too much. Unfortunately, that was not what they got. What they got was a stern lecture on how they could have and should have played better. Kristin didn't get a word in edgewise as Jackie tore into each and every one of the girls about the mistakes and errors they made. It was so far removed from the Head Coach's normal attitude and demeanor that everyone just sat there and stared, dumbfounded.

Some of the parents were close enough to hear the harsh words of the Head Coach, including Maggie and Evelyn.

"Is she yelling at them?" Maggie asked as she turned away from the dug-out and looked at Evie quizzically.

"Sounds like it." Evie said flatly.

"Christ... they didn't play \*that\* bad! What's the problem?" Maggie griped as she turned back to

listen some more.

"I'm sure Lauren will let you know." Evie answered in a careless tone, looking away from the dug-out and her friend.

"What is with you, Evie?" Maggie asked, coming to stand in front of the blonde.

Evie flinched, not expecting the direct question. "N-Nothing." She stammered.

"Bullshit. You hardly said two words to me the entire game."

"Well I didn't know we were here to socialize; I thought we were here to watch the game." Evelyn huffed, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Yeah, right," Maggie sniffed. "Y'know, you say that Taylor is the one who's been acting weird, but if you ask me, you're acting just as strangely." Evie pursed her lips but said nothing. "So... you gonna tell me what's going on, or what?" Maggie repeated, cocking her head to the side.

Evelyn sighed loudly and glanced away, seeing that the team meeting was finally over. "They're done. I'll talk to you later." She said, completely ignoring Maggie's question and walking away to catch up with Taylor, who was already headed for the car.

Maggie snorted incredulously and shook her head as she watched the two blondes disappear. Lauren appeared at her side and Maggie turned to look at the solemn face of her daughter as she too watched her friend's retreating figure.

"Hey kiddo... tough game, huh?"

The younger redhead shrugged, "Yeah, I guess. Coach thought we sucked."

"So I heard." Maggie said, feeling sorry for the dejected girl. They had a lot of things to talk about tonight. "Hey... whaddya say we pick up a pizza on the way home, huh?"

"Cool. I'm starved." Lauren said, glancing up at her mother and giving her a small smile.

"Let's go." Maggie said, slinging her arm around her daughter's shoulder.

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Everyone had gone home when Kristin entered the dug-out area to help Jackie clean up the equipment. She was surprised to see that the Head Coach had already gathered up nearly everything by herself. The brunette was shoving the last of the batting helmets into a big canvas bag when Kristin approached her.

"So... you going to tell me what's up your ass, or do I just continue to play mediator between you and all the parents who are pissed off because you yelled at their daughters?"

Jackie stood up straight and glared at Kristin, "I don't need you to play anything; if the parents have a problem with something I've done, they should come directly to me!"

"You were out of line today, Jackie." Kristin said calmly.

"No I wasn't! They played badly! They made mistakes! Stupid mistakes! They know better!" Jackie yelled, hastily cramming another helmet into the bag.

Kristin paused for a moment, "Are we talking about the girls here, or you?" She asked quietly.

Jackie stopped dead and fixed the Assistant Coach with dark, murderous eyes. "Kristin... if you know what's good for you, you'll shut your mouth right now."

"Fine, Jackie. Just let me say one thing before I go and leave you with your miserable self," Kristin snapped. "If you continue with this tortured, withdrawn, bitch-on-wheels thing, you're not only going to strike out with this entire team, you're going to strike out with that pretty little blonde too."

The Assistant coach spun abruptly and walked out of the dug-out, leaving Jackie behind in a cloud of troubled, guilt-ridden dust.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Nine

Evening in the Graybill household was a somber affair. Evelyn had tried to talk to Taylor several times, but each attempt was met with a curt, one- or two-word answer, and no discussion of any kind developed. It was late now, and Evie was getting ready for bed when the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Evie, it's Maggie."

"Oh, hey... what's up?"

"Listen... we need to talk."

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An hour and forty-five minutes later, Maggie had spilled all the details of Lauren and Taylor's disagreement into Evelyn's unbelieving ear. The little blonde was stunned, to say the very least. Not only had Lauren told Taylor about the very personal phone conversation she'd overheard, the two teens had also gotten into a huge argument over Evelyn's sexuality. It was a humongous can of worms, but it certainly explained why Taylor had been so upset lately.



Evie paced her bedroom for a long time, debating on whether or not she should go and wake her daughter and clear the air right that very minute, or whether it could wait until morning. She glanced at the clock, noting that it was nearly one a.m., so she decided to put it off until morning.

The older blonde awoke to the sound of the shower running. Taylor was up, and even though Evelyn hadn't slept for shit, she arose and prepared to confront her daughter with the truth.

Evelyn was sitting at the kitchen table drinking her coffee when the teen entered the room. She ignored her mother and went straight to the cupboards to fetch a bowl and some cereal.

"Morning honey," Evie offered.

"Morning."

*The one-word answers are apparently going to continue*, Evelyn thought. "What are your plans for today?" She inquired carefully.

"I dunno." Taylor said, pouring the milk while still refusing to look at her mother. Since it was Saturday, she hoped to find something to do outside the house, lest she be trapped in here playing twenty-questions all day long.

"Well, before you take off someplace, can you come over here and sit down? I'd like to talk to you." Evie said evenly.

Taylor closed her eyes and sighed audibly. "I don't wanna talk, Mom."

Evelyn drew a deep breath, preparing herself. "Maggie Hanson called me late last night." She began, then paused. "She had a long talk with Lauren." She paused again, waiting for some kind of reaction from her daughter. When the teen just kept eating her cereal, she continued. "I know why you're upset, honey. Lauren told her what happened with you two."

Taylor finally reacted by ceasing her actions and placing her hands on the counter. She hung her head and closed her eyes.

"Honey," Evie said softly, "please come over here so we can talk and I can explain."

Lauren was silent and unmoving for a long moment. "Unless you're going to deny everything, I don't want to talk about it." The teen finally said.

Evelyn got up and walked over to stand beside her daughter. "I can't deny it, and we have to talk about it." She said, keeping her voice as even and quiet as she could.

Taylor continued to stand with her head bowed, saying nothing for a full minute. "I don't understand." She finally whispered.

"Which part don't you understand?" Evie asked cautiously.

Suddenly, Taylor whipped her head up, her blue-green eyes flashing angrily, "None of it! I don't understand \*ANY\* of it!" She yelled, taking Evelyn off-guard for a moment. "I don't understand how you can be \*GAY\*, Mom! You've been dating all these guys for so long! How can you just wake up one day and decide that you're gonna be \*GAY\* now!?"

"I didn't just wake up and decide it... it doesn't work like that, Taylor." Evie said, trying to keep her voice calm. She understood Taylor's anger, and she didn't want the discussion to fall apart and become a war of hateful, hurtful words. "This is something I've been avoiding for a long time. It's something I've been... denying and pushing away." Taylor looked at her, confusion and dismay clouding her pretty, youthful features. "I knew I was gay long ago, honey, I just... I just didn't want to acknowledge it. I didn't \*want\* to be gay. I didn't want to face the difficulties that went along with living that kind of lifestyle. I didn't want that for me, and I certainly didn't want that for you."

"Good! I don't want it either! I don't WANT to have a Mom who's \*gay\*!?" Taylor yelled again.

"Yeah, well, it's not that easy, babe." Evelyn snorted cynically.

"Yes it is! If you can just start being gay one day, then you can just stop too! And I want you to \*stop\*! I want you to be \*straight\*!" She yelled again, slamming her fist on the counter.

"It's not something you just stop or start, Taylor!" Evie finally yelled back. "It's not a decision you consciously make!"

The two locked angry gazes for a moment. The teen couldn't fathom having a mother who was 'different', and Evelyn couldn't imagine how she was going to adequately explain things to her disillusioned little girl.

"I tried to change myself, Taylor. I thought, if I denied it enough and \*forced\* myself to feel differently, I could change. But it doesn't work that way! You can't choose whether or not you \*want\* to be gay... you just \*are\*. And you can try to lie to yourself, and your family, and everyone around you... but the only person you're really lying to is yourself. And I'm tired of living a lie." Evelyn finished quietly, hoping and praying that somehow her daughter understood.

The blonde teen stood and stared at her mother for a moment, then she looked away, contemplating long and hard. The silence stretched immeasurably. "So... when did you figure all this out?" Taylor asked quietly, her eyes still fixed on the floor.

Evelyn sighed. "I'd been with a woman before, honey. It was a long time ago, but... it was enough for me to know that I preferred women over men."

Taylor stared at her mother, open-mouthed. "B-But... I don't understand. If you knew you liked women, why'd you date guys? ...And how did I come to be?"

Evelyn gave another deep sigh. "It's a long story. Basically, the woman I was with broke my heart, and in retaliation, I decided to just date men. I hooked up with your father while I was still in college and... well, you know the rest of that story. I tried to convince myself that being with a man was easier and better for me than being with a woman. I was still trying to convince myself of that until... last weekend."

At that, Taylor closed her eyes and looked away, shaking her head. Evelyn knew that her relationship with Jackie would be another hurdle to overcome, but it was, again, something they had to discuss and get out in the open. They were silent for a few more moments.

"So... you're seeing Coach Roberts now, or what?"

"No, I'm not 'seeing' her, we just..." Evelyn hesitated, momentarily unsure how much to tell her daughter. As far as she knew, no one was aware that they'd slept together, and she quickly decided that it should stay that way. "We hung out last weekend, with some friends, and... I like her, that's all. I just... I think I like her... a lot." Evelyn stumbled over the partial truths.

"So you wanna date her now? And she wants to date you?" The teen asked, her brows furrowed in uncertainty.

"I... I guess... I don't really know, honey, it's... it's a little complicated." Evie admitted, rubbing her temple as she again tried to avoid the complete truth.

"No, it's just bizarre." Taylor snapped.

Evelyn sighed again, "I know."

"I mean, my mother is dating my teacher and coach - that's freaking \*bizarre\*, not to mention, like, unethical, or something!" The teenager spouted, feeling her anger return.

"I know, and I agree. If Jackie and were to... date, or... whatever, we'd have to wait until the end of the school year, at least."

"So, you haven't, like, decided yet? You guys haven't talked about it?"

"Well... no. We only hung out last weekend and, uh... got to know each other a little. We haven't... 'discussed' anything. She hasn't asked me out, and I haven't asked her out." Evelyn stammered again.

"Well good, then there's still time to call it all off." Taylor said, crossing her arms over her chest and looking at her mother pointedly.

"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean that it's too \*weird\*, Mom! You can't hook-up with one of my \*teachers\*! I'll be the laughing stock of the whole school!" Taylor cried, throwing her hands up in the air.

"Taylor... for heavens sake! You're worrying about something that hasn't even happened yet!" Evie reasoned, but the alarmed look in her daughter's eyes didn't diminish. "Look, honey... I understand your fear - I \*really\* do. But I've made my decision. I won't lie to myself any longer, and I don't want to hide, so please don't ask me to."

Taylor's chin began to quiver and her eyes filled with wetness. Evie reached out to cup her face. "I know it won't be easy - not for me, and not for you either - but I really need your support, honey." I don't blame you for being scared and not understanding all this, but I \*need\* you, Taylor. I need to know that you're at least in my corner." Evie whispered, brushing her thumb along her daughter's cheek as the tears dribbled down.

"I'm always in your corner, Mom, I just...," The teen began, squeezing her eyes shut and shaking her head.

Evelyn cut her off, "I know, honey... I know." The older woman reached out and enveloped the crying girl in her arms, holding her tight and sending out a prayer that everything would eventually work out in the end.

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## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Ten

It was the end of May and the softball season had finally come to an end. The Cross Creek girls hung on and fought their way back from their initial loss in the playoffs, and they wound up taking second place in the end. Despite having high hopes of making a comeback and snagging the title, they were satisfied with their performance overall.

Jackie and Evelyn hadn't spoken to each other for nearly three weeks. They had come close several times, bumping into each other after the games and being forced to at least say 'hi', but it never amounted to more than that.

Maggie had finally coerced the complete truth out of her blonde friend, and even though she understood Evie's hesitation to pursue anything with the tall brunette teacher while school was in session, the redhead insisted that Evelyn not give up on Jackie completely. Summer vacation would soon be upon them, and Jackie would no longer be Taylor's teacher, nor would she be in contact with the girl until the next softball season, which was, Maggie argued, a long way off. Still, Evelyn insisted that Jackie should be the one to make the move, simply because it still was her career and reputation that could be at stake if anyone were to discover that she was dating the mother of one of her former students. So, she decided, she would simply wait.

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The waiting lasted an agonizing four weeks. Evelyn had pretty much given up hope of ever seeing Jackie again, figuring that there was too much damage and/or too much risk for the

brunette to handle. However, rather than immerse herself in the dating scene again, she instead decided to spend more time with her daughter. She and Taylor were carefully rebuilding their relationship with one another, and Evelyn told herself to be glad that at least this part of the dilemma was working itself out. She had just stepped out of the shower when the phone rang twice, then stopped.

"Mom! Phone's for you! It's Maggie!" Taylor's voice called out.

Wrapping her towel around her body, Evie walked over to her bedroom and picked up the extension. "Hello?"

"Hey girl... Whatcha doin'?" Maggie's voice called out.

"Taylor and I are getting ready to go out to a movie... why?"

"Welllll... how 'bout Taylor and Lauren go to the movies, and you and I go \*out\*?" Maggie enticed.

Evelyn let out a sigh and flopped down on the side of her bed. "Oh I dunno, Maggs... I promised Taylor we'd do something together this weekend."

"So do something together tomorrow." The redhead offered. Evelyn's answer was another sigh. "Come onnnnnn, Evieeee!"

"I dunno. I'd have to see if Taylor would mind-"

"She doesn't - Lauren already asked her. She's gonna stay overnight, so we're free the whooollle night." Maggie sing-songed.

"Oh no - this sounds like deja vu all over again." Evie warned.

"No no no - this time's different; this time everyone knows the score." The redhead assured.

Evelyn rolled her eyes. "I dunno Maggie... I don't wanna go bar-hopping or anything."

"We don't have to do that. Let's just go have dinner or hang out someplace, or whatever."

"Why do I think you have an ulterior motive here?" Evie said, feeling suspicious.

"I don't - I swear. It's just you and me and whatever we wanna do."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

\*\*\*\*\*

The evening was progressing very well, and Evelyn had to admit that her fears were, thus far, unfounded. The girls had taken Maggie's car and headed out to the mall and then the movies, and Evie and Maggie were having a nice, relaxing dinner at one of their favorite little eateries. They were in a deep discussion over Maggie's lack of a love life when a familiar voice called out to them.

"Hey guys!"

They both turned to see Kristin Winslow heading toward their table. "Hey Kris... fancy meeting you here." Maggie grinned.

"Yah. Jackie and I were just leaving, but I wanted to stop over and say 'hi'." The brown-haired woman said, motioning over her shoulder with her thumb.

*Jackie... Jackie's here? ...Jackie's here!* Evelyn's mind fairly screamed. *She said they're leaving... and that she wanted to say 'hi'... that means they saw us long ago.* Evie felt her face flush suddenly and she turned very slowly to glance behind Kristin. Sure enough, standing near the exit was the tall, alluring woman who still, somehow, held a piece of Evelyn's heart. The dark-haired woman quirked a small smile and raised her hand in a silent greeting. With that friendly little gesture, Evie felt the grip of panic lessen a bit, and she smiled and waved back. It probably should have ended there, but it didn't. Jackie couldn't tear her eyes away from Evelyn's, and Evelyn couldn't stop staring back. Thinking that she was being rude, and stupid, Jackie finally took a deep breath and began walking toward the table. Kristin and Maggie were still chatting away when the tall brunette finally came within speaking distance.

"Hi." She said to the blonde, another small smile dancing on her lips.

"Hi." Evelyn answered back, feeling the mutual nervousness. It was such a perfunctory little greeting; she wanted to say so much more to Jackie, but this obviously was not the place nor time.

Maggie finally noticed the other woman's presence, and she leaned around Kristin to greet Jackie as well. The four of them stood and made polite chit-chat for a few minutes, but soon Jackie insisted that they leave and allow Maggie and Evelyn their privacy again.

"Well, listen guys... Jackie and I were gonna go grab a drink someplace... why don't you two join us?"

Evelyn's raised brows matched Jackie's, and they both turned to glare at their respective friends.

"What?" Kristin said, seeing the obvious glare from her tall friend.

"Hey, don't look at me!" Maggie argued, putting her hands up as Evelyn glared at her as well. "I didn't set this up!" Maggie and Kristin looked at each other.

"I didn't either! It's coincidence... honest!" Kristin insisted.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I can't believe I'm doing this again... \*why\* am I doing this again?!" Evelyn yelled into Maggie's ear as they made their way through the throng of bodies that crowded the 'Planet Z' club.

"Because, you wanna see her! ...Don't you?!" The redhead yelled questioningly above the music.

"Yeah, but... I don't wanna end up with repeat performance of the last time, y'know?!"

"Don't think about that! Just have fun! ...But if you \*do\* end up doing anything, at least you know you'll \*enjoy\* it, right!?" Maggie yelled with a grin.

"Thanks! You're a big help!" Evie yelled back.

"Stop being such a spazz and relax!" Maggie scolded, grabbing the blonde's hand and dragging her the rest of the way.

They found the booth where Kristin and Jackie were already seated and drinking. The music was loud and the crowd seemed to be especially rowdy tonight. As the four of them sat and drank and talked, Evelyn felt like her skin was on fire. She wanted to think that it was due to the liquor she was consuming, but in reality, she knew it was most likely due to the fact that she was sitting right next to Jackie.

It was difficult enough being in such close proximity to the brunette, but whenever Evie chanced a glance in the dark-haired woman's direction, those piercing blue eyes would catch her and melt her insides like hot glue. She was fairly certain that her bottom was permanently affixed to the vinyl-covered cushion she sat upon. They hadn't even been alone with each other yet, and she was already coming undone.

*Jesus, get a grip, Evie. You screwed around with the woman once and now you think you're madly in love with her. Evelyn scolded internally. Oh my god... I didn't just say the 'L' word, did I? She panicked for a moment and quickly reached out to down the rest of her drink. God, take it easy! No getting bombed tonight!*

Jackie noticed the blonde's erratic movements; she'd been noticing them all night, really. Obviously Evelyn was just as anxious about being here as she was. She supposed that thought should have relaxed her, but instead, it made her feel worse. How would they ever mend fences and start anew if they were too scared to even sit beside one another?

A slow song began to play and Jackie started drumming her fingers on the table as she contemplated making a move. Kristin caught her eye and glared at her, making a face and mouthing 'ask her to dance'. Jackie gave her an annoyed look in return and rolled her eyes. The two friends had discussed the situation at length before Evelyn and Maggie arrived; Jackie

thought it best to take it slow and easy, but Kristin insisted that Jackie just 'go for it'. Watching the blonde's obvious nervous gestures, Jackie began to feel like a dope for just sitting there and doing nothing at all.

Taking a deep breath and steeling her nerves, she leaned in toward Evelyn, "Uhm... would you, uh, like to dance, Evelyn?"

Evie could tell that Jackie was nervous, and she would have found it charming if she weren't equally as skittish. She wanted to say 'I don't know if I can move', but as soon as she looked up at those sky blue eyes, she fell headlong. She could and would move... she would do anything Jackie asked her to do.

"Uhm... yeah, sure." Evelyn answered.

When they reached the dance floor, they didn't speak, they just danced. It took a moment to get used to being so close and touching each other again. Jackie cursed her nervousness as her fingers fidgeted and refused to lie still along Evie's back. Evelyn closed her eyes and wrapped her arms around Jackie's neck, holding on for dear life in case her legs decided to give out, which was entirely possible. They stayed like that the entire song, and when another slow song began, they continued right on.

"Evelyn." Jackie's rich voice finally cut through the haze, and the blonde looked up into the blue eyes with question. "I... uhm...", the brunette faltered, "I wanted to apologize."

Evie held her breath and tightened her grip on the brunette's neck a smidge. *Here we go...*

"That night... well, that morning... I-I wanted to wake you up before I left, or leave you a note, or something, but... I didn't know what to say. I mean...", Jackie's brain stumbled and searched for words as her eyes searched Evelyn's face.

"I understand," Evelyn interrupted. "If I had been awake, I'm sure I wouldn't have known what to say either." She smiled gently.

Jackie's face relaxed in relief. "I... I felt like we had done something really shameful and awful, but... it wasn't awful, it was... amazing and... wonderful. I hated that I had such mixed feelings about it."

"I know. I did too." Evelyn nodded, loosening her grip and relaxing a little. They held each other's gaze for a beat.

"I should have called you or something. I mean, I should have talked to you rather than stay away." Jackie added.

"It's not your fault, Jackie. I should have talked to you too, instead of hiding like a big coward."

They eased further against each other, acknowledging their mutual stupidity with soft smiles.



"Well... maybe we could... start over...? I mean, we sort-of got off on the wrong foot, but... maybe we could try a different approach?"

Evie smiled wider. "Yeah... I'd like that."

\*\*\*\*\*

As the evening wound down, Evelyn began to feel her anxiety multiply. Despite her initial uncertainty, she was actually having a pretty good time, and now, she was loathe to part with Jackie's company. She definitely wanted to see the brunette again, but she wasn't brave enough to take the bull by the horns and ask the woman for a date outright.

*Chicken*, she scolded herself as she checked her watch again.

Jackie noticed that Evie was doing the watch-checking thing, which meant she was getting antsy and was probably ready to leave. She really wanted to invite the beautiful blonde back to her place for the night, but based on what happened the last time they were alone together, she decided it'd be best to just let the evening end, bid the blonde adieu, and wait to ask about getting together again.

*Maybe she'll surprise me and make the move?* Jackie pondered hopefully.

Maggie and Kristin were dancing and talking as they had been most of the night. When the current song ended, they came back to the table grinning like a couple of Cheshire cats.

"So... are you guys about ready to go?" Maggie asked.

"Uh..." "Uhm..." The blonde and the brunette stammered, looking at each other and then their friends. "Yeah, I guess so?" Evelyn finally answered. Jackie's heart began to throb with dread.

"Okay, well, if you guys don't \*mind\*," Maggie began.

*Oh no*, Evelyn thought immediately.

"Kristin is gonna take me home, because we wanna stop at her house so she can show me pictures of Katie Laughton's wedding last summer." Maggie said, trying to sound nonchalant.

Evelyn's eyebrows rose up high as she regarded her friend with wide eyes.

"Katie and Kristin and I used to live close to each other." Maggie said. "I didn't go to the wedding." She added. "And I \*really\* wanna see the pictures." She explained, padding her story with additional justification.

*Oh yeah... they're back to their tricks again*, Jackie thought, her eyebrows arched high to match Evelyn's. *Guess that means I'm moving too slow... gotta change that, I guess.*

"Jackie can take you home," Kristin said, looking at Evie. "Right, Jack?" The amber-eyed woman said, turning and giving her friend an innocent look.

"You two are so full of shit, the whites of your eyes are turning brown." Jackie said, her voice and her face completely serious. "C'mon Evelyn... let's get out of here." The brunette said tersely, standing up and offering the blonde her hand.

Evie gave Maggie a wide-eyed look, uncertain what Jackie's tone meant, exactly. Nonetheless, she followed as the brunette tugged her along.

As soon as they were out of earshot, Maggie looked at Kristin, "Think we went too far?"

"Nah. They'll thank us tomorrow." Kristin said with a confident grin.

Outside, Jackie and Evelyn walked down the street in silence until they finally climbed into Jackie's Jeep. "Listen, Jackie," Evie began as soon as they got inside, "this was obviously intentional, and I-

The brunette cut her off and started the car. "Don't worry about it. It's no problem."

The blonde was quiet for about ten seconds, until she couldn't stand it any longer. "Are you mad?"

Jackie turned to look at her seriously, "No, not at all."

Evie hesitated, confused for a moment. "Well... you seem upset...?"

Jackie put the car in gear and turned back to Evie, this time fixing her with a brilliant smile, "Good... that's exactly what I want those two meddling fools to think."

Evelyn gave a conspiratorial laugh and the two of them drove off.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Strike Out**

### Chapter Eleven

They arrived at Evelyn's apartment in full déjà vu mode, the realization that they might be about to repeat history gnawing at their minds. Jackie parked the car and kept the engine running, fully expecting the blonde to just bid her goodnight and disappear.

Evelyn had been debating what to do ever since they walked out of the club, and now, sitting here in the parking lot of her apartment complex, she still didn't have an answer. She knew what she wanted and she knew what she needed, but what she didn't know was whether or not she should take the leap.

*Asking her in would be a bad idea.* Didn't they agree to start over and take a different approach this time? Shouldn't they really try to get to know one another first? She sighed and wrapped her fingers around the door handle, preparing herself to just say 'thank you' and 'goodnight'.

"Uhm... would you like to come in?" Evelyn asked, shocking herself as well as Jackie.

Jackie stared at Evelyn carefully, their eyes locking onto one another, despite the darkness. She should decline. Of course she should decline... what were they, crazy? Stupid? Hopelessly aroused sex fiends? *All of the above?* Jackie thought.

"Uh...", the brunette hesitated. "Okay, sure." She answered, her voice casual but with an underlying huskiness that Evelyn easily picked out.

*Oh yeah, this is most \*definitely\* a bad idea,* Evelyn thought as they walked up to her door.

\*\*\*\*\*

Once inside, Evie took their jackets and led them into the kitchen. "So... what can I get you to drink? Some wine? Maybe coffee?" The blonde asked lightly.

"Hmm... I feel reasonably in control... let's go with the wine." Jackie answered with an easy smile.

Evie gave a nervous chuckle, "Well that's more than I can say for myself," she muttered under her breath as she turned around and opened the cabinet to retrieve two glasses.

"What was that?"

Evelyn jumped. The voice was right beside her ear, and when she turned around, Jackie was standing in her personal space. She could smell her perfume, and she swallowed hard against the lump in her throat. "Uhm, I was just saying that... it's good you're... 'reasonably in control'." She stammered, leaning back against the counter.

"Reasonably in control"? Is that what I said?" Jackie murmured, her face looming even closer.

"Yeah... that's what you said." Evelyn whispered back, her eyes locked on Jackie's lips as the brunette spoke.

"Hmm... perhaps 'reasonably in control' wasn't the appropriate phrase to use." The brunette continued to tease. "Perhaps... '\*mildly\*' in control' would be better, or... '\*slightly\*' in control?" Enthralled by the blonde's eyes and lips and smell, Jackie knew she couldn't hold back much longer.

Evie swallowed again, "Uh huh," she mumbled dumbly. Jackie's nearness was undoing her rapidly.

"Or maybe... not in control at all?" Jackie whispered lowly as she closed the gap between them, leaning in and placing her hands on the counter on either side of Evelyn, and administering a gentle, lengthy kiss.

Evelyn released a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding and hummed aloud after they broke apart. "Mmm... what is it with you and this kitchen counter?" She asked with a sexy grin.

Jackie let out a small laugh, "I dunno. Something about you and formica just drives me wild, I guess." She said, smiling wide.

"Well, y'know, I *\*do\** have a bedroom." Evie said, raising a finger to delicately trace the brunette's lips.

"You do?" Jackie feigned surprise.

"Uh huh. I even have *\*a bed\**." Evelyn teased.

"Oh wowww."

They both erupted in laughter and leaned into one another again, their kisses quickly intensifying and leading them in a direction they willingly would go.

\*\*\*\*\*

The rumbling sound of a flushing toilet roused Evelyn from her sleep. Her eyes opened and immediately focused on her alarm clock. 8:35 a.m. *Ooo, I slept in... how 'bout that.* She thought. Suddenly she felt the mattress moving, but before she could turn her head, a pair of warm lips kissed in-between her naked shoulder blades. Evelyn smiled and closed her eyes, humming aloud. ...*God.* She turned her head and opened her eyes to find two sky blue orbs gazing at her.

"Morning." Jackie whispered, gracing her lover with a gentle smile.

"Good morning." Evie answered, reaching out to pull Jackie in for a proper kiss.

"Mmm... that's nice," Jackie smiled and they kissed again.

Evelyn started to run her hands up and down Jackie's body and was unpleasantly surprised to find her lover dressed. "You're leaving already?"

Jackie kissed her gently, "Yeah. I gotta get home and let the dog out before she ruins my carpet and never speaks to me again."

"Oh... I didn't know you had a dog." Evelyn said, sadly realizing that there was a lot she didn't know about Jackie Roberts.

Jackie just nodded, and they stared at each other for a long moment, both their minds heavily inundated with deep thoughts.

"So much for taking a 'different approach' this time, huh?" Evelyn said in a quiet, rueful voice.

Jackie smiled and brushed blonde bangs out of Evie's eyes. "Yeah, I know. If we mess things up this time, we'll have two strikes on us. ...Not very good odds for a batter." She said with a small grin.

"Hmm, you're right." Evelyn said with a mock-frown. "So, Coach... how do we make things 'different' for our next at-bat, hmm?"

"Welllll," Jackie drawled, casting her eyes skyward. "This time, I'm going to tell you that you're the most beautiful, gorgeous, luscious woman in the entire world," she paused, bending down to place a soft kiss on Evie's lips. "Then, I'm going to tell you that I had an amazing, incredible evening," she paused and kissed the smiling blonde again. "Then, I'm going to give you a proper kiss goodbye," she said, bending to place a long, deep kiss on Evelyn's waiting lips. "And then, I'm going to tell you that I'll call you tomorrow night to see when you want to go out for a real, honest-to-goodness \*date\*." Jackie finished at last, fixing the blonde with a gentle grin.

Evelyn couldn't say anything, she just smiled and looked at her lover through glassy, tear-filled eyes.

"Now... will that earn us a hit, or will we end up with a strike-out?" Jackie asked, her nose nearly touching Evelyn's.

Evelyn smiled even wider as she reached up and wrapped her arms around Jackie's neck. "Oh man... that has the potential to be a homerun, babe."

\*\*\*\*\*

**The End.**